

**\UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL  
INSTITUTO DE LETRAS**

**DÉBORA CRISTINA MARINI**

**JANE AUSTEN FOR CHILDREN: THE *AWESOMELY AUSTEN* COLLECTION**

**PORTO ALEGRE  
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DÉBORA CRISTINA MARINI

**JANE AUSTEN FOR CHILDREN: THE *AWESOMELY AUSTEN* COLLECTION**

Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado ao Instituto de Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Licenciada em Letras.

**ORIENTADORA: PROFA. DRA. SANDRA SIRANGELO MAGGIO**

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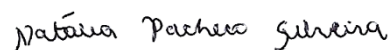
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*“And long may her bonnet reign.”*

Katy Birchall, *Jane Austen’s Emma*.

## **APOIO DE FINANCIAMENTO EM PROJETOS DE PESQUISA**

Meus estudos durante o período de graduação, bem como o presente trabalho, contaram com o apoio financeiro parcial da Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul (FAPERGS). / *This study was financed in part by the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul (FAPERGS).*

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## RESUMO

Nesta monografia, analiso a coleção *Awesomely Austen*, uma recontagem para crianças de seis romances de Jane Austen publicada pela Hachette UK entre 2019 e 2020. A série visa introduzir as obras da autora inglesa para jovens leitores, na faixa etária recomendada de oito a doze anos. O objetivo da pesquisa é descrever e caracterizar a coleção *Awesomely Austen*, para identificar o que permanece e o que é modificado com relação ao original, e por quais razões. Para tanto, a coleção é examinada quanto ao projeto gráfico e às técnicas de redação adotadas para dar conta do estilo e da temática da autora, que é reconhecida mundialmente pela forma como aborda as relações humanas fazendo uso da comédia e da ironia. Como lastro teórico, utilizo textos de Peter Hunt como embasamento para teoria sobre literatura infantil, e dos autores Vera Maria Tietzmann Silva e Leonardo Pogliata Vidal para o trato com as imagens. Para o estilo de Austen me apoio predominantemente na obra *Jane Austen and Her Art*, de Mary Lascelles; e a contextualização de época é feita a partir de Roy Adkins e Lesley Adkins. A literatura infantil é planejada e produzida para um público específico, formado por pessoas que estão desenvolvendo suas habilidades de leitura e suas capacidades cognitivas, de modo que é responsabilidade do autor para crianças respeitar essas circunstâncias (*cf.* HUNT, 2010). A monografia vem estruturada em duas partes. Na primeira, trato sobre aspectos da literatura infantil, estabelecendo relações com o corpus dos recontos das obras de Austen, e também apresento a base teórica utilizada para análise dos livros. Na segunda parte discorro sobre a coleção *Awesomely Austen*, analisando o projeto gráfico, os textos e peritextos e as técnicas de redação como se apresentam nesta publicação do grupo editorial Hachette UK. Ao término do trabalho, espero que o produto seja útil para os pesquisadores da obra de Austen, para os pesquisadores de literatura infantil, e para leitores interessados em ambas as áreas.

**Palavras-chave:** Literatura inglesa. Jane Austen. Reconto. Literatura infantil. *Awesomely Austen*.



## ABSTRACT

The present monograph investigates the *Awesomely Austen Collection*, a recounting for children of six Jane Austen produced by Hachette UK Editing Company between 2019 and 2020. The series aims at introducing Austen's works to young readers from the recommended age of eight to twelve years old. The objective of my research is to describe and characterize the *Awesomely Austen* collection to identify what elements of Austen's style remain, what is modified, and for what reasons. The collection is examined in its graphic design and in the writing techniques embraced to adapt the style and the themes of the author to this new reading public, as Austen is recognized worldwide for the way she approaches human relations making use of comedy and irony. As theoretical support, I use texts by Peter Hunt for theory on children's literature. The treatment of images is examined through Vera Maria Tietzmann Silva and Leonardo Pogliã Vidal. Austen's style is addressed predominantly through Mary Lascelles book *Jane Austen and Her Art*; and the period contextualization is informed by Roy Adkins and Lesley Adkins. Children's literature is planned and produced for a specific audience, formed by people who are developing their reading skills and cognitive abilities, so that it is the author's responsibility to respect these circumstances involving the young readers (cf. HUNT, 2010). This monograph is structured in two parts. In the first I deal with children's literature concepts, establishing relationships with the retellings of Austen's works, and presenting the theoretical basis used for the analysis of books. In the second part, I discuss the *Awesomely Austen* collection, analyzing the graphic design, texts and peritexts, and writing techniques as presented in this Hachette UK editorial project. At the end of the work, I hope that the product proves useful for researchers of Austen's work, for children's literature researchers, and for readers interested in both areas.

**Keywords:** English Literature. Jane Austen. Retellings. Children's Literature. *Awesomely Austen*.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Reading is a habit I developed from a tender age. I learned to read at the age of four, through the contact with children's books. The first one I read had an audio version too, which probably helped in the process. After that, my mother and I would read together: children's books, classic books, fantasy books... I loved all of them. Literature has always been part of my life. However, growing up, I had no idea that Literature was a field of knowledge – even less an object of research! When I considered this as a possibility, I was already in my twenties. I was studying Engineering at the University, after having frustrating attempts with other professional choices. Sitting at one of the cafés at the University, I started to read Jane Austen in between classes, and the pink hard-covered book changed my life.

