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Jane Austen's Women: Attempting To Escape The Gothic Frame

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Iina Lukkari, 2018, Jane Austen's Women: Attempting To Escape The Gothic Frame

Originally published at : Mémoire de maîtrise, Université de Lausanne

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Faculty of Arts

Jane Austen's Women: Attempting To Escape The Gothic Frame

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Master Thesis of Arts in English Language & Literature | January – 2018

English Department | University of Lausanne | www.unil.ch/angl

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
CHAPTER 1: THE GOTHIC AND JANE AUSTEN	9
CHAPTER 2: THE ESTATE	15
<i>I. Northanger Abbey's Greenhouses</i>	16
<i>II. Mirrors of Subjectivity in Mansfield Park</i>	20
CHAPTER 3: AUSTEN'S GOTHIC HEROINES	26
<i>I. Catherine's Gothic Prison</i>	29
<i>II. Mansfield Park's Entrapped Women</i>	35
<i>III. Surviving Subversive Women</i>	47
CHAPTER 4: AUSTEN'S ENLIGHTENMENT FEMINISM	56
CHAPTER 5: THE ESCAPE ROUTE FROM THE GOTHIC FRAME	60
<i>I. Education, Observation, Maturing: Catherine's Evolution Out Of The Gothic Darkness</i>	62
<i>II. Fanny's Emancipation</i>	71
CONCLUSION	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY	93

INTRODUCTION

Representing in a detailed manner human relationships is what Jane Austen is celebrated for, depicting her characters' journey toward a 'happy ending', which takes place with the joyous flourishing of a relationship in the resolution of the novel. Her emphasis is however on women and her tales centre on a heroine's evolution who is expected to make a match before the last page of the novel has been turned. They do all achieve this goal, providing the seemingly satisfactory ending to the story. But a note of discrepancy resonates in this predictable closing of the novels, awakening curiosity in the face of such an unalterable contingency. Is this the only possible ending Austen proposes? Is it not conceivable that a novel could have had a deviating resolution?

I would argue that the answer is negative, as the endings of Austen's novels are a part of a precise project she sets out to accomplish through her works. She endeavours to denounce women's situation in the England of late eighteenth- early nineteenth-century in a male dominated society where they have no legal rights. To do so, she depicts in her realistic style women's journeys, showing their helplessness in the face of patriarchal society's control over their futures. This position aligns her with proponents of Enlightenment feminism, a type of conservative feminism that became very present in the eighteenth-century on the public scene through Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman*. Austen strives for similar claims Wollstonecraft poses in her work, namely women's right to be considered as morally equal to men, for men to see them as human beings endowed with reason (Reiff 275-277). To achieve this, both authors highlight the necessity of providing a

proper education for women, identifying this factor as the starting point in their struggle to assert the validity of their moral development.

Other types of stigma promulgated by men, participating in the creation of the notion of women as inferior to them are attacked, such as women's supposed physical frailty. Wollstonecraft declares women must, in addition to exercising their minds, exercise their bodies, thus rebelling against the image of weak, fragile women, needing to rely on men to do all activities related to physical abilities, while women patiently recline on sofas in the drawing-room. Austen showcases the benefits of physical training, as it participates in the same end goal of helping women emancipate themselves, by gaining more confidence in their aptitudes and becoming less dependent on men.

What is striking about the gender constriction portrayed in her novels is their uncanny affiliation to women's representation in Gothic novels popular at the time. The Gothic genre reveals sources of anxiety, dilemmas weighing on the individual, representing them in the form of hauntings, ghosts that stand for unresolved resurfacing problems. No phantoms appear in Austen's works, but what does drive the narrative is her denunciation of analogous issues. The persecution of victims through imprisonment, exploitation of a sexual or economic kind by Gothic malevolent characters are examples of concerns Austen depicts in her works. Like in the Gothic, such issues take stage in the private sphere, the organisation of which is based on the model dictated by patriarchal society. Thus, Austen represents this domestic domain, exposing societal problems through the medium of families, by portraying their effects on her characters, especially on women, the victims in this setting.

The popularity of the Gothic genre in Austen's time was due to fissures appearing in the patriarchal structure of society, the culmination of these tensions being apparent in the French Revolution. Austen partakes in the denunciation of this phallogentric organisation, by giving centre stage to the theme of women's subordination, which she shows to be similarly oppressive for them, just as the monarchy was perceived to persecute and take advantage of its subjects. Representing female characters' lives in her realistic style, Austen sheds light on the problems women face in the private and, inevitably, in the public sphere. Their submissive state under male rule leaves them little leeway to act autonomously, having predetermined roles assigned to them from birth by patriarchy, in order for them to fit within its organisation of society. Austen's women appear, therefore, similarly confined as Gothic women, whose helplessness is strongly accentuated in the genre through the recurring themes of women's pursuit, imprisonment, rape and death. Austen's realism refrains from spinning tales about Gothic castles, abbeys, locked turrets and dungeons as the Gothic does, but she nevertheless portrays how women are victims of men's oppression in her novels just as much as in the Gothic genre's fantasy world.

This mémoire will focus on *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*, as both demonstrate, in different ways, how women are living in comparable circumstances to prisoners, unable to control any aspect of their lives and being confined to male ruled spaces. Some rebelling against their condition are seen to achieve nothing more than an unhappy result, testifying to the despondency of their situation. However, some approach the fight against the system in a more productive manner, these characters being the protagonists of Austen's tales. The novels portray their journeys, describing their evolution, which is brought about through a set of emancipatory strategies

redolent of Mary Wollstonecraft's claims, namely with the heroines' education and moral growth. Through their improvement, Catherine Morland and Fanny Price find themselves capable of resisting patriarchy, declaring their ability and their right to wield control over their lives.

Austen's assimilation of her women with Gothic female characters delivers a criticism of the horror of women's abused condition. She highlights the preposterousness of such circumstances through this association that reveals women of her time to be in as grave a danger as women in Gothic tales, who are at risk of suffocating, being buried alive and dying under such oppression.

She presents her heroines advancing on their voyage depicted in the novels as if they were moving inside a Gothic castle, through dark corridors, where obstacles in the shape of representatives of patriarchy materialize, challenging their forward movement. They learn to protect themselves against their onslaught, circumventing or struggling against them, in order to move passed them and onwards on their path. Learning to do so is the main piece of knowledge they must acquire in order to gain control over their lives, as it stands as the key to their mental emancipation from male rule. They remain physically married to men, and legally their property, with no claims of their own, but the psychological liberation is the first primordial step, unleashing women's desire to obtain more rights and to realise they have a chance of doing so.

Austen's purpose is then revealed through her heroines' endings: their marriages stand as representations of their success in challenging patriarchy, as they get to marry the men of their choice. This plot line is, conversely, the reason behind the main criticism directed at Austen regarding her feminism, her heroines marrying

into the system seeming anticlimactic. Nevertheless, Austen depicts how this ending is achieved because of her heroines' emancipation from several societal limitations, the subtlety of her condemnation leading some critics to fail to recognise it. Indeed, Catherine Morland and Fanny Price's growth and persistence in following their moral compass' guidance in their actions, proving Wollstonecraft's ideas about women's nature to be right, are rewarded for their commendable behaviour by marrying men who value these qualities in them. The physical and mental evolution of these heroines delivers Austen's message of empowerment to female readers, showing they can be educated, reasoning, moral members of society, who can and should be able to make important decisions in their lives for themselves.

This mémoire will be structured firstly with an exploration of the similarities the Gothic genre shares with Jane Austen's novels, a correspondence arising from their respective denunciation of the patriarchal oppression of women. The focus will then be on the manner in which the estates depicted in *Northanger Abbey* and in *Mansfield Park* accomplish a comparable feat to that of Gothic mansions and castles, as they reflect the inner workings of their inhabitants' minds, the conscience of the residents being mirrored in the house's aspect and arrangement. In the Gothic genre, the habitations partake in the creation of the eerie atmosphere pervading the works, as they are represented as extensions of their owners, commonly a tyrannical patriarch who has a threatening aura, as can be seen in Austen; every corridor and room thus exemplifies the inhabitants' inner selves, producing a menacing feeling which permeates every aspect of the setting.

Moreover, I will turn my attention to how Austen's female characters are analogous to Gothic novels' women, as they share many characteristics. Indeed, the

women in Austen's works are persecuted and oppressed by representatives of patriarchy, finding themselves in dire situations, as their status resembles that of slaves, possessing no rights in their phallogentric world. I will investigate how the women in these two novels are entrapped in this system, some employing various techniques to defy men's control, but never able to entirely free themselves from its influence.

Thereupon, I shall endeavour to demonstrate how the author does not leave her female characters without solutions, subtle elements appearing as tools destined to help them emancipate themselves from men's onerous dictatorship. Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas of Enlightenment feminism come into use here, Austen appearing to adhere to Wollstonecraft's beliefs, as her heroines are guided towards acquiring the attributes the latter claims women need in order to be able to assert themselves by advocating their morality and their rights. This leads Austen's heroines Catherine Morland and Fanny Price to start their journey towards acquiring the qualities exulted by Wollstonecraft, namely by making education their point of superiority, and by exercising regularly to cultivate in addition to a strong mind a firm body. Through experiences and observations, they display their strong sense of morality, revealing women as reasoning and moral human beings, contrarily to the image men attempt to maintain in place. Women no longer see themselves as helpless victims, enduring male rule without any way to defend themselves. Rather, they emerge able to stand up to patriarchy's oppressive force so as to defend their rights and their opinions. This analysis foregrounds Austen joining forces with Wollstonecraft's call for a reformation of female manners in her indictment of women's situation, accomplished by the veiled likening of her female characters with

women from Gothic novels and their desperate conditions. Her heroines work towards gaining a degree of freedom from men's control and a measure of respect, revealing the struggle women go through in order to have their voices heard.

CHAPTER 1: THE GOTHIC AND JANE AUSTEN

The Cambridge Companion To Gothic Fiction describes how the term "Gothic" came to acquire its definition as a literary genre, identifying the word to be indebted to Horace Walpole, who used it in his title for the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto: a Gothic Story*. This choice appeared at its time of publication in 1765 as paradoxical, as the term Gothic referred to "the Gothic age", which was considered as a

long period of barbarism, superstition, and anarchy dimly stretching from the fifth century AD, when Visigoth invaders precipitated the fall of the Roman Empire, to the Renaissance and the revival of classical learning. In a British context it was even considered to extend to the Reformation in the sixteenth century and the definitive break with the Catholic past.

(E. J. Clery, "The Genesis of Gothic Fiction" 21)

In addition to representing a historical period, "Gothic" also called to mind at this time "anything obsolete, old-fashioned, or outlandish" (21). Walpole's *Gothic Story* is generally considered to be "the first Gothic novel" (21), its plot and themes becoming the basis on which later Gothic works modelled themselves.

Clery postulates furthermore how the term "Gothic" persisted regardless of its original lack of association with literature, explaining that the "Gothic novel" is "mostly a twentieth-century coinage", supported by the fact that its adoption as a literary term came by "analogy with the Gothic Revival in architecture, which also began in the mid-eighteenth century" (21). *The Castle of Otranto* may be indeed set in Gothic times, but the later Gothic novels often ignored the temporal frame, neither did

they show an attachment to reproducing in the tales the Gothic's original reference to "obsolete, old-fashioned, outlandish" things. It became a genre that does considerably more, which is why its popularity was so great in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Castle of Otranto demonstrates how Gothic tales expose "some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural, throughout the history of western culture since the eighteenth century" (Hogle, "Introduction" 4), which are represented in the text through the image of haunting. Characters are psychologically or physically haunted, the ghosts being actually manifestations of unresolved conflicts or problems that cannot be buried out of sight anymore. This inner conflict is identified by Leslie Fiedler as a sense of "guilt of the revolutionary haunted by the (paternal) past which he has been trying to destroy", and calls the fear perceived in Gothic tales as "the fear that in destroying the old ego-ideals of Church and State, the West has opened a way for the intrusion of darkness: for cultural and individual insanity and the consequent disintegration of the self" (Hogle 4). The Gothic depictions of fictional settings and characters expose the sense of societal unrest felt in the eighteenth century, expressing in a covert manner a fundamental problem linked to revolutionary ideas and drastic contemporary changes.

Accordingly, the Gothic genre became extremely popular in the beginning of the nineteenth century, as it was an adequate format for the expression of the issues brought to the forefront of everyone's mind through the French Revolution. Hazlitt explains how "a widespread perception that all old structures were in a tottering condition, such as, for instance, castles, or the constitution, with its feudal, Gothic

foundations" at the time led to the Gothic's prevalence, as it "fed off the revolutionary anxieties of its readership" (Miles, "The 1790s: The Effulgence of the Gothic" 44). It appeared therefore as a useful tool for the expression of the considerable anxieties of the period.

William Godwin's placement in his Gothic novel *Caleb Williams* of the "remains of feudalism", which stand for the old order of monarchy and patriarchy, not in a "material castle from a bygone age", but in the "immaterial manners and class structure of the present day" (Miles 45) also serves to illustrate how the Gothic allows its authors' to showcase the disastrous state of affairs of their time. Godwin denounces his society's manners and class structure as comparable to the Middle Ages', presenting thus a clear criticism resonating with the French Revolution's attack against their society's "remains of feudalism". Godwin shows how the elements of the Gothic are not simply fictional creations unrelated to reality, as his work exhibits how "the feudal castle that blights the present is thus not an object out there, but a state of mind that immaterially fetters its victims, burying them, and their rights, alive" (49). It exposes how "old codes lock us in and how they are difficult to destroy", how "abstract structures imprison us", and how we "unwittingly find ourselves locked within Bastilles of the intellect" (50). The Gothic embodies this purpose, aiming to denounce the way in which societies imprison individuals within a fundamentally unjust order. It also reflects through the "tottering nature of old structures" (59) there is reason to hope the order is not unbreakable, the denunciation of its instability pointing towards its frailty.

The present mémoire will endeavour to link Jane Austen to this theme of the Gothic, showing how her novels *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* in particular

partake in the Gothic's purpose of denouncing society's evils in the period of apparition of cracks in absolutist models of ruling, which reflect the fissures emerging in the rule of the father in the home sphere. Another aspect attaching her to the Gothic is perceived in her treatment of her female characters. Indeed, Austen's women resemble Gothic heroines on various aspects, revealing thus how the genre can be inserted into different contexts, as she too represents and condemns the "state of mind that immaterially fetters its victims, burying them, and their rights, alive" (Miles 49) in her novels.

Hogle explains how the Gothic is usually about a "middle-class family", where a "'son' both wanting to kill and striving to be the 'father' and thus feeling fearful and guilty about what he most desires" (Hogle 5) is seen. As this mémoire will show, this can be applied to Gothic heroines as well, who also seek to "appease and to free themselves from the excesses of male and patriarchal dominance" (5). This is a major theme in Austen's novels, as she portrays in *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* the failure of patriarchy. Her heroines liberate themselves from the shackles of the old order as they partake in wearing it down, while remaining within its frame. However, their situation is improved, having found ways of gaining more freedom than ever before.

