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READING IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

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Thank you to my family for their love.
Without them my dreams would remain only
dreams;
to my friends, who make the hard
ground of reality seem softer to walk on;
to my professors for sharing their
knowledge and offering their support.
Thank you to my advisor for his
guidance and dedication.

ABSTRACT

Reading, literary references and bookish characters receive vast representation in Jane Austen's novels. This depiction goes beyond the act of reading itself, it offers clues about the characters and the way they relate the universe of what they read with their experiences in the world. It also discusses the different aspects of the representation of reading in Jane Austen's novels, including a character's habits and preferences in reading as a reflection of personality and a determining factor in their judgment of others. Furthermore, the study discusses the views of reading in Austen's time and their representation in her novels. The novels used to exemplify this analysis were *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion* and the unfinished *Sanditon*. The conclusions reached with the study of Austen's work shows a conscious usage of reading as an indicator of discernment, as a revealing aspect of the characters' personalities and as a comparison between their readings of books opposed to their reading of people and of the world.

Keywords: Jane Austen. Reading. Judgment.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Emma - E

Mansfield Park - MP

Northanger Abbey - NA

Persuasion - P

Pride and Prejudice - PP

Sanditon - S

Sense and Sensibility - SS

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INTRODUCTION

During her lifetime, Jane Austen's works were all published anonymously, as was common for women authors in the early nineteenth century, and, she never reached the popularity she achieved in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As an author, her skills were often underrated, even by her brother Henry, who described her as an unpretending writer, and by Henry James who spoke of her as unconscious and natural in her writing. Although many still attribute to Austen the dubious merit of being a good writer without consciously attempting it, once her work earned due criticism and study, such views started to change. It is clear to the attentive reader of Austen's work and reflected by the amount of studies it affords until this day, that Jane Austen's constructions were carefully planned, and her usage of the language was well thought out to convey with subtlety the intricacies of her characters and her plots which were layered by irony. Amongst the resources Jane Austen used in the construction of her novels and in particular the shaping of her characters and their interpersonal relationships, was the popular and at times controversial subject of reading.

Reading as a practice and as a metaphor to a person's views of life and relation to the world around them has often been a matter of discussion and it found an active seat in works of the eighteenth and nineteenth century England, such as Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, Scott's *Waverley* and Barrett's *The Heroine*. Jane Austen's novels feature amongst those that include reading as a central matter of discussion.

This paper aims at a discussion and analysis of the representations of reading in three of Austen's novels and one of her unfinished works, seeking to add to the studies of Austen's *oeuvre* concerning the representation of reading and furthering the understanding of her work. Taking into consideration Austen's usage of reading in her novels and the status and meaning it held in the society of the time, the paper will be divided into three chapters. First we will identify the most relevant instances of reading present in each of the selected novels, discussing them briefly; in a second moment we will discuss how the characters' reading habits and choices reflect or help build their personalities and lastly we will analyze how a character's or even the reader's opinion of a particular character is changed and influenced according to what is known of that character's reading.

1. INSTANCES OF READING IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

Jane Austen's works have long been considered to reflect Realism rather than Romanticism, the literary style in vogue in her time. For readers who seek more than entertainment in Austen's work, a conscious reading can reveal particular depictions of life during the Georgian and Regency periods. Furthermore, a study of her work unveils subtle criticism and thoughts on the society of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (mostly concerning gentry and pseudo-gentry¹) that are neatly weaved into the plots of her novels.

Although Jane Austen had a short life, she lived in a very interesting historical period. During most of the eighteenth century, Britain was at war with France and Spain, mainly over territory disputes and trade (LE FAYE, 2003) and even so, Paris remained for a long time the capital of fashion of the world. British ladies and gentlemen mirrored the Parisian style in habit and dress. King George III might have been responsible for the beginnings of flourishing patriotism in England, being proud of his place of birth and education and caring for the affairs of Great Britain more closely than those of his German inheritance to Hanover, as Deidre Le Faye (2003) points out that his ancestors had done. The period of Regency (1811 to 1820), in which all of Austen's novels were published, was known for its influence in art, literature, architecture and style, but was also pervaded by times of war. The Napoleonic Wars in particular had a significant impact in the United Kingdom. The wars took place between 1803 and 1815, therefore affecting both the reigns of George III and of the Prince Regent George (later George IV), who was considered much different from his father for being extravagant and flamboyant in his lifestyle.

Austen's texts were, at the time of their publication, considered faithful renditions of reality. Although she claimed to restrict herself to "Three or four families in a country village"², we see in her work the effects that the social, political, economical and philosophical state of affairs of the time would have had upon a family, even one distant from the center of the action – the large cities. *Persuasion*, for example, is no war novel, but it addresses the subject of war and the uncertainties of life in the navy and also its moral and financial rewards to those who served their country well. *Persuasion* reflects the growing

¹ David Spring described this class as the middle class that identified with the interests of the landed gentry, but did not own land, such as lawyers, physicians, clergymen, officers, merchants, etc., in 'Interpreters of Jane Austen's Social World: Literary Critics and Historians', *Jane Austen: New Perspectives*, ed. Janet Todd (New York, 1983).

² Austen, Jane . Jane Austen's Letters To Her Sister Cassandra and Others, letter to Anne Lefroy, September 9th, 1814.

patriotism of the British and also their increasing respect for those who entered the navy, joined the war and earned their fortunes through merit and not inheritance. *Sanditon* undertakes the world after war, when the *nouveaux riches* owners of plantations in the Americas and West Indies could return home free from danger and be well-accepted by families of tradition. *Mansfield Park* speaks of the problems with the slave-trade in the West Indies, and does so without ever making the topic central to the novel, just as it occurs with the discussion of adultery represented by Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford.

The matter of inheritance in a patriarchal society, female rights, marriage and economy are also present in all of Austen's novels and it is her skill as an author, in not taking any one of those issues as a particularly central matter of her work, that gives it such accuracy. Life was not, and is not, defined or affected by one single problem at a time. Her texts possess such verisimilitude that it exposes readers of the twenty-first century to glimpses of the practices and views of approximately two hundred years ago with great precision. One can approach Austen's literary production from many different aspects, such as social-economic aspects, the institution of marriage, family, education, etc. Among the numerous possibilities, many authors, such as Barbara Benedict (1998), Marilyn Butler (1976), Claudia Johnson (1988) and Susan Allen Ford (2008), have found an important subject in a practice featured with considerable relevance in all of Jane Austen's novels: reading.

The period in which Jane Austen lived was a time of great change for the printed media, literature in itself and the reading habits of the people. Many different aspects, some of which were cited above (educational, social, economic, cultural etc.) played an important part in this transformation. By the end of the eighteenth century, reading was changing. Books were too expensive; novels, for example, were sold in volumes, enabling a family to read the same book at once, each having one different volume at hand. The standard three-volume novel would cost approximately US\$ 100 today (ERICKSON, 1990), being, at time, what a poor family lived on for a whole week (LE FAYE, 2003). Having private libraries was a luxury even to those not so poor, and circulating libraries were starting to rise in popularity; in the latter, the reader either paid an annuity, which allowed them to take a certain number of books a year, or they would be charged by the amount of days the book was kept, which led readers to prefer easy-to-read novels. This encouraged superficial reading, but also a demand for such work to be written and published; booksellers started to publish collections and anthologies containing extracts of texts instead of the complete one (BENEDICT, 1998). These changes allowed easier access to literature by the masses, but unfortunately at the expense of a thorough reading and some quality on the published production: "They thus

encouraged readers to memorize literary fragments to show off their fashionable sensitivity. This cheap use of literature for profit and self-display is one of Austen's targets in *Northanger Abbey*" (BENEDICT, 1998. p. 2).

An additional obstacle to a widespread culture of reading was the issue of literacy. However, the action of Austen's novels takes place in social circles where literacy is presumed. In spite of any pecuniary complications the characters may be going through, they belong – the majority – to high or middle classes, such as the landed gentry, clerics, lawyers, doctors, sailors, and even baronets, such as Sir Walter Elliot, Sir Thomas Bertram and Sir Edward Denham. Literacy was not the issue for those of middle and higher classes, thus, Austen needs not address it, once it is not of relevance to her characters' lives; she does, however, address their ability to read well, something of extreme importance to the author.

For some time, possessing books or having a taste for reading, indicated "good breeding" and served only to fulfill this purpose of self-display (ERICKSON, 1990). However, as we see through the profuse literary representation of reading in contemporary authors (WON, 2006), this practice overcame the status of "fashion", and became an important, natural, part of people's lives. By focusing on a character's reading skills, and not only their tastes, Austen was able to draw parallels between their choices (in reading, or not, and what was read) and their experiences and opinions revealed throughout the novels.

To Gary Kelly (1982), reading is used as a paradigm of "perception and judgment" (p.29), and in all of Jane Austen's novels, being a good or a poor reader can be equaled to those characters' abilities of 'reading people'. Kelly (1982) goes on saying: "A character's interest in reading books and ability to discriminate among them, are used by Austen as an index of that character's general powers of discrimination, from *Northanger Abbey* through to *Sanditon*" (p.29). Through characters' practices in reading, Austen poses a challenge to her reader, for them to read her novels properly and beyond their value as a "disposable pleasure" (ERICKSON, 1990).

Another aspect of widespread discussion and controversy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the influence of reading on the "reader's formation of subjectivity" (WON, 2006). This contemplates unsupervised reading or indiscriminate reading. Most of the controversy centered on young readers, but especially young women, whose taste for novels was seen as dangerous and gave place to the publication of many conduct books and didactic novels which sought to guide these readers into appropriate reading manners. To women in particular, reading represented a great danger, as discussed by Jessamyn Jackson (1994), for a young lady's mind could be greatly influenced by romantic and fictional ideas which could

make the search for a husband more difficult, or delusion her as to her possibilities and make her refuse offers. Furthermore, it was also a mother's responsibility to educate her children and start forming their opinions, and a mind filled with such "novel-formed" notions (JACKSON, 1994) might also affect the formation of their children's minds. For such purposes, authors such as Fordyce, mentioned in *Pride and Prejudice* – his *Sermon to Young Women* being the book chosen by Mr. Collins to be read to the Bennets instead of a novel (*PP*, p.59) –, published books with the purpose of educating young females as proper readers.

Austen addressed this subject noticeably in *Northanger Abbey*, apparently refusing to conform to the disregard for novels, seen as a lower literary form, and constantly referred as thus by novelists in their own works. Yet, the author also makes use of this common belief to question her reader, by giving romantic ideals clearly influenced by her readings to Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, a character who charms the 'well-informed' Colonel Brandon with her romantic opinions. Still she is able to gain the sympathy of those around her as well as the reader's in spite of this apparent flaw in her qualities. Later in the unfinished *Sanditon*, Austen challenged the view that mostly the minds of young ladies were susceptible, by making Sir Edward a very poor and easily influenced reader regardless of the quantity of books he has read. Austen shows in her work that education is not about formal instruction, information and developing accomplishments; but a cultivation, improvement, of the mind, and one of the possible means of achieving it being through reading, not only books, but people and situations, beyond the surface (KELLY, 1982).

While all of Austen's six completed novels and her short and unfinished work contain a strong presence and importance of reading, its object varies according to the novel. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the Bennet girls are known to enjoy reading in general (novels included); however, the majority of the reading material present in it is that of letters. Those, while relevant sources of information are very personal, directed to an specific person and not a general audience which might or might not be influenced by their readings. It is through the letters exchanged between the characters that much of their mind is revealed to the reader (for example, Mr. Darcy's).

Letters were an important part of the life in the early nineteenth century, especially for ladies, and it was considered a great quality to write good letters. Towards the end of *Sense and Sensibility*, Edward Ferrars shows Elinor a letter from Lucy, recently married to his younger brother, and comments:

For worlds I would not have had a letter of hers seen by you in former days. In a sister it is bad enough, but in a wife! How have I blushed over the pages of her writing! And I believe I may say that since the first half-year of our foolish – business – this is the one letter I ever received from her, of which the substance made me any amends for the defect of the style (*SS*, p. 358, 359).

Correspondence between a gentleman and young lady were also a matter of great importance, as such behavior was considered a breach of decorum unless there was an engagement between the two parties. Thus, Elinor is perfectly ready to accept correspondence between Marianne and Willoughby as proof of an engagement.

Persuasion takes us into discussions of poetry and its healing qualities as well as its dangers and praises the value of prose; *Mansfield Park* parallels biographies and journals with Fanny Price's journey (FORD, 2008), and the importance of reading well out loud. Ultimately, Fanny is the perfect match for Edmund due to her cultivation of mind – molded precisely by him. Catherine Morland (*Northanger Abbey*) delves deep into the world of Gothic fiction, while Marianne (*Sense and Sensibility*) adopts the romantic ideals of her books, and Emma works to improve Harriet Smith's mind through reading, while she herself has long neglected her list of books to study (*Emma*, p.27). These, however, are hardly the only types of reading Jane Austen's novels are limited to and their presence in each novel goes far beyond mere representations of a habit. Each character presents particular inclinations and dispositions and their choices are expressions of their personalities. Their power of discrimination and their relationship with the world can be seen through their reading. Looking into these readings and seeking a deeper understanding of Jane Austen's work, is the intent of this paper.

Notwithstanding the fact that literary representations of reading can be found throughout Austen's *œuvre*, to allow a deeper analysis of the subject, characters, context, sober fashion, seeing those influences not only as results of weakness, but as having their redeeming aspects. *Persuasion*, being the last completed novel by Austen, carries the signs of the more experienced author, the romantic, but sober, tone of a heroine who is not too good or inexperienced to understand the world and who can be forgiving of slight flaws of character in those who have cultivated minds. And *Sanditon*, though left incomplete, shows the starts of an interesting antagonism between the modest, but perceptive, heroine and the self-indulgent and indiscriminate reader, Sir Edward.

In all of these novels, as well as in those left out of this study (but which may be referred to in the following chapters) another important aspect to be observed is how other

characters react to one's tastes and habits in reading. Their opinions give away to the reader the character's own conduct in the matter and *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, even though not analysed here, also serve as great – though very different – examples of the value of being a good reader.

Fanny Price, although not Austen's most popular heroine, can be classed as the one with the most "cultivated competence as a reader" (KELLY, 1982). This presents a challenge to the Austen's audience; to read the novel properly and come to understand Fanny despite how different she is from the author's other (and considered more captivating) heroines. Fanny Price was guided in her readings by her cousin Edmund, and throughout her stay at Mansfield Park she has had enough time to improve herself, to know herself and be able to read others properly. She does not have remarkable moments of self-discovery as Elizabeth Bennet (PP), Emma Woodhouse (E), Marianne Dashwood (SS) and even Catherine Morland (NA) have. This self-discovery is precisely what makes reading so important to Emma. The heroine in *Emma* is an intelligent young lady who has read Shakespeare and many other poets and can even stand against Mr. Knightley in a discussion. However, she lets her fancy regulate her judgment and has a far-fetched interpretation of the events around her. The importance and possibility of discussing those works under the perspectives adopted for this paper is undeniable, but demands a larger study, devoting proper attention to all six published novels and possibly Jane Austen's minor and unfinished works.

In this and the following two chapters we will discuss different aspects of the instances of reading featured in Jane Austen's novels. The considered tokens will not be restricted to literary references, although these are abundant in her work, but also reading as a general practice, led privately or publicly, silently or aloud, and the implied previous readings that the narration or dialogues may reveal throughout the novel. Having seen how reading is represented in each of the analyzed novels we will take a deeper look into what is behind each moment, what particular situation or emotion leads a character to resort to reading and what kinds of reading they resort to.

The following chapters will then focus on the tastes and choices of the most prominent readers depicted in Austen's work and what they tell us about their personality, once the point defended here is that Austen's choices for each character, not only of what is read, but how it is read, reveals much about each character and their depth as characters. Then, we will focus on how certain characters read another, interpret them and take conclusions based on their readings and their erudition.

Each chapter will explore the three appointed aspects of: instances of reading, taste and personality, and influence and judgment; looking separately at each novel, following the chronological order in which they were written. *Sense and Sensibility* was the first novel written by Jane Austen, initially as *Elinor and Marianne*, in epistolary form (probably written in 1795) and later (1797) revised and published in 1811. Austen started to write the first version of *Northanger Abbey* (known as *Susan*), between 1798 and 1799. Incidentally, the novel would only be published posthumously along with *Persuasion* in 1817. Between *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, (the next novel to be studied in this paper), *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* were written and published. Austen began *Persuasion* in August of 1815 and *Sanditon* early in 1817, less than six months before her death. Not all of these works present an equal opportunity of analysis, some containing more literary references than others, but each has very important aspects that will contribute to this discussion.