I first met Jane Austen through the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* film. When it ended, I saw in the credits that it had been adapted from a novel, and I knew I had to read it. It was not the love story, or the characters. What fascinated me was the fact that an author from the early nineteenth century wrote a novel that was still so up to date. And she managed to present her view about the time with such subtlety, without being explicit! After I enrolled in the *Letras* course, I had the opportunity to study Jane Austen's world. Then I understood that Miss Austen was ahead of her time not only in her themes, but also in style. Looking for more, I received a newsletter from the website *Jane Austen em Português*, written by Raquel Sallaberry Brião, mentioning the fact that a collection of Austen's novels retold for young readers had just been released. That was October 2019.

Did I need an excuse to buy and read this collection? Not really, they were appealing to both the child and the adult in me. As the physical editions only became available in 2020, I started with the eBooks. When the volumes finally arrived, I felt proud of myself for the purchase. My first thought was that the collection of books was beautiful. The collection *Awesomely Austen: Illustrated and Retold* was released in two blocks. First, *Emma, Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion*, in 2019; then *Northanger Abbey, Mansfield Park* and *Sense and Sensibility*, in 2020. Each retelling was written by a different author, and all the collection was illustrated by the same artist. The books are colourful and have hard lightweight covers. The Hodder Children's Books – a branch of the Hachette UK Group – offered this collection as an introduction to Austen's works to younger readers.

Beautiful as they were, those retellings puzzled me. If Jane Austen is so vastly read by young readers, what was the purpose of this collection, especially in a context of English-

speaking readers? Maybe in the Brazilian context, as our reading rates are low (INSTITUTO PRÓ-LIVRO, 2019) such retellings would be appropriate as tools to promote literacy strategies, but that was not the case in that context. Thus, I decided to solve that mystery. That is how the idea for the present research took form. As the investigation took form, several different fields of knowledge came into play. Besides Austen studies, I got in contact with texts that address literature as a product, as business, and reveal practical elements in the routine of publishing companies that – even if we do not realize that – affect the literary context.

And I also read studies about children’s literature, to find out that they are highly developed in the areas of Pedagogy, Psychology, Language, and Literature. According to Professor Peter Hunt, in the book *Criticism, Theory and Children’s Literature*, children’s literature belongs in all these fields and should be considered as much as literature as adult books. Good literature is not meant to be adults-only, and children’s books are not meant to be considered inferior. (HUNT, 2010)

Hunt’s *Criticism, Theory and Children’s Literature* presents a survey of the history of children’s literature and became my main tool of analysis. Another important author to this monograph is Teresa Colomer, who believes that it is the responsibility of a mature society to offer child readers access to cultural traditions. Since literature is one of the main sources of access to the representations of a social community, classical stories connect different generations, provide the sharing of knowledge, and offer a sense of belonging. (COLOMER, 2017) Regarding the illustrations in the collection, created by the awarded artist Églantine Ceulemans, the analysis of the role they play in the Hachette UK project is based on Vera Maria Tietzmann Silva’s (2020) and Leonardo Pogliá Vidal’s (2019) considerations about images as carriers of meaning in literary narratives.

Taking into consideration that this investigation ranges through different fields – such as Jane Austen studies, children’s literature, literature as business, literature and image, and sociology of reading – this examination of the *Awesomely Austen* collection has in its root the desire to understand the reasons why Hachette UK decided to launch this project, and the reasons why it proved so successful. So, my monograph is devised in two sections. The first one, divided in three sections, offers an account on Austen and her time, to contextualize the original works. Then, the main aspects of children’s literature are introduced, through Hunt’s considerations about what children’s literature is, the ways in which a story is told, what having a child as a reader means – and what retellings have to do with that. The third subsection regards illustration as carrier of meaning, and its role in children’s books. In the second part of the

discussion, I present the collection and its structure, and analyse the books separately. By doing so, I take each author into account, the ways they retell Austen's novels, the decisions they make, and how Ceulemans' drawings work in each case.

I hope that this analysis of the *Awesomely Austen* collection, in the end, may serve the purpose of understanding the effects of these retellings in Jane Austen studies, identifying what intended reader is addressed by Hachette UK, what strategies are used by the authors, and to what effect. I believe that, as Jane Austen belongs to the field of Letters and Literature, professionals of Letters are entitled to carry out investigations about the by-products of her novels. In this sense, the Hachette UK collection can cast light on the differences between the structure of Austen's early 19<sup>th</sup> century originals and the structure of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century retellings, so that we can understand to what extent the differences are related to the age-range of the targeted readers, and to what extent we are dealing with different views about social issues and gender roles in the different societies involved.

## 2 CONTEXTUALIZATION

This section aims at presenting information that can serve as tools to be used in the understanding of several elements mentioned in the second part of the work, where the analysis of the books in the *Awesomely Austen* collection is carried out. The first contextualization respects Jane Austen: her life, her work, and the society she criticizes and represents. The second introduces concepts from the field of children's literature studies that may explain certain procedures adopted by the authors of the retellings. The third aspect considered relates to image(s) as text, where some scholars in the field are brought to explain the choices behind Églantine Ceulemans drawings used to illustrate the series.