The Castle of Otranto also formed the basis for how female characters would be represented in Gothic tales, with Isabella being the first woman to find herself in what has become

the most classic Gothic circumstance: caught in a "labyrinth of darkness" full of "cloisters" underground and anxiously hesitant about what course to take there, fearing the pursuit of a domineering and lascivious patriarch

who wants to use her womb as a repository for seed that may help him preserve his property and wealth, on the one hand, yet worried that, fleeing in an opposite direction, she is still 'within reach of somebody [male], she knew not whom', on the other.

(Hogle 10)

Women's central role in the Gothic genre is made clear, and their despairing situation, being in the hands of sexual predators and being pursued, is what forms an integral part of the action of the Gothic tale. Women's status of victim and their oppression is necessary for the story line to advance, and their "othering" (10) is key for the patriarchal villain's plan to possess and use them like an object, turning women's condition into a principal subject of the Gothic.

This tyrannical behaviour towards women in the Gothic genre is caused by what Hogle identifies as an "attempt to repress, as well as a quest to uncover a potentially 'unruly female principle' that antiquated patriarchal enclosures have been designed to contain" (10), and in some cases even bury, as in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall Of The House of Usher*. As I will show, women are restrained forcefully by society, which seeks to keep them docile and malleable for men's convenience. Ann Radcliffe developed through her popular Gothic novels this theme of the confined woman, but turned it into a way for women to go on a journey which leads them to "come into some power and property by their own and other feminine agency" (10). Women are therefore given hope, their fates being handed back into their hands by their authoress, although they remain within the frame of the "still-antiquated and male-dominated world" (10). Radcliffe's development of the heroine and of her escape from a "patriarchal ogre" represents a change she makes in "Walpole's formula" (Miles 46). She insists in her Gothic novels on having a heroine who stands for a

"future of enlightened sensibility", who nevertheless still faces an explicit representative of "the old, dark, feudal order" (46).

Female readers participate in the revolt against the "old order", as women were for the first time associated through their reading of the Gothic novel with a form that "challenged (or was perceived to challenge) traditional literary authority" (Miles 60). This is a testament to the Gothic genre's usefulness for women, showing how within fiction the order of things can be influenced, as can also be accomplished within contemporary society, which will be presented through the example of Jane Austen. I will argue Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* accomplish a comparable feat to Gothic novels, as they too denounce hidden social issues, which I will show by keeping these characteristics of the Gothic genre in mind and by explaining how Austen's novels work in a similar way, with a particular emphasis on the denunciation of women's oppression by patriarchy and their attempts to escape from it.

CHAPTER 2: THE ESTATE

Austen's novels depict a vision of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century English life through an array of families and acquaintances cohabiting and socialising within the frame of a city, village or estate. The focus on a small number of characters allows for an exploration into their lives, habits, and events taking place. *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*, the two novels that show through their titles a particular emphasis on the settings of the tales, reveal the importance of the residences in the stories. The estates are seen as symbols of their inhabitants' social status, a connection Austen takes further, as she presents a similar link to what can be found in Gothic novels: the house's structure offers a mirror image of its occupants' minds. Thus, the novels take on a new dimension, the houses on which the focus is centred becoming a way to map out the characters' minds and their relationship to the centre of power, the father, who rules the estate; corridors, recesses and rooms in the homes appear as maze-like formations that stand for the dark corridors of the mind, full of anxieties, repressed feelings and secrets. Changes to the houses translate an alteration in the characters, chaos in one displaying the turmoil in the other. Austen uses this Gothic convention to demonstrate how the solid, old houses, symbols of social power and patriarchy, can be affected by the characters, a relation which becomes a representation of the old, fixed social order that can be shaken and changed by its inhabitants.

I. *Northanger Abbey's Greenhouses*

Catherine Morland's adventures in *Northanger Abbey* showcase Austen's use of the Gothic, notably through Catherine's wild imaginings of imprisoned or murdered wives, hidden away in a secluded part of the abbey. However, her development of her heroine's Gothic reveries is not without further purpose, as they bring about the introduction of another theme: Roger E. Moore argues that Austen is criticising through *Northanger Abbey* the dissolution of monasteries, and through it the destruction of a benevolent system that helped provide social stability to communities. This argument, although concerning a very precise subject, can be extended and envisioned in relation to Austen's general purpose, the exposure of the fact that changes in houses are due to modifications in their owners. This example exhibits how abbeys' primordial purpose having been stripped away in the sixteenth century left them to be bought by wealthy individuals as private property, thus "transferring property from sacred to secular hands" (Moore 64), which Austen can be seen to criticise through Catherine's experience at *Northanger Abbey*.

The heroine's distress at finding the abbey very different from what her Gothic readings had led her to fantasize about is evident throughout her visit of the Tilneys' home. Indeed, Catherine sees "*Northanger* had been stripped of its past; it had been 'improved'", as the General's "improving hand" (Moore 67) could be noticed everywhere where new inventions or constructions replaced the old mainly to satisfy the General's taste. Catherine's reaction to these changes is one of disappointment and anger, as she "could have raved at the hand which had swept away what must have

been beyond the value of all the rest, for the purposes of mere domestic economy" (*Northanger Abbey* 174).

Moore argues that such improvements, which transformed abbeys into "gentlemen's houses", illustrate "the greed and selfishness of a world without monks and nuns" (67). This argument concerning greed and selfishness is confirmed by the narrator of *Northanger Abbey*, who comments in the passage describing Catherine's visit to the kitchen of Northanger how the General's "endowments of this spot alone might at any time have placed him high among the benefactors of the convent" (*Northanger Abbey* 173), bringing forth the memory of the role an abbey such as this one would have played in the community before the Reformation. The General would have appeared as "devoted to the well-being of the entire parish in perpetuity" with the money he spent on the abbey, whereas his money is now seen to only serve to appease "his own appetite" (Moore 68).

Finally, the state of Northanger's gardens add a further nail in the coffin Catherine has been constructing in her mind for the General. His "hot-houses" (*Northanger Abbey* 168) represent the height of superficiality and selfishness, as instead of assisting the village surrounding Northanger, "which formerly would have depended on the convent for aid", the abbey's garden is filled with "greenhouses" (Moore, 68), serving to grow exotic fruit only for the General's consumption. Furthermore, the "spiritual life" of the parish that would have been "guided by the monks" is also no longer of concern to the General, as he represents the "secular landlord", who only cares for his own needs and proceeds accordingly with his improvements, which are "devoted to his own gratification", serving "not the common good but only his delicate palate" (68). The General is presented as a Gothic villain,

causing an entire community to suffer because of his neglect of old traditions and his imposing of an order that serves only him.

What Austen accomplishes through this criticism of the changes brought to Northanger by the General is to create the sense that such innovations are brought on by someone who is as vain as the modifications are. As Alistair M. Duckworth states in the Preface to his work *The Improvement Of The Estate*, the house is in Austen's works a "metonym for other inherited structures- society as a whole, a code of morality, a body of manners, a system of language" (ix). This idea is key in order to understand the importance of the estates, as they are metonyms of their inhabitants, a mirror of their inner-selves. Duckworth's thought is therefore in accordance with the Gothic convention, showing how the superficiality, selfishness and immorality of characters affect negatively the estate, which reflects their state of mind.

The General as a Gothic villain becomes in Austen's novel an immoral character, whose faults Catherine perceives abstractly from the start, and which come to be exposed for all characters to see through his rude banishing of her after finding her not to be as wealthy as he had been led to think. Northanger Abbey's changed form is thus a way for Austen to present how characters' affect their environment, and how the alterations brought on by them are exposed as being negative, as they hinder the estate by denigrating its past utility and character. The traditional role of the abbey having been stripped away by the General leaves in its place a house that serves only its owner's selfish purposes, changing therefore what it represents: Northanger Abbey has been turned from a central part of the community's spiritual and economic life to a gentleman's house. The General is therefore criticised for having taken an important

part of community life and transformed it into a symbol of his personal wealth, thus changing a communal space into a private one.

For Catherine, the offense is in addition linked to the General's desecration of the building itself, of its Gothic architecture, which she longed to see as a result of her numerous fantasies brought on by her reading of Gothic novels. This can finally be interpreted as another way in which the General commands the inhabitants of Northanger Abbey; Catherine's imagination being thwarted by the modern aspect of the abbey represents her impeded inventiveness, the disruption of her freedom of imagination. The General's changes to the abbey consequently stand for the modulation he effects on Catherine. He diminishes her excitement in the face of the Gothic architecture, as he has stripped parts of it from the abbey, and he directs her inclinations, making her tour of Northanger a lesson in taste, showing her only what he thinks of worth and avoiding places she finds more interesting, as his bypassing of Mrs Tilney's favourite walk and Catherine's fascination with it shows. Catherine is obliged to reign in her wants and to follow meekly her host.

The patriarch's control over the women present under his roof is thus visible, as it extends to his daughter, who is just as much as Catherine obliged to regulate her wants and needs according to his wishes. The General's innovations at Northanger Abbey are hence seen to affect, in addition to the home, the life of the community and of the women residing at the abbey, exposing the negative effects of such changes and of what they stand for. The General's Gothic villain persona and the Abbey's eerie atmosphere illustrate Austen's use of the Gothic genre's features to denounce the patriarchal organisation of society and its oppression of others, especially of women, which the General and his home stand for.

II. Mirrors of Subjectivity in Mansfield Park

Mansfield Park's rooms do likewise represent the inner selves of characters, changes operated in them mirroring the alterations taking place in their minds, therefore illustrating their positive or negative outcome. The rooms stand as the outwardly visible portrayal of characters' thoughts and morality. The theatre episode constitutes a fit example of this, as it is a time in which different changes take place within the house and in the characters under its roof. As Duckworth observes, the house goes through considerate modifications to accommodate its inhabitants' new desire for acting. He explains how "the general air of confusion in the furniture" (56) signals "both the moral confusion of the actors and the confusion that their acting has introduced into an ordered social structure" (56-57), which illustrates the danger in which the house is.

The changes done in Sir Thomas' study and the billiards room reflect the actors' new wants, which is a testimony to their modified characters. The rooms' original purpose is forgotten in favour of a new objective: the creation of a stage for the characters to act the play *Lovers' Vows*. The choice of the scandalous German play already indicates Austen's opinion regarding the proceedings she depicts, which is further seen through the descriptions provided through Fanny Price's point of view. She sees the entire acting scheme for what it truly is: a ruse for the young people to do something they sense would not be possible to organise under normal circumstances, namely when the master of the house was home. The feeling of doing something taboo spurs them on, adding excitement to the scheme. Secondly, the moral ambiguity of the chosen play, dealing with themes of premarital sexual relations and illegitimate

children, also enhances the forbidden nature, and therefore appeal, of the play. Duckworth argues "All of the characters are revealed by their conduct during the play and by the parts they choose or are persuaded to take", which is confirmed by the developments that follow, as "the casting of *Lovers' Vows* accurately prefigures the future careers of the players" (Duckworth 59). The dissonance of the changes in the house is further exemplified by Sir Thomas' quick restoration of the house "to its proper state" by clearing it of "every object enforcing the remembrance" of the theatrics that had taken place there, as he "saw all the impropriety of such a scheme among such a party, and at such a time, as strongly as his son had ever supposed he must" (*Mansfield Park* 174). The changes wrought on the rooms in the setting up of the stage for their acting thus mirror the players' moral decomposition, showing how Austen uses the Mansfield house to translate her characters' inner changes.

Other rooms are of significant importance in Mansfield, such as Fanny's East room. Fanny's occupancy of the old "school-room" (139), and the description the narrator provides of her progressive acquirement of it, demonstrate how the room reflects Fanny's state of mind. Indeed, Fanny appears to save the room from the neglect it suffered after it had become "useless, and for some time was quite deserted", since the Miss Bertrams and Miss Lee had "quitted" the room which was of no more use to them as a school-room; Fanny is the exception, going to the room to take care of her plants, or when she "wanted one of the books, which she was still glad to keep there" (140).

Interestingly, Fanny is seen to progressively expand her range of belongings in the room, adding "to her possessions" in proportion to the increase of her "value for the comforts" (140) the room and the objects present. This image of Fanny adding

effects to the room as her enjoyment of the space expands is valuable, as it shows how the room allows her to increase her pleasure, as it forms a space where she can enlarge her interests. She therefore "spent more time there; and having nothing to oppose her, had so naturally and so artlessly worked herself into it, that it was now generally admitted to be her's" (140). Without obstacles to make her turn in another direction, Fanny is free to take over this room in a peaceful manner. Her naturalness and artlessness are significant, as Fanny seems to get this room, as well as other things later in the novel, because of this side of her personality, which, as can be seen through the definition of "artlessly", describes her as "1. free from tricks, cunning, or craftiness; honest. 2. not artificial; natural; simple" (wordreference.com). The Oxford English Dictionary gives information about what the term meant in Austen's time, appearing to have also meant "Without artifice; with unaffected simplicity, guilelessly". Fanny seems to deserve this room because of her lack of cunning and artificiality, which are characteristics noticed in other characters, notably in her cousins Maria and Julia, making this therefore a distinguishing trait in Fanny.

The room reveals her potential, and allows her to perform accordingly. She gets to have "what nobody else wanted" because of her "willing mind", which gives her an advantage over the other characters who abandoned the room: she learns to appreciate, take comfort from this space where she is pursuing activities that improve her, such as caring for her plants, reading her books, writing at her writing desk, and labouring on her "works of charity" (140). The room allows her to explore sides of her personality that are able to expand because of this safe space where she gets extreme "comfort in her hours of leisure" (140). The room is thus influencing Fanny's

development, showing how Austen uses this Gothic convention of rooms reflecting character's minds.

A specific remark concerning the room illustrates how Fanny's personality is reflected in it, as its

aspect was so favourable, that even without a fire it was habitable in many an early spring, and late autumn morning, to such a willing heart as Fanny's, and while there was a gleam of sunshine, she hoped not to be driven from it entirely, even when winter came.

(140)

The "favourable" room is as Fanny, a promising base where anything could blossom, as even without fire it is fit for habitation, which can be seen as standing for her propitious nature. As her plants manage to grow in this favourable space, so can Fanny grow there, which leads her to become the woman who finally gets to marry the man of her choice. Fanny is a well-disposed young woman who becomes Austen's heroine, deserving of a happy ending. The room is seen to influence her while she influences it too, illustrating how Mansfield Park's rooms are seen to be similar to the rooms in Gothic novels, becoming reflections of their inhabitants' inner-selves, thus allowing for the representation of these otherwise unacknowledged sides of characters.