1.1 SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Reading can be considered a central matter in *Sense and Sensibility*. As Young Seon Won (2006) states, this novel moves around the idea of different readings and their possibility of success in the world.

Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters, Elinor, Marianne and Margaret are left in a strenuous situation when Mr. Dashwood (the girls' father) dies, leaving nothing more than a verbal last wish to be fulfilled by his son from a previous marriage. This son is Mr. John Dashwood, to whom their Norland estate is entailed, following the patriarchal system of inheritance of the time. That is the first situation the protagonists must adapt to and learn to read properly, according to their new conditions. In this matter Elinor and Marianne Dashwood prove to be different readers, but not as entirely opposite as many have been inclined to think.

While Marianne portrays the effects of reading indulgently on a young, unprepared mind (although not necessarily unsupervised, as Mrs. Dashwood seems to approve and agree with her daughter's ways of perception), Elinor goes through a deep transformation in her reading process as well. She is outwardly the steady rock in the family, the one to be relied on at all times, and this role befalls her precisely due to her choice – based on her readings of the world around her, of society and what it expects from her – to rely on reason and rationality

instead of actions guided by emotion. She rejects excessive sentiment and must learn to see feeling in a more lenient fashion.

It might be more evident that Marianne's excesses will bring her harm, but Elinor does not suffer any less for adopting reason. Elinor reads those around her with more moderation and suspicion, sometimes even greater tolerance but she must learn that Marianne's ideals are not all wrong simply for being romantic or less close to reason than hers.

As a starting point, we have the reading of Mr. Dashwood's will. This first Mr. Dashwood is an old uncle of Mr. Henry Dashwood, the father of our heroines. Mr. Henry Dashwood only takes on the name as the oldest member of the family for little over a year after his uncle's death. The will is read, and there is little to be done about it, it reveals the fate of the Dashwood ladies as the pages of a novel reveal the chance of its characters, and in this case, both happen simultaneously. When the heroines' father dies, they are left with little money, living at Norland with their half-brother and his wife, which soon becomes unbearable to ladies who might have no wealth, but still hold onto their pride and personal values.

The moments of reading found in *Sense and Sensibility* confirm the integration of this practice in daily life by the end of the eighteenth century. Sir John Middleton – son-in-law of another of the Dashwood's neighbors, Mrs. Jennings – took his paper to the Dashwoods every morning. It can be that he read his paper every day, even not being much of a reader, however we might also infer that if he is able to lend the publication to them so quickly after having received it, he probably only browses through it. Lady Middleton is also not in the habit of reading, especially once she herself is aware of her immoderate idleness. However, the Dashwoods are probably glad for the opportunity of keeping well informed. Marianne's own reading of the newspaper changes dramatically during the course of her story. In chapter thirty-two, once in London, Marianne is eager to hear of Willoughby, who promised her he would return to her as soon as possible, but never again gave any news. She, who as her sisters, probably used to take up the papers for information on various subjects, now was seen by Elinor "eagerly examining it every morning" (SS, p.221), in search of information about Willoughby's arrival in town.

Mr. Palmer, the husband of Mrs. Jennings's younger daughter, intends to run for parliament and part of his aloof behavior, always hiding behind his newspaper, is meant to create the idea of seriousness and importance, when for the most part self-importance is what comes across. He is always looking at things from over his paper, or not looking away from it at all, detaching himself from the things he does not care for by the barrier of paper and printed letters (SS, pp.104-5). A vehicle of reading and information such as the newspaper,

which had already become considerably accessible during Jane Austen's time, is here used as much more than the means to convey information. By Sir John it is utilized as a way of finding employment and distraction; by Mr. Parmler as both a wall and a badge of distinction, and by Marianne as the conveyor of hope.

The Dashwoods are a family that cultivates the habit of reading. That becomes obvious not only in the references of their opinions of others based on their taste, but in their own practice of it. Mrs. Dashwood is a romantic, just as her daughter Marianne and just as the youngest, Margaret, is growing up to be. When her older daughters are invited to go to London, Mrs. Dashwood's easiest way of soothing their worries is to assure them: "we shall go on so quietly and happily together with our books and our music! You will find Margaret so improved when you come back again!" (SS, p.149). Such artistic and cultural pursuits are a part of that family, and even if Mrs. Dashwood does not guide them through it in the safest way – according to a society worried over the influence of books in young people's minds – she does educate them and mold their minds to be more discerning and sophisticated than that of virtually any other lady portrayed in the novel.

At the end of the third chapter, Marianne expresses her distaste with Edward's reading the previous night. The practice of collective reading had great significance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was common for a family to gather in the drawing-room after dinner, or later at night, to read together. It could be that each member of the family had a particular volume of a work, or that one read aloud to the rest, proportioning a moment of bonding and instruction, and, depending on the family, a father might read didactic novels or conduct books to his daughters, or the work of moralists, poetry, or different kinds of novels such as the Bennet family did.

The origins of the habit of reading aloud go back to times when only few had the ability to read and others learned through listening, or even during factory work (MANGUEL, 1997, p.133), when most people had their hands occupied, one person was designated the function of reader, and they would sit aside, reading while the others worked. In Regency England, however, other than during service at the parish, reading aloud normally related to a practice between family or "lovers", as we see from Marianne's relationship with Willoughby.

Even though their relationship was never formalized, the atmosphere of courtship was present in every word spoken about them by others, or even in each word spoken by them to each other. During Willoughby's stay in Devonshire, Willoughby and Marianne spent many hours together, talking, singing, but also reading (SS, p. 46). Later in the novel, once

Willoughby's actions have sunk Marianne's spirits and health dangerously, her mother finds the volume of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which the young man had been reading to the family. At that time, Marianne's pain led her to read "nothing but what they had been used to read together" (SS, p.81). Reading can be said to have become a refuge to her, a haven from life without the man she loves; she could find in those lines the emotions with which they had once read them together, relive each moment, and yet, in doing so, she is only increasing her pain and not relating to her reality. In that sense, reading was perhaps dangerous for Marianne.

Marianne could easily be identified as the biggest reader in *Sense and Sensibility*. She did not only hear her friend Edward read, or eagerly browse the newspapers in search of news, but actively read on her own and in family, as well as with Willoughby, reading being one of their greatest common interests, especially with their taste for intense feeling. In her suffering, Marianne resorts to books once more. They are her distraction and what eases her mind from reality, an escape from what she considers the unwanted society of the Middletons, Palmers, Mrs. Jennings and Colonel Brandon. At Cleaveland, Mr. and Mrs. Palmer's home, Marianne seeks refuge yet again, for "she had the knack of finding her way in every house to the library, however it may be avoided by the family" (SS, p. 296). The passage also reveals more about the Palmer's own habits in avoiding their library, keeping it only as a sign of their status and gentility. There, at their friends' house, Marianne is taken ill, a result of her own disregard for her health in the time she pined and suffered from Willoughby's unkind and wrongful treatment of her.

The pain of reality took her mind so deeply that "she was unable to read" (SS, p.299). However, once the sickness is gone, and she has learned from her misjudgments and misreading of others, Marianne formulates a plan to improve herself, and that plan revolves precisely around reading: "I mean never to be later in rising than six, and from that time till dinner I shall divide every moment between music and reading" (SS, p.336). Those are not only her two favored pursuits, but those which in her view, and in that of her family, could truly elevate and educate the mind: "I have formed a plan, and am determined to enter on a course of serious study" (p.336). Marianne means to deepen her reading, seek for new meaning, new interpretations, or to seek other works which will allow her to broaden her ideals. She has read so much of their own library that it has become "too well known"(SS, p.346), to offer her anything more than amusement. But is it truly the fact that she knows those books so well that they can offer only entertainment, or does the type of reading to be found in their library not allow true development? Marianne clearly seems to intend to give up

excessive sensibility – where it relates to emotion – to be more sensible, reasonable and prudent. Yet, it is in her nature to be romantic, and not only her, but the entire family is unable to keep to such enthusiastic plans of study, but they were “at least planning a vigorous prosecution of them in the future” (*SS*, p.346).

Even if Marianne can be pointed out as the most active reader in *Sense and Sensibility*, we must remember that her reading, as well as that of all characters in the novel, is in some way inadequate, and she is not a model of perfection, although her inclinations and tastes make her mistakes pardonable. While Elinor is not described as reading literature or papers for the most part, it is Elinor that we must consider the greatest reader in the novel, for not only does she read her sister’s story to us, but it is through her thoughts and opinions, her readings of the people in her society, that the narrator weaves the tale of the Dashwood family.

1.2 NORTHANGER ABBEY

Northanger Abbey tells us the story of Austen’s youngest heroine, Catherine Morland, who is only seventeen. At such a tender age, Catherine should hardly be expected to figure among Jane Austen’s more well-learned protagonists.

The novel starts telling us readers of Catherine’s life at Fullerton, where she is one of ten children, belonging to a family of middle class, neither poor nor rich. In its first page, the novel already requires previous readings from its readers, something Austen experimented with often. Being ignorant of the books or subjects she addresses or parodies prevents the reader from proper enjoyment and understanding of them. To the twenty-first century reader, most of these problems are solved by footnotes and textual notes, but to those living in Austen’s time, there were no such crutches to lean on. Seeing as Austen was unafraid of using that resource to make her point, we can make certain assumptions as to the readers she wrote for, or the popularity of the works and the conventions she makes frequent use of in her texts. In this case, the narrator compares Catherine’s life to that of the heroine of a Gothic novel. Her parents had a happy marriage and her father was “not at all addicted to locking up his daughters” (*NA*, p.5). She is the eldest of the girls, and has grown up preferring boy’s games to any delicate, feminine play such as watering the flowers, playing with dolls or nursing wounded animals. From the first we see that she is not made to be a Gothic heroine according to the conventions of those novels.

An important aspect of Catherine's non-heroic self is that she is no prodigy. She does not learn anything before she is taught, on the contrary, she has difficulties at times, and learns just as any other child and Catherine's first contacts with a proper education and reading were through her mother. Mrs. Morland took three months to teach her to repeat Reverend Thomas Moss's poem "The Beggar's Petition", which was often recited to teach diction. She has also studied the tale "The Hare and Many Friends" by John Gray, a tale in which the hare's friends disappear whenever he is in danger – a story filled with irony. Curiously, this text was also part of Mrs. Elton's formation in *Emma*, and she makes an embarrassing misinterpretation of it when quoting it to Jane Fairfax (*E*, p.365). This is yet another moment that contributes to confirm Grundy's (1999) words in saying that Austen enjoyed revealing the foolishness of her characters through their distortions of texts (p.195).

In her adolescence, Catherine preferred active pursuits to reading "books of information" (*NA*, p.7), books such as conduct books and other works meant to help mold a young person's character (JOHNSON, p.358 , *NA* textual notes). However, as a young lady, she was no longer averse to reading for entertainment.

At the very end of chapter three the narrator once more requires previous readings from the readers of the novel. The narrator draws onto what was clearly a previous reading of the author (that they would be mentioned thus) and of the narrator, to be used in their telling of the story. Austen refers to Samuel Richardson, who once wrote it was imprudent for a young lady to be in love before the gentleman has formally applied to her and her family. That was the custom of the time, dictated by conduct books and society. The passage serves both to point out Catherine's alleged foolishness in dreaming of a gentleman before he has been known to have dreamed of her and to question the reader as to what kind of heroine, or what kind of person could be unromantic enough to be able to guard their affections against spontaneously given love. Catherine had, until then, read mostly under the guidance of her mother. Even if that did not do much to improve her understanding, it kept her from giving into fanciful illusions and excessively romantic ideals. Once in Bath, however, Catherine has no one to guide her reading, but plenty of people desirous of influencing her. First there is Isabella Thorpe. Isabella is a young lady of twenty one, coming from a poor family. The poverty of the Thorpe's is not only monetary, however, as we see from the general affectation of manners in them, as they try to convey elegance and fashionable habits. It is only later in the novel that we understand Isabella's exact motive for befriending Catherine, but from the very start her excessive affection tells the reader that she is not the lovely girl Miss Morland thinks.

Upon the start of their acquaintance, Isabella has many exciting novels to recommend to Catherine, the first being *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by Ann Radcliffe, a popular Gothic novel. It tells the story of an orphaned girl that is taken away from her peaceful and innocent life in the countryside of France to the artificial, pretentious and at times deranged society of Paris, to later be locked up in a far away castle in Italy under the control of a greedy step-uncle. Catherine is soon taken by the book and whenever there was a rainy morning, she and Isabella would shut themselves up to read together. Such a practice was highly frowned upon; the idea of two young ladies reading unsupervised seemed to give even more room to the proliferation of romantic ideas, or a detachment from reality, which Catherine does suffer from. She is even willing to overlook her duties in favor of novel-reading. When they meet again, Isabella is eager to ask how her reading goes, and Catherine just as enthusiastic in having someone to talk to about them: “I have been reading it [*Udolpho*] ever since I woke” (NA, p.25).

Besides Catherine and Isabella, John Thorpe, Isabella’s brother, also shows himself in his reading. His reading and his judgment of novels will be discussed in the following chapters, however, it is clear enough that even though he denies reading novels, he does read them, such as *Tom Jones* (by Henry Fielding), *The Monk* (by Matthew Gregory Lewis) and even some part of *Cecilia*, by Fanny Burney. This may be evidence that, contrary to what he says, he does not have “something else to do” (NA, p.32), other than to read novels. His disregard for their cultural and educational value is obvious and yet ironic, considering his own coarseness and lack of cultivation. On page 52 (NA), Catherine reminds herself of her original values before arriving in Bath. As she now overindulges in her concern about her clothes and what to wear, she remembers the guidance of her family, her aunt having “read her a lecture on the subject just the Christmas before”. She berates herself for it, but cannot help giving into such frivolous pleasures. In the textual notes of the text, Claudia L. Johnson observes that Austen is making a comparison between the kind of reading Catherine was exposed to at home in Fullerton, and in Bath (NA, p. 366).

Other characters are not given specific scenes of reading, but we learn of their past readings through Catherine and the narrator. Mrs. Morland owns a copy of *Sir Charles Grandison*, by Samuel Richardson – one of Jane Austen’s own favorite books. As books were incredibly expensive and Catherine’s family is not considered rich, this means Mrs. Morland greatly enjoyed the novel, and read it many times, as her daughter says so herself.

Henry and Eleanor Tilney are role models to Catherine. To her, Eleanor is elegant and intelligent, and Catherine’s partiality to the brother justifies her increasing the qualities she

sees. The characters are both portrayed as kind and having good judgment and a good understanding of the 'picturesque'. In her conversation with Mr. Henry Tilney during their walk around Beechen Cliff, Henry reveals more of his taste and reading. He confesses to having read many novels, and even having broken a promise to his sister of waiting for her to read *The Mysteries of Udolpho* so they could read it together.

The instances of reading represented in *Northanger Abbey* help us begin to comprehend more of each character, but it is their interpretation of texts and people, their relation to literature (whether fictional or not) and reality, that will further reveal them to us readers.

1.3 PERSUASION

Persuasion is one of Jane Austen's novels where characters are most clearly judged in value based on their reading and that perception of the world and cultivation of mind brought on by it. However, this novel differs from the others in the sense that it works with rereading. Won (2006) and Auerbach (1985) have seen the novel itself as a rereading not only of *Sense and Sensibility* but of different elements present in each of the four novels published before *Persuasion*. Although the practice of reading has definite importance for the characters, rereading is essential for the plot.

Anne Elliot is a woman of twenty-seven, nearing the age of confirmed spinsterhood. She belongs to a family of important name, but that has vacillating moral values and too deep a love for luxury and keeping up appearances. Anne lost her mother, the woman who held their family together, approximately thirteen years earlier and she "had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older" (*P*, p.23). She fell in love once at nineteen, but through the persuasion of her family and her friend Lady Russell (who feared for Anne's reputation and wealth in marrying a sailor), Anne broke off the engagement. Her story could be a novel all on its own, and critics such as Won (2006) and Litz (1976) have come to call *Persuasion* a sequel of its own novel, of the story of Anne's early years, her second chance in love. The same ideas are echoed by Johnson, 147; Brown, 148; Duckworth, 181; Tanner, 211; in " 'Persuasion': Forms of Estrangement," in *Jane Austen: Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, A Casebook*.

The action of the novel takes place eight years after that estrangement, when Anne and her first love Frederick Wentworth (now Captain Wentworth) meet once more under very

different circumstances. If the novel is, as the above mentioned critics have said, about second chances, then it is about finding new interpretations, new meaning in old things and evolving as a reader of the world and of the people in it. That is the case for Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth, but also for Captain Benwick, Lady Russell, and many other characters who are faced with life-changing situations. However, some can learn from their second chances, and others retain the same fixed view of life as they have always had; the greatest example of this being Sir Walter Elliot, who will be discussed later in chapter three.