### 2.1 Jane Austen

Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775, in Steventon, Hampshire. The sixth child of the Austen family was the daughter of a clergyman, and perhaps that was how she became literate and skilled in her writing. Rev. George Austen was not only in charge of the parish, but also of a kind of informal boarding school. In this sense, both Jane and her sister Cassandra were aware of their female role among all boys they lived with most of their lives – especially because, despite their family context, “Georgian girls weren’t supposed to be clever, or demand too much attention” (WORSLEY, 2017, p. 41). However, the sisters would attend some of Rev. Austen’s classes, and he was fond of novels enough to have them at home and share them with his children.

The novel was, at that time, a new genre, developing slowly. At first, it was considered a lower form of art, for escaping reality, having no commitment to a realistic representation of society. What Austen did was something new: she wrote about what she observed, and attempted to represent her world more faithfully (ADKINS; ADKINS, 2013). But what society was that?

One of the most important aspects of Georgian England was social stratification, separating royalty from nobility, gentry, and working classes. Beyond these strata, people’s status was also influenced by wealth. As a member of gentility, Austen wrote about middle and upper classes, of whom she was more experienced. But such social separation was not limited to social rank.



There was a larger separation between the sexes as well. It was agreed, in the late eighteenth century, that “self-effacement, if not natural, is at least proper for women, and [...] women’s behavior must significantly differ from that of men, who express their own wishes, make their own choices, and imprint their images on the receptive glass” (POOVEY, 1984, p. 4). Men were possessors of properties, the main source of income until then – for trading and the bourgeoisie were recently ascending and gaining respect –, and women were responsible for the maintenance of their husbands’ interests, being dutiful and managing the family life. The education of women was affected in this sense. As seen before, Georgian girls were educated to be the least troublesome as possible, developing accomplishments instead. Beyond ruling domestic life, they had to be skilled in

needlework, both for necessity and for pleasure; simple arithmetic; fine hand writing, which was considered a very elegant accomplishment; enough music to be able to sing and play some country dances on the forte-piano or harpsichord for family entertainment; a little drawing; some French fables to recite; reading the Bible, Shakespeare, other poetry and some respectable novels such as *Sir Charles Grandison*; and some very scrappy ideas of history and geography. (LE FAYE, 2002, p. 87-88)

These skills were usually taught at home, but certain situations required girls to be sent to boarding schools instead. Such institutions would develop girls’ abilities without making them prodigies – for those skills were, after all, just enough to impress men. In a society such as that, marriage was the best solution of survival for a woman: “Spinsterhood haunts many of Austen’s women, as do the very real threats posed by loss of reputation, abandonment, poorly paid employment, and poverty” (MORRISON, 2019, p. 108), as well as being young enough to attract a partner. According to Mary Wollstonecraft, perfecting accomplishments meant putting women in a position in which they were less than human beings who had opinions of their own (WORSLEY, 2017).

Being more literate, and having had more access to knowledge than the average lady of her time, how did Austen reveal her opinion about society through her novels? In a description of Austen’s style, Mary Lascelles poses that the English author elaborated sentences usually in simple structures – reserving elaborate lines to certain types of characters. Austen was precise and strict in the creation of her characters, both through dialogue and narrative, revealing their nature in realistic forms (LASCELLES, 2002). Because of her thorough work, she was also able to twist the use of language to promote laughter and, to another level, irony.

Unlike other authors of her time, who were neither afraid nor limited to explicitly expose opinions on matters of their society, Austen could not speak her mind openly. Unmarried, she depended on her brothers after Rev. Austen passed away in 1805 and, perhaps, being explicitly against the rules of her society might cause her problems. Morrison states that, “just beneath the domestic comedy and romantic love that shimmers across the surface of all six novels, Austen explores disturbing questions – especially concerning the fate of women – with an arch and amiable irony that only partially conceals an unflinching moral anger” (MORRISON, 2019, p. 108). Thus, instead of attacking conventions openly, she uses irony to “adopt and embody them, so politely and justly as to avoid, almost, the tone of parody, until she is ready to apply the slight added strain that brings them down altogether” (MUDRICK, 2018, p. 6). Focusing on women’s life, she combines romance and satire.

In opposition to dialogue, which contains the exact sentences a character performs, speech representation may also occur in different forms in a narrative. Speech acts do not necessarily correspond easily to speech verbs, for instance, and in speech representations that do not contain explicit reports of speech acts, the description depends only on the narrator (LEECH; SHORT, 2007).

Free indirect speech (FIS) is a resource in which the narrator reports a situation intervening as an interpreter, but has an odd status because “it is in a sort of halfway house position, not claiming to be a reproduction of the original speech, but at the same time being more than a mere indirect rendering of that original” (LEECH; SHORT, 2007, p. 261). In the case of Austen, both free indirect speech and free indirect thought have an interesting twist: what are the limits between character and narrator? According to Morini (2009), this fine line makes the possibility of the Austen female main character become as a spokesman for the narrator.