The parsonage is also a noticeable example of this idea of a house reflecting characters' inner-selves, as can be seen through Mrs Norris' comments about the "planting and improving" (51) she did there. She explains how her husband and her made it "quite a different place from what it was when [they] first had it" (51). The most striking part of her description is seen with her reference to the apricot tree,

which they planted and which she claims "is now grown such a noble tree, and getting to such perfection" (52). Mrs Norris' character is illustrated through this reference, as she presents herself as performing all kinds of honourable deeds and accomplishing many things, as she does in this instance, boasting about the ameliorations she brought to the parsonage, while in truth her actions bring very little benefice to any living thing.

This is seen as Dr Grant, the current resident at the parsonage, reveals that the apricot tree is producing fruit that is "so little worth the trouble of gathering", as he declares "these potatoes have as much the flavour of a moor park apricot, as the fruit from that tree. It is an insipid fruit at best; but a good apricot is eatable, which none from my garden are" (52). Hence Mrs Norris' emendations at the parsonage, and especially her planting of the apricot tree, exemplify her personality, showing her to be an improver whose reforms are inept and inappropriate. Her malice, seen through her treatment of Fanny throughout the novel, seems to pour out through the fruit of her apricot tree, displaying her inner baseness. Austen is thus exhibiting her characters' innermost thoughts and feelings through descriptions of their surroundings by showing their effects on said surroundings, as well as the result of the environment on them.

The Parsonage's apricot tree can be of further importance if thought of in relation to Fanny, as Enit Steiner explains. The "insipid" (*Mansfield Park* 52) fruit can be seen to parallel Fanny, who was also accused by Austen's mother, who "used precisely the epithet 'insipid' to describe" (Steiner 128) her. Differing from expectations and distasteful to some, both are nevertheless transplanted into new soil, where the "vulnerable to frost" (128) apricot tree manages to grow despite the odds

into a handsome tree at the Parsonage. By analogy, "we can expect [Fanny] to mature slowly into a stout and productive person" (128) too after her transplantation to the Parsonage, where she will be able to flourish and thrive.

CHAPTER 3: AUSTEN'S GOTHIC HEROINES

Pieces of the estates revealing characters' personalities in Austen's novels demonstrates her adoption of the Gothic trope of houses reflecting characters' thoughts. This method enhances characters' hidden aspects, and can be seen to accomplish the same feat with the divulgement of another covert element: women's unfortunate situation. Indeed, Ruth Bienstock Anolik presents an explanation of how women, and especially mothers, are in danger in Gothic novels, starting with *The Castle of Otranto*, which "concretized the conventions that inform the Gothic" (25), where Manfred immures his wife in a convent in order to chase Isabella, whom he has chosen to bear him more sons. Women are "subject to imprisonment and to rape, including rape in the guise of forced marriage" (25). However, Anolik argues that the woman facing the greatest threat in Gothic novels is the mother, typically absent, being "dead, imprisoned or somehow abjected" (25). The term "abjected" is borrowed from Julia Kristeva, who gives it the meaning of being "neither subject nor object" (25), which illustrates a key issue Gothic novels denounce, the powerlessness of women in society on legal grounds, translated in their object like state, transferable from father to husband. Anolik exposes the way in which Gothic novels represent "marriage as dangerous and confining to the wife", and "motherhood as resulting in the disappearance of the mother", which serves to "literalize and thereby to reveal the horror implicit in two legal principles that governed the lives of women in England" (26): coverture and primogeniture.

Anolik endeavours to showcase how female characters in Gothic novels reflect women's unjust situation, exhibiting the horror of their lack of power in the patriarchal

society of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century. Wives are seen as husbands' property, a law found in the English Constitution of 1758 decreeing a woman to become a "feme covert", meaning she "ceased to exist as a separate legal entity" (26) after she married. Anolik explains how "under the law of *coverture*, the woman's legal identity was 'covered' by that of her husband. She underwent a civil death and forfeited all rights to possess property, custody of her own children and, indeed, herself" (26). Barbara Bodichon denounced *coverture's* inequitable submission of married women, citing in her 1854 *A Brief Summary, In Plain Language, Of The Most Important Laws Concerning Women; Together With A Few Observations Thereon* that

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*.

(6)

This principle remained in place until the late nineteenth century. The Gothic's representation of women therefore "literalizes" and "demystifies this legal abstraction" (Bienstock Anolik 27), which serves to denounce this bigoted principle of *coverture*.

Furthermore, Anolik showcases how Gothic novels also expose the issue of primogeniture, as it exerts the same effect on women as *coverture*, which is to reduce them to objects. The "focus" of primogeniture is to "secure private ownership of property" (34), which is done by taking away daughters' right to inherit property. Only the first born sons are given the honour, so as to keep the property within the family, which would not be possible through daughters, as they must invariably marry men whose name they would take and thus hand over all possessions they may have in

their name to their husband. Through "literalizing legal and economic structures, the Gothic mode allows for a demystified and thereby skeptical reading of such structures, encouraging the reader to see the horror implicit in seemingly mundane systems of oppression" (34), consequently revealing these archaic, unjust and inhuman principles to need reforming.

I. Catherine's Gothic Prison

Northanger Abbey can be seen as a representation of a patriarchal den into which Catherine Morland enters, as General Tilney's home appears as the territory for his practice of male dominance over women and others under his rule. There he exerts his dominion, disregarding others' feelings or needs and notably by placing the women in a position of subservience. Catherine's adventures at the Abbey display then a more sombre side of her tale.

Indeed, once she is at Northanger, she discovers a setting very different from what she experienced previously in Bath, where women were able to roam quite freely, going from one social gathering to another, from shop to shop, from making calls to acquaintances, without men interfering much in their daily pursuits, as is seen with Catherine and Mrs Allen's activities, and Mr Allen's relative absence from their midst during the day. In the company of Isabella Thorpe too Catherine is able to roam the streets of Bath, avoiding or alternately chasing after young men. In Northanger, however, she finds a stricter rule of conduct must be abided to, as the General dictates the manner in which proceedings are executed in his household. The defined times for meals set by him, his organisation of the tour of the house Catherine is taken on, and his forbidding his daughter from proceeding without him on the tour, are instances that contribute to illustrate how he makes his authority felt throughout the home. It is furthermore an authority under which only the women present under his roof seem to be, which shows how Austen, similarly to Gothic novels, criticizes this patriarchal dominion he exercises over his daughter and her friend.

Firstly, Eleanor can be seen to be entirely under her father's command, as she appears as an embodiment of the silent, fearful daughter. The General's overbearing persona casts a shadow over her, incapacitating her completely, as she is almost unable to speak in his vicinity. When debating what part of the Abbey to show Catherine first, the General appears to ask for his daughter's advice, "Which did his daughter think would most accord with her fair friend's wishes?", but he goes on to answer himself, "- 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" (*Northanger Abbey* 167). Eleanor's inability to speak up is orchestrated on purpose by her father, who shapes the conversation so as to get his daughter and Catherine to do as he pleases, in this case join him on his walk he always takes "at this time of day" (167), instead of showing Catherine around the inside of the Abbey. This example showcases the General's clear manipulation of both young women, and their incapacity to refute his decision. Eleanor, used to her father's ways, has to convince Catherine that "it will be wisest to take the morning while it is so fine" (167).

Eleanor finds freedom from her father's rule only when she marries, showing the power he holds over her to simply be transferred to another man, leaving her helplessly under male control; but at least the hands are ones she has selected, for whom she had had a "partiality" for some time, who luckily was a "Viscount", and who is described by the narrator, albeit ironically, as "the most charming young man in the world" (234). Eleanor's case serves to enhance Austen's point about women's powerlessness under patriarchy's rule, especially daughters' helplessness.

The General's patriarchal power in *Northanger* appears as a pervasive force that Catherine notices without being able to identify it, brooding over the unease

she feels in his vicinity and because of his actions, thinking it the result of her imagination excited by the Gothic novels she enjoys. She turns him into a Gothic villain in her mind, jumping on every detail fitting with the image she is concocting in her mind of the General: "-Here was another proof. A portrait- very like- of a departed wife, not valued by the husband!- He must have been dreadfully cruel to her!" (171). Added to this discovery is Catherine's impression of his appearance, upon which she ponders as well, thinking "handsome as he was, there was a something in the turn of his features which spoke his not having behaved well to [his wife]" (170). Without her realising, Catherine is identifying through her impressions of the General what forms the link between Austen and Gothic novels, especially as Anolik defines it: the denunciation of patriarchy's oppression of women, in particular of mothers. The General, as Catherine will find out, cannot be accused of murdering or imprisoning his wife, as Gothic villains do, but what he could be held accountable for is his tyrannical patriarchal behaviour.

As Catherine concludes after her tour of the gardens of Northanger, she could no longer attempt to

hide from herself the nature of the feelings which, in spite of all his attentions, he had previously excited; and what had been terror and dislike before, was now absolute aversion. Yes, aversion! His cruelty to such a charming woman made him odious to her.

(171)

She recognises the General's dual nature, seeing through his politeness the cruelty towards women which she senses him to be capable of. Finally, in the aftermath of this conclusion, Catherine encounters the General again, a situation in which her

inability to express her dislike of him, and where she finds herself instead "obliged to walk with him, listen to him, and even to smile when he smiled" (171) is showcased. Oppressed subjects' tendency to become complicit with their tormentor is thus demonstrated through Catherine's reaction. This scene illustrates a problem suffered by women in Gothic novels, as well as in real life, when faced with a man in a position of power; women are unable to express their antipathy, the male's authority being perceived so strongly by them that it hinders their revolt fantasies. Catherine instinctively represses her hatred of the General when faced with him, choosing instead to submit to his smiles and conversation as if nothing has changed. Austen thus displays men's suffocating rule over women, adhering especially to the Gothic idea that mothers are targeted by men, Mrs Tilney serving as the example that shows how in Austen's tale too the mother is absent for the Gothic villain to be able to persecute his daughter and her friend.

The father figure is thus all-powerful, imposing his dictatorship on the women present under his roof, which is what creates the feeling of terror and aversion Catherine senses and mistakenly associates with extreme acts such as murder, provided readily by her imagination as a result of her passion for Gothic novels. Nevertheless, this can be seen as Austen's way of introducing this issue of male dominance over women, and how the situation is horrific for them, who appear as silent victims, to the extent that it can be compared to the relationship between Gothic villain and his female prey.

Indeed, Catherine remains polite with the General, silently accusing him of crimes, but unable to express her feelings, even when he orders her rapid departure from his house. Only when she is beyond the grounds of Northanger on her way home

does she let her tears "burst forth in torrents (211), demonstrating how she was restraining herself under the General's roof, where she felt unable to be at ease, to speak or to show her emotions. Thus, Catherine's experiences away from home can be seen, as Diane Hoeveler describes, as an adventure in "a feminine world" (6) in the Bath section, in which "social artifice, hypocrisy, surface show contradicting reality, a species of 'imprisonment'" (Steiner 64). This contrasts with the Northanger section, which Hoeveler perceives as "a 'masculine' world where imprisonment is effectuated by 'psychic artifice' and 'mercenary motives'" (64). These worlds are nevertheless "essentially the same and both [are] rejected by Catherine", as

The friendships [she] 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.

(64)

Both experiences of oppressive situations give Catherine the possibility to differentiate herself from her two female counterparts. She refuses to submit as meekly as Eleanor to the General's authority, challenging it by going against his orders to Mrs Tilney's room, while simultaneously distancing herself from Isabella's dictatorial behaviour towards her, exerted in order for her to feel powerful in an attempt to counteract the feeling of impotence in a male ruled society. Catherine recognises in them behaviours she does not wish to endorse, making instead her own way in the world by following her own line of reasoning, feeling a sense of duty to

assist her female companions suffering under men's dominance and rebelling to a degree against unjust patriarchal rule.

II. Mansfield Park's Entrapped Women

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen presents still more female characters who suffer under patriarchal dictatorship, exploring in this novel how women react in different manners to this oppressive situation. Indeed, the heroine's subjection to her uncle, aunts' and cousins' rule has been commented on by many critics, some going as far as seeing Fanny Price as a slave.

This claim can be illustrated through looking at various instances in which Fanny's behaviour supports the image of her as a slave. Fanny seems to be constantly worrying about how she ought to behave, but a striking passage can be seen after she has been invited for the first time to have dinner at the Parsonage. Sir Thomas is called for to decide whether she should go or not, and Fanny fears she "might not be able to appear properly submissive and indifferent" (202) in front of her uncle while he ponders on the issue. This reveals how Fanny moderates her behaviour around others, but especially when near her uncle, whose authority pushes her to want to appear in the appropriate light. Sir Thomas' response to the question posed to him further demonstrates the oppression under which Fanny is, as he says she "appears to feel as she ought" (202) because she chose to consult her aunt and uncle for their permission rather than giving an answer to the invitation to dinner herself. This submissive behaviour is therefore seen as normal and expected in Sir Thomas' household, revealing under what strict set of unsaid rules Fanny lives.

Furthermore, Fanny's situation can be defined as Susan C. Greenfield does, as a "problem of objectification" (318), which refers to the way she is used by

Sir Thomas as a commodity that he can shift to the buyer who offers him the best deal, which in this case is Henry Crawford. Greenfield postulates that

Perhaps especially because he can no longer trade slaves in Antigua, as soon as Sir Thomas inducts Fanny into the 'trade of coming out' back home, he is ready to exchange her body on the marriage market, ready to give her to Henry Crawford in return for the benefits of reducing his expenses and improving his family's economic connections.

(318)

This attitude is showcased at the ball, when Sir Thomas was "advising" Fanny to "go to bed immediately", which the narrator does not fail to comment on, noting how "'Advise' was his word, but it was the advice of absolute power", yielded in order to "recommend her as a wife by shewing her persuadableness" (*Mansfield Park* 259). The narrator is thus explicitly pointing out this aspect of the behaviour of the patriarchal tyrant towards Fanny, showing him to be promoting her chances of securing Crawford's affections by treating her as a manipulable object.

The extremity of patriarchy's dominion over women is thus seen through Fanny's character, in particular over young unmarried women, whose fates lie in the hands of the male chief of their family circle. Fanny's challenging of Sir Thomas on this question of marriage reveals Austen's criticism of this tradition, as Fanny appears to be rewarded for her defiance by the end of the novel by finally marrying the man of her choice, and Sir Thomas realising his error of judgement concerning Henry Crawford after his elopement with his daughter Maria.