Moments of reading itself are not vastly portrayed in Austen's last novel, for they are for the most part assumed or referred to. The characters' reading (or lack thereof), has helped shape them as they are seen during the development of the story. Most of them are older than the characters of other Austen novels, precisely due to Anne's own "advanced age" to be the heroine in a love story according to the standard of the time.

The famous opening scene of *Persuasion*, where Sir Walter Elliot reads the Baronetage, seeking comfort from the unpleasant reality in the printed evidence of his importance, is the first instance of reading we find in the novel. The scene can be used to establish a comparison with the way in which other characters read or seek relief from the difficulties of the world. Sir Walter is by no means an exemplary reader and this is Jane Austen's way of dealing with the distortion of values in that society. Elizabeth Elliot, his eldest daughter, cannot even find any more pleasure in the Baronetage; she is nearly thirty and has no entries in their glorious book other than her birth, no baronet written down as her husband to save them from debt.

Mary Musgrove, Anne's youngest sister could be described as self-centered and shallow. She is entirely alienated from anything that does not relate to herself. Due to lack of cultivation, Mary's way of receiving the attention she craves for is by being persistently ill and suffering. She cannot earn it with intelligent conversation, or sate the need by active or intellectual employment. To Mary, reading was for the sake of pure entertainment or to provide material for fashionable conversation. In Lyme Regis, where she goes to tend to her sister-in-law Louisa (and only because it was unacceptable to think Anne had been chosen over her for the task), her main employment (instead of caring for Louisa) is renting books at the local circulating library: "and she got books from the library, and changed them so often, that the balance had certainly been much in favor of Lyme" (P, p.99). The line fits perfectly with the afore mentioned tendency to seek books as sources of entertainment only. Novels in particular could be read quickly and did not require much reflection. Thus they could be read easily and exchanged for a new volume, adding not only to the profits of the library, but to the

list of the reader, who, if not afraid to admit they read novels, could then easily boast about numbers.

Lady Russell's first active appearance in the novel is no less revealing: "'If we can persuade your father to all this,' said Lady Russell, looking over her paper, 'much may be done...'" (P, p.9). It might sound too obvious to say that the mere sight of her reading a paper during this discussion is a sign of her habits in keeping well-informed, but it makes the first statement on her personality. Another revealing instance is the speech which involves her deeply into the several attempts of persuasion that we are shown or referred to throughout the novel, – and reading, too, is about persuasion. Captain Benwick, another important reader in *Persuasion*, is an avid reader of poetry. His conversations with Anne at Lyme are centered mostly on their appreciation of certain poems and their poets, and Miss Anne Elliot's attempts to advise moderation in his sentimental indulgences. Benwick was also in the navy and worked in Captain Wentworth's ship, *The Laconia*, until he became a captain himself. By then, however, all of those achievements seemed meaningless considering his fiancée Fanny Harville had died. Nevertheless, the friendship with her brother, Captain Harville, remained, and he took residence in his friend's house. There he even had a shelf "for a tolerable collection of well-bound volumes" (P, p.75); These volumes were even more expensive, and Robinson (2007) suggests the quality of the binding was meant to withstand Benwick's long periods of time at sea, always in the company of his books. This tells us that he deeply valued those volumes and read them more than once to wish to have them at hand as they probably had personal meaning to him. These aspects of the Captain's personality will be discussed later, but the combination of factors does seem to confirm his habit as a reader. And, though he is a reader of deeper insight than many others Anne is acquainted with, Benwick is taken by some quixotic, romantic ideals of feeling and affection. Yet, it seems the readings of a much smaller character than Captain Benwick or Lady Russell can have had just as much of an effect on the heroine of the novel and conveyed Austen's ideas throughout his own lack of action.

Charles Hayter, a cousin of Anne's brother-in-law Mr. Charles Musgrove, is a small character that bears some importance to Anne's process of rereading Captain Wentworth and their past. Contrary to most people in her society, Charles Hayter is a reader, is studious and wishes to become a clergyman. His ambition is not for fortune, but a comfortable life with the woman he loves, Henrietta Musgrove, his cousin. There is an apparent understanding between the two cousins, but upon the arrival of Captain Wentworth (a man of fortune, status and striking figure), Charles feels slighted and turns to his books to stand away from rejection.

Charles does not actively seek to regain Henrietta's apparently dimmed affections, but his patience and constancy eventually reward him, much as later happens to Anne as well. While she is more active in seeking to regain Captain Wentworth's good opinion than Charles Hayter is to regain Henrietta, she, too, depends upon chance and the choices of others to have her own happiness, and in that wait, only fortitude of mind could help.

1.4 SANDITON

Sanditon starts with a coach accident, an event that was most common in Gothic novels. The event, however, brought nothing of extraordinary with it, other than new acquaintances for Mr. Parker, who, in gratitude for Mr. Heywood's help in tending to his injured ankle, takes one of his daughters to visit Sanditon. This novel brings elements that represent much of what was fashionable during the early nineteenth century. Its action takes place in a fictional seaside town being turned by Mr. Parker into a social and therapeutic resort, much like Bath (which Mr. Parker surely meant to rival and surpass in fame eventually). The novel also brings the first description of a character's visit to a Circulating Library, giving more details of its importance to the town than only lending books. Later the reader is also reintroduced to the over-romanticized beliefs of unprepared minds influenced through their reading in the form of Sir Edward Denham.

In its twelve existing chapters, we see Mr. Parker's struggle to write his own fantastic story, going against the current of mediocrity and normalcy that his life might have been. He actively tries to convince all to see Sanditon (read it) in the same light, with the same potential he does. Upon arriving in town, their first visit is to the Circulating Library; most importantly, to the Library's Subscription Book. It is to Mr. Parker, and those interested in the development of Sanditon, the most important of books, just as the Baronetage was to Sir Walter Elliot. It was a fashionable practice to subscribe to the local Library as soon as possible upon one's arrival in town. The library was a place where people could observe others and be seen, thus the Subscription books "became a useful guide to who was in town" (ERICKSON, p.576), and to Mr. Parker that book could tell how well his undertaking was doing. There they find Mrs. Whitby, the Librarian, "in her inner room, reading one of her Novels, for want of Employment" (*S*, p.315), a clearly ironic reference to the idea that reading was an idle activity and that novels in particular could make one become careless regarding one's duties. Yet, "Mrs. Whitby came without delay from her Literary recess" (*S*, p.316).

Miss Charlotte Heywood picks up a book from the shelf, and it is Fanny Burney's *Camilla*, the story of a young lady that comes to face great financial distress due to her following others' advices. Everything seems to fit into a larger puzzle and it is no coincidence, Charlotte herself is going through a new situation, away from her family for the first time, and relying solely on the education she received from her parents to guide her good sense and judgment.

Sir Edward has also read much, mainly because he had grown up "confined to one spot", and had sought employment in reading, "more Novels than agreed with him". He indulged far too much in a single kind of reading: sentimental novels, which explored the nature of Man's passions at its highest, creating in his vulnerable mind an appeal for such kind of sentiment and intensity. He – just like Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* – was confined not only to the same place, but to the same kind of reading. He sought no variety, as Anne Elliot suggests to Captain Benwick, and has no moderation. Furthermore, Sir Edward had not the guidance Charlotte Heywood had had in her education, and she, too, grew up confined to her family's hay farm.

The significant depiction of different readers and the influence of reading in those characters' lives in *Sanditon* proves that the subject was still relevant to Austen, and in all probability to the social circle in which she lived in by the end of her life. Through all of the four works reviewed here, one can see reading was increasingly present in the daily life of every family during Jane Austen's life, which comprised the end of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth. The author's own family placed great importance in reading and in education, and in spite of their financial difficulties – brought on by a small income combined with a large family – there seemed to never be a moment without cultural pursuit for the family, even if that rested in the writings of Jane Austen herself. In her letters, Austen often comments on her current readings or of those she wishes to take up again. Her correspondence, in special with her sister, shows us how literature played an important part in her life, as a reader and later as a writer, and, in being so, the subject could not be far from the foreground of her work. While illiteracy in its most literal sense was not a subject considered in Austen's novels, especially due to the social ranks and classes her works move in, illiteracy of mind, ignorance and its repulsive effects upon a person who has no desire or inclination to learn and improve themselves, is clearly felt.

It would be generalizing too much to say that to Austen those who enjoy reading with some discrimination are thoroughly good or superior, and that those who do not have a taste for intellectual pursuits are inferior. Her characters seem far too well developed – even the shallow ones – to conform to such simplistic methods of division. It is safe to say, perhaps,

that a proper, good reading of books and of the world was considered of high importance to Austen, and that they would, therefore, figure amongst the qualities of those characters that are deserving of their happy endings, especially those heroines which underwent a process of shift and development in their minds. Lucy Steele is described as ignorant and deceitful, and yet, despite her ignorance, her crafty ways and moral flexibility eventually grant her all she had wished for. She marries a rich man (Edward Ferrars' brother), and eventually falls in her mother-in-law's graces, while the reasonable, intelligent and educated Elinor cannot earn half as much respect from Mrs. Ferrars, Edward's mother. Catherine Morland is an ignorant reader at the start of *Northanger Abbey*, but her learning process improves her where Isabella Thorpe remains the same. Captain Harville is described as not being a reading man, and yet he is considered thoroughly respectable, while some of the characters themselves cast doubts over Captain Benwick's constancy of mind and heart. However, there is not one only way to perceive the world or accept the way one is influenced during their lives (and part of those influences come from previous readings). This richness and diversity of characters that can be outlined focusing on only one aspect of them, reading, proves the profundity and power of Jane Austen's skills as a writer and confirms the idea that there are valid conclusions to be reached from such a study which will allow us a deeper understanding of her works.

2. READING HABITS AND PERSONALITY IN AUSTEN'S CHARACTERS

The interest in studying Austen's novels through the specific lens of *reading* as a determining factor in her characters' persona and behavior does not carry the intention to propose a new interpretation of these characters, neither to examine what is behind their every action. This paper's intention is to take what is known of these character's personalities and discover how or where their reading might have contributed to the formation of their minds. Their choices in such a formative and molding activity as reading, can tell us about these characters without the need to look into their personalities from a more traditional perspective. By taking a single aspect of their entire appearances in the novels – their reading – much can be learned. Austen's usage of reading as an index of discernment and education allows such a reading of her works. Here, we attempt to deepen our understanding of this subject, without taking too much freedom in our conjectures and strengthening the emphasis on this most interesting aspect of her work. While she was called an 'unpretending' artist by her brother Henry, and has been considered to write with a restricted view of the world, not addressing more serious issues discussed in other novels of the time, it is clear to those who take the time for a deeper reading of her *oeuvre*, whether approving of her themes and style or not, that this is not so.

Jane Austen was an avid reader, one who seemed to abominate the carelessness with which a true thinking and reading mind had come to be undervalued in favor of fashion and frivolity. However, Austen does not underestimate her reader, she does not write in the attempt to educate the shallow readers into reading better, but to expose their society's flaws to themselves. Through an involved and delicate form of criticism, Austen uses understatement to overstate and plays with oppositions and common conventions of her day and time. That is how all of her characters take shape in her work. While we may clearly spot the heroines and heroes and identify antagonists in a society that – safe from the very protagonists and a few exceptions – seems entirely "silly" in their way of thinking, not all is black and white. Austen's heroines and heroes have lessons to learn and those who threaten their happiness, sometimes by prior engagements (such as Lucy Steele's and Edward Ferrars' in *Sense and Sensibility* or the presumed connection between Captain Wentworth and Louisa Musgrove in *Persuasion*), or excessive pride or aristocracy (as we see in Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice* and General Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*), there are no villains in Austen's stories. Austen's novels present no purely evil or entirely good and pure characters to facilitate the reader's work in identifying the shortcomings of each and serve as

models of good or bad conduct in the real world. There are no heroic acts; the characters only find their happy endings in the chance of a change of situation, by the choices and actions of those who caused its impediment in the first place. With the exception of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion*, which are considered Austen's most romantic novels (in the sense of romantic love, not in belonging to Romanticism), her books lack the excessive sentimentality common in the Romantic age. Although her characters ultimately find their 'happily ever after', it is all within the grounds of reality. Not all of her heroines marry a man as rich as Mr. Darcy (*PP*), in fact, Elizabeth Bennet is the only one to marry so entirely above any financial worries. Anne Elliot (*P*) marries the man she had always loved, but knowing the dangers of his profession and how short and unstable happiness might be. Not to mention Catherine Morland (*NA*) and Fanny Price (*MP*), who only inspired affection in those they loved much later than a typical heroine would have. Marianne Dashwood (*SS*) learns to love Colonel Brandon completely, yet she did not marry him out of love, but out of gratitude and a kind familial pressure. Emma Woodhouse (*E*) hardly suffers for love in all of her ironic reason; she already has a degree of intimacy with Mr. Knightley which prevents them from having a love story of gothic proportions. Perhaps none of those happy endings are entirely so fairy-tale like as the modern reader is inclined to think upon a first reading. Perhaps that is precisely what appeals to us, unlikely romances within reason and much of that is due to how Jane Austen built not only the plot of her novels, but her characters. As Mathison (1957) points out in his essay on *Northanger Abbey*, "Jane Austen introduces nothing *dramatic* for the divertimento of the casual reader...but sets out to show that the kinds of events that normally take place in the life of a young girl of Catherine's position may be sufficient both for the maturing of the heroine, and for the subject of a novel" (p.143).

Marilyn Butler (1976) divides Jane Austen's heroines in those who can do no wrong (Anne Elliot, Fanny Prince, Elinor Dashwood) and those who still have much to learn (Marianne Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, Catherine Morland). If we take a moment to think of the reason behind the need for reformation for the second group, we can easily see how closely their problems are related to their reading. All of them have had problems in perception, in reading the situations and the people around them properly and justly.

Marianne Dashwood is so involved in her romantic ideas and ideals, her desire for the picturesque and strong emotions, that she neglects to show politeness or regard for those who do not rise to her expectations, later regretting her conduct in that aspect. Elizabeth Bennet, too, is excessively quick to judge Mr. Darcy. Only through a second reading of their

acquaintance and of his person -through his explanatory letter and her visit to Pemberley (PP, pp.168; 208) – is she finally able to dismiss her prejudice. Emma Woodhouse (*E*) is another perfect example of this correlation. In spite of her wealth and status in her community, of being elegant and showing merit in her accomplishments (the female accomplishments expected of elegant young ladies), she neglects her reading list (has done so for many years), but acknowledges the importance of reading for Harriet Smith's improvement. Although opinions may vary as to whether her reading of the happenings around her were entirely wrong, Emma finds herself mistaken in her defiance to Mrs. Weston's and especially Mr. Knightley's opinions more than once. Finally, Catherine Morland (*NA*), who has youth to mount to her naivety and ignorance, is easily led by Isabella Thorpe's manipulative efforts, even in suggesting a list of Gothic novels that, in the depreciative views of the time concerning the genre, might negatively influence such an unprepared mind into a world of illusory expectations.

Their journeys, as characters who have been in the wrong but find their way, place them as the more likely favorites with the reader. Their wrong-doings do not stem out of flaws of character, but deficiencies in their education. These limitations could most likely be overcome through the self-improving habit of reading and of reading well. Thus, the young ladies are able to enhance and develop their minds and find redemption to justify their happy endings.

In Jane Austen's novels, a character's excessive taste in dress can tell you as much about their superficiality as the excessive taste in money. While a preference for books is not always a certain indicative of depth of character or good understanding – precisely because reading had diffused in society as a fashionable practice – it is the choice of those books and the way how each character learns from their readings or incorporates them in their view of the world, that will give the reader the most instructive and enlightening revelations about their personality. As Grundy (1999) states, Austen “commonly defines her characters in part through their reading habits” (p. 203).

2.1 SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

The Dashwood family is a reading family. Mrs. Dashwood has educated her daughters well, in spite of her own Romantic tendencies in her views of the world. As Grundy (1999) comments, Mrs. Dashwood can even speak of a rather unknown novel, *Columella*, by Richard

Graves, and “expect to be understood by her daughters and Edward Ferrars’ (SS, p.204). They faced the loss of the head of their house - and of the comforts they had been used to - with grace, “placing around their books and other possessions, to form themselves a home” (SS, p.28). It was not the spacious rooms or luxurious houses and clothes afforded by a large income that would soothe their pain and help them through the loss of a father. Instead, that which made them a family and brought them together, art; their music; books and each other’s company, is what brings them comfort. The unity of the family in its reading shows the reader their harmony and closeness in other matters which would be the Dashwoods’ consolation; in spite of their differences, an inherently solid bond could not be altered even by their disagreements.