Morrison poses that all six of her novels are “poised and tightly constructed comedies of manners that trace a young woman’s errant but ultimately successful journey to self-discovery” (MORRISON, 2019, p. 108). The notion of *Bildungsroman* only started to be developed in the eighteenth century in Germany. At that time, a female *Bildungsroman* would not be in an equal position, since the female *Bildung* was more focused on internal changes in adult life. The female *Bildung*, therefore, was the “spiritual, emotional and moral development”<sup>1</sup> (FARIA, 2021, p. 37). In Faria’s studies, *Bildungsroman* characteristics are

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<sup>1</sup> My translation from the original in Portuguese: “É dessa forma que ela constrói seu *Bildung* e consegue desenvolver seu lado espiritual, emocional e moral.”

present in Austen's novels, although not completely for both the development of this subgenre and the differences posed at that time between men and women (FARIA, 2021).

The popularity of Austen was built on her reception. In avoidance of a view of Austen that would leave stains on the family name, her nephews wrote that she was indeed a genius in her skills, but did not have a satirical disposition as her novels seemed to show (WILKES, 2001). The publishing of James Edward Austen-Leigh's memoir turned large attention to Austen's works, and it had an interesting effect: the readers were able to identify the fine line between characters and author, revealing the durability of her novels, and she became the subject of research. Austen has been retold in theatre, film, and TV shows for the past one hundred years, showing she was not only canon, but also a modern phenomenon.

These two sides of Austen promoted a growth in her fandom through online communities over the past thirty years. The reading of Austen's novels, as well as their derivatives, promoted connections between communities of readers (SALES, 2018). The increasing of such communities of fans called the attention of many businesses, that used the opportunity to make the celebrity of Austen a tool of monetization. In addition to the original novels, a wide range of Austen-related products are being created<sup>2</sup> – among them, an investment in the next generation's literacy: children's books.

## 2.2 Children's Literature

Peter Hunt defends that children's literature is a subject worthy of being studied in the literary field (HUNT, 2010). What usually happens, in terms of children's books, is that its *use* is taken into consideration, rather than the book itself. When we consider Psychology, Pedagogy and Literary studies of the uses of children's books, he argues that this separation results in unproductive contributions. In this sense, literary theory comes in aid to develop a coherent study of children's literature.

Hunt considers the role of the reader as the main contribution of literary theory to the studies of children's literature. This aspect is useful for it puts all studies regarding children's books under the same roof, so they cannot ignore one another. Another point of contact between

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<sup>2</sup> Such as the products sold by *The Unemployed Philosophers Guild*, which include mints, hygiene products, lip balm, and stationary.

literary theory and children's literature is the preoccupation with "politics and power, the response of the reader, deconstruction, structures and myths"<sup>3</sup> (HUNT, 2010, p. 33).

All these considerations regarding the main point of analysing children's books: what differentiates child readers from adult readers are the stages of development and the necessary skills to read a book. Thus, one of the arguments regarding the inferiority of children's literature – that children's books are not "good literature" – falls apart: children's literature is just different, and must be considered as such.

Children's literature contributes to social history and is vital to literacy and culture, for it contains different genres. The retelling of classics is a genre that almost exclusively belongs to children's literature (HUNT, 2010). The access to the literary legacy is a complex subject, since canon literature (or what has been considered "good literature") should not be the only source of reading for a reader in development. However, in our context more voices "defend the social responsibility of offering to boys and girls the access to a cultural tradition shared by collectivity"<sup>4</sup> (COLOMER, 2017, p. 127), because the presentation of literary classics provides representations of society in different moments of its history, it articulates reflections on its artistic values, and connects different generations.

In a broad sense, retellings may include translations and adaptations of literary works, maintaining the original genre or changing to a similar one. To retell means "to simplify plot and language, aiming at an audience to whom the adapted texts are destined"<sup>5</sup> (SILVA, 2012, p. 14), depending on the intention of the narrator, who puts their personal touch to the narrative. If the narrator chooses to add a moral evaluation to the actions that took place in the original story, it will appear in their style. But how to analyse in which ways the new author decided to change the original story?

As I mentioned before, children's books are valuable in educational terms for increasing literacy. Hunt questions to what point children's books are didactic, or *necessarily* didactic (HUNT, 2010). When we speak of retellings, we must pay attention to the fine line between simplifying a text to allow a child to read it in easier ways and simplifying a text because this reader will not understand it otherwise. If language acquisition is one of the most important

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<sup>3</sup> My translation from the original in Portuguese: "[A teoria e a crítica] têm se preocupado, por exemplo, com a política e o poder, a reação do leitor, a desconstrução, as estruturas e os mitos".

<sup>4</sup> My translation from the original in Portuguese: "No entanto, na atualidade aumentam as vozes que defendem a responsabilidade social de oferecer aos meninos e às meninas o acesso a uma tradição cultural compartilhada pela coletividade".

<sup>5</sup> My translation from the original in Portuguese: "Recontar implica simplificar trama e linguagem, tendo em mira a faixa de público a que os textos adaptados se destinam".

aspects of children's literature, a children's book must be written regarding this aspect, not neglecting it.

Hunt elaborates a list of criteria to analyse a children's book. The first regards textual aspects and the production of meaning. Literary texts imply the need of the reader to evoke images to build their meaning. In the analysis, it is necessary to consider the form not only of the story inside the book, but also what are the peritexts alongside this story, and the materiality of the books (HUNT, 2010).