Although Fanny's case is an example of subjection to stalwart patriarchal tyranny, she is not the only female character in *Mansfield* to suffer from it. Maria

Bertram is under the same pressure as Fanny, feeling her options regarding her future to be limited. As she was in her "twenty-first year, Maria Bertram was beginning to think matrimony a duty" (37), showing how she perceives marriage to be her destiny now that she is an adult. Such a vision is shared by many characters in Austen's novels, enhancing the sense for women of inescapability linked with marriage, and thus of inevitable subjection to men's will. The only way Maria finds to control what her life will be like is to choose a husband herself while her father is away in Antigua. Settling for Mr Rushworth, whom she convinces herself will at least "give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father's, as well as ensure the house in town, which was now a prime object", she seems to trick herself into believing that "the same rule of moral obligation" was leading her to do her "evident duty to marry Mr Rushworth if she could" (37). Her conclusion seems quite bleak, her reasoning revealing the sense of duty she feels to be the driving force behind this choice, which creates a feeling of frustration, as Maria's incentives are based on superficial needs she has been trained since childhood to believe she must have in order to lead a contented life. This misguided reasoning leads her on the wrong path, which steers her towards her unhappy ending far away from society, destined to suffer her aunt Norris' company alone. Austen reveals the impasse women face, as they cannot find another solution than marriage because patriarchal society keeps them in such a condition so as to ensure they are always under a man's authority.

The Bertram sisters' antipathy towards the patriarchal rule reigning in their home can also be seen through their evident pleasure at their father's absence, as a letter from him provokes a reaction of aversion in both daughters: "It was much pleasanter to think of Henry Crawford than of their father; and to think of their father

in England again within a certain period, which these letters obliged them to do, was a most unwelcome exercise" (100). Here patriarchy's failure to achieve what it prides on can be seen, namely educating loving, respectful children, as this instance represents the daughters' defiance of Sir Thomas' rule. Maria is more affected by this news, as she will have to welcome her father back into her life as well as her husband, which appears to her "a gloomy prospect" (100). Finally, Mary Crawford heightens Maria's dire fate by jokingly commenting on the situation: "it does put me in mind of some heathen heroes, who after performing great exploits in a foreign land, offered sacrifices to the gods on their safe return" (100). Her likening Maria to a sacrifice given to gods as part of a ritual hints again at the extent of the power the father yields over his daughter, and at her helplessness in the affair. She is resigned to the idea of a troubled future, remaining in the position of object passed from father to husband through a social convention she feels her father will not allow her to escape from.

Maria's abhorrence of her upcoming nuptials is further seen when Sir Thomas does return, and even he notices his daughter's evident unhappiness at the prospect. However, she remains firm in her choice of husband, as she is glad to be "safe from the possibility of giving Crawford the triumph of governing her actions and destroying her prospects" (187), for whom she had developed feelings, notably during the theatre episode. Thus, "retired with a proud resolve" now that she had "given up every hope" of Crawford, or because she was "absolutely resolved on enduring his rival" (187), Maria is resigned to her future. The terms here emphasize her pitiable state of affairs, creating a dire picture of her life ahead.

However, what appears to be an even stronger motivator in her decision is the certitude she wants to be free:

Independence was more needful than ever; the want of it at Mansfield more sensibly felt. She was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed. The liberty which his absence had given was now become absolutely necessary. She must escape from him and Mansfield as soon as possible, and find consolation in fortune and consequence, bustle and the world, for a wounded spirit.

(187-188)

Here Austen makes visible a woman's desperate need for autonomy, a desire to be rid of male authority, which Maria thinks to have found with Mr Rushworth, a fool who is simply said to have "fancied himself in love" with Maria because he was "from the first struck with [her] beauty" (37). The only form of control she will ever have is the manipulation she can exert on him, even more so because Rushworth is said to be "a heavy young man, with no more than common sense" (37), which leads Maria to marry him, imagining she will thus wield some authority instead of being condemned to remain under the power of men.

As in Gothic novels, Maria is the object of a man's desire, which will lead her to marry him, thus exhibiting her constrained state of affairs. The situation shows her to simultaneously attempt to defy men's government over her, as she perceives her union with Mr Rushworth to allow her to hold some control and power over him, more than she could hope to under her father's roof or tied to a wilful man like Henry Crawford for example, while submitting to the status of wife, which makes her Mr Rushworth's property. However, her plan backfires, as she relied on the opportunity of wielding power as a wife to give her the satisfaction she was missing as a daughter, but it does not appear to suffice, as she is still unable to resist the idea of eloping with

Crawford. This scheme represented the ultimate escape from society's rules, allowing the lovers to live freely, were it not for the fact their relationship was not based on mutual love and respect, leading Maria to despair and suffer to a more severe degree probably than if she had contented herself to a life with the little power over her husband and freedom she had as Mrs Rushworth.

Julia Bertram comes from the same mould as her sister, as she is said to be "quite as eager for novelty and pleasure as Maria" (189). For her too the novelty lies in having a newfound freedom during their father's absence from home, which she does not want to relinquish on his return. However, Julia fares better in the end than her sister, as key differences between the two seem to explain their varying outcomes. Indeed, the narrator specifies concerning the novelty and pleasure both sisters crave, how Julia "might not have struggled through so much to obtain them, and could better bear a subordinate situation" (189) than her sister. This appears to be the result of her status of younger sister, who was "less flattered, and less spoiled" by Mrs Norris, as she was "less the darling of that very aunt" (432). The narrator therefore concedes the fact that "Julia escaped better than Maria, was owing, in some measure, to a favourable difference of disposition and circumstance" (432). The pressure to accomplish what was perceived as a woman's duty, namely marriage, is not as strongly felt by Julia, as her older sister is expected to go through with the deed before she has to. She then manages to postpone her inevitable fate by accompanying her newly married sister to her house in town, buying herself more time to enjoy freedom from her father's rule. Her status of younger sister also conferred on her the role of second best in the esteem of her family; luckily for her, this meant "education had not given her so very hurtful a degree of self-consequence" (432) as it had to her sister. Austen thus shows the

irony of the "inferior" sister turning out to be the sister who has the advantage on every level in the end, just as Fanny, the insignificant cousin, is eventually shown to have the advantage over both Bertram sisters.

Julia's saving is also due to how she dealt with Crawford, as she "submitted best to the disappointment" in him out of the two sisters, especially when she met him again in town, moment when Maria succumbed to his charms; Julia "had the merit of withdrawing herself" from the situation "in order to secure herself from being again too much attracted" (432) to him. Her ability to see through Crawford and divine his dishonest intentions is what allows her to have a relatively positive outcome, which consists of her eloping with Mr Yates. This decision is interestingly brought on by her sister's scandalous conduct with Mr Crawford, as it leads Julia to panic and to act:

her increased dread of her Father and of home, on that event- imagining its certain consequence to herself would be greater severity and restraint- made her hastily resolve on avoiding such immediate horrors at all risks.

(432)

It is then a feeling of selfish dread at the idea that she could be reeled back under her father's tyranny after Maria's downfall which makes Julia act in such a way. As the narrator finally comments, "Maria's guilt had induced Julia's folly" (*idem*), but what has to be emphasized is the fact that both daughters' actions were motivated by their rebellion against the patriarchal rule exercised by their father.

Finally, the Bertram sisters' mother should also be mentioned among this list of women of *Mansfield Park* who appear as slaves and prisoners seeking ways to escape Sir Thomas' dominance. Lady Bertram may seem as the most complacent

character of the novel, going about her routine without worrying about any of the goings on of Mansfield or about the well-being of the young people under the same roof as her. However, her lethargic state can be interpreted in a sombre light, namely as her lack of interest in anything surrounding her being the result of a crushed spirit. "Lady Bertram's silence" (*Mansfield Park* 5) is what characterizes her most accurately, being rarely heard throughout the novel. Her interventions are seldom reported directly, the narrator instead simply providing sentences such as "Lady Bertram made no opposition" (11), or "Lady Bertram agreed with her instantly" (7), to communicate her answers. She is represented as a vain creature, forever reclining on a sofa "half asleep" (67), dozing through the events taking place in her home.

Nevertheless, the image of her content, idle existence is opposed to facts inserted into the text by the narrator, which hint at her possible dissatisfaction. Her lack of action seems to stem from her lack of control in any field, as she is "guided in everything important by Sir Thomas, and in smaller concerns by her sister" (20), showing her to be constantly under the authority of others. This can be further seen when Sir Thomas is away, a circumstance which does not offer Lady Bertram any more control over any aspect of life at Mansfield, as she was

astonished to find how very well they did even without his father, how well Edmund could supply his place in carving, talking to the steward, writing to the attorney, settling with the servants, and equally saving her from all possible fatigue or exertion in every particular but that of directing her letters.

(33)

Her son takes on the role of patriarch without hesitation, assuming his mother would

not care and would not be capable of accomplishing such tasks. Furthermore, Lady Bertram had to give up "the house in town, which she had been used to occupy every spring, and remained wholly in the country, leaving Sir Thomas to attend his duty in Parliament, with whatever increase or diminution of comfort might arise from her absence" (20), demonstrating once more her passiveness, and inserting here the possibility of her having been unhappy because of this change.

The infamous theatre episode provides an unusual instance in which Lady Bertram's advice is sought by her children, and in which she has an opinion to give, albeit testifying to her incapacity to produce an original thought:

"Do not act anything improper, my dear," said Lady Bertram. "Sir Thomas would not like it.- Fanny, ring the bell; I must have my dinner.- To be sure, Julia is dressed by this time."

"I am convinced, madam," said Edmund, preventing Fanny, "that Sir Thomas would not like it."

"There, my dear, do you hear what Edmund says?"

(131)

Even though she rapidly returns to the refuge of a male point view as soon as Edmund speaks, she does nevertheless expressly state her opinion regarding the young people's performance of *Lovers' Vows*. Even in such a rare case, her point of view is influenced by what her husband would think, as the second half of her answer reveals, proving once more how incapable of being her own person she is.

A further example of the extent of Lady Bertram's subordination to Sir Thomas can be seen when Edmund raises the question of Fanny having a horse in order to exercise. Here too her agreement with a scheme is sought by one of her

children, but she is unable to express an answer truly free from her husband's influence, as she

entirely agreed with her son as to the necessity of it, and as to its being considered necessary by his father; she only pleaded against there being any hurry; she only wanted him to wait till Sir Thomas's return, and then Sir Thomas might settle it all himself. He would be at home in September, and where would be the harm of only waiting till September?

(35)

Her reaction seems to reveal a sense of fear of Sir Thomas, of his being opposed to decisions being made without his consent; Lady Bertram's pleading Edmund to wait for his father's return exposes her sense of transgressing her husband's authority if she gives her agreement to such a decision, displaying a wife's complete subordination to her husband and fear of displeasing him.

Lady Bertram appears as the embodiment of a wife leading an idle, meaningless life devoted to writing letters, being read to and dozing on sofas, which can be seen to belie a hidden dissatisfaction with her situation, which manifests in her fear of her husband's anger. What further demonstrates her possible discontentment is apparent when, in an unforeseen episode, she takes center stage to reveal to Sir Thomas how his children had been occupying themselves during his absence:

in the elation of her spirits Lady Bertram became talkative, and what were the sensations of her children upon hearing her say, "How do you think the young people have been amusing themselves lately, Sir Thomas? They have been acting. We have been all alive with acting.

(168)

This intervention can of course be interpreted as Lady Bertram simply being naive and unaware of the tension in the room concerning this subject. However, the uncharacteristic nature of this speech can be seen as hinting at the significance of this passage: it could be a way for Lady Bertram to show her disagreement with her children's acting and their disregard for her advice against it. Her use of the term "alive", a revealing choice of word for passive Lady Bertram, indicates the importance of this speech. This interpretation would then display a deeper level to Lady Bertram's character, showing her to be aware of what happens around her, and conscious of the impropriety of the acting scheme. She is in this instance then delivering an ironic and cutting comment meant as a gibe at her children for their misbehaviour.

The conclusion is hence quite desolate: Lady Bertram is a woman entrapped in a prisoner like state in her marriage, unable to hold any control over her life or her children's, living in fear of her husband's displeasure. Her only option is to play the part of the passive, half-asleep mother who does not intervene in her offspring's lives in any way. Her unhappiness is veiled under this layer of idleness, surfacing only in certain moments, in which the despair of her situation is visible. Austen is thus denouncing the fact that a woman, "if 'well married', may pass away thirty years half asleep on a sofa, with a lap-dog, and a tangled useless bit of needlework", while still being "reckoned a respectable wife of a respected public man" (Kirkham 88). Prisoners of patriarchy, Austen's women are suffering because of the confining roles of niece, daughter, wife, mother, that leave them very little room in which to be themselves. As in Gothic novels, Lady Bertram, in addition to her state of prisoner in her marriage, appears through her lethargy almost as lifeless. She can accordingly be seen as a representation of the extent to which a woman's lack of

freedom can affect her, leading her to slowly die in her parlor, as if entombed on the sofa from which she rarely gets the chance to rise.

III. Surviving Subversive Women

Among the suffering women in her novels, Austen disperses some that appear oblivious to their sisters' distress, seeming themselves to adopt an unconcerned attitude towards their subordinate role in their male dominated society. They defy conventions, revealing a rebellious streak in the face of the domineering representatives of patriarchy to which other female characters submit. Indeed, not all Austen's women are sentenced to a living-dead state similar to Lady Bertram's condition, some managing to dictate their own rules of conduct. Isabella Thorpe may be taken as an example, as her selfish pursuit of men gives her satisfaction, while her disregard for the pain she causes around her because of it display her self-involved nature, which allows her to lead a relatively free existence. What Catherine sees as her misbehaviour towards her brother is in fact what forms Isabella's strength, as she cares only about her own pleasure. As Catherine criticizes her for being indecent for allowing Captain Tillney's attentions while she is engaged to Catherine's brother, Henry Tilney points out to her how Isabella is choosing to "torment" (143) James Morland with this flirtation for her own pleasure.

Her reading habits, crucial in forming the bond with Catherine through their apparently mutual love of Gothic novels, are actually seen to be as artificial as her proclamations of attachment to James and Catherine. She appears to only be interested in the novels Catherine reads passionately for their prevalence in the general opinion; she keeps herself informed of the latest fashion in order to have the adequate tools to hold conversations, studying only the summaries of novels to be able to discuss them without having actually read them. Her artificiality shines through, but

with it comes a boldness which is seen to be beneficial to her, as it is what allows her to stand up to patriarchal society's rules. Her superficial reading of Gothic novels thus demonstrates how the type of reader she is reflects the type of person she is: what matters to her is keeping up appearances, as it is her way of dealing with the male dominated environment she lives in.

She does not fit into the category meant for her, as she refuses to settle into the role of young woman waiting to catch a man's attention and attachment; instead she plays with men, not settling as propriety dictates for one suitor, but seeking more than one man's attention. Isabella is condemned for it, Catherine finding her to be a "vain coquette" (204), but she is regardless able to act as she pleases, simply because she refuses to abide by the rules set up by patriarchy. She holds control in her relationships with men, toying with suitors, presenting thus a case of a woman with a degree of power over men. However, Isabella's mastery is only temporary, as she loses both men in the end, as well as Catherine's friendship, which leads to question the usefulness of her hold over men.