Generally speaking, in each of Austen’s novels we find very different depictions of the family institution and some particularly affectionate bonds, such as that of Jane and Lizzie Bennet (PP); Fanny Price and her brother William or her cousin Edmund Bertram (MP); Catherine Morland and her brother James (NA) and Emma and Mrs. Weston (E) - Anne Elliot, in *Persuasion*, seems to be the loneliest of Austen’s heroines. Yet, possibly with the exception of the Morlands, although that family in itself does not play a major part in *Northanger Abbey*, the Dashwood family seems the closest of them all. Even in their different tempers, they complement one another and protect each other. It might be said that was brought on by the sudden lack of a patriarchal figure, but possibly their own dispositions, coupled with their habits and education greatly contributed to the results.

Marianne Dashwood is idealistic; Elinor prides herself in being realistic and clear as that might be to the modern reader, to those who could better understand their processes as readers and in judging others by their reading, the layers of their personalities might have been more easily understood. Marianne’s opinions were “all romantic” (SS, p.53), Elinor said. She was romantic not only in her expectations from love, but in her identification with the ideals of the Romantic Movement, from which it is likely most of her readings came from. The excessiveness of feeling, love of nature and of intense emotion in Marianne seems to substantiate the idea. At the beginning of chapter ten, after Marianne’s first lengthy conversation with Willoughby, Elinor tells her: “You have already ascertained Mr. Willoughby’s opinion in almost every matter of importance. You know what he thinks of Cowper and Scott; you are certain of his estimating their beauties as he ought, and you have received every assurance of his admiring Pope no more than it is proper” (SS, p.45).

According to Grundy (1999), Austen expresses the opposition she saw in Cowper³ and Johnson in Elinor's and Marianne's behavior; between "Elinor's Johnsonian attempts to combat grief and depression through mental activity, and Marianne's Cowperesque savoring of melancholy"(p.199), that they represent in a different level the paradigm of sense and sensibility. Grundy (1999) also questions Elinor's comment as to Willoughby admiring Pope "no more than is proper" (SS, 45) in reference not to a shared opinion of the two sisters on the poet, but to Marianne's contact with Pope's work. Perhaps she was selective in her reading of Pope, but maybe her knowledge and acquaintance with it was limited and therefore Willoughby's knowing too much where she knew too little might be just as bad as his excessive love for works she might have restrictions about. When Marianne seeks to know more of him, both by asking Willoughby himself or through Sir John Middleton, his past readings and disposition are what she seeks to learn about. She believes her own ideas to be quite different from the society in which she lives and finds it extremely important that Willoughby, too, should rise above commonplace thoughts.

Marianne is aware of her different way of perceiving the world and she seems to see her own form of thinking with certain superiority, considering how she treats Mrs. Jennings or others whom she judges simpletons or too affected and pedantic. In that, Willoughby suits her perfectly in their 'ardor of mind', their strong opinions (such as her ideas about second attachments; the impossibility of a woman of twenty seven finding love or Colonel Brandon's advanced age and Edward Ferrars' lack of spirit). Marianne and Willoughby also show themselves reckless and thoughtless in their behavior towards one another as well as others; for example in giving a clear impression of an engagement that does not exist and in speaking cruelly of Colonel Brandon, the man who – contrary to Willoughby – has a true regard for Marianne. However, Marianne's irresponsibility and disregard for common courtesy are eased in the eyes of the reader due to her good heart and firm principles. She cares for her family and their happiness, even if she is selfishly trapped in her suffering; she has the right values, never overrating money and society nor being too stubborn to be changed by experience and advice: "Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favorite maxims" (SS, p.372). The narrator is opposing reality and the Dashwood's world, showing the reader, through Marianne's unlikely change, that most people never come to truly learn from their

³ William Cowper (1731 – 1800), English poet, often praised withdrawal from the world as a condition for "sober contemplation and peace of mind" (SANDERS, 2000, p.352).

mistakes. They follow old philosophies of life that they can no longer justify with their own opinions, which have changed through life. This can be compared to a change in one's reading processes in general, for a book read a second time by the same person will not seem exactly the same, just as a situation lived at two different times of life will provoke very different reactions.

Elinor Dashwood's education has been much the same as Marianne's. With the addition of two years of experience, nothing else differs in the input the sisters have received; they have both read Thomson⁴, Cowper, Pope, Scott and Shakespeare. They have more feeling and intelligence than most young ladies who seek only entertainment or to conform to fashion by collecting quotations from such works; and yet the sisters seem very different. Their difference lies only in the manner with which they choose to express and guard their feelings. Marianne lets herself be guided by what she reads, while Elinor hopes to be mistress of her thoughts and sentiments, and both partially fail. The appeal that reason or *sense* has to Elinor might make her seem distant and unfeeling, but the narrator often reassures the reader of her suffering. Perhaps Elinor deserves more than Marianne the title of heroine; she sets aside her pain to care for her family. But the oldest of the Dashwood sisters admits herself to use her silence and employment in her own favor, to distract the mind and heart from her sorrows, and not so selflessly for the sake of others. Elinor's greatest act as a reader, as we shall see later, is in reading her sister's story and finding the means to improve herself through the experience.

Edward Ferrars seems to fit easily into the description of a helpful, trustworthy and pacific gentleman. While future events which reveal his engagement to Lucy Steele might cast a shadow over his principles, his initial fault is pardoned in being attributed to the foolishness of young age and idleness. His character is further confirmed and distanced from the greater follies of Willoughby by his insistence in keeping his word and doing right by Lucy Steele in spite of his heart's desire. As a gentleman from a considerably wealthy family, he has been educated formally. Edward has doubtlessly read all the classics and kept well-informed, but perhaps in his youth he did not derive from those readings the wisdom which might have saved him from trouble. Should he have found true reflection in his studies, idleness would not have prompted him into a thoughtless engagement, and yet, his mind seems to conform with perfection to Elinor's approval (*SS*, p.18). To Marianne, his reading aloud is insipid, which only adds to her views of his lacking warmth, spirit and fire, but being

⁴ James Thomson (1700 – 1748), English poet of Scottish ascent, “found creative stimulus in a variety of received ways of observing both nature and society” (SANDERS, 2000, p.293).

very amiable. The power of the spoken word also greatly changed Fanny Price's ideas of Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park* (p.340). Being a good speaker is very important in the world of Austen's novels, where half of her heroes are or will become parsons and to them, well-used words have great power of influence. Thus, Austen makes her reader wonder how much of their own view of a certain character is dictated by the perception a second character has of the first.

Marianne and Edward's differences in reading are continually brought to attention to contrast Marianne's and Elinor's own differences in perceiving their beloved ones. Once discussing the landscape, Edward excuses himself for not enjoying a picturesque scene as his friend does: "I have more pleasure in a snug farm-house than a watch-tower – and a troop of tidy, happy villagers please me better than the finest banditti in the world". Marianne looked with amazement at Edward, with compassion at her sister" (SS, p.94). Edward is referring to Gothic novels, in which the presence of troops of banditti endangering the heroine in exotic and foreign lands was a common event. Marianne's "amazement" is also a reference to her way of perceiving those stories, for the word (as Claudia L. Johnson mention in the reference of Henry Tilney's objection to its use in *Northanger Abbey*) is associated with the sublime, "the awestruck cessation of faculties" (NA, p. 367). It is an intense reaction to be had on such an account as Edward's words in *Sense and Sensibility* and only help confirm those excessive traces in Marianne's personality.

Colonel Brandon hardly fits Marianne's ideal of a hero, and yet he becomes her husband. At the beginning of the novel he is described as "neither very young nor very gay" (SS, p.32). In the same page, the narrator introduces him with more depth by saying that: "He was silent and grave. His appearance, however, was not unpleasing ... he was on the wrong side of five-and-thirty; but though his face was not handsome, his countenance was sensible, and his address particularly gentlemanlike". His affection for Marianne seems doomed when compared to her ideas of Willoughby, who could not be more suitable to her description of a hero in her favorite stories (SS, p.41). Yet, Brandon has on his side the experience which at first seems to make him an unthinkable option for Marianne. Experience gave him time to cultivate his mind and learn from the past, though his behavior is governed by the melancholy of his youth. Brandon might be a character who is close to mastering the relationship between reading life and fiction, of relating to his reading appropriately, as he does to people and in life, and of applying to his view of the world that of most sensible and wise which he can extract from his readings. He has seen other cultures, has read much and beyond that, he has a thinking mind (SS, p.49). Colonel Brandon seems not to conform to common thought and

conventions; he has learned how to read the world around him more deeply. That is how he can find something positive and endearing in the Romantic ideas that Marianne and young ladies in general might be criticized for, “when the romantic refinements of a young mind are obliged to give way, how frequently are they succeeded by such opinions are but too common and too dangerous!” (*SS*, p.54). Marianne learns, once married, that her similarity to Willoughby’s way of thinking would not have necessarily brought them happiness, for in their differences, Marianne and Colonel Brandon complement each other.

The personality of some minor characters have been briefly discussed in the previous chapter, but it is valid to remember the way in which one can confirm Lady Middleton’s ill-disposition towards the Dashwood sisters due to her own dislike of reading that serves as a reminder of her idleness. Lady Middleton is far too concerned with herself, even in her desire to see her children praised. Those who have no compliment or attention to lavish on her are of little importance, hence her instant approval of the Steele sisters, who, through the narration, are seen to obviously dislike to fawn over the disagreeable Lady Middleton, but do so for interest. Sir John Middleton has a good heart, untouched by the bitterness of unacknowledged self-importance that his wife feels. He is not entirely idle, but wealth allows him an idleness of mind that promotes ignorance. He is given to common-place jargon that Marianne despises and lives only for sport and to be in the society of others.

The Steele sisters fall perfectly under the stereotypes of young ladies in search of husbands. Miss Steele practically forces her company to tease her about her dear Doctor, and Lucy is scheming and clever, but as far as her education and cultivation of mind, Elinor describes her as “illiterate, artful and selfish” (*SS*, p.133). How can it be, then, that Lucy, being the opposite of Elinor – the heroine of the novel –, eventually marries Edward’s brother, becomes richer than Elinor and loved by her mother-in-law, until then described as cold and ruthless? The answer is in the minds and personalities in the Ferrars family. Lucy succeeds because she is dealing with people even more ignorant than herself. She may be uncultured, but she knows the ways of the world and how far flattery can take someone. Mrs. Ferrars and Mr. John Ferrars are blind to the falsehood of others so long as their need for reaffirmation of their powers and greatness is intact; they read the situations around them to best suit their purposes and pleasures.

2.2 NORTHANGER ABBEY

Catherine Morland's readings were guided by her mother in her youth, and, as she was still so young when traveling to Bath with the Allen's, she still needed someone else's guidance to steer her taste, for it was not fully formed yet. In the first pages of *Northanger Abbey* she is described as a very active girl that favored boy's games, which in itself hints at her lack of a proper taste for reading or any "idle" pursuits. In her early teenage years, she was no longer averse to reading, so long as "nothing like useful knowledge could be gained from them [books], provided they were all story and no reflection" (NA, p.7). The humorous tone of the narrator discloses the criticism behind the words, cautions against the common practice of reading for nothing beyond entertainment. Catherine is, at that age, a poor reader, superficial, but she has age on her side and much of *Northanger Abbey* is about her development, her growing up into an adult, growing up mentally. Yet many ladies and gentlemen well beyond their adolescence still had their reading taken in a such trivial way. Benedict (1998) describes Catherine's maturation into a Heroine as a process achieved through her learning of proper reading (of people and situations alike).

The criticism continues in the very next sentence; Catherine grows up and her own tastes change: "...from fifteen to seventeen ... she read all such works as heroines to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives" (NA, p. 7). Austen's irony in the passage can be easily understood if we oppose a deep reading to a superficial one, that, guided by fashion and aims only at knowing enough to *seem* knowledgeable. Heroines from romantic novels, especially Gothic novels, were often near perfection. They were extremely well-educated in spite of whatever their situation was, but the narrator tells us that one cannot rely on such notions of perfection. If to a heroine reading serves to gather quotations to promote self-display and gain prestige in society, it does not conform to the idea of true cultivation of mind, and they could not, therefore, be such exponents of all there is of good and proper in society. Moreover, the author herself was averse to the idea of reading in this fashion, appropriating quotations as representations of vast knowledge. She seemed against the abridged volumes and anthologies that enabled this practice, by gathering only lines of the most famous poets, which are exemplified in the novel with loose verses from Pope, Gray, Thomson and Shakespeare (p. 7). This criticism is brought up again in her famous discourse in defense of the novel (NA, p.23).

Isabella Thorpe and Catherine Morland's friendship can also be paralleled to the idea of shallow reading. They quickly become intimate, to the point of addressing one another by

the first name, an uncommon practice at the time, save for family and very close friends. Catherine's favoritism for the young lady, who, later proves to be taking advantage of a friendship with someone well connected, is a glaring mistake that only a young, innocent Catherine would make. She is sweet and romantic, her mind unrefined and deceived by the new world around her. While Catherine Morland hasn't matured, she reads superficially, but does so innocently. She seeks thrill, but mostly at the service of friendship, to please Isabella Thorpe and to socialize. Isabella, on the other hand, uses reading as means of self-display and to influence Catherine's gullible mind into the world of fantasy (fantasy also of any real friendship existing between them) where it would be easier to mold it to her convenience (BENEDICT, 1998). As Glock (1978) points out,

Catherine exclaims that she would not have abandoned *The Mysteries of Udolpho* except to meet her dear friend, Isabella. Real life seems to draw her away from the illusionistic world of fiction, but the pervasive paradoxical structure of *Northanger Abbey* emphasizes the contrast with Catherine: Isabella's role-playing is as unreal as her appreciation and understanding of good novels. (p. 38)

Catherine Morland lets herself be taken in by the world of novels, a world which Isabella is a part of by actively ensuring she has more of those works which have formed her own mind to feed from. One of the most common concerns around the idea of too much novel reading was that of being immersed into a fictional world in excess, enough to alter one's mind and behavior in the 'real world' by exciting the imagination too much: "Catherine was then left to the luxury of a raised, restless and frightened imagination over the pages of *Udolpho*, lost from all worldly concerns of dressing and dinner ..." (NA, p. 35). Austen once more uses Catherine to exemplify such evils, but softens them by the heroine's eventual triumph. Catherine did disregard her duties as Mrs. Allen's guest, much preferring the universe weaved by Ann Radcliffe's novel, however, the duties she failed to perform were hardly of true relevance and her "infraction" does not seem to affect the reader's idea of her.

Northanger Abbey's heroine is endearing to the reader, but the narrator makes no secret of her ignorance, nor can Catherine conceal it, for she is not entirely aware of her flaws. In chapter ten, when Catherine is still involved in the series of attempts to visit the ruins of Castles and in the Thorpe's attempts to dismiss the Tilney's, Catherine has another eager conversation with Isabella Thorpe. She mentions the famous episode of the black veil in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in which she refers to the night Mr. St. Aubert died, calling him St. Aubin, and earlier calls another character, Lady Laurentini, of Laurentina. Catherine is an

easily excitable reader, but any truly passionate reader will have an intimate knowledge of a book's characters. Of course this may be a simple mistake, but it might also be another subtle reminder of the superficiality of the young lady's reading and a confirmation of her tendency to look for pleasure and entertainment in the activity, but no reflection. She constantly expects reality to live up to fiction or imagination, expecting great Gothic adventures in *Northanger Abbey*, easily believing Henry's teasing story of her own Gothic adventure.

Catherine was very innocent and naïve and her naivety drove her to do things frowned upon by society, such as being interested in Henry Tilney before he showed any interest in her and being obvious about her affections for him. Yet, the narrator and author's "insistence" that Catherine does not conform to the common rules and to what was expected of a heroine, was what promoted her happiness. Mr. Henry Tilney's affection "... had originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought" (NA, p.180). Had Catherine concealed her affection, Henry Tilney's love would never have been her own; had she not been pure at heart and inexperienced to make the mistakes she made, she would not have learned and grown, in spite of her steady principles.