The making of meaning may take place in different ways – from the meaning of words and the mechanisms of the language to allusions to other texts and how the text in question works. The child reader must acquire, through the contact with the text, the familiarity with the genre. By peeking the inside of the book, the reader acknowledges the level of effort necessary to read the story: if the sentences are long or short, elaborate or simple, among other aspects. The subject of the story, what is important to remember from it and the satisfaction of curiosity are aspects that regard the baits of the text, to keep the reader reading. Previous knowledge needs to be taken into account when it comes to retellings of canon literature. This intertextuality reveals the connections between generations and reading communities.

The process of the concretization of the text relates directly to the level of interaction between the reader and the text. If the objective of the text is to develop literacy, it must leave some space for interaction, so the reader fills in with their ideas (HUNT, 2010). These ideas may come from personal experiences or from interpretive communities, which may provide a point of view of the text. The narrative attitude is also a concern of children's literature. A narrator in full control of the narrative may reveal they do not believe the child reader is able to understand the story without thorough explanation of the events – which relates directly to the notion of child and of literature. The style, through which the narrator expresses the text, is the first realization the child reader has to make in order to unravel the literary text. Language is one of the most important aspects to what is considered children's literature, for it shows the views of the adults towards it. During language acquisition, children experience the voices of others, including the ones they read (HUNT, 2010).

What is taken into consideration, however, is the paternalistic approach to children's books. Certain patterns of style, especially if simplistic, infer that the text is used to preach, that it has someone controlling its meanings. Convincing the reader is also an aspect of style, and it may impose either good thoughts or prejudice. One of the stylistic aspects of the text that Hunt points out is the presentation of speech. Narrative report of speech acts and free indirect speech

suggest narrative control – explicitly and implicitly respectively. The narrative report of speech acts is the technique in which the narrator poses what happened, explaining instead of showing. Free indirect speech, as I mentioned in the previous section, “occupies the grounds between showing and telling”<sup>6</sup> (HUNT, 2010, p. 167). Direct speech, although more artificial, detaches the narrator from the control of the narrative.

The presentation of dialogue through the narrative report of speech acts, for instance, reveals the understanding that the reader needs someone to explain and deduce what is happening. It limits, however, the interaction of the reader with the text, narrowing the realization of meaning. Free indirect speech, on the other hand, presents itself as more “refined” in the sense that it requires from the reader the realization of the interference of the narrator. Direct forms, on top of that, demand that the reader has to insert speech acts in the characters’ lines. What happens is that improper simplification of a text is dangerous, for it violates the narrative pact between narrator and reader.

The interest in the plot may vary according to the age of the implied child reader. Nelly Novaes Coelho (2000), as well as Hunt, suggests different types of plots for each stage of development. If we take the ages between 8 and 12 (the age suggested to read the *Awesomely Austen* collection), a conflict that has to be resolved until the end of the story, subjects of the world that are pertinent to the reader, and a main character who solves problems are the main aspects of attractive literary books for this age group (COELHO, 2000). The *Bildungsroman* is usually well accepted by this age group, according to Hunt (2010).

Other aspects of children’s books contribute to the making of meaning and to the ways the book is presented to the reader. Blank spaces in the pages, spacing between lines and letters, and the layout, are aspects that reveal to what audience the book is intended. Alongside these publishing aspects, we also count on the illustrations.

### 2.3 Illustration and Design

In children’s books, the author of the text and the author of the illustration usually are not the same. Vera Maria Tietzmann Silva suggests that studies regarding illustration in children’s literature are few because of this different authorship (SILVA, 2020). It is important

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<sup>6</sup> My translation from the original in Portuguese: “O ‘pensamento indireto livre’ ocupa o terreno médio entre mostrar e dizer”. I take into account that not only free indirect thought, but free indirect speech also occupies the common grounds, based on what Leech and Short pose on their book.

to highlight that, in children's books, image(s) has (have) an important role as a carrier(s) of meaning since it is through images that the child "reads" the world (COELHO, 2000) – and growing up they still do, unnoticedly, as they learn to read words.

Silva observes that illustrations in children's books somehow interact with different forms of art (SILVA, 2012). Through the studies of famous paintings, sculptures, and drawings, illustrators study techniques and strategies of representing the world. The main difference between art in a museum and illustrations in a book is the situation of the observer.

Illustrations in books need an opening of pages to be seen, and the touch of the hands to be reached. In this sense, the design of the whole book is relevant to an analysis. The type of paper in the cover, the paper inside the book, the layout of the pages – spacing of letters and of lines, the position of the drawings – involve the reading with both eyes and hands. Silva mentions that the privileged position of illustration is on the odd pages for "[they] have more visibility of the reader, because it is the focus of their attention when opening the book"<sup>7</sup> (SILVA, 2020, p. 56). By taking all these aspects into account, the illustrator and the designer (if they are not the same person) need to know the literary text in terms of plot, characters, and intention.