Another female character standing out through her different approach to the patriarchal society is Mary Crawford, another example Austen designs to explore how women can stand against the male defined order of things. Her personality is her asset, not needing to resort to scheming behaviour like Isabella, instead charming and gaining a degree of control over men through her agreeable character. During their visit to Sotherton, Miss Crawford shows her ability to enchant Edmund, managing to transform her mistaken claim about the distance they had walked in the grounds into a charming trait of character:

He still reasoned with her, but in vain. She would not calculate, she would not compare. She would only smile and assert. The greatest degree of rational consistency could not have been more engaging, and they talked with mutual satisfaction.

(90)

This episode testifies of her skills of seduction, which allow her to manipulate men to find her irresistible.

Finally, she is seen to hope to achieve yet another goal: to convince Edmund to change career paths and forget his plan to take orders. Here her charms do not yield enough power, as this scheme makes Edmund judge her and consider her lacking in moral qualities, as he describes her as having "a tinge of wrong" in her "conversation" and in her "professed opinions" (248). He claims "She does not *think* evil, but she speaks it- speaks it in playfulness- and though I know it to be playfulness, it grieves me to the soul", which leads him to admit "for sometimes, Fanny, I own to you, it does appear more than manner; it appears as the mind itself was tainted" (248). Mary's comical way of speaking of serious matters such as the Church shows a similar disregard for social conventions as seen with the character of Isabella Thorpe, revealing her superficial nature, which Edmund notices. She therefore stands as different to Gothic women, who are prey to men's dominance, as she challenges men by her mocking of Edmund's chosen profession.

This accusation of her having "a tinge of wrong" (248) in her is then a result of her ridiculing Edmund's future occupation, revealing his judgement to be a consequence of a feeling of incongruity brought on by a woman challenging him. In the end he distances himself from her, perceiving the "tainted mind" (248) of a woman who stands up to him to be an undesirable quality in a prospective wife. Mary

Crawford's shallowness, the ensuing disregard for the religious profession and mainly her defiance of Edmund are insurmountable obstacles for the latter. Her power over him is then ineffectual because of his moral integrity and staid character, showing her mastery of men to be limited.

Isabella and Mary stand as strong women with a predatory approach to their seduction of men, which confers on them a sense of authority over unsuspecting male characters. Yet these women yield their control in order to pursue an objective that is no different from other women: finding a husband. In the end, these two examples serve to show how women are perpetually under patriarchy's influence, acting out scenarios that will serve in men's favour. Women's belief that their happiness lies with men seems then inescapable in Austen's novels and in society. A true revolutionary action would be for a woman to find happiness by herself, or within her family, without needing a man to complete the picture. Until then, women are still prisoners of patriarchy, unable to free themselves from its influence, condemned like Gothic heroines to bare the weight of patriarchy's control over them.

Waldo S. Glock makes the link with Gothic novels clearer, as he argues in *Northanger Abbey's* Catherine's case that

the point of the Gothic scenes at Northanger, in fact, is to emphasize by contrast that Catherine cannot find happiness in fantasy and romantic retreat from reality; it can only be found in the acceptance of the general ordinariness of life, as epitomized by the witty and original, yet totally unromantic Henry Tilney.

(38)

He is then presenting another version of women's reality, less bleak than the slave/captive state, but still a variety of imprisonment. However, one could argue that it is actually through fantasy that Catherine discovers the Gothic of the "general ordinariness of life" (38), showing her to profit from her wild imagination, which is then suppressed when she recognizes the inevitable truth of her female destiny. It serves to make women resign themselves to accept the "general ordinariness" of the lives they are destined to lead as wives, which allows them to find happiness. This statement accentuates women's passiveness regarding their future contentment, showing how their choices are extremely limited. Claiming acceptance to be the only way to find happiness places women even closer to the image of slaves, having no choice in the matter of their futures than submitting to the inevitable fact that they will marry. Once they accept this, they can be satisfied with getting a husband who is at least "witty and original" like Glock describes Henry Tilney, or kind and familiar as Edmund Bertram can be described in Fanny's case.

In *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*, from the married women such as Mrs Allen and Mrs Morland to Lady Bertram, Mrs Price and Mrs Grant, to as of yet unmarried young women such as Catherine, Isabella, Eleanor and Fanny, the Bertram sisters and Mary Crawford, all female characters are in fact in this situation. Their recognition of their role being intrinsically linked to marriage is evident, all resigned to their mediocre lot. It is the only transaction they will be a part of, the only thing they have to sell within a patriarchal society being their own body. They enter a contract that keeps patriarchy intact and testifies to their despondent situation. This argument thus proves, once more, how women are captives under patriarchy, advised to learn to be pleased with their condition of wife. Gothic novels' women's

circumstances are thus recognised in Austen's works, her female characters enduring male domination and seeming to have no definitive way of liberation from the threat posed by tyrannical men.

The case of Mrs Norris appears therefore as an exception to this generalization, as she presents herself as a participator in the imposition of men's dominion over other women. She appropriates male power to herself and stands as an even stricter wielder of authority than the men of the novel. Indeed, she takes it upon herself to act as Sir Thomas' representative during his time away in Antigua, taking charge of the "supervision of the household while he [was] overseas" (Wiltshire 76). She is shown to enjoy holding "power over her inferiors" (88), which appears to be a result of her discontentment with her situation. Her peculiar longing to be of importance within her sister's family can be read as coming from her dissatisfaction with her condition of widow, a state of affairs that in Austen's society has "little social clout", which she counteracts by "[securing] what she can in the way of prestige by attaching herself to her sister's rich and important family" (88). This ensures her a prominent position within Mansfield Park, which she exploits abundantly, seen on a multitude of occasions where she flaunts her tyrannical authority over other characters, notably on Fanny, in whose case Mrs Norris' treatment of her can be categorized as cruelty. Her status of widow means she is free of a husband's tyranny, and her power hungry behaviour ensures she is in a position to act herself as a tyrant.

It would appear as if Mrs Norris represents a case of a woman taking control of her life, without letting men command her decisions, as she demonstrates through her manipulation of Sir Thomas regarding Fanny's living accommodation for instance; despite her groundless arguments, as she declares "if Sir Thomas should ever

speak again about my taking Fanny, you will be able to say, that my health and spirits put it quite out of the question- besides that, I really should not have a bed to give her, for I must keep a spare room for a friend" (*Mansfield Park* 29), she manages to persuade her sister that she can in no way have Fanny move in with her, which also convinces Sir Thomas of "how much he had mistaken his sister-in-law's views" (30), displaying her manipulation of patriarchy to allow her to be free to do exactly as she pleases. Her active nature adds to the portrait of a strong, independent woman, as she "was walking all day, thinking every body ought to walk as much" (35), reinforcing the image of her as an energetic and enterprising woman.

However, her apparent independence can be counteracted if one considers Mary Wollstonecraft's pronouncement in her *Vindication For The Rights Of Woman*, that woman "has always been either a slave or a despot" (Wollstonecraft chap. 4 para. 8). Mrs Norris can be seen as a Wollstonecraftian oppressor, therefore exhibiting she is not in fact an example of a woman free of male supremacy, but a slave to the system, just as the women she abuses. Her lack of suffering under male dictatorship is thus not an indicator of her freedom, but of her being intrinsically bound to the system of patriarchy, where she contributes to the perpetration of the despotic rule of men through her denigration of Fanny, her substantial role in Maria's marriage, and her encouragement of Lady Bertram's idleness. She emerges as comparable to a Gothic villain through her exploitation of her fellow female characters in the manner of male tyrants, keeping them in the role of submissive, inert wives, while she is simultaneously seen to be a victim herself, as testified by her unhappiness.

Her need for power, for control over others and her wickedness are the result of what John Wiltshire explains to be her fate:

Mrs Norris has been condemned to act out in the world- in bizarrely pointless activities, in meddling, in bullying, in adding to her savings, in slavishly doting on Maria, the eldest sister, like herself- the conflicts within.

(91)

Her inner battle with unresolved feelings of jealousy towards her two sisters is at the core of her flawed character. Her relationship with Maria can be identified as relating to her recognising herself in her, and thus wishing to arrange the advantageous marriage for her she did not get, as it was her younger sister who became Lady Bertram, revealing her bitterness at the unfairness of her less recommendable marriage to Mr Norris. Finally, "Latent in the family history of the Ward sisters are the forces that shape Aunt Norris and her relationship to her niece [Fanny]", as her adoption can be seen as "Mrs Norris' unconscious revenge on her sisters" (91). Mistreating Fanny, taking a perverse pleasure in ordering her about and witnessing her discomfort is her aunt's misguided manner of righting the wrong which she unconsciously perceives has been done to her, having no children of her own while her sister, who is also called Fanny, has nine.

Thus, Mrs Norris is just as much a sufferer of patriarchal society's unjust set of rules and principles imposed on women, as she is doomed to spend her days bitter and wretched because she does not have what is perceived by this society as the height of happiness for women: a husband and children. Within the Gothic frame she then stands as a misunderstood, pitiable villainess, haunting Mansfield Park, spreading her unhappiness wherever she goes, unable to let go of the past, reliving it and replaying her difficult relationship with her sisters with the new generation of female

characters. Accordingly, Mansfield Park's inhabitants enjoy a more tranquil existence after Mrs Norris' banishment, enhancing her portrayal as a wretch that needed to be excommunicated from the family's midst. Her character appears thence as pitiable, her meanness arising from her own feelings of inadequacy in a patriarchal culture where she has the impression of having failed in her role of woman, her plight reflecting the inescapability and the pressure of women's set fates.

CHAPTER 4: AUSTEN'S ENLIGHTENMENT FEMINISM

The dire picture of Austen's women as subjected to male supremacy creates the sense that she is leaving her characters without options. This assumption is, however, to be taken as a starting point, which Austen uses to present women's situation in the society of the end of eighteenth- and the beginning of nineteenth-century England in order to denounce the extent to which they are subjected to male rule. This claim is emboldened by the exploration of eighteenth century literature, which shows how moral discourse was a topic of importance, especially with the question of the moral nature and the status of women becoming an issue of interest.

Margaret Kirkham argues that Austen's novels are "the culmination of a line of development in thought and fiction which goes back to the start of the eighteenth-century" ("Feminism and Fiction: 1694-1798" 1), which should therefore be called "*feminist*" as it was concerned with establishing the moral equality of men and women and the proper status of individual women as accountable beings" (1-2). The first ideas brought to public attention that are retrospectively considered feminist came from Catherine Macaulay and Mary Wollstonecraft in the 1790s, who were against "the assignment of women to an inferior status as spiritual and moral beings" (2). The claim of these women's "Enlightenment feminism" is centered on the notion that women have the powers of reason, and therefore must "have the moral status appropriate to 'rational beings', formed in the image of a rational God" (2). This point became of consequence to women, as it cast their condition as morally inferior to men not as a natural difference between the sexes, but a distinction invented by "male theologians, moral philosophers and poets" (2). The denunciation of such an

unscientific and unfair claim became feminist writers' aim, an injustice which they perceived could be redressed through women improving "their powers of rational understanding and reflection" (3), which led them to demand a proper education for women.

Mary Wollstonecraft is of particular importance in the study of Austen, as she has been shown to adopt "the same point of view on many questions as Wollstonecraft ", especially as she is seen to share with her "a belief in 'a liberationist principle' which is the essence of the eighteenth-century feminist tradition" (Kirkham, "Women As Authors: 1788-98" 32) within which Austen writes. In her work *Maria: Or The Wrongs Of Woman*, notably a Gothic novel, Wollstonecraft sets out to present a heroine who possesses "powers of mind which enable [her] to acquire moral principle through rational reflection upon experience" (34). Austen's adherence to this idea is clear through all her heroines, who learn lessons through experiences that allow them to better themselves.

In her *A Vindication Of The Rights Of Woman*, Wollstonecraft displays the main ideas concerning women's condition that had been developing over nearly a century. Her concern lies with women from the middle class, as she sees them as the most likely to find "moral independence" (Kirkham 40), and especially with married and destined to be married women. Her interest is located in the roles they play in society: daughter, mother, wife, roles which she argues cannot be performed well because "the education [women] receive does not equip them to acquit themselves creditably here" (40). She identifies the problem behind women's education as being due to the fact that the books used for the purpose are written by men who "considering females rather as women than as human creatures, have been more

anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers" (41). Wollstonecraft sees this as leading to another problem: "the civilised 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", an issue also exposed by Austen through the negative portrayal of characters such as Isabella Thorpe, Maria and Julia Bertram or Mary Crawford, while the "nobler ambition" (41) is conversely seen to be portrayed by heroines such as Fanny Price.

Another aspect Wollstonecraft attacks centres on women's presumed lack of physical strength. She denounces the fact that young women are encouraged to present themselves as feeble and without bodily strength for men to find them attractive and to feel compelled to offer them masculine protection. Her claim centres on the idea that it is wrong to encourage women to think "an artificial weakness of body" to be an advantage, or that "a defect can, by any chemical process of reasoning, become an excellence" (41). Cultivating weakness in women is a further way in which they are kept in an inferior position to men, needing them to perform physical feats they are allegedly too weak to do. Women's dependence on men is then in addition to economical also physical, demonstrating male dominance to pervade their lives on all levels.

Finally, Wollstonecraft argues that women's condition will change only when they are no longer seen as "'relative creatures' or 'objects' in a male-devised scenario", and are instead considered as "equal human beings, subject to the same moral principles" (42). Then women will not be able to hide behind ignorance and frailty, but will have the opportunity to show themselves just as capable of functioning in society as men. They would thus gain power within the private sphere of the home,

to which they would still be confined until women start having a role in public life, but for these early Enlightenment feminists their objective would already be attained with the conquering of the home sphere. Consequently, women would be less subservient to the institution of marriage and would not need to "marry for support" (42) if they received what Wollstonecraft, and as we will see Austen too, demand: a better education, the chance to exercise the body, allowing them to take control of their own minds and bodies, making them less dependent on men, and finally demonstrating them to be morally equal to men.

The panorama of women's condition in eighteenth-century English society shares a remarkable amount of similarities with women's status in Gothic novels. The similarities in power relations between men and women of Gothic novels and of the society Austen portrays reveal her denunciation of the problematic nature of these relations seen in women's subordinate state. She takes these women into her realist novels, depicting their subjectivities, showing their internal reality to be comparable to Gothic women's. Women's desolation is reflected through Austen's fictional women, whose misery mirrors their Gothic counterparts' distress, unfolding therefore how the real women of Austen's time, passing their lives in sitting rooms, are thus dissatisfied and fearful of the power of patriarchy. Disclosing women's inner struggle against the order of things serves to highlight Austen's representation of the outer action that can be taken by the women of her novels, as she offers them ways to slowly begin weaving together threads of change into their lives, a change that begins with a reformation of their relationships to men.