Isabella Thorpe, as her actions and affectation clearly show us, is not cut out to be a heroine. She is far too ambitious to live her own romantic novel. While she is realistic in her awareness of her poverty and setting out to solve it by a profitable marriage (practically a woman's only option to get out of financial distress), she deludes herself in thinking Captain Tilney greatly attached to her and in seeing Catherine and James Morland as gullible and easy to manipulate. She does not evolve as a character, while Catherine grows and perceives Isabella's pettiness and egotism. As a reader, Isabella is hardly more advanced than her new friend. She might claim to have read many novels, but she has not used her books to learn or for more than a pastime and never explores other genres. In chapter four of the first volume of the novel (p.25), Isabella claims to have "a list of ten or twelve" books to recommend to Catherine, however, her list comprises only seven titles. This serves as fair warning that, even in her favored genre, those books seem all the same to her and only count as numbers. She prides herself with having introduced Catherine to the world of Gothic novels, but, in truth, her own selection is formed on the word of another particular friend of hers, a Miss Andrews, whom she claims to admire and praise endlessly. Isabella argues that she has "no notion of loving people by halves" (NA, p.25), a romantic ideal that Austen explored in Marianne Dashwood, in *Sense and Sensibility*, but in a much different light. Marianne, even if taken by her excessive emotions, feels genuinely. Isabella only affects to do so, and her frequent

declarations of her constancy in friendship, honesty and admiration for others are glaring warnings that her need for self-assertion represents her need for others to perceive her as something she is not.

Isabella's superficiality as a character and as a reader are very evident, but there is a particular instance where it becomes clear: on her thoughts on *Sir Charles Grandison* by Samuel Richardson, one of Mrs. Morland's favorite books, Isabella calls it "an amazing horrid book" (NA, p.26). Glock (1978) points out that Isabella has such an inconstant character and no particular regard for reading that she sees it as having less importance than discussing clothes. Her reply to Catherine's explanation of Richardson's novel being very different from Mrs. Radcliffe's book, but enjoyable is to say: "– you surprise me; I thought it had not been readable. But, dearest Catherine, have you settled on what to wear on your head to-night?" (NA, p. 26)

Mr. Thorpe and Henry Tilney can, perhaps, be classed as clear opposites in certain aspects of their reading. As far as the approach of a male to novel-reading in the late eighteenth century, they most certainly counter one another. Mr. Thorpe is contradictory, he passionately claims to have more to do than read novels, and yet, seems to have read his share. Henry Tilney soothes Catherine's worries of having offended him with her curiosity on his literary taste and by assuming a man would read novels. He finds great enjoyment in novel-reading.

While Tilney has his failings, he certainly takes a more open-minded view of the practice, which might represent a tendency to open-mindedness in other aspects as well. This is proved by his marrying a young woman he had known to be attached to him long before he could love her, and one who is poorer than him and not entirely approved of by his father. Henry Tilney shows sense and level-headedness precisely in his disobedience and as a reader he is much the same. He praises novels, enjoys them greatly, but is able to mock them. He has not been taken in by the dangerous influences attributed to the genre upon young minds. He cannot keep his promise to wait for his sister to read together, and that might be a sign of his inconstant nature, but his qualities, his moderation and caution in judging others are far more visible. Mr. Thorpe's passionate displeasure and tendency to over-compliment his own abilities or his possessions and his disagreeable insistence for Catherine's attention are, on the contrary, very unfavorable to him.

Close to the end of the novel, the narrator unfolds the development of Catherine and Henry's story in the "tell-tale compression of pages" (NA, p. 184) for which Gothic novels were famous. In it we hear of the signs of future happiness: Henry's heart was entirely

Catherine's, "their tempers were mild, but their morals steady", and Mrs. Morland seemed to fear her daughter would be a careless housewife, but reminded herself that there is "nothing like practice" (NA, p.184), nothing like learning, which our young heroine certainly did.

The basic difference in Henry Tilney's and Catherine's temper could be shown in their reading. She was easily impressed and had an active imagination while he was more experienced and able to detach himself from fantasy, to understand the two worlds of reality and fiction and circulate in both spheres with more confidence than his future wife. She still had much to live to be able to understand those differences, and yet her "flights of fancy" in seeing General Tilney as the tyrannical Montoni from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* were not so unjustified as Henry believed. He chides her for her assumptions: "Remember the country and age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable... Does our education prepare us for such atrocities?" (NA, p.145). Perhaps the Englishman of the eighteenth century was not prepared for the idea of murder or kidnappings and horrible acts committed for the sake of money. And yet, the entire Thorpe family was ready to bend the truth to suit their purposes and to rudely extract Catherine from her commitment with the Tilney's and dismiss her opinions; General Tilney was not an amiable husband and if not perverse, an authoritarian father, driven by ambition. He was ready to disregard courtesy and kindness and expel Catherine from his home to travel without company, a danger both to her person and to her reputation.

In her experience and maturation, Catherine does not find all of her ideas to be wrong or excessively unreal. She learns to see the truth behind those Gothic allegories, to read those around her more carefully, but without becoming suspicious. In that sense, the reading of the Gothic brought no harm upon her. Isabella's guidance produced its positive results. Catherine's need of guidance in her manner of reading and thinking – which she seeks from Isabella and later from Henry and Eleanor – slowly give way to her own mind, one which no longer needs her mother's suggestion to improve her spirits by educational reading to dispel her illusions about "great acquaintances" (NA, p.178). Mathison (1957) addresses this topic saying: "It is a character's achieving maturity that makes her a heroine. For, to achieve genuine understanding of oneself and the world is difficult; as we are reminded in the novels by seeing how few of the characters have done so or ever will" (p.140).

2.3 PERSUASION

Anne Elliot is the heroine of Jane Austen's last published novel, however, for most of the novel she stands back from the centre stage of action, observing the people around her, reading her own story unfold. Only her love for Captain Wentworth and her belief that it might still be returned can prompt her out her seat as a spectator. She seems to have her eyes downcast in humility for most of the novel, adding to the sense of isolation around her character. Even when she acts, Anne's actions are only that which is proper for a lady to take. Her only active role in ensuring her happy ending is in trying to make Captain Wentworth feel welcome and valued not only in her presence, but that of her family, as we see in the episode where the Elliot's attend a concert sponsored by Lady Dalrymple in Bath. Anne remains a reader of her own story for most of it, depending on chance and the actions of other characters to make the events align in her favor.

She is the heroine, the main character, and, the narrator's closeness to her thoughts leaves the reader with little doubt of it. However, Anne makes many concessions to other characters of rights which ought to belong to the heroine of a novel. She is not the first, not even the second character to be introduced and the reader only learns more of her story in the fourth chapter of *Persuasion*. Until hope starts returning the bloom of her features, she is not truly considered beautiful and even her place of first beside Captain Wentworth she loses at one point to the Musgrove sisters. That may be a striking feature of her personality, a certain complaisance or resignation to what life has reserved for her, and yet, in spite of her compassionate and humble behavior, Anne is still proud and does not deny her upbringing as daughter of a Baronet. But Anne is moderate in her pride, as well as in her judgment of others. She dislikes Mrs. Clay only out of a strong conviction of her motives for becoming close to her family, but is never unfair in her treatment of Mr. Elliot in spite of her instincts that he is not entirely truthful, or resentful of Lady Russell for persuading her to end her engagement to Frederick Wentworth eight years before. Her foolish sister Mary, as well as the Musgroves, she treats with kindness and finds quality in those who are active and unassuming, even if they are not as well-read or educated as her. Anne certainly reads for pleasure and not only for information, as the references to Burney's *Cecilia* and Prior's *Henry and Emma* imply, in addition to a narrative passage that brings great resemblances to Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* as Elaine Jordan suggests in the introduction of the Wordsworth Classics' *Persuasion* edition (2000).

Regardless of her literary tastes, one constant source of reading for Anne Elliot since Frederick's departure had been the navy lists. The those lists indicated the situation of ships, their crew and station as well as the battles each had participated and prize money the captain and higher officers of each ship had earned. Through them she is able to keep track of Captain Wentworth's success in life and confirm his determination. He had promised he would – as he did – rise quickly in his ranks and become wealthy. But Anne does not regret the past, she sees the success of their relationship being based on their matured minds, both of which have learned to deal with pride and accept new interpretations of the actions and mistakes of their youth.

Mostly, Anne Elliot seems to see therapeutic properties in literature, be it fiction, moral essays and biographies or poetry. It is this usage of reading that she recommends Captain Benwick upon perceiving that his own use of literature is far too thoughtless and immoderate. Somewhat able to identify with Benwick's pain in losing his fiancée, Anne understands his choice to retreat into literature, specifically poetry to support him through his grief, but feared for his over-indulgence and:

...recommended a larger allowance of prose in his daily study; and ... mentioned such works of our best moralists, such collections of the finest letters, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering, as occurred to her at the moment as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples of moral and religious endurances. (*P*, p.78)

Amongst the recommended readings, the works of Samuel Johnson were probably included, being a favored author by Austen herself and preaching active employment to counter grief. Yet, Anne is neither above failure nor does she worship blindly those authors who offer her comfort in her own pain, for she fears to have been “like many other great moralists and preachers ... eloquent on a point in which her own conduct would ill bear examination” (*P*, p. 78). Anne, too, gave into grief for far too long and had not been able to forget her love for Captain Wentworth. She tries to find relief from the pressure of the real world in literature, as she does in the episode of the walk to Winthrop. Therefore, she feels it is not her place to judge Benwick as other characters do, accusing him of inconstancy in his affections. Inconstancy may be an evil from which she has never suffered, but Anne understands the sorrows of a broken heart and each person's different ways of dealing with it.

The personality of Captain Benwick – the other great reader in *Persuasion* – has often been under discussion. John Sutherland and Deirdre Le Faye's (2005) ideas point out to

Benwick's taste in poetry being of recent authors at the time (Byron, Scott), while the conventional preference fell on Cowper and other more traditional poets. The authors argue that could be seen as a representation of Benwick's own fickle nature in his affections (preferring always what is new, becoming bored easily). They compare Benwick's life and the lives of his favorite poets, especially Lord Byron, who loved intensely, and had many lovers, feeling restless with domesticity. Sutherland and Le Faye (2005) state that he possibly took to these particular authors after the death of his fiancée and that his taste for reading and indulging in it would have sprung from that event. Although these are not implausible views, Austen's prime intention in choosing the authors and poems favored by the mourning Captain do not seem to be quite the same.

Robinson (2007) points out that Wentworth had known Benwick for longer than his fiancée had been dead and even before he was already described as having a taste for reading and possessing well-bound volumes. Such volumes were very expensive at the time and justified only by a strong taste for reading. It was also said that "disposition as of the sort which must suffer heavily, uniting very strong feelings with quiet, serious, and retiring manners, with a decided taste for reading" (*P*, p.74). Benwick had been saving money, building his wealth to be able to marry Fanny Harville and that could scarcely be called inconstant on his part. Captain Wentworth sees fault in his friend's quickly-formed attachment to Louisa Musgrove, placing himself in his friend's position in overcoming his affection for a woman so much superior. He is surprised at the change, for "his attachment was indeed an attachment. A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman! – He ought not – he does not" (*P*, p.143). He has himself as an example, and here, through Wentworth's interpretation of Benwick, it becomes clear that Wentworth has not overcome his own feelings for Anne Elliot. Even being superior to Benwick in the resilience of his love, Wentworth does not judge his friend as a bad person, he knows him to be worthy, well-intentioned and "a clever man, a reading man" (*P*, p.142) and he realizes, just as Anne does, that Benwick needs to be loved to be well.

According to Robinson (2007, p.3), Benwick uses poetry as a means of communication. Being excessively shy, he can make his feelings or opinions known through his readings. Poetry can hold a great amount of significance and a short number of lines. It can be a powerful way of communicating. While Anne feared for his generous indulgence in excessive feeling and poetry, Charles Musgroves' later report of Benwick's desire to discuss the books she had recommended him with (*P*, p.100) shows that his inclination for excess in feeling was not restricted to poetry.

Benwick is part of those characters who, through their actions, help ensure Anne's future happiness. Benwick and Louisa fell in love over poetry while she recovered from her accident at Lyme Regis. If these events had not taken place, had Benwick never sat beside the recovering girl's bed with sweet verses to express himself, the hero and heroine of the novel, bound as they were to pride and honorable principles, might never have had their second chance.

Every character has flaws, and with the exception of a few entirely foolish ones, the characters of *Persuasion* cannot be placed in columns of good and bad, worthy and foolish, and where their reading fails to aid them in improving their minds, the assistance of an active life and good heart seems to help. Lady Russell is a very intelligent woman; not only is she experienced, but also well-informed and well-educated. She has the Elliots' best interest at heart, especially Anne's, and she is sensible. She sees in Anne a mind much like her mother's and hers, unable to find happiness with a man whose intellectual pursuits and good-judgment were not equal to her own, thus she disapproves of a union between her goddaughter and Charles Musgrove. Yet, even with her great cultivation, Lady Russell is victim of over-valuing rank, due to her own lack of it in comparison to Sir Walter and her reading of the world around her is somewhat influenced by it. She reads the papers, poetry and keeps informed in the political, economical and philosophical questions of the nation. Doubtlessly she also probably reads the works of moralists such as Johnson and finds great worth in those people, like Charles Hayter, who seek to improve themselves through study and work, if birth has not gifted them with wealth and position.

As seen in the previous chapter, Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot's personalities are easily outlined by the importance they give to the Baronetage, which reflects their ideas on self-importance, rank and luxury. This leads them to live just to keep up with appearances, constantly going beyond their income and sinking the family in debt. Charles and Mary Musgrove seem an uneven match and in this aspect their lack of taste for reading could not be the decisive aspect to define them, but their way of interpreting the world around them could. Mary sees in every moment an opportunity to attract attention to herself, to reassure her vanity, not through the arrogant pride of her father and older sister, but through her hypochondriac tendencies. She is always feeling ill or suffering more than any one else, much as the heroine of a novel would be. She is idle and ill-disposed to seek improvement, while Charles Musgrove is active, which keeps him from falling into similar traps of a life dedicated to fashion and superficiality (as we can verify by Mary's constant change of books at the Circulating Library of Lyme [*P*, p.99]). Yet, he too lacks the drive to study and better himself.

This lack of motivation – which might be attained from living around people who shared intellectual pursuits or challenged him – can be an aggravating cause.

Captain Wentworth is not depicted as a reader, but he is clearly well-learned, even if not so much of a ‘reading man’ as Benwick. His personality, full of charm, vitality, self-confidence, was formed in his youth, in the guidance of his mother and sister along with his early experiences and readings. However, the way he presents himself upon his return to Kellynch Hall, his pride, stubbornness and resentment, are shaped by his way of reading their past story, which has taught him how to perceive the world and what to expect of people. These expectations are slowly changed as Anne teaches him to seek new interpretations and give old stories a second glance, something vital in the process of maturation and enhancement of his discernment.

2.4 SANDITON

Sanditon, even in its incomplete form, can reinforce the picture of society painted by Austen in her other works. While critics say she did not expose her personal ideas as clearly as other authors of the time, as Grundy (1999), Ehrenpreis (1980), and Johnson (1988) discuss; if read properly, Austen’s text is provocative and entice her reader to question common convention. Ehrenpreis states that “Few authors conceal their opinions on subjects of controversy so well as Austen, screening her thoughts behind those of her characters” (p.133) and Grundy (1999) argues that Austen is indirect in her approval and disapproval of the authors she makes reference to in her work (p.191), therefore veiling her opinion. Perhaps this meandering way of exposing her opinion, through irony and mismatched references, using understatement as a form of overstating something (JOHNSON, 2008, NA introduction), gives her reader greater room to build their own interpretation and accept Austen’s challenge in reading her work. That is why it is dangerous to assume the author and not the narrator is making such a bold defense of the novel in *Northanger Abbey*, for example.

In *Sanditon*, after so many examples of proper and bad reading and of the effects of the lack of education and idleness, the reader is once more confronted with the idea that formal education and access to literature in general are not enough to ensure the formation of a discriminating mind, and, both Mr. Parker and Sir Edward are examples of this. Mr. Parker is an educated and well-informed man. He reads and advertises on the *Morning Post* and *Kentish Gazette*, but his understanding is deceived by his desire of seeing Sanditon become a

famous sea-bathing resort. He is firmly convinced that all must have heard of Sanditon, or at least never heard of other resorts which pose competition to it. When reading the paper and seeing the advertisement of a doctor offering his services, he finds just what he needs to boost the status of his growing undertaking, and, in his excitement, mistakes the directions given.

Still discussing the popularity of his resort, Mr. Parker contrasts Cowper and Voltaire, opposing the happiness of a peasant, content with their situation, against a worldly bard, used to grandeur. Mr. Parker misreads the passage “She never heard of half a mile from home” (*S*, p.300), as the infelicity of having never known more of the world, or never having been known to the world, while Voltaire’s poem seems to be praising the life of calm contentedness of a peasant who escapes the frivolity known to Frenchmen and “worldly” people who have been tainted by shallowness.