Silva mentions that, in Spanish, the book cover is called *portada*, which means *the entrance door* – "a very proper name, since the cover works as an appeal, an invitation to enter another dimension"<sup>8</sup> (SILVA, 2020, p. 56). The aesthetic concern of English publishers started with book covers made with special papers or binding in leather or fabric. Nowadays, covers in Couche paper are more common. Another observation Silva makes is that the fourth cover (in the back) may complement the front cover, or add information that will influence the reading of the text – such as short reviews or a summary of the contents (SILVA, 2020).

Books for children are usually colourful inside and out, for it makes the book attractive. Silva says that, in general, children's books do not contain written peritexts, such as preface, introduction, or other types of notes (SILVA, 2020). However, retellings might contain such materials to provide context to the reader – as it is observed in different retellings of Austen's works, for instance.

What does the image inside the book tell the reader? The style of the drawings has much to say about the work of the illustrator, and how they interpreted and convey the story. Leonardo

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<sup>7</sup> My translation from the original in Portuguese: "Uma convenção aceita é de que a ilustração deve situar-se nas páginas ímpares, que têm mais visibilidade para o leitor, pois é onde sua atenção se foca quando abre o livro".

<sup>8</sup> My translation from the original in Portuguese: "Esse é um nome muito adequado, pois a capa funciona como um apelo, um convite para ingressar numa outra dimensão".

Poglia Vidal (2019) brings the notions of icon, cartoon, and closure by McCloud (1993, *apud* VIDAL, 2019). An icon is a convention of representations, a cartoon is a simplification of reality to focus on key information, and closure is “a way of mentally completing vacancies in order to see the relation between the representation and the represented” (VIDAL, 2019, p. 278).

In children’s books, cartoons seem to represent the general type of illustration. “The result of a simplified approach, then, is the greater involvement of the reader, who is able to understand the essence of the image presented without the complications of the real world” (VIDAL, 2019, p. 278), for it enhances characteristics of the real world that commonly catch our attention. Cartoons may convey the idea of humour by exaggeration, such as happens with caricatures. Silva, however, states that the situation around the cartoon – the criticism and sarcasm through humorous images – “does not belong to the universe of the child reader”<sup>9</sup> (SILVA, 2020, p. 96) because their concerns relate mostly to the everyday life, and only with age they understand the satirical purposes of the cartoon. Thus, according to Silva, in children’s books cartoons convey mostly humour, and nothing else.

The shape of lines is also an important aspect of drawings. Vidal shows the classification of lines according to their direction, form, and character – and adds the thickness to this list. “The shapes and forms of lines vary widely according to their means of production” (VIDAL, 2019, p. 280), and in children’s literature there is a great variety of means. In this sense, round and regular lines are more welcoming and direct, provoking a sympathetic reaction to the character, for instance. The artist must have, in their repertoire, a basic amount of body language and facial expressions – basically, human anatomy – so that exaggeration and realism can be operated (VIDAL, 2019).

Colours influence the meaning of an illustration as well. Warm colours (red, orange, yellow) usually represent more intense emotions than cool ones (green, blue, purple). Shadows are related to depth, adding information to the image. Darker shadows imply more emotion than lighter or no shadow at all (VIDAL, 2019). Colourless and simple illustrations are present in children’s books. The called ludic illustration invites the reader to colour it themselves. Other illustrations do not require colour at all, for more artistic purposes (SILVA, 2020), such as the point of view of a certain character, or to mimic art from another moment.

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<sup>9</sup> My translation from the original in Portuguese: “Esse tipo de crítica, ou de situação criticada, não faz parte do universo do leitor infantil.”



To summarize, I add Graça Ramos' suggestions to the analysis of books with illustrations: the graphic project indicates the type of book we have in our hands. The cover presents the product, whether it is predictable or innovative. The internal layout indicates the legibility (which is a sort of communication through images too, called graphic enunciation). The position of the images and their function are also relevant, for they dialogue on different levels with the text, and depending on the place the illustration occupies on the pages it may have greater or lesser value. Colours, shadows, and lines reveal the reading the image requires (RAMOS, 2020).

With no further to add, let's work on the *Awesomely Austen* collection.

### 3 THE AWESOMELY AUSTEN COLLECTION

When the *Awesomely Austen* collection was released, Raquel Sallaberry Brião wrote a post on her blog, *Jane Austen em Português*, on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019, announcing this collection to her readers. She presents the collection thus: “*Awesomely Austen*, or ‘Incrivelmente Austen’ in Portuguese, is a collection for readers aged 8 and above of the six Jane Austen books retold in a condensed form and published Hodder Children’s Books”<sup>10</sup> (BRIÃO, 2019). This is how I first met this collection. On their website, Hachette UK presents *Awesomely Austen* in this way: “The perfect way to discover Austen for the first time, this bright and bold collection features some of the most inspiring and famous heroines in English literature. For readers aged eight and up” (HACHETTE UK, 2019). The books may be bought either separately or as a set. Also, according to the website, the six novels are available in four formats: audiobook, eBook, paperback, and hardcover. I had access so far to the eBooks and the hardcover editions, thus I will detain myself to these two formats.

Image 1 – *Awesomely Austen*’s book covers



<sup>10</sup> Translated from the original in Portuguese: “*Awesomely Austen*, ou *Incrivelmente Austen*, é uma coleção para leitores acima de oito anos, dos seis livros de Jane Austen recontados de forma condensada e publicados pela Hodder Children’s Books.”