CHAPTER 5: THE ESCAPE ROUTE FROM THE GOTHIC FRAME

Female characters in Gothic works are generally seen to search for a way to escape the haunted building where the tale is set, seeking refuge from the Gothic villain, an essential plot line in these tales which mirrors the mental journey women are progressing on simultaneously. Their march towards the exit of the terrifying prison-like building is reflected in their inner development, as they also head forward on a voyage in their minds consisting of coming to the realisation that they are able to resist patriarchy's oppressive force. The comprehension that they do not have to be men's submissive victims, that they can stand up to their authority, is the key to women's growing awareness of their own worth. As Jane Austen's heroines, they recognize their right and ability to refuse to suffer men's tyranny, which they can oppose by taking matters into their own hands.

Austen showcases this revolt through her alignment with Wollstonecraft's Enlightenment feminism ideas, which leads her to demonstrate in her novels how "women share the same moral nature as men, [they] ought to share the same moral status, and exercise the same responsibility for their own conduct" (Kirkham 42). The way for women to escape physically and mentally from men's subjugation requires them to embrace the fact that they are moral agents just as men are, and proving it to the latter, leading to their slow realisation that women are morally equal to them. What is remarkable about Austen's novels is how this innovative idea is presented "apparently without effort, as though it were perfectly natural for young women to think, to learn through what passes under their own observation, and to draw conclusions the author thinks valid from it" (Kirkham 42). Indeed, she shows her

heroines' education and their resulting growth to take place without obstacles, making it appear absolutely normal that they are benefitting from studies and experiences which allow them to expand intellectually, morally and personally. Kirkham notices how "it looks natural, but it is done by playing with the mirror of art and producing an illusion" (82), as Austen presents tales where women have these opportunities in order to suggest how it could be, and simultaneously to exhibit how it is not so in contemporary society. Kirkham calls the illusion "visionary and salutary", as it proposes a possible way of living, while criticising how the reality is "a world where women, however marked their abilities, are not thought of (except by a few, mostly *heroes*) as equals and 'partners in life'" (82). Therefore, Austen's focus on the visionary and salutary allows her to showcase her version of an improved society, which begins with an ameliorated education for women.

I. Education, Observation, Maturing: Catherine's Evolution Out
Of The Gothic Darkness

For Catherine, education is gained mainly through personal experience and through her courtship with Henry Tilney. Despite her young age and evident naivety, she is nevertheless "always shown as possessing sound, healthy affections and a good deal of native common sense" (Kirkham 86). Her mistakes can be seen to not likely "be long-lasting, for her own abilities, with a little experience, are bound to correct them" (86). Her time at the Abbey illustrates her fast learning, as an important lesson is assimilated when she reflects on the "absurdity of her recent fancies", as she feels ashamed of the misrepresentation of her imagination, which "had filled her with expectation and alarm, and robbed her of half her night's rest!" (*Northanger Abbey* 164), all because of a "washing-bill" (163). The realisation of her mistake, and her ensuing reasoning, as she reflects on her room's "modern" and "habitable" state, seeing it was ridiculous to imagine "a manuscript of many generations back could have remained undiscovered" (164), or indeed that she could be the only one able to find it, reflect her capacity to acknowledge her error and to learn from it. She is embarrassed by her mistake, especially at the idea of Henry ever finding out how she had let her "folly" (164) sweep her away. Catherine learns a valuable lesson, enhanced by her shame, intensifying her desire to improve herself by reigning in her straying imagination.

The emotional experience serves as a firm push towards Catherine's maturing, which Carol Margaret Davison argues is linked to her diminishing passion for the Gothic, as "In its character portraits and excesses, the Gothic is deemed to be entirely

out of touch with reality. Thus Austen seems to equate Catherine's maturity with her developing ability to separate 'real life' adult fact from immature Gothic fiction" (161). She is distancing herself from her love of Gothic novels while at Northanger, as she feels embarrassment at her gullibility, which she perceives as a sign of immaturity, which is the opposite of what she wants Henry Tilney to associate her with.

The Gothic is, however, not entirely eradicated from Catherine's life, turning out to have provided her with correct judgement concerning the General. The Gothic seems to be given here according to Davison "a deeper meaning" by Austen, as she reveals Catherine's associations between "Tilneys and trap-doors" (161) not to be baseless. This suggestion demonstrates how she "defuses and modernizes the Gothic by simultaneously bringing it down to earth and up to date" (162), which she does by showing Catherine to have been right in her ominous feelings about the General. He may not have murdered his wife, but his baseness, superficiality and the tyranny he wields in his household are sufficient to cast him in the role of Gothic villain. The Gothic is then a part of her education, a "powerful means of instruction and indictment" (164), as it allows her to recognise the wickedness of her host. Austen thus demonstrates how the Gothic "encodes deep-seated, sometimes dark truths" (164) which it serves to reveal. Catherine's instinct regarding the Gothic, which she seems to have absorbed and to be accordingly able to detect effectively, associated with the growth she has gone through as a result of her experiences in Bath and Northanger, together with her morals, give her the ability to denounce the patriarchal oppression exercised by the General.

Another aspect of Catherine's education can be seen when she professes to have "just learnt to love a hyacinth" (*Northanger Abbey* 165), as a result of Miss

Tilney's teaching her. This acquirement has the benefit of appealing to Henry Tilney, who claims "I am pleased that you have learnt to love a hyacinth. The mere habit of learning to love is the thing; and a teachableness of disposition in a young lady is a great blessing" (165). Despite the condescending tone of the comment, it reveals Henry's appreciation of Catherine's ability to learn to reevaluate her judgement, showing her adaptability, which testifies of her maturing, as she shows herself capable of absorbing Eleanor's teachings. Interestingly, this depiction of Catherine shows her to be comparable to male heroes of novels, as Mary Wollstonecraft asserts in the Preface to *Maria: Or The Wrongs Of Woman* that

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 born to be immaculate, and to act like goddesses of wisdom, just come forth highly finished Minervas from the head of Jove.

(Wollstonecraft Preface)

Catherine's association with male heroes through her progressive evolution into a virtuous character, as opposed to being born so, reveals Austen's intention of proving the equality between men and women. By such subtle ways, she weaves within her novel the idea that women are evolving, rational creatures who resemble men on many aspects, especially regarding learning skills and morality. Catherine's progression towards becoming a reasoning, principled woman is thus visible through this simple observation about flowers, demonstrating how her mind's improvement spreads from making sense of Gothic fancies to all aspects of her life.

Catherine's growth and education is put to the test when she is, as Jo Ann Citron puts it, "the victim of a very metaphorical kidnapping, carried away not by the

teller but by his tale" (274) when Henry Tilney spins for her his Gothic story on their journey to Northanger. Catherine, in the role of the victim, is dragged into Henry's tale, which she resists at first, refusing to partake in his denial of "the separation between the world one reads about and the world one lives in" and to "imagine herself the heroine" (275). She is a "literalist" (275), unable to catch on to what Henry is proposing, saying instead "I do not think I should be easily frightened, because there would be so many people in the house" (*Northanger Abbey* 149). She is nevertheless pulled into the world he creates with his story telling, through which he offers her "the opportunity to indite the story, to use her salvaged writing-desk to rescue the tale" (Citron 276), as he "entreat[ed] her to use her own fancy in the perusal of Matilda's woes" (*Northanger Abbey* 152). She is unable to resist a try at what appears as the culmination of her Gothic dreams.

Catherine enters the Gothic realm Henry has created through her illicit exploration of the Abbey, having taken on Matilda's role of heroine and imagining herself in a Gothic tale. This expedition through the forbidden corridors of the Abbey and through her imagination leads her to unforeseen discoveries, which "Despite her most outrageous errors" (Citron 276), show her to have

done well to seek a hidden life behind General Tilney's exterior, for her experience in doing so is what eventually prepares her to understand Isabella's character and actions; to measure the extent to which the General behaved villainously toward her; to appreciate the possible effect upon her own fortunes of John Thorpe's self-serving lies. Catherine's reading of the General is partially authorized after all.

(276)

Her imagination, accompanied with her growth, enable Catherine to make the right conclusion concerning other characters. Thus, Citron argues "This discovering of reading as action rewrites the powerless heroine of the tale into a figure that begins to resemble the omnipotent author of the tale" (276), showing Catherine frees herself from her role of feeble woman situated under the masculine authority of the General and Henry. She takes what she has learnt through reading, through her experiences at the Abbey, and through Henry, who serves as "a critic through his lively ridicule of her speech, ideas, and taste in reading" and his sister, who in turn stands as "an ideal" (Mathison 143) for Catherine, and becomes the denouncer of other characters' faults.

Indeed, she sees, as Kirkham claims, the General's "evil" side, and how his wife had in a way been "imprisoned by her marriage to him, perhaps even brought to an early grave through unhappiness", and this because he is "allowed by the laws of England and the manners of the age to exert near absolute power over his wife and daughter, and he does so as an irrational tyrant" (87). Through this conclusion, Catherine reveals she is "stepping out of Henry's shadow and making her own statement" (Steiner 70), as he passively let his father behave in such a tyrannical way towards his female family members, which Catherine refuses to watch without acknowledgement. The General's complex character and his drastically changing behaviour serve to make her develop her mind and her judgement. Catherine's ability to discern his baseness is a sign of her evolution, which leads her "to see people as they are, not as they are officially classified in society, and to frame her own standards of human merit" (Mathison 143). This realisation means she is then able to decide for herself how she wants to behave, and how to respond to others who do not act according to her moral standards.

An expanded circle of acquaintances serves to awaken Catherine's investigative ability, imbuing her observations with moral judgement, which serves in the same vein to prompt her education. Her dislike of Captain Tilney's conduct towards her brother through his uncaring flirting with Isabella makes him, according to Mathison, a "bad example, who teaches her to discriminate: not all people even in a nice family need be nice" (143), something she seems not to have considered before. Furthermore, from John Thorpe she learns that "there are evil motives she could never have suspected" (Mathison 144), causing her agony, which nevertheless finally serves her well, as it enhances the idea that her dislike for people can be well founded. A secondary female character should also be added to this category: Mrs Allen, who through her unreliability forces Catherine to "struggle to puzzle out answers to the problems which the brave new world of Bath has presented to her" (144). Mrs Allen's blasé attitude to anything not related to fashion drives Catherine to make her own decisions and judge for herself, and noticing her chaperone's uselessness adds to her expanding ability of perception.

Finally, her discerning of Isabella's faults is the last piece of her learning process, as she determines people can be deceptive, selfish and superficial. Her doubts arise when she observes Isabella's behaviour regarding Captain Tilney, and sees her "manner had been odd" and that "she had looked so well pleased at the sight of Captain Tilney" (*Northanger Abbey* 139); she perceives it as being the result of "a degree of wilful thoughtlessness which [she] could not but resent" (Mathison 141). Catherine's definitive phase of judgement of Isabella is seen after the latter's desperate attempt to make nothing of her flirtation with Captain Tilney in a letter to Catherine. She recognises the "strain of shallow artifice" in Isabella's words and all the

"inconsistencies, contradictions, and falsehood", which make her "ashamed of Isabella and ashamed of having ever loved her" (*Northanger Abbey* 203-204). She can discern her "professions of attachment as disgusting as her excuses were empty, and her demands impudent" (204), showing Catherine's new found ability to espy Isabella's true nature and to awaken to the fact that she had not cared for her brother nor for her. Isabella stands as a figure of the Gothic genre, a deceitful character playing on her powers of seduction, attracting and finally disgusting Catherine, appearing thus as an obstacle she must overcome in order to continue her advancement on her journey to enlightenment.

She additionally recognizes through her observation of Henry how his criticism of Isabella is accompanied by a silent justification of his brother, a bias which she confronts. She sees his "unspoken solidarity and complicity with his brother", making her realise that "his camouflaged misogyny is coupled with a reluctance to address male shortcomings" (Steiner 70). Catherine is finally able to take off the veil that had covered her eyes and made her blind to Isabella's faults, and to see her actions, behaviour and words as false, and in consequence to make the decision to cut ties with such a person, while concurrently espying faults in Henry she is able to judge and condemn too.

Thus, as Catherine advances through the corridors of *Northanger Abbey*, expecting to find Gothic nightmares come to life, she instead unearths behind one door Eleanor's submissive situation under her father's rule, lurking behind another the General's tyrannical nature, and behind a further one she uncovers Isabella's falseness, as well as Henry's defects. Her forward motion has a twofold aspect, arising also on a psychological level, as she progresses through the corridors of her mind, making sense

of her experience at Bath and Northanger. Catherine "must reject the Gothic as she had rejected her first valuation of the Thorpes, and what she arrives at in her rejection of the Gothic can not be mere unthinking return to adolescence but an advance to a truer view of society" (Mathison 147). Her clearer vision of society allows her to understand better the complex inner workings of characters, and to judge them accordingly. Essentially, Gothic novels assist Catherine in recognising her own foolishness and inexperience, a reflection that enables her to improve herself, as she perceives her mistakes as well as others' errors.

Her growth of "conscience and socialization" is visible in the "increased use of free indirect speech after she has left Bath, displaying her analysis of gothic symbolism and character", which "introduces a new kind of 'drama of surveillance and chastisement, of self-surveillance and self-chastisement'" (Steiner 72). The Gothic has two effects on Catherine, teaching her how to examine Gothic symbols as well as how to investigate herself and her motivations. Her readings, and her ensuing reining in of her Gothic fantasies, give her the sense "The forms of cruelty and violence in the Gothic novels were unreal, but cruelty and violence do exist in the well-ordered society of the English midlands" (Mathison 149), as they made her see what her screened life had hidden from her. Her growth is displayed by her starting to think of what is "important, what trivial, what admirable, and what detestable in life and behavior" (Mathison 150), and by the fact she "permanently inquires after the morality of human actions" (Steiner 70), through her pondering over the decency of a father like the General imposing forcefully his will on his family, or of women submitting meekly to male control as Eleanor does, or on the contrary, of women like Isabella flirting outrageously with men simply for the sake of attention.

Catherine's deliberations reveal how Austen portrays in *Northanger Abbey* morality as "not external, but the result of internal reflections that undergo change through constant interaction with the external world" (Steiner 71). She is thus aligning herself with Wollstonecraft, who claims "Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in" (quoted in Steiner 71), which is the case for Catherine, who learns her lessons from her interactions with different members of society. She becomes, by the end of the novel, free of Gothic delusions, while keeping in mind the lessons learnt through her passion for the genre, which allows her to be clear sighted about the faults of characters and society, thus becoming through her critical eye free from the passiveness and submissiveness associated with women's condition in Austen's society.