Sir Edward Denham seems an even clearer case of a “misreader”, a quixotic reader, probably the most stereotyped one to be seen in Austen’s work. “Sir Edward and quite without conveying meaning of any kind...”, Grundy (1999, p. 207) states, in spite of his own claim otherwise, he was an indiscriminate novel-reader who had been isolated from the world for too long, and had idle time and wealth on his side to encourage such indulgences in his reading and behavior. Sir Edward is well-read, but his reading was misguided. He had “read more sentimental novels than agreed with him. His fancy had been early caught by all the impassioned and most exceptionable parts of Richardsons” (*S*, p.327), such as *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, which present heroines in great distress, bending to the wills of villains with great charm and minds poisoned by passion .

Sir Edward speaks of the Sublime, which at the time had its meaning differentiated from that of beauty. As Johnson (textual notes, *NA*, 2008) states, he took inspiration from Edmund Burke’s ideas, that the sublime was related to the idea of an awe-inspiring, immeasurable power. This conforms with his ideas of great passions and intensity of feeling opposed to obedience to moral values and social conventions followed through “rational restraint” (*S*. p.321). In Scott’s poems, the fault he finds is the lack of passion and in other authors admired by him, such as Burns, Wordsworth, Campbell, Montgomery, what he admires the most is what he sees of passion and soul in their writing.

His tastes have shaped him and his personality to follow that of the typical villain of a seduction novel. He finds himself attracted to money, to controlling the lives of those who might influence his, he

...read all the Essays, Letters, Tours and Criticisms of the day – and with the same ill-luck which made him derive only false Principles from Lessons of Morality, and incentives to Vice from the History of its Overthrow, only hard words and involved sentences from the style of our most approved Writers. (*S*, p.328)

Charlotte Heywood is quick to see the fault in Sir Edward's character through his reading. When exposed to his ideas on feeling and sensibility, his views of the passion which, to him, ought to be present in each line and verse to make it worth being read and praised, Charlotte affirms that their taste is not at all the same (*S*, p.227). She sees excess in him and disapproves of it, for she has a more moderate way of reading. Grundy (1999) and Won (2006) seem to agree that Charlotte's character has shades of Anne Elliot, Won believing it also carries resemblances to Elinor Dashwood. She is "sober-minded" (*S*, p.317) and well-educated enough to be able to find both amusement and instruction in her readings without being excessively influenced by what she reads. She has read *Camilla* and is aware of the difficulties faced by Burney's heroine and unwilling to face the same by over-indulging in expenses and in fancying herself in a new world in the city of Sanditon. Won (2006) finds support in the studies of respectable Austen critics such as Tony Tanner, John Lauber and Clara Tuite in his claim that "Most of the characters in *Sanditon* are victims of quixotic imagination" (p. 204), such as Mr. Parker in his enthusiasm for Sanditon and the estate; Sir Edward's admiration for the "Spirit, Sagacity and the Perseverance" (*S*, p. 328) of a villain that make him identify and seek to follow them; and Mr. Parker's sister, Diana's hypochondriac obsessions and illusions that involve the whole family under her quixotic, exaggerated reading of afflictions and illnesses. On that note, an affirmation by Isobel Grundy (1999, p.207) serves well to close this chapter: "As always in Austen, what matters is what you make of your reading"; it may be that reading has negative effects on an ignorant or unprepared mind, but only one's initial disposition towards reading can determine the effect it will have upon them. The words of a text by themselves can hardly cause any effect, be it positive or otherwise, on a mind closed to its action and suggestions.

3. READING AND JUDGEMENT IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

As we have seen in the previous chapters, in Jane Austen's work a character's taste for reading, their preferences and their relationship with the practice in general can reveal much about their personality and their relationship with the world. Considering Austen to use aspects of a person's reading as indexes of education and ability of discrimination, as suggested by Kelly (1982) and Won (2006), it is reasonable to say that this view will be enforced not only by the narrator but by the characters themselves. It will be seen not only in their relation to their own reading, but in their judgment of others based on their readings. Thus, it is possible to establish a comparison between the characters that conform to each novel's ideas of an educated and cultivated mind and those who fail to do so, and how revealing this is of their personality, without the need of punctual or lengthy description of moral character and personal opinions.

Austen works on two levels, weaving her narrative and molding her characters, but also guiding her reader, challenging them to make a proper reading of her text. The author speaks of the formation of the reader's opinions through their experience with the text, general views of the activity and how a character's habit influences the opinions of others in their society. This is all carefully laid out for each participant in her novels and at times it hints to their possible deserved fate. In this chapter, we will attempt to observe the instances where the view of certain characters about another is influenced, or illustrated, by their estimation of them as a reader, in turn reflecting how they regard themselves as readers.

3.1 SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

As a metaphor to different kinds of reading and their possible consequences – a subject that will be largely developed in the novel – at the very beginning of *Sense and Sensibility* we are presented with two wills. The first is the will of Henry Dashwood's old uncle, given in writing and favoring the male line of the family in a patriarchal view of society, as it was common at the time. His will allows only one interpretation, a formal one which must be followed to the letter, as determined by law. One year later, Henry Dashwood himself dies, leaving his wife and three daughters with no formal assurance for their future. His will comes in the form of extracting a promise from his son from his first marriage, John Dashwood; that he shall take care of his sisters. John Dashwood's interpretation of that

request varies along the course of the novel. Affected by the emotional moment and the honor of seeing to a father's last wish, John Dashwood is ready to be very generous. However, his nature is fickle and soon his wife very tactfully makes him see reality in her way, read his obligation as extending to nothing more than neighborly attention. As Won (2006) states,

The reader brings his or her own interests and expectations to reading, which affect, if not determine, the ways the text is effectuated as well. On the other hand, reading is also a passage through which a reader is led, or guided, to certain interpretations that the text configures (p.9).

While the influence of one's readings on their mind was a raging discussion between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England, one's own mind and personality clearly affect the way in which one reads. That explains the dissimilarity of taste in two people; of reading a text that greatly affects one person and has little power over another. In the case of John Dashwood, his wish of being acquitted from responsibility for his sisters' well-being significantly affected his reading of his father's "will".

Belonging to a family very adept of reading, both Dashwood sisters (consciously or unconsciously) arbitrate the value a person is due considering their taste for literature and other arts. Marianne can only feel passionately about those who think as herself and while she can see someone's moral worth, she has certain restrictions. This applies to her view of Mr. Ferrars when she tells her mother: "Oh mama! How spiritless Edward's manner in reading to us last night! I felt for my sister most severely." (SS, p. 16).

In fact, Marianne esteems Edward's friendship greatly, perhaps especially because of her sister's affection towards him, but their long acquaintance (he is one of Mrs. John Dashwood's brothers) has made him special to her too. However, she feels it impossible to understand how anyone could be content with a lover who has such little sensibility and ardor of mind or how someone can be so calm and composed in their affections such as Elinor is. In this case, the reading referred to is not merely the reading of a text, but reading aloud. This practice was very common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (MANGUEL, 2006), and shows some intimacy between Mr. Ferrars and the Dashwood family, or perhaps a wish on both parts to show courtesy and respect. From this we gather that, although more frequent as a family practice, it was also usual for guests to be offered the distinction of being the one to read. Edward Ferrars read to the Dashwood ladies as an intimate friend, but also sitting in for the father who could no longer read to his daughters. Yet even so, Marianne cannot think

well of her friend's lack of life in his reading. Elinor is then quick to defend the man she loves:

I have seen a great deal of him, have studied his sentiments, and heard his opinions on subjects of literature and taste; and, upon the whole, I venture to pronounce that his mind is well-informed, his enjoyment of books exceedingly great, his imagination lively, his observation just and correct, and his taste delicate and pure (SS, p.18).

Elinor could not be clearer. In listing the qualities she finds in Edward, all of them relate to his reading skills, be it as a reader of literature, of the world or of people. She, too, perceives value through a person's cultivation, but to her, more than having feeling in their choices or interpretations, being well-informed, having good discernment and taste are more important and in doing so, Elinor is also reading and interpreting the world around her.

Marianne could not love Edward in the way her sister does, for she finds their inclinations and tempers incompatible. She could not love someone without great sensibility, thus, in the way he is presented to us readers, her interest in Willoughby is nearly certain from the first moment. His rescuing her is a scene typical of Romantic texts and his behavior towards her and her family as well as his good looks and countenance easily earn him a faithful correspondence with Marianne's ideal of a hero, a Romantic hero. Miss Marianne Dashwood is from the start reading Willoughby based on the circumstances in which they are placed, without analyzing a greater context.

When seeking to know more of her savior, Marianne asks Sir John Middleton for information. First Sir John does not answer her satisfactorily, reading the question as related to his own tastes: society and sport. What she truly wishes to know is of his manners, his pursuits, talents and genius (SS, p.42). Sir John's and Marianne's ideas of an interesting person worth knowing are very different and, therefore, their interpretation of character is bound to be as well.

Once their acquaintance is furthered, the middle Dashwood sister seeks to know Mr. Willoughby through his tastes in reading and his accordance to her own and finds "their taste was strikingly alike. The same books, same passages were idolized by each..." (SS, p. 45). Any differences in opinion were easily dissolved by the passion of the argument of the other. Marianne could not help but develop an attachment to that man. If she commonly placed a person's value in their mind and taste, having her own taste as reference and finding someone so entirely similar to her in the relevant matter, she could hardly have a greater esteem for Willoughby. As Marianne and Willoughby's meeting ends, Elinor reproaches her sister for

having shared too much, they would soon have nothing else to talk about, as they had gone over almost “every matter of importance” (*SS*, p.45). Now that her sister knows his taste and just how properly (according to their own standards) he values certain authors, the sisters can hope to form an image of his character; Marianne especially believes so.

Marianne and Willoughby read together as well, and in him she found all the “sensibility and spirit” (*SS*, p.16) which she felt were wanting in Edward. Here she reads both characters as being very distinct, and, as the novel advances, we see that Edward Ferrars is a man of word, unwilling to dishonor a promise he had made in his foolish younger years, while Willoughby proves to have done much more than Marianne could have expected from her Romantic hero. He had disgraced a young girl, fathered a child and left both unattended even after becoming aware of their situation. In addition, he pretended to be oblivious to Marianne’s affections and married for money. Nevertheless, Edward and Willoughby bear interesting similarities (JOHNSON, 1988). Both are young men, leading idle lives while they wait for the inheritances which will set them free to build their lives. While Willoughby is easily judged as unworthy for having engaged Marianne’s affection with no intention of returning it, Edward led a similar path. Although his love for Elinor is genuine and constant, he did let himself love her and even encourage her affections – to the point that she is throughout the novel certain of his love – when he, too, had no intention, or possibility, of openly returning those feelings and marrying her while still engaged to Lucy Steele. Here the narrator presents the reader with the possibilities of how these two characters should be read: as opposites, or as young men who start their journeys sharing many similarities, but whose choices, or chances, lead apart; one to a positive and one to a negative path. By the end of the novel, Elinor does not fail to reprimand Edward, however, her own happiness is too great and too certain for that to matter anymore.

Another character who divides the sisters’ opinions for a long time is Colonel Brandon. Marianne thinks him old and therefore probably lacking a passion for life. She is not fond of the idea of being the object of his affections and she and Willoughby often speak of him in unflattering ways, to which Elinor is once more ready to argue against. She speaks up in his favor saying that “he... has been abroad; has read, and has a thinking mind” (*SS*, p. 49), meaning that he has lived, has many experiences and has seen the world, but he has also been through many worlds in his mind, in reading, and is a man of good understanding.

Once more, the parameter used to judge a person’s value is their cultivation of mind, mostly through their reading. As we advance on each example, it becomes clear that Austen

used these ideas on reading intentionally, and these are not distant interpretations formulated two centuries after the publication of her works.

Perhaps Elinor was not able to read all of Colonel Brandon at the beginning of their acquaintance. She expected him to partake in her opinion of the possible hazards of feeling as Marianne does, of disregarding her duties towards others in her society or for forming ideas too radical: “her opinions are all romantic” (*SS*, p.53), the older sister claims. Colonel Brandon, however, does not see that as a great failing on her part; he can see a certain charm in the prejudices typical of young minds, and prefers Marianne to see the world through her romantic systems than to become terribly deceived and disillusioned as do the two Elizas in his life.

Elinor’s ideas of her sister’s quixotic views of the world are later, to some extent, supported by Edward’s belief of what the younger Dashwood sister (the youngest being Margaret) would do if she were to be in possession of a large sum of money: “spend it on books, securing all of her loved volumes to herself or paying annuities⁵ to her favorite authors” (*SS*, p.89).

Even though the sisters, Elinor and Marianne, share the position of main characters in this novel, it is Elinor’s thoughts that are closer to the reader, more frequently revealed by the narrator. Their stories develop during the same period of time, sometimes in parallel and others in opposed ways. Marianne feels herself as a heroine in her own dramatic, melancholy story, and comes to learn from experience and from her sister, how to better read the world around her and relate to it, without losing her power of feeling entirely. Elinor, who can see, as Won (2006) points out, both the ‘dangers’ and the ‘power’ of her sister’s ways – strives to behave always in a firm fashion to avoid the threats that such romantic thoughts might bring. She has to learn from Marianne that moderation is necessary not only in excess of feeling, but also in excess of reason. This distinction allows the reader to understand more of the sister’s functions in the story, “...the novel constitutes Elinor’s consciousness as a narrative center, designates Elinor as a reader who reads her sister’s story” (WON, 2006. p.140).

Seeing Elinor Dashwood as the reader – within the novel – with whom the reader of Jane Austen’s text has the most contact with, we are in contact with many of her opinions on other characters. Most of them, though based on the propriety of their conduct, go back to

⁵ Readers would subscribe to an author’s particular novel, or pay an annuity to them independent of the work to be produced next. It worked similarly to the idea of ordering a work on commission, although the writer had freedom over what to write, the readers’ demands prompted them to write a new work.

their cultivation of mind or reading. In chapter twenty-two (p.123-4), the narrator gives us an interesting account of Elinor's thoughts about Lucy Steele:

Lucy was naturally clever...and as a companion for half an hour Elinor frequently found her agreeable; but her powers had received no aid from education, she was ignorant and illiterate, and her deficiency of all mental improvement, her want of information in the most common particulars, could not be concealed from Miss Dashwood.

Even if her opinion is biased by her jealousy of a woman who claims to be engaged to Edward Ferrars, it is clear on what she bases her argument as to the young lady's value and she asks herself if Edward truly could, with all his refinement, uprightness and "well-informed mind, be satisfied with a wife like her – illiterate, artful and selfish?" (SS, p.133).

The Middleton couple provides us with one of the most interesting, if not the clearest, example of the different readings one can have of a same circumstance or fact, in this case, of reading itself. Sir Middleton is a good man, but he is described as not being a reader, he leads too idle a life and that makes him foolish. The books in his house are for display, and he is shocked to find the Dashwoods employed reading almost every time he visits them. His ideas of reading and books are all fashionable and shallow (Won, 2006). Lady Middleton is more than futile; she is prejudiced towards people with too great an education in reading, for she is aware of her own lack of cultivation and excessive idleness. The Dashwood sisters' taste in reading made her see them as satirical, "perhaps without knowing exactly what it was to be satirical, but that did not signify. It was censure in common use and easily given" (SS, p.240). This substantiates all the more Austen's intention to use reading as a paradigm of judgment and to address different issues regarding the practice of reading in her time.

3.2 NORTHANGER ABBEY

Northanger Abbey can be rated as one of Jane Austen's most controversial books. Being one of her earliest works, many critics have discussed the quality of the text in comparison with the other novels; some claiming it to lack the potential, style and also the relevance found in her later work. Others believe that *Northanger Abbey* deserves great merit, and that Austen's authorial power can be seen through the decisions made for the novel.

Another great discussion is around the author's position regarding fiction and gothic fiction. *Northanger Abbey* has been considered to have a narrator with a more authorial voice,

closer to Austen's in her defense of the novel. However, much has also been said about that being the author's exact intention in posing such strong opinions on a topic vastly discussed during her time, to confront her reader with their common beliefs on the subject; Mary Lascelles and Andrew Wright (*apud*. MATHISON,1957) pointed out the danger of taking Austen's defense of the novel too seriously. Such discussions and the work resulting from them represent some of the different ways Austen's work can be read and interpreted, and here the reader (and the critic reader as well) can be featured in our discussion as to their reaction towards one's habits or practices in reading and speaking of reading.