Each title suggests the retelling of an Austen novel. All of them begin with *Jane Austen's*, and then the original title. The covers contain, along with the title, the name of the collection, the author of the retelling and the illustrator, and illustrations of the protagonist and four other characters. Here, the author and the illustrator are not presented as “retold by” and “illustrated by”. Instead, the publisher decided to use “witty words by” and “delightful doodles by”. This starts to suggest the tone of the words and illustrations inside the book.

Opening the cover, there are portraits of some characters as well, framed and scattered on the two pages, among doodles of leaves and flowers. Next, on the even page, there are the other titles of the collection, and, on the odd page, there is a sort of repetition of the cover, without the four extra characters. Here, we see “retold by” and “illustrated by”.

Turning the page again, there are the copyrights on the even page, and an introduction to the novel on the odd page, with an image of the protagonist. The text of the introduction is the same in all novels, changing only the title of the novel, the protagonist, and the year of the publishing of the original novel.

On the next page – the odd one – the characters are presented in family trees, when it is the case. The protagonists are usually in their family trees, and the other characters are presented either separately from the rest, or in their family trees when certain facts are important to state. The faces of each character are in this presentation, suggesting which characters are snobbish, funny, or mocked through the exaggeration of their features. Three pages are used to present the characters.

After this presentation, there is the novel itself. Some of them contain more illustrations, some less – in the next sections, there will be a detailed analysis of the inside of each novel. When the novel finishes, there is some information regarding the novel, the author of the retelling, the illustrator, and Jane Austen.

First, there is “A note from [the author]”, in which the author presents themselves and tells a little about their feelings regarding Austen and her novels. Next, comes “A note from Églantine”, which is repeated in all novels, in which the illustrator presents herself and her feelings regarding illustrating the collection. Then, comes the section “So, who was Jane Austen?”, in which Austen is presented – as well as Ceulemans, in all novels. Two of the three paragraphs regard her biography. The third paragraph regards Austen’s style:

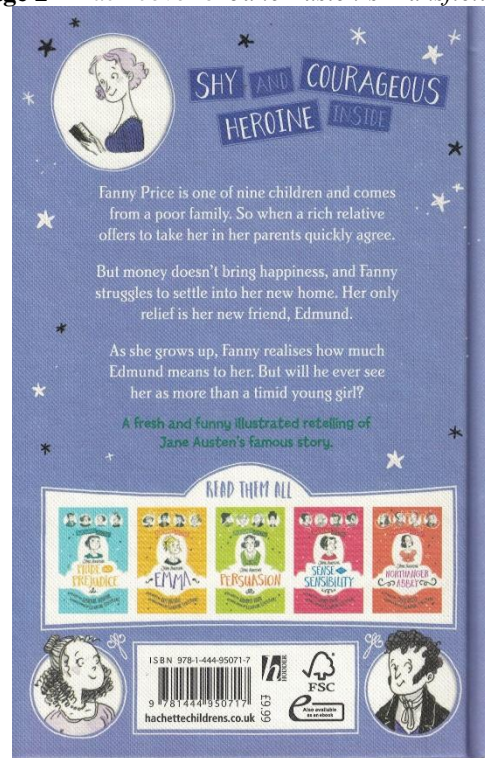
Austen’s books as well-known for their comedy, wit, and irony. Her observations about wealthy society, and especially the role women played in it, were unlike anything that had been published before. Her novels were not widely read or praised until years later, but they have gone on to leave a mark on the world for ever, inspiring

countless poems, books, plays and films. (HACHETTE CHILDREN'S GROUP, 2019)

Last, but certainly not least, comes a section called “And what was it like in 18xx<sup>11</sup>?”, in which the main subjects of the novel are explained in comparison to today. Inheritance, marriage, wealth, clothes, and houses are just examples of topics. This section will be better explored alongside each novel later.

The fourth cover (or the back cover) contains a summary of the story inside, as well as two words that characterize the protagonists (e.g., “Strong and caring heroines inside”) on top, and the images of the other covers on the bottom.

**Image 2** – Back cover of *Jane Austen's Mansfield Park*



Each book has a cover in different colours, with the title written in another colour. To the touch, the texture resembles fabric, but it is made of paperboard. The inside of the book is not coloured as the outside. Églantine Ceulemans, the artist behind the illustrations, painted the drawings in black and white. In a video published by Hachette UK in their YouTube channel in 2020, Ceulemans shows the process of the creation of the illustrations. The video contains a timelapse of her hands with instrumental background sound.

<sup>11</sup> According to each novel, the number regards the year of the first publishing: 1811, 1813, 1814, 1815 or 1817.