II. Fanny's Emancipation

Fanny Price has the ability to perplex readers of *Mansfield Park*, appearing, as Marija Reiff explains, either as "Austen's experiment with a 'contemplative heroine'", or as her "endorsement of conventional female roles" (275). Reiff discusses how Fanny is seen to represent both aspects, as she can be considered as an emblem of Austen's ideas concerning feminism. Indeed, she demonstrates in *Mansfield Park* her inclination towards Wollstonecraft's "conservative" feminist beliefs, as she can be seen to make Fanny her "experiment in creating an Enlightenment feminist" (276). This feminist concept is based on Wollstonecraft's notion that women ought to fight against the idleness patriarchal society encourages them to adopt in order to keep them meek and subservient to their rule. She defines what forms for her the most effective ways of countering this bias, namely a proper education, leading to the exercise of the mind in order to showcase women as moral creatures, and exercising the body to enhance their physical strength, so as to not be dependent on men on any level.

Mansfield Park begins with the bringing of Fanny as a child into the Bertram household, a portrayal of significance, as it is the only novel where Austen represents in such detail her heroine's growth from childhood into adulthood, which allows her to show the importance of infancy in the development of individuals. This displays Austen's awareness and association with defenders of further contemporary issues, such as the Romantic writers, namely Wordsworth, who highlights childhood's defining role. Wordsworth's idea of the child as a prophet, an almighty seer, who appears as the father of men can be seen in the novel, Fanny being presented as the

mother of woman, the woman she becomes by the end of the novel being already decided at this phase of childhood. Steiner explains how the

autonomous behaviour of the adult is neither isolated from the past, nor fixed in a historical context, because the mechanisms of self-restraint, foresights and self-observation do not emerge out of nowhere, but are an enactment of social and economic relations with and outside the family.

(106)

Fanny exemplifies this idea, Austen demonstrating through her evolution how she learns to apply these mechanisms to herself through the experiences she undergoes. The family life at Mansfield Park, the interactions with the Parsonage's inhabitants, the theatre episode and her time in Portsmouth deliver lessons compounding to make an array of experiences from which Fanny learns and which shape her adult character.

Austen especially emphasizes the importance of childhood in this novel, as the child characteristics in Fanny are stressed, as she is presented as a "little girl", "small", "exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice" (*Mansfield Park* 13) when she arrives at Mansfield, inspiring derision from her family members. She appears to conform "to many of the features of the conduct book young lady, being modest, quiet, delicate, passive, religious, and dutiful" (Reiff 277), thus the opposite of a Wollstonecraftian feminist, the religious aspect being at first the only link between Fanny and Wollstonecraft's idea of feminism, the latter being also religious. Fanny's beginning at Mansfield is characterized by her inability to adjust, her discomfort and her tearful state. Uprooted from her home and placed in her relatives' house, Fanny appears as standing, petrified by fear, at the edges of this new family she is expected to fit into, unknowing of how to advance. She has to adapt to her new life, moving

forward, albeit with difficulty at first, through the corridors of Mansfield, which can be seen as representing equivalently the corridors of her mind. Her anxieties stand as obstacles along the passageways, which she has to learn to surmount in order to adapt to her current circumstances.

A significant detail of little Fanny's arrival at Mansfield is the fact that she is met first by Mrs Norris, who "regaled in the credit of being foremost to welcome her, and in the importance of leading her in to the others, and recommending her to their kindness" (*Mansfield Park* 13). The seemingly harmless selfish reason for Mrs Norris' attending on Fanny upon her arrival is given a darker dimension, as she is said to have been

talking to her the whole way from Northampton of her wonderful good fortune, and the extraordinary degree of gratitude and good behaviour which it ought to produce, and her consciousness of misery was therefore increased by the idea of its being a wicked thing for her not to be happy.

(14)

Fanny's natural feelings of sorrow at having had to leave her home are seen to be repressed immediately at her arrival within range of Mrs Norris' unkind tongue, highlighting the desolate atmosphere of her arrival and marking the beginning of her education. The fear and feeling of gloom accompanying her on her arrival, and the new rules of conduct she must learn, are part of the oppressive framework into which Fanny enters, which outline her growth and shape the character she becomes. The influence of her childhood years at Mansfield is consequent, impacting on her mind set, as she sees herself for many years as inferior to every other inhabitant, fearful in the presence of everyone except Edmund; only when she has grown and evolved

mentally and physically in the manner of an Enlightenment feminist does she realise she can assert herself, claim her rights and be valued by others. Accordingly, her aunt Norris stands as the first Gothic obstacle Fanny faces, as she physically accosts her on her arrival, in addition to being behind the decision of Fanny's placement in the small removed attic bedroom near the servants' rooms. Mrs Norris' responsibility in Fanny's positioning inside the house is of consequence, as it indicates how she literally causes Fanny to be situated in the periphery of family life, in a position of outsider. Her journey through the house's corridors towards its centre thus begins with her learning to circumvent the barricade aunt Norris poses in order to move forward physically within the house and metaphorically on her mental progress towards the realisation of her potential as a representative of Enlightenment feminism.

A meaningful aspect of her personality visible despite her silence, which proves to be useful to her, is this Wordsworthian child's ability to observe what takes place in her vicinity and the characters surrounding her, as can be seen in the scene following the exploration of the grounds of Sotherton. Fanny's attention to detail allows her to notice how some characters are discontented or upset: "She felt, as she looked at Julia and Mr Rushworth, that her's was not the only dissatisfied bosom amongst them; there was gloom on the face of each", while others such as "Mr Crawford and Miss Bertram" were "much more gay", and she perceives that the former was "taking particular pains, during dinner, to do away any little resentment of the other two, and restore general good humour" (97). In such an instance, Fanny's discerning skills enable her to see problems in relationships that will be of great weight later on in the novel. Her passive observation of situations reminds of the modest and quiet conduct book lady, but in truth it can be seen as an important tool

that ultimately serves her to compose an informed picture of her family and acquaintances, which will give her a valuable advantage over others who are enchanted by the superficial image their fellow characters uphold.

Indeed, Fanny escapes Henry Crawford's clutches because of her close scrutiny of his indecent behaviour towards her cousins. He makes the latter fall under his charm, clearly in Fanny's eyes enjoying the manipulation of the two women. The narrator makes a point of noting she is "the only one of the party who found anything to dislike" in him, as

since the day at Sotherton, she could never see Mr Crawford with either sister without observation, and seldom without wonder or censure; and had her confidence in her own judgement been equal to her exercise of it in every other respect, had she been sure that she was seeing clearly, and judging candidly, she would probably have made some important communications to her usual confidant.

(108)

Her correct reading of Henry Crawford's character allows her to conclude, after he has made his wish to marry her known to Sir Thomas, that she was "so perfectly convinced that [she] could never make him happy, and that [she] should be miserable [her]self" (295), which is why she refuses his advances. The ability to see through characters' artifice to their real selves and to thus form her opinion of them accordingly gives her the upper hand, which spares her from making an unfitting match with Henry Crawford. Fanny has therefore moved from her peripheral position of detached observer to the centre of the house and of the action that stands for the centre of knowing through Austen's feat of reversal of her heroine's situation.

Fanny's astuteness is a result of her education, which Wollstonecraft poses as the key for women to be able to "reason and make the correct moral choices independently" (Reiff 277). Reading is Fanny's first form of learning accomplished on her own, as a supplement to the education she receives simultaneously with the Miss Bertrams. Edmund encourages her reading, as he "knew her to be clever, to have a quick apprehension as well as good sense, and a fondness for reading", motivating him to "recommend the books which charmed her leisure hours" (*Mansfield Park* 22). His consequential influence is thus seen as he "encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgement", and finally as he succeeded in making "reading useful" and "heightened its attraction by judicious praise" to Fanny by "talking to her of what she read" (22). Fanny conversing with Edmund is of significance, being proof of her advancement on her forward journey, as interaction such as this takes her away from her isolation towards a more sociable version of herself. Learning to hold a conversation is also a tool of her Enlightenment education, allowing her to learn to discuss her opinions with others, as opposed to only going over her thoughts by herself.

Edmund directs Fanny's reading experience considerably, embedding himself into the role of tutor and confidant, being her only source of "support", which was of "the highest importance in assisting the improvement of her mind, and extending its pleasures" (22). He pushes her to better herself, reading serving to develop her mind and imagination, which becomes "an education in itself" (22) for her. Austen's heroine improves her mind through reading, which also serves to create a bond between Edmund and her, showing her to have enriched herself on the level of relationships, gaining in Edmund the first person at Mansfield whom she loves.

Fanny's education continues without Edmund's assistance, as she develops a strong sense of morals, which she demonstrates on multiple occasions. Austen portrays through Fanny the positive effects of education and of her good disposition by contrasting her to the other women of the novel, out of whom none come close to Fanny in the category of moral behaviour. Fanny's conscience has a tendency to "[stop] her in the middle" (144) of actions or words, restraining her because of her principles, being less ready than other characters to set them aside for the sake of some amusement, as can be seen throughout the acting episode. She spends a considerable amount of time pondering if her decision to refuse her cousin's plea for her to act in the play was the right answer, wondering "what she *ought to do*", and

Was she *right* in refusing what was so warmly asked, so strongly wished for? What might be so essential to a scheme on which some of those to whom she owed the greatest complaisance, had set their hearts? Was it not ill-nature- selfishness- and a fear of exposing herself?

(141)

She doubts her reasoning, considering her refusal to be motivated only by her finding it "horrible to act", making her think her incentive selfish, as she "suspect[ed] the truth and purity of her own scruples" (142). She weighs the advantages and disadvantages of her actions, always recognising the possibility for errors to infiltrate her decisions, exhibiting a great understanding of faulty human nature.

Her choice concerning the issue of the play shows Fanny's determination to act in a morally correct manner, as her decision leads her to be more ostracized and lonelier than ever, having "no share in anything, she might go or stay, she might be in the midst of their noise, or retreat from it to the solitude of the east room, without

being seen or missed" (147). Her sorrow at the development leads her to "almost think any thing would have been preferable to this" (147), exhibiting her conflicted feelings, as she concurrently perseveres in thinking she "could never have been easy in joining a scheme which, considering only her uncle, she must condemn all together" (148). These reflections showcase Fanny's developed emotional spectrum, which is a result of her sensibility and her education, which leads her to be capable of estimating correctly other characters' reactions, in this case Sir Thomas'. Her morality leads her to object to acting, as she perceives the wrongs linked to the scheme and the selfish drive pushing the other characters to go forth with the project. Consequently, her astute observations linked with her strong moral compass show Fanny to possess qualities needed for Austen's prototypical Enlightenment Feminist.

Mental abilities are not the only necessary improvements women must pursue according to Wollstonecraft, as Austen makes her heroine gain an interest in physical exercise. Regular physical activity's benefits are accentuated through the scenes where Fanny has not been able to exercise, and as a result suffers a decline in health, as happens when she has to share her horse with Mary Crawford, or during her stay at Portsmouth. What is remarkable is how Austen uses this phenomenon not only to criticise women's traditional lack of activity due to their confinement to the home, and to the wished for frailty in women described in conduct books, but also to demonstrate how "Fanny's physical weakness and ill health" actually "correspond with [her] submission and reticence", which shows that "this inertia makes Fanny almost pathologically unable to assert her desires or opinions" (Reiff 279). Women's submissive state is then seen to be a result of many issues affecting them in all areas

of life, starting with their presumed physical limitations, making them appear inferior to men on the physiological level as well as on the moral level.

Austen can be seen to use this as yet another way to expose women's perverted condition, disclosing how women appear trapped as Gothic genre's women within the confines of the home, to which the men hold the keys, where they are weakened and debilitated in order to bring out a desired delicate side to women. Thus, they are contained within the walls of the sitting room, where the lack of movement leads them to wane away, fading into feeble creatures, becoming pale, ghost-like companions for men to control with ease. The opportunity to exercise is hence of utmost importance, going against this transformation women are conditioned to go through, walks and rides returning colour to their cheeks and empowering their bodies and their minds. This example too stands as an obstacle on Fanny's path to Enlightenment feminism, as her weak body hinders her advancement mentally and physically.

When Fanny does gain in physical strength through horse back riding and walking outdoors, her looks improve, as is noted by Sir Thomas upon his return to Mansfield: "A fine blush having succeeded the previous paleness of her face, he was justified in his belief of her equal improvement in health and beauty" (*Mansfield Park* 166). This development correlates with a "burgeoning mental independence" (Reiff 280) in Fanny, as her physical melioration coincides with her strengthening confidence, as Reiff notes "one of her first minor moments of assertion occurs when she chimes in on the discussion of improvements at Sotherton and says, 'Cut down an avenue! What a pity'" (279-280). Thus, Fanny asserts her opinions more frequently, which corresponds with another circumstance taking place simultaneously, the departure of the Miss Bertrams from Mansfield. Being the only "young woman in the

drawing room", her "value increase[d]" among her family members, but also at the Parsonage, where she "became a welcome, an invited guest" (*Mansfield Park* 191). For the first time, she is sought after and given importance, her company being valued by an increasing number of characters, a testimony of her advancement from her original isolated starting point.

This invitation to go outside of the home sphere represents her first step towards a form of independence from her uncle's dominance, Fanny beginning to socialize with characters with whom she shares no family ties, these people then not having any obligation towards her, seeking her company out of the interest or affection for her. She can therefore be seen to have exited her uncle's house, going to engagements that do not include the generation of the parent figures. She has thus successfully bypassed the Gothic obstacle posed by Mrs Norris and her placement of her in the secluded corner of the house, and is able to go forth into the outside world to develop relations with other characters and experience novel things.

This phenomenon illustrates how she has moved from her place in her rooms at the outskirts of the Bertram family circle to the very heart of it. Her invitation to the Parsonage also demonstrates her ascension outside the family sphere, showing her worth to have risen in the social domain too. She is deemed a "most acceptable" (191) companion by Mary Crawford, making her the epitome of a sociable young woman, whose time is divided between family and friends. This progression is consequently an illustration of Fanny's improved being, making her seem to have advanced through the corridors of her mind by having conquered the hindrances that were in her way, having improved her fearfulness and awkwardness, reaching finally Mansfield's drawing room and the front door of the house, where the doors were wide open for

her. The house has lost its frightening aspect, the rooms no longer "too large for her to move in with ease", and her initial manner of "[creeping] about in constant terror of something or other; often retreating towards her own chamber to cry" (15) definitively reformed, demonstrating how Mansfield, similar in Fanny's eyes to a Gothic house to begin with, has lost its unnerving aspect, having become a space where she is able to move freely about, feeling more at ease in it and with herself.