The debate on whether *Northanger Abbey* is a Gothic or Anti-Gothic novel seems endless and still depends on the reader's own interpretation of the text. There seems to be elements of both in the novel. Being a well-informed reader as she was, Jane Austen was very well aware of what was thought of unsupervised reading and indulging in novel-reading. Her family read novels, and Austen perceived them a valid literary form, while society in general seemed to have greater regard for non-fictional works, with a prejudice in particular novels:

As an inducement to subscribe Mrs. Martin tells us that her Collection is not to consist only of Novels, but of every kind of Literature &c. &c. – She might have spared this pretension to our family, who are great Novel-readers and not ashamed of being so; – but it was necessary I suppose to the self-consequence of half her subscribers.⁶

In spite of her admiration for novels, Austen could discern between good and bad works without generalizing the genre as flawless. In *Northanger Abbey*, the discussion is more closely restricted to the Gothic style, and the narrator shows the reader that its fantastic elements are not entirely groundless to a well-prepared reader. The horrific dangers presented in one of those novels might seem exaggerated, but they did exist, even if in smaller scale, in the English society. They were not alienating to those who could extract a productive reflection as well as entertainment from their reading, something that did not happen for Isabella Thorpe.

Such conclusions concerning readers and critics belong to the world outside of the novel, but within it, we can see judgment applied by characters not only in the topics mentioned above, but in different aspects of reading. Still, this does not happen as extensively as we have seen in *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Catherine Morland's journey is one of self-discovery, and while she clearly perceives the world around her based on the

⁶ Letter to Cassandra, 18 December 1798, *Letters*, p. 38-39.

influences she has most recently received (and at one point they are gothic novels), she mostly tries to understand herself to better understand the world around her. It is this innocence that initially places Isabella Thorpe high in Catherine's regard as a person superior to herself, for having read so many books and having introduced her to those works which give her so much delight.

Isabella's brother, Mr. Thorpe, easily surpasses his sister in disagreeableness, for his manners are as rough and unpolished as his mind. Conforming to the common thought of the time when asked if he has read *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Mr. Thorpe rudely claims he never reads novels, he has more things to do. It is possible to derive from this opinion that he finds reading an idle employment and probably does not approve of it as a habit in others; he prides himself on not indulging in. In truth, he has read novels, but without any depth, his inattention going as far as being unable to distinguish one author from another (WON, 2006).

Catherine's family does not seem contrary to the reading of novels. Catherine Morland at one point tells Isabella her mother is very fond of *Sir Charles Grandison* and has read it many times, even owns the volume, which at the time, considering the price of books and their availability at circulating libraries, could only mean Mrs. Morland liked Samuel Richardson's novel very much. Yet, Catherine finds herself falling into the commonplace opinions. Even though she enjoys novels, she is apparently uncertain of their worth to more elegant people than her, and she comes to see it as something no man could enjoy, especially after Mr. Thorpe's strong disapproval of them. Her inexperienced and unsophisticated views of the world make her wish to adapt to the higher society she believes herself to be in. Catherine is ready to assume Henry Tilney is above being a novel-reader: "– But you never read novels, I dare say?/ Why not?/ –Because they are not clever enough for you – gentlemen read better books" (NA, p. 77)

But what does Catherine consider as 'better books'? Perhaps political, moral essays, even poetry, but not prose fiction. Henry Tilney is then quick to break her recently formed opinion with his own, which the young lady greatly respects: "The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid." (NA, p.77). His opinions are strong, too, for one does not lightly profess others to be 'intolerably stupid'. He defends Ann Radcliffe's novels and admits his enjoyment in reading most of them. Later, in the second volume of the novel, when Henry accompanies Catherine to the abbey of Northanger being aware of her easily-impressed imagination and her fascination with the Gothic (spurred on by her readings that fueled her expectations of what to find in his home), Henry teases his friend, creating the very own gothic tale Catherine will live. Claudia L.

Johnson (1988) claims that Henry Tilney “dismisses gothic novels as a good read” and “a set of stock situations” (p.35). Whether he truly “denies the gothic any legitimately mimetic provenance” (JOHNSON, 1988, p.35) or not, Henry is certainly aware of the differences between the real world and fantasy. To Won (2006), he is an intelligent and refined reader who is “familiar with literary conventions of popular literature but also is able to enjoy using coded conventions in literature” (p.96). Won (2006) continues his argument saying that Henry Tilney’s detachment from the text he reads is his difference from Catherine, but is also partly a flaw. He does not realize how real that world feels to Catherine, especially in her beliefs concerning General Tilney and his late wife. While her exceptionally Gothic ideas about him as the murderer of his wife and tyrannical father are proven wrong, he certainly is oppressive towards his children, his marriage indeed had no happiness and the General proves to be more cruel than anyone who dismisses the idea of Gothic novels containing any reality in them could have expected. In an earlier review, Glock (1978) expressed a contrary view to Johnson’s, saying that Catherine Morland does not become a new Madame Bovary because she learns that extraordinary events and adventures only exist in her time in “second-rate novels”. Works of more recent dates tend to take a milder view of the implausibility of correspondence with reality in Gothic novels, as much has been studied in relating these works particularly to certain political circumstances of the time.

Henry Tilney’s opinion and habit of reading, as well as his sister Eleanor’s, set Catherine Morland’s mind at ease. In her admiration of them, she is able to eagerly accept their views on the matter. The reader is not, however, limited to Catherine’s ideas. We know the minds of the other characters mostly through their own speeches, to which the narrator often makes comments regarding their most relevant lines. Still relying on his own voice, the reader hears of Henry Tilney’s perception of Catherine related directly to her:

With you, it is not, how is such a one likely to be influenced? What is the inducement most likely to act upon such a person’s feelings, age, situation, and probably habits of life considered? – but, how should *I* be influenced, what should be *my* inducement in acting so and so? (NA, p. 96)

He means that Catherine is not concerned with persuading others to see or think like her or to her own benefit, but has her attention turned to how she should behave to her best interest, to be well regarded and accepted by others whom she judges good-natured or superior. That also shows us Henry’s thoughts, his opinion of propriety and influence, his way or reading and interpreting those around him. In the future, however, he questions Catherine’s

own judgment when he discovers her suspicions of Captain Tilney's guilt in Mrs. Tilney's death: "Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?" (p. 145). He does not believe those ideas could come from Catherine's good-hearted person and naïve mind, but can assume she has been influenced, forming such beliefs without discrimination. Won (2006) also offers insight on two important aspects of *Northanger Abbey* in relation to the influence of reading: Henry Tilney and Isabella Thorpe, each in their own way, show us that being conscious of the role of literary conventions in life can be just as threatening as Catherine's romantic and at times unrealistic readings. Also that a person's reading choices cannot on their own help us determine who they are or what influence such a text might have over them – "reading's influence is deeply affected by an individual character's motivation and the way in which he or she is involved in life's experiences" (p.113).

3.3 PERSUASION

Persuasion, Jane Austen's last completed novel, differs from most of her published work for having a more serious narrator, but still maintaining the subtle humor characteristically attributed to the author. Anne Elliot, being her most experienced heroine, created by a more mature Austen, provides the reader with interesting means of comparison to the author's other heroines, and her reading cultivation is not the least of them.

Anne's experiences in loss and solitude qualify her as a good reader of people. For most of a novel, in which she is the main character, she stands aside through the largest part of the action, seeing the plot unfold through her quiet eyes. Though she does not often take an active voice, through the narrator we can properly judge her perception of those around her as accurate and just, even if Anne herself could not find the words to justify her likes, dislikes and suspicions.

As a reader of literature she has learned to find moderation. Although seeking the healing properties of good poetry, she knows its heavy emotional charge must be appreciated with temperance, and that prose can have just as much of an uplifting and educating effect. She has also kept informed through the 'navy journals', in general terms, of the fate of Frederick Wentworth. But Anne Elliot is far from being the only reader in the novel, or the only one to judge and be judged by her taste and habits.

Sir Walter Elliot's personality is revealed to the reader within the first pages of *Persuasion*, which adds to the idea of his superficiality of character, being that in just a few

pages his character can be thoroughly known. Meanwhile, Anne Elliot, who is introduced only after her father and older sister, has her character developed all throughout the novel. A couple of pages are enough for us to understand Sir Walter from beginning to end: vain. The scene in which he is presented is even more elucidative: “Sir Walter Elliot...was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the *Baronetage*; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one...” (*P*, p.3). In these lines, the reader learns that Sir Walter is not a reading man, he does not read for information or cultivation. The idea that he turns to books in times of distress, or to pass time, could atone for some of the superficiality of his character, were it not for the fact that he always turns to the same book, and without ever finding deeper meaning in it than a “textual mirror of himself” (WON, 2006), like the many looking-glasses he has spread around his house. His reading is always the same, fixed, just as he thinks his own looks to be, unchanged by time.

Although we cannot see other characters’ reactions to Sir Walter’s reading and his taste in particular, the narrator prepares the reader to form that judgment and from his conduct throughout the book, as well as other characters’ views of him in general aspects, this initial description is easily confirmed.

We see Elizabeth Elliot, Anne’s older sister, as Sir Walter’s favorite daughter, and in this alone we may make assumptions as to her personality. She is described as being very similar to him, having the same set of superficial values that make her think: “[he]...would have rejoiced to be certain of being properly solicited by baronet blood within the next twelvemonth or two. Then might she again take up the book of books with as much enjoyment as in her early youth...” (*P*, p.7) The reader might then question what Elizabeth’s perception of her father’s reading is. She respects him and values the book as a prized reflection of their importance just as much as her father does. What other book could contain content as relevant to them as *The Baronetage*? However, her own life falls short of reflecting the favorable lines she wishes to see written there. She is twenty-nine, unmarried, and her family is going through financial problems. Her expectations (readings) of that book have stayed the same. Elizabeth has remained “confined to her sense of self-importance” (WON, 2006, p.165), she rereads the *Baronetage* seeking to satisfy her vanity, but cannot find as much relief for an hour of distress as her father can.

While Sir Walter has barely felt the effects of time over him, only noticing it in the decaying state of all others around him and while he still considers his eldest daughter to be as lovely at twenty-nine as she was at nineteen, Elizabeth has keenly felt the passage of time. She is very aware of those thirteen years that separate her from the time when her mother used

to run Kellynch and she could take up ‘the book of books’ with great enjoyment and full of hopes for the future. Yet, still more is revealed, though indirectly and in a very intricate way about Elizabeth’s reading and rereading.

At the very beginning of *Persuasion*, we are given a small description of Lady Elliot as an “excellent woman, sensible and amiable; whose judgment and conduct, if they might be pardoned the youthful infatuation which had made her Lady Elliot, had never required further indulgence afterwards” (*P*, p. 4). The narrator describes Lady Elliot as a good and intelligent woman; she was the one who administered their household, always within their income in spite of Sir Walter’s extravagances; and, as the passage shows, she had good judgment. On the following page, as Lady Russell is introduced to the reader, she is described as a very good friend of Lady Elliot’s and someone who feels great affection for all of her three daughters, however “only in Anne could she fancy the mother to revive again”. Anne is the only one of the three children who has Lady Elliot’s discernment. While this is not directly related to their reading or taste in it, taking into consideration the previously explored vision of education and reading as a paradigm of judgment, this description tells us what Lady Elliot and Anne have and what her sisters Elizabeth and Mary lack in cultivation of mind in Lady Russell’s opinion. In chapter ten of the second volume of the novel Elizabeth tells Anne:

Oh! you may as well take back that tiresome book she would lend me, and pretend I have read it through. I really cannot be plaguing myself for ever with all the new poems and states of the nation that come out. Lady Russell quite bores one with her new publications. (*P*, p. 168)

Lady Russell is seen as a well spoken and well informed woman, and from Miss Elliot’s words, one can assume she also enjoys reading poetry as well as more political works, although we do not see many scenes of her reading. She is regarded by the great majority of the characters as a wise, respectable woman. This might be a result of her being older than most of the cast in the novel or due to the natural distinction to wealthy people. Still, the regard for her opinions is undeniable, as she is referred to or sought after in many occasions, even from the first conflict presented in the novel: resolving the Elliot’s debts.

Elizabeth’s phrasing “that tiresome book she would lend me” (*P*, p.168), may be a reflection of common usage at that time, but her use of ‘would’ might also give the reader the impression of insistence on Lady Russell’s part that she would read that book, and perhaps many other books. This can be seen as an attempt on Lady Russell’s part to improve Miss

Elliot's reading, which she must, therefore, consider poor. However, her efforts fail miserably in that aspect.

Nonetheless, her failure in guiding Elizabeth does not lessen Lady Russell's influence over others. She is a good woman, with sense of honor and decorum, but aristocratic in her views and highly valuing rank. This makes her a deeper, more layered character than a thoroughly wise lady who could do no wrong and her own misreading of Captain Wentworth (which her educated and well-read perception does not make her immune to) helps set into motion the plot of *Persuasion*.

At the early chapters of the novel, Mr. Shepherd, Sir Walter's friend and lawyer, being only too conscious of his inferiority to his friend and going through great lengths not to displease him, refuses to give his opinions as to the measures to be taken to dissolve Sir Walter's debts and "only begged leave to recommend an implicit reference to the excellent judgment of Lady Russell" (*P*, p.8), who would ultimately deliver advice that suited his own ideas.

The reader can also see Lady Russell's influence or an acknowledgement of her stricter views further revealed in opinions of other characters; for example, when Anne, her sister Mary, Charles Musgrove and Lady Russell herself are speaking of Captain Benwick. Mary is certain the older lady will find nothing agreeable in him, while Anne disagrees, she thinks: "... Lady Russell would like him ... she would be so much pleased with his mind that she would very soon see no deficiency in his manner" (*P*, p.101). That is to say, of course, that Anne herself is pleased with the Captain's understanding and possibly believes herself to think in a similar way to that of her friend.

The most visible situation of Lady Russell's opinion of someone being affected by their reading habits is concerning Charles Musgrove. He is given a lengthier description of personality and character in chapter six of the first volume (p.32). He is said to be civil and pleasant, but the narrator adds to his description Anne's and Lady Russell's thoughts on him:

Anne could believe, with Lady Russell, that a more equal match might have greatly improved him; and that a woman of real understanding might have given more consequence to his character, and more usefulness, rationality and elegance to his habits and pursuits. As it was, he did nothing with much zeal but sport; and his time was otherwise trifled away, without the benefit from books, or anything else (*P*, p.32)

This description includes the ladies' thoughts on Mary as well. It was believed that a good match in marriage could not only bring happiness, but, with the right disposition, the

spouses would learn from one another and atone for their deficiencies in learning from or becoming more like the other. Mary is seen by both as lacking in understanding, the sort of cultivation of mind which women, in special, could find in reading, once they did not have as much access to formal education as men did. Books and a deep, discriminating reading (or even rereading) of them was one of the means of “self-education” which Austen thought beneficial, “Refashioning reading as a means to improve oneself, the new ideal of reading converts the susceptibility of the young, ignorant, and idle reader into the educability of the new reader” (WON, 2006).

Charles Musgrove is a good man, of good ‘temper’, with the right disposition to improve himself into a gentleman, if only he has the proper input, the right companion. In this, Anne might have been his hope, had she not been far too superior to him, as Lady Russell thinks. However, Charles has himself to blame as well. He finds pleasure only in active pursuits, in sport, and devotes none of his time to improving himself intellectually, which will keep him forever a good, but plain man. During a conversation with Captain Wentworth (*P*, p.68), Louisa (Charles Musgrove’s sister) says Lady Russell was the one who persuaded Anne to refuse Charles Musgrove’s proposal, Louisa’s parents said “...Charles might not be learned and bookish enough to please Lady Russell”; bookish here nearly becoming a synonym to being ‘worthy’ of Anne.

Nevertheless, Charles is not only an object to others’ judgments based on his reading habits; he makes his own conclusions as well. On his return from Lyme Regis, where he and Mary attended to his recovering sister Louisa, Charles reports to Anne his suspicion of Captain Benwick’s affections for her. He and his wife disagree on the matter, but he claims: “his head is full of some books that he is reading upon your recommendation, and he wants to talk to you about them...- Oh! I cannot pretend to remember it, but it was something very fine...” (*P*, p.100). Charles Musgrove recognizes the elegance of a more cultivated mind, however, he cannot bring himself to have an interest in the same thing. He can barely remember what Captain Benwick wishes to discuss regarding his readings; even in his way of saying “full of some books” (*P*, p. 100), we can see his carefree disregard for the activity. And later on, their difference in disposition is brought to surface once more in a conversation with Anne on Benwick’s engagement to his sister Louisa. He tells Anne of how Benwick sits beside his fiancée, reading her poetry, and Anne laughingly points out he must not be very pleased with that, considering his own opinions. But Charles’s opinion of Benwick is not affected, he thinks “His reading has done him no harm, for he has fought as well as read. He is a brave fellow”. His idea of him is not affected because Benwick did not lead an idle life

dedicated only to intellectual pursuits, he had been active, and he had proved his value in fighting for his country, the feeling of patriotism being another strongly present element in *Persuasion*.

Different critics, such as Young Seon Won (2006), previously mentioned in this paper, and Nina Auerbach (1995), have come to see *Persuasion* as an inversion of *Sense and Sensibility*, perhaps in special due to the acceptance of some of Marianne's romantic ideas that end up discarded, such as the idea of one single love to last a whole life, a love impossible to be forgotten or overcome. For Marianne, that proves not to be true, however Anne Elliot, at the age that the younger Dashwood sister claimed to be impossible to inspire or engage affection, finally has her happy ending in resisting all other attachments and finding the constant love she feels has also lasted for Captain Wentworth. Another aspect often compared between the two novels is the idea of the quixotic reader, and in *Persuasion*, Captain Benwick is most often pointed out as the one to take that role. Benwick is not as well liked by all as he is by Captain Wentworth and Anne. For her, her only objection is against self-indulgence in excessive feeling, and while poetry may have its therapeutic purposes (ROBINSON, 2007) as we see her apply to herself during her walk at Winthrop – she thinks too much of it can do just as much harm as good. Anne is not only more experienced than any other of Austen's heroines, as formerly stated, she is also more moderate. Robinson (2007) points out she stands halfway between the extremes of Emma and Fanny Price in her views, and so she is not so quick to judge Benwick. She understands him and as mentioned earlier, she sees he must love to be well and does not read evil into his quickly excitable affections after such a short period of mourning for his dead fiancée; it only proves her later argument that while a man's love may be stronger, a woman's is constant and lasts longer.

Anne defends that point of view to Captain Harville – another attacker on Benwick's inconstancy. He says history is against her and that he has read much about women's inconstancy; however he promptly professes to know that her response will be that most of what has been written, has been written by men: "Books and education has always been more for men" (*P*, p.184), Anne says. And Captain Harville himself, though described as being "no reader" (*P*, p.75), shows in this discussion that he has read his fair share. He is a man of good understanding, experience has taught him what he did not learn from books, he is active, not idle, and while he has not dedicated most of his time to improving his mind, he has not had such an idle mind as to give into the follies of fashion.

Captain Wentworth himself is not portrayed reading or as a reading-man, and in his initial reactions to Anne, we see his reading of their past has not evolved through the years,

and only renewed experience, new readings of Anne are able to change his heart. He re-learns to see her as having a strong mind when she is sought to take the lead in attending to Louisa after her accident and he re-learns to see her as beautiful after having said he would not recognize her. Vanity is not entirely absent in the Captain, nor is pride. His pride stops him from finding new interpretations in their history and story together, and perhaps we may see a very mild echo of Sir Walter Elliot's pleasure in taking up the Baronetage, when he takes the navy list to assist Louisa and Henrietta in finding what is written of the *Laconia*, his ship, and about himself: "he could not deny himself the pleasure of taking up the precious volume into his own hands..." (*P*, p. 50). But Captain Wentworth is not set out to become another Sir Walter Elliot. He learns his lessons throughout the novel; he learns to see past his injured pride and read Anne's feelings, his interpretations do not remain fixed forever, and that makes him a worthy match for Miss Anne Elliot.

In the second volume of the novel, when meeting by chance inside a shop while trying to escape the rain, Anne and Wentworth share their views on Benwick and Louisa's engagement. Wentworth has learned to look beyond Louisa Musgrove's assertions of being of a strong mind, for, in truth, she is not. Her affections have shifted just as quickly as Benwick's were said to have, and Anne is utterly aware of this mistake in judgment from her beloved, who once judged her to have a weak mind, susceptible to persuasion. This is the reason why Anne finds it so amusing to think of Louisa transformed into an "enthusiast for Scott and Lord Byron". Louisa's love of literature will not come from a genuine cultivation, but from an infatuation.

The narration happens very close to the thoughts of the heroine of the novel. Through them the reader can perceive her own judgment of those around her and her sense of self-value is greatly related to the cultivation of mind and the education she has achieved through her reading. Nearly at the end of the fifth chapter of Volume I, we see Anne's melancholy feelings in having such an unloving family. She is jealous of the good relationship between her cousins Louisa and Henrietta that do not allow even their initially mutual interest in Captain Wentworth to separate them. Nonetheless, Anne Elliot is only too aware that sisterly affection is not essential, desirable as it may be. The sisters are given to the latest fashions, have weak opinions, their education is limited to the typical female accomplishments which they have learned at school, and Anne "would not have given up her elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments" (*P*, p.30), for the sake of sisterly affection, given how highly she rates the importance of having a well-learned and elegant mind.

Minor characters, too, are outlined by their judgment and cultivation. While Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove cannot understand Charles Hayter's behavior in 'shutting himself up' with books, studying (which to them could only mean that something was not alright), Anne understands him. She comprehends his desire for solitude in fearing to have lost Henrietta's love and judges it to be the best measure to take, not to impose himself or suffer the humiliation of rejection by any imprudent and insistent pursuit. Anne herself finds reading to have its curative, restorative properties. During her walk to Winthrop, as mentioned earlier, she tries to recall verses that can describe the autumn scene around her, verses that will distract her from the pain of seeing Captain Wentworth walking with Louisa Musgrove. She "understands well how literature can relieve the burden of reality" (WON, 2006, p.176). But she also knows fiction does not substitute reality for she does think it will be difficult to find in poetry the precise words to describe the autumnal scene. Young Seon Won (2006) says that: "As in Austen's previous novels, reading in *Persuasion* is a revealing trait of the characters, and the characters' different readings illuminate how one's reading is closely linked with one's hermeneutic understanding." (p.156).

Anne's story, as well as that of most of the other characters, is one of rereading. She has had the time to contemplate her past and take a new attitude towards Captain Wentworth once she can believe that hoping for his affections is more than foolish fancy. Focusing on rereading rather than only reading makes *Persuasion* a novel that delves deeper into its characters and their experiences in different readings than any of Austen's other novels. Benedict (1996) affirms that Austen contributed to the idea of shaping a new kind of reader. Reading itself is seen then as an "exercise" that teaches one to find new interpretations in a text, thus enlarging their perception of the world.

3.4 SANDITON

The last piece started by Austen, *Sanditon*, although left unfinished, shows great relevance in the study of Jane Austen's style and subjects, even in its incomplete development. In writing, it is said to have the potential to have been Austen's finest work, both in technique and in her authorial maturity and statement. Even in its different tone from the rest of her work, the smoother, more serious tone of it contrasts with the colorful humor of previous novels (with the exception perhaps of *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*). The play on conventions and manners are there and certainly the clever irony is present and would probably have made a greater

appearance throughout the novel, but, most prominently, the motif of ‘reading’ remains ever present.

We do not know much about the heroine of the novel, Charlotte Heywood, but we certainly only come to know more of her after she arrives in Sanditon. At home she did not play an outstanding role in a family of many children, but her thoughts and words, from the first, tell us of a good education. The reader can first identify the influence of her readings on her judgment when Charlotte meets Clara Brereton.

Clara seems a potential rival to Charlotte’s post as heroine, for Charlotte herself sees her as the perfect fit for any description of the most “beautiful and bewitching Heroine” (S, p.317) in any book. However, the narrator soon tells us: “These feelings were not the result of any spirit of Romance in Charlotte herself ... she was a very sober-minded young lady, sufficiently well-read in Novels to supply her imagination with amusement, but not at all unreasonably influenced by them...” (S, p.317). The author and the narrator are conscious of the common idea related to reading too many novels and are quick to dispel it. Charlotte seems an ideal reader if she can truly find amusement, appreciate romance, but not lose her reason. Yet, this might be another delicately planted irony that the full development of the novel would have exposed. This serves to question the judgment of society, the reading they would have of such a character. Still, as quoted from Won (2006) regarding *Northanger Abbey*, the person’s private dispositions also play a part in how their readings influence them.

Charlotte does interpret Clara, her person and her situation, as that of a heroine, but she can quickly admit to herself that the lady does not seem to be suffering from any of the horrors that ‘ought’ to fall upon her as a heroine. She might not be perfectly happy, but seemed to be in ‘comfortable terms’ with Lady Denham.

In the fragment of the novel which has reached us, there is one extremely important relationship with reading which would very likely have been one of the high points in *Sanditon*: Sir Edward Denham. Charlotte has an opportunity to observe him, read him, and afterwards to talk to him and confirm her conclusions. She thought he had the air of a “Lover”, but feels he requires closer observation. The conversation between Charlotte and Sir Edward is revealing, although it unfortunately does not reveal much of what would have awaited us in future pages. He falls into a long, interminable speech about a Man of Feeling and Sensibility, of ardor and his favorite lines in poetry, and by the end of it, “she began to think him downright silly” (S, p.232). She understood him very well, but chose to feign ignorance rather than reveal her thoughts on his interpretations of the world and his readings; Charlotte did not think them “very moral”, nor was she pleased with the fashion in which he tried to praise her excessively.

Chapter eight is virtually entirely dedicated to Sir Edward's reading formation. As discussed earlier, he was obliged to remain always in the same place, finding amusement and escape only in his books, in which he over-indulged. He believes himself a highly cultivated reader, for he is: "No indiscriminate Novel-reader. The mere trash of the common Circulating Library I hold in the highest contempt" (S, p.326). This speech echoes loudly of others we have read before in Austen's novels; *Pride and Prejudice* has Mr. Collins to judge the practice, *Northanger Abbey* has its Mr. Thorpe; *Sense and Sensibility* has a variety of characters who dislike reading and look with wary eyes upon novels. However, Sir Edward, who prides himself unashamedly, is the exact contraire of his own description. He appreciates works of grandeur, novels and poems that "enlarge the primitive capabilities of the heart" (S, p.327), works that speak of passion, where a woman awakens "the Fire in the Soul of Man" and leads him to reckless actions to have her. He enjoys the sort of text that aggrandizes passionate actions and disregards reason, which justifies immoral acts in a man's pursuit of a woman. In the same page the narrator confides to the reader the information that his "fancy had been early caught by all the impassionate, and most exceptionable parts of Richardson". Rejecting *Sir Charles Grandison*, a book greatly esteemed by Austen and her family, a title used to show Mrs. Morland's good understanding, he enjoys the earlier works *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, tragic novels in which a man could go to unimaginable lengths to have what he wanted, many times in detriment of the heroine's wishes. His "great object in life was to be seductive" (S, p.328), his role models were seduction novels, and the narrator foretells of his possible plans regarding Clara. We are assured of Charlotte's good judgment in her opposition to Sir Edward's, for she pointedly tells him "our taste in Novels is not at all the same" (S, p.327). Clara's own mind is positively asserted in the narrator's voice, for as Sir Edward is described through his unorthodox tastes and systems, "Clara saw through him, and had not the least intention of being seduced" (S, p.328). The difference between Sir Edward and the heroines of Austen's novels who also integrated their romantic readings in their views of life, is that Sir Edward, as a man, particularly one of high rank, has greater possibilities of influencing other's lives. Considering his actions will be guided by his distorted vision of the world, one can only imagine how he would affect others.

In all of Jane Austen's novels, even those in which the reading of literary pieces in particular is not the central focus, the issue of reading is always very visibly addressed, and yet, *Sanditon* seems to be more outwardly so, just as *Northanger Abbey* had once been thought.

CONCLUSION

Reading is a more intricate activity than it seems to one who happens to walk in on someone quietly perusing a book. The activity exercises the brain and involves the mind in deeper levels. Different kinds of reading are meant to cause varied reactions; some are meant to provoke the reason, others to evoke the senses and in each person this will come about differently.

To read is an act that can be private or shared, yet, even while two or more individuals read together, finding a moment of connection while they are all turned to the very same purpose, to each one, the images and ideas awakened in the mind will be different. Even as a social practice, reading winds up being virtually a personal activity. This happens because of the different canvases where a book (or any other reading material) will be painting its impressions – no mind is entirely blank or free of pre-conceptions and personality. The individual's character and inclinations, which were formed and shaped by experience, will determine how they will perceive and receive the input obtained from reading.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries offered us a great number of authors that are remembered until today, especially in Great Britain. If that was one of the most memorable times in the history of literature, it is reasonable to assume that there was much reading being done. However, that does not necessarily mean that much qualitative reading happened. As the printed media evolved and literacy rates grew, so did the offer of more books of lower literary quality to please the masses. Reading became a matter of fashion instead of reflection. That (added to the outspread belief that certain kinds of reading could cloud the mind and detach one from realistic ideals) made literature and proper reading one of the great discussions of the time.

The frequency with which the act of reading is depicted in Austen's novels (be it the reading of books, journals, papers, letters, etc.) marks the relevance of the matter not only to the time to which her works are circumscribed, but to the author herself. Moreover, the instances of reading presented in Jane Austen's work are not mere illustrations of a common practice; they serve a greater purpose, confirmed over and over in each of her books. Every work mentioned has a particular quality that helps the reader to discover and understand more about the character who reads it.

The poets and prose writers mentioned by Austen were not chosen lightly or based solely on the author's own taste. Each genre attributed as a favorite to a different character has a structuring function in their personality. Moral essays, biographies, newspapers, navy lists,

subscription books, novels of sentiment, Gothic novels; each of these varieties (when considering how they were viewed at the time and for what purposes they were read) has a very telling quality. Beyond the type of reading chosen by each character, the way they read is of fundamental importance to Austen's usage of reading as an indicative of discernment and perception. She shows her reader that, while much is said about the influence of certain genres in a person's mind and of the inappropriateness of unsupervised reading, ultimately, what truly matters is the reader's interpretation of what he or she reads; their initial inclination on how to assimilate those ideas.

Marianne Dashwood's reading in *Sense and Sensibility* is supervised by her mother, and still she is a quixotic reader whose views of the world are highly romantic. Catherine Morland (*Northanger Abbey*) is young, unprepared for the world and in need of guidance, everything that makes her vulnerable to the influence of Gothic novels. Yet, while she lets her imagination be carried away, she learns through her experiences and is able to take good teachings from a genre so ostracized for its alleged bad influence. In any reader represented in Austen's work, we see that their personality and principles were only influenced by reading due to their initial disposition to accept the values written in those pages as absolute truths, such as Sir Edward Denham does in *Sanditon*. It is the mind that distorts and interprets what it reads and not what is read that alters on its own the mind of the reader.

In addition, Austen also relates a character's choice in reading as well as their habits and views of the importance of cultivation of mind to a mirror image of how they see and construe the world around them. When one misunderstands a situation or fails to see certain aspects of it, it is due to the manner in which they are reading it and understanding it. The way a character reads life determines their attitude towards it, just as the way they read people will guide the how they treat them. If one sees the world through excessively romantic or perhaps pessimistic eyes, most of what happens to them and how they behave will be based on the same values.

Reading is also related to judgment as far as one perceives others as well. Austen uses this characteristic of reading in a very interesting way. Her own characters seem to know the value attributed to reading. Whether they themselves enjoy it and practice it or not, they take their own attitude towards reading as a basis of comparison to other characters. *Persuasion*'s Charles Musgrove is not a reader and he even sees it as a possible weakness if not accompanied by an active life; he judges Captain Benwick on those principles, for their ways of reading the world are not the same. Lady Russell in her turn judges Charles Musgrove

based on her own experience of the value of a reader and its contribution to an elegant, well-learned mind.

Reading properly and improving one's mind, being active and moderate seem to be the "lessons" Austen defended. The way reading is used in her work and the deliberate choices for each character, the repercussions it has on them and their lives, proves that hers was no unconscious depiction of a common activity of the time. Reading had power, and the mind able to read properly, to find moderation in learning, to conciliate its views of the world with what can be taken and learned from a book, had great power as well.

Austen is not radical; she does not reserve happy endings and fortunate lives only to bookish characters, those that read often and well. People who do not give in to idleness of mind and superficiality of principle are also preserved from the silliness cast over characters such as Mary Musgrove (*Persuasion*) and Lady Middleton (*Sense and Sensibility*).

Austen's writing is considered realistic. Her heroines were not above knowing that a good marriage was their only chance of a good life, they are not extraordinary in their wishes, they did not seek independence or greatness, they found greatness in the situations life reserved them, in reading the book of the world with intelligent eyes.

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