Through her education, Fanny has grown into a woman able to assert her opinions, counteracting her timidity, which allows her to step through into other characters' line of vision, making them take notice of her. Her journey began with the improvement of her mind and her body, leading her to find her rightful place amongst her family and friends, which exemplifies the idea that Austen is showing how "without the power of reason, [women] cannot make moral choices and are disposed to blind obedience of whatever power structure can claim authority over them" (Reiff 277). Indeed, it was as if Fanny was confined to her rooms before reaching this stage in her education, when she can rid herself from blind obedience to patriarchy through the affirmation of her opinions, and hence move from her lodgings into the centre of the house.

Austen appears, therefore, to liberate her heroine from the feeling, traditionally seen in Gothic novels, of being a stranger to oneself, which is linked to the subject's alienation. Fanny's first years at Mansfield are riddled with an uneasiness that is seen as being the result of her extreme shyness, but that can also be caused by her feeling as an outsider in the house she is expected to consider her home. This sentiment is what appears to change in her through the obtainment of her higher status within the

home after the improvements she has gone through and her cousins' leaving the central role in their family open for her.

Fanny is consequently finally feeling as part of the family circle, no longer a trespasser, which showcases her evolution from a quiet, ghost-like creature, hovering on the edges of family life, to a flesh and blood young woman, the "fine blush having succeeded the previous paleness of her face" (*Mansfield Park* 166). Fanny blossoms through others' acknowledgement of her worth as a result of her educational and physical growth. This represents her advancement along the corridors of her mind, as she gained in knowledge, strength and confidence, all the while retaining and developing her innate morality, which enables her to finally "assert herself against the patriarchy" (Reiff 282).

This begins with her refusal to act, thus defying Tom, who in the absence of Sir Thomas stands as the representative of patriarchy, and Mrs Norris, who holds the role of "substitute manager of the estate" (Reiff 282). Fanny's negative answer is then a "bold step toward independence" (282), launching her on her mental progression on the road to freedom from the tyranny of patriarchy. She takes a further step when she becomes able to disagree with Edmund, who goes against his and Fanny's belief in the impropriety of the acting scheme and agrees to take part in it. For the first time she does not agree with her guide, her teacher, instead remaining firm in her opinion on the subject, and criticising him for being "inconsistent":

To be acting! After all his objections- objections so just and so public! After all that she had heard him say and seen him look, and know him to be feeling. Could it be possible? (...) Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong? Alas! it was Miss Crawford's doing.

(Mansfield Park 145)

Fanny demonstrates her newfound ability to hold onto her own ideas, refusing to follow "Edmund's emotional and intellectual lead" (Reiff 282) anymore.

Her journey continues, as she confronts yet another man, this time Henry Crawford. He stands as an obstacle in her way, pushing her to express her feelings of dislike against him, as his behaviour appears throughout the novel offensive to her. The first instance can be seen when he laments the end of their acting caused by Sir Thomas' return, going as far as to wish his return had been postponed. Fanny is for the first time impelled to speak "so angrily" (*Mansfield Park* 209) as she had never done before, telling him:

As far as *I* am concerned, sir, I would not have delayed his return for a day. My uncle disapproved it all so entirely when he did arrive, that in my opinion, every thing had gone quite far enough.

(209)

She dares firstly to disagree with him, and secondly to imply his behaviour regarding the acting and his comments about Sir Thomas were inappropriate and distasteful to her. Never before had Fanny voiced any form of criticism about other characters, making this an important milestone in her development.

Nevertheless, Mr Crawford provokes her more than once, causing her distress a second time by his marriage proposal. She refuses, having formed through her observations her opinion of his character, and not wishing to attach herself to a man she perceived to be without "principles" (293). She must once again stand up to Sir Thomas and Edmund, who, similarly to all men in the novel who prove to be

unreliable guides, here try to coax her into accepting the proposal. Her resistance, even in the face of Sir Thomas' criticism, which is of the most hurtful kind to her, as he calls her "wilful and perverse" (293), and worst of all, his accusation of her showing "*ingratitude*" (294), show her determination to remain firm to her resolution. However, his censure is based on the fact that he is shocked she would "decide for [herself]" (293), and "without even asking for [his] advice" (294), demonstrating how Fanny is actually being reprimanded for making a choice for herself. Thus, Austen has made Fanny a true Enlightenment feminist, resisting male oppression by standing on her own two feet and not allowing patriarchy to dictate her future, even though she is horrified of displeasing Sir Thomas and Edmund.

In addition to holding fast to her principles and refusing to bend her will to suit the men in her life, Fanny also resists in the face of another aspect which is a part of the male dominance over women: as Reiff points out, "she recoils strongly from Sir Thomas and Edmund's admiration of her physical attractions" because she "fights to be seen as more than just a sexual object" (284). Indeed, when Edmund chastises her by exclaiming "You must try not to mind growing up into a pretty woman", Fanny's reaction is very revealing: "Oh! don't talk so, don't talk so", which is accompanied by an indication regarding her feelings, as she is said to be "distressed by more feelings than [Edmund] was aware of" (*Mansfield Park* 184). She sees the men's praise of her as degrading and objectifying, and justly identifies their view as dangerous for her, as it makes Sir Thomas see her as ready to be married off. Furthermore, her reaction is aligned with the Enlightenment feminists claim that the "repression of [women's] sexuality 'permitted the development of their reason and independence'" (Kaplan quoted in Reiff 284), which is what Fanny seeks to accomplish too.

Now that she is in the centre of the home and family, she still faces hurdles she must overcome, but the obstacles come no longer from within her, but from the outside. They are posed by the representatives of patriarchy, trying to dictate a future for her she does not approve of, against which she fights by remaining steadfast in her adherence to her principles. She holds her morals as a protective shield, which she uses to defend herself against the external attacks brought down on her by men. She can thus keep moving forward on her journey through the corridors of her mind, still learning along the way. In the reality of Mansfield, however, she cannot move, as Sir Thomas sends her to her childhood home of Portsmouth, which he intends as a punishment for her defiance of his wish for her to marry Henry Crawford.

There she seems to stagnate, being deprived of her usual books and physical exercise. However, her taking on the responsibility of educating her sister Susan gives her a purpose and a way to keep improving herself. Fanny was her "oracle" and Susan was "a most attentive, profitable, thankful pupil" (*Mansfield Park* 388), giving Fanny for the first time a sense of being looked up to, admired and listened to. She gladly takes on her new role of teacher, creating the sense a full circle has been completed, with Fanny one level further than when she started her journey at Mansfield. She has now ample knowledge, experience and proficiency from her status of member of the Mansfield Park branch of the family, to fill the position of instructor to her sister. This stands as the ultimate validation of her worth, showing Fanny to be mature and sufficiently evolved to be able to take on the role of teacher and adviser.

She has now Susan by her side, standing with her behind her shield of morals and education, with which Fanny protects both of them, until they return to Mansfield. There she can finally let down her guard when she gets the ending she has longed for:

marriage to Edmund. Her struggle against patriarchy seems at an end, as she appears content to settle into her role of wife at the Parsonage, harmony reigning over Mansfield after every character's outcome is made clear, the dust settling on all the uproar, leaving Fanny and Susan at the heart of the family. Susan's entrance into Mansfield Park brings a change to the household, as her

more fearless disposition and happier nerves made every thing 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.-

(438)

Susan's painless insertion in the midst of the Bertram family in the conclusion of the novel reflects how the house has transformed from a frightful, intimidating Gothic building in Fanny's eyes, to a welcoming home to which Susan is "delighted" (438) to come to. Fanny's lessons combined with her perception of everyone's dispositions allow Susan to implant herself at the heart of the family, becoming a valued member who "could never be spared", and whose established status had "every appearance of equal permanency" (438) as her sister's.

The definitive step in Mansfield's conversion from Gothic horror house, where young Fanny was a pale, scared ghost-like creature, skirting uneasily around family members, taking refuge in her attic room, happens with Susan's arrival. She completes the transformation of the house's atmosphere, turning it into a welcoming place, now rid of its most immoral characters, with the banishment of Mrs Norris and Maria, and

the departure of the Crawfords, leaving Susan to occupy the central feminine role within the home sphere. As she brings "comfort" (438) to her sister and to the other family members, she creates a harmonious mood within Mansfield Park, truly transmuting the formerly Gothic building into an agreeable family home.

Finally, Susan's coming to Mansfield Park is drastically different to her sister's, with which the novel began. Closing the work with a mirroring of its beginning discloses Austen's emphasis on the importance of these young girls' introductions to Mansfield. Fanny's abundant suffering upon her arrival can be seen as a result of her young age and of her not having had a choice in the matter. The more mature stage at which her sister joins the Bertram household indicates she spent her infancy undisturbed in her childhood home, moving only when she could wish it, and with her older sister there to guide her and keep her company initially. The parallel experiences of the sisters unveil Austen's criticism of Fanny's forced transplantation, revealing the trauma she suffered as a child to have impacted her adult self, as the much more positive experience Susan goes through suggests that was the correct way of conducting such a change in circumstances. Austen is therefore exposing how some trauma never disappears, showing Fanny to be affected by her transplantation into Mansfield Park up to her adult age, her fears, anxieties and sorrow having conditioned her growth and evolution. Her adult mind is able to observe, judge and understand the goings on of Mansfield, her subjectivity being able to make sense of every thing in a different manner to what her child's subjectivity could do. Thus, Mansfield Park no longer appears to Fanny as a frightening Gothic abode, filled with unnerving characters in front of which she did not know how to defend herself, as her subjectivity has discovered how to interpret what before she was unable to understand,

which is what caused her fear and uneasiness. Now comprehending how the other characters function, having grown herself and matured into a moral character, the house loses its frightful aspect, becoming the site of all of Fanny's finest memories and possibly of her future happiness.

CONCLUSION

The Gothic genre reveals sources of anxiety or dilemmas by representing them in the form of hauntings, ghosts depicting unresolved problems that are surfacing. Judith Halberstam defines "Gothic fiction [as] a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known" (2), revealing the significance of subjectivity in the genre, and how it exposes perverted characters, while concurrently uncovering unadulterated ones, creating thus a context in which to explore these aspects of individuality. Austen takes inspiration from this trope, using its principle of examination of subjectivity in order to denounce in *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* a key anxiety disturbing the society of her time: women's oppression within patriarchal society. She unveils her characters' subjectivities, with a view to exhibit how the concern about women's condition, due to their helplessness in legal and financial matters, affects every aspect of their lives. The analysis of these novels with the Gothic's generic features in mind reveals how similar Catherine Morland and Fanny Price's situations are to Gothic heroines'. They may not be physically chased after by evil men, striving to take their virginity by force, or locked away in dungeons, but their relations with men are nevertheless difficult and disquieting, if not threatening, to their subjectivity.

Male characters are seen to pose a menace to women, which Austen endeavours to condemn through her presentation of the perturbing dominance they exert over her female characters. Following in Mary Wollstonecraft's steps, she advocates change for women, which she depicts through the evolution her heroines go through by acquiring an education, exercising and exerting their moral abilities. She

shows this to be the key to the beginning of her heroines' emancipation from men's control, as they develop into strong, morally independent women capable of showcasing solid principles, which serve to give them the confidence to stand up to patriarchal tyranny. Thus, Austen reveals society to be haunted by women's unjust submissive condition, which requires change.

This *mémoire* has striven to demonstrate Austen's strategies to denounce this sensation of haunting, and how she gives her heroines ways of fighting against this feeling of discontentment in order to ameliorate their condition. Contrarily to some of the novels' other female characters, the heroines appropriate the education they receive through books, experiences and teacher figures, using this social and educational capital to their advantage, as they are able to act morally and make wise decisions. It leads them to their desired conclusion, or in any event the most favourable outcome they can hope for in their society, namely marriage with the men of their choice. Women who stand as counterexamples of the heroines, behaving immorally or thoughtlessly, do not benefit from a joyous ending, highlighting Catherine and Fanny's distinctiveness.

I have shown how both women's evolution is presented as a journey through the twists and turns of their social lives and their minds, comparable to the obscure corridors of a Gothic structure, where hidden dangers can startle one at any moment. The heroines navigate through the complex corridors of their minds, questioning theirs and others' behaviour, learning through the experience how to act morally. The representatives of patriarchy appear as obstacles that the women have to learn to bypass by asserting themselves and standing up against men's wrongful presumed superiority. Morality and education stand as the women's defence in the face of men's

offense against their independence, allowing them to grow into adult women capable of reasoning and questioning their situations, pushing them to make a change. They strive for a preferable situation, which comes with the procurement of a greater independence from men's rule.

Jane Austen's alignment with Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas concerning Enlightenment feminism are revealed in this analysis of *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* through the lens of the Gothic genre, highlighting the denunciation of women's despondent condition in society as the link uniting these works. The unexpected connection between Gothic novels and Austen in their similar condemnation of a crucial concern in contemporary society shows the extent of her social criticism, delivered through her realistic style of depicting the ordinary lives of characters. Austen is not meekly pointing out how women are vexed because of their confinement to the home sphere and their submission to men's dominion in all aspects of life; she is divulging how women are progressively claiming the right to exert their own decisions, without the management of men, therefore slowly learning to demand their independence from under male rule. Jane Austen thus exposes how women are morphing from the victimized creatures of the Gothic narrative into heroines who proclaim the importance of women's education and establish their resulting sound morals and minds, which will no longer submit to a position of inferiority.

This mémoire has endeavoured to present Gothic genre's universality through its key characteristic, namely the denunciation of social issues through their portrayal as hauntings that affect characters, disturbing them to the point that they cannot ignore it any longer and must face head on what is tormenting them. The application of this concept to the analysis of Jane Austen's novels was what this mémoire sought to do in

order to demonstrate how she accomplishes a similar feat to Gothic novels in her works. Her criticism of contemporary women's conditions is delivered through the same principle of stealthy denunciation, by means of revealing the problem progressively through the presentation of her female characters' constrained and oppressed lives. Her portrayal of her heroines' adoption of attitudes differing from the general way women are expected to think and behave, as they assert themselves in the face of male authority, delivers Austen's aspiration for women to achieve mental emancipation. The path to self-governance on which she places her heroines presents obstructions in the form of representatives of patriarchy, that attempt to halt women's progression towards education and morality, but fail to do so, as the heroines elude their backward pull to the prison of patriarchy. Women's mental and physical journey observed through the Gothic lens enables the visualization of their passage from voiceless, powerless characters to women who can wield a degree of control over their decisions and actions. What remains unsettling is Austen's take on her heroines' endings, irony seeping through the descriptions of their joyous yet contrived endings in marriage; the women's achieved advancement is marred by the doubt creeping in regarding the exaggerated felicity of their unions, hinting at the possibility of their being weighed down by reasonable doubt. Austen's unnatural endings insert an uncertainty reflecting the precarious nature of women's condition, as one is left to wonder, can the daughters in law of men such as General Tilney and Sir Thomas be expected to find happiness?

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