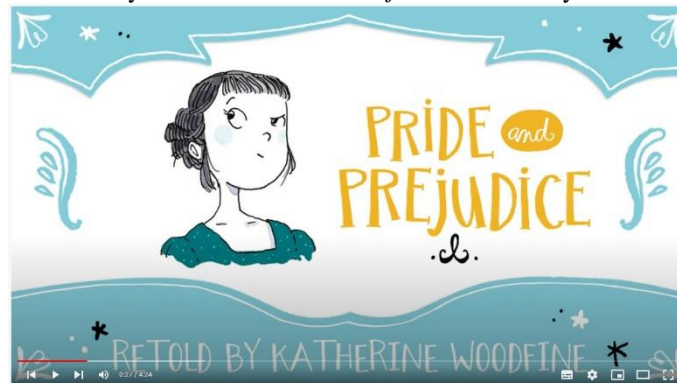
First, Ceulemans sketches the characters and the scenario with a technical pencil. Then, she uses a nib pen to outline the drawing and add the details. As Vidal points out in his dissertation, nib pens provide increased agility when used. All the drawings in the *Awesomely Austen* collection are drawn with mostly round lines, not necessarily being regular and well curved. Straight lines rarely appear. After erasing the pencil lines, she uses the ink wash technique to paint. The dilution of the ink creates darker and lighter colours, and it mimics black and white images. To add texture or patterns, Ceulemans uses either the nib pen or the pencil again.

**Image 3** - In the studio with Églantine Ceulemans



As well as Ceulemans, each author of the retellings has a video on the Hachette UK's YouTube channel. They present themselves, and read an excerpt of the novel they retold. Even in the YouTube channel there is a concern regarding the visual identity of the collection, as we see in the image above and the image below.

**Image 4** – *Awesomely Austen: Pride and Prejudice* – retold by Katherine Woodfine

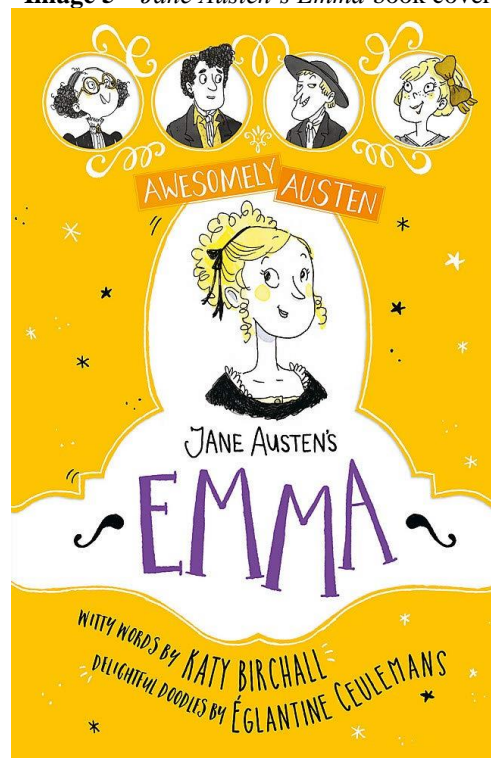


Now that the overall has been described, let's go deeper into each novel. The order of the books in the following sections is based on the order of their publishing.

### 3.1 Jane Austen's *Emma*

The first novel of this analysis is the yellow-covered retelling of *Emma* (1815). To contrast with the colour of the cover, the word “Emma” in the title is purple. This colour scheme is made of complementary colours, according to the colour wheel. Complementary colours suit well together and at the same time they represent energy and personality, so this choice of colours may be giving hints of who is Emma Woodhouse. Above the face of the protagonist, there are the portraits of Miss Bates, Mr Knightley, Mr Elton, and Harriet Smith. In this retelling, the “witty words” were written by Katy Birchall.

Image 5 – Jane Austen's *Emma* book cover



Katy Birchall is an author already familiar with writing for young readers, the *It Girl* series being her debut and her most successful work. She has a master's degree in English Literature, and, while she was studying at the University of Manchester, Birchall won the 2011 *24/7 Theatre Festival Award* for “Most Promising New Writer” for a comedy she wrote (BELL LOMAX MORETON, 2022). Perhaps she was chosen to retell *Emma* for her comic skills. According to herself, “adapting Jane Austen's *Emma* has been my ultimate dream project” (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 213). She has been an Austenite since childhood, having shelves devoted to the English author.

Taking the notion of retelling as an addition to the new author's touch, this is what we see in *Jane Austen's Emma*. Very few sentences are copied from the original story – in general, only those that are greatly familiar among Austen readers: “Emma Woodhouse was beautiful, clever and rich, and had reached the age of twenty-one with very little to trouble her along the way” (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 1).

*Emma* begins with the marriage of Emma's governess, Mrs Weston (former Miss Taylor), with Mr Weston. This event provokes a series of others, in which Miss Woodhouse proves to the reader she is used to getting things her own way without many arguments on whether she was right or wrong – except under Mr Knightley's eyes, she was always right. Emma lives with her father, a hypochondriac, who dislikes cake and discusses in which ways broccoli is dangerous (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 34).

Among Austen's protagonists, “Emma Woodhouse is the one who has more movement spaces, since she has her own income and does not depend on a marriage to count on financial independence”<sup>12</sup> (MARINI; MAGGIO, 2021, p. 59). We may say, at this point, that Emma has an interesting position in the Rural Gentry: she is allowed to have a masculine position in the little village of Highbury, where personal relations have more value than social conventions. Otherwise, Emma would be in a delicate situation: women must marry, as we saw before.

Emma does not have to marry to survive, so she has the power of choice on whether to get married or not, and with whom. On the other hand, the other female characters in *Emma* represent different female situations from Regency England.

Marriage becomes the best situation for Miss Taylor. Mr Knightley notes: “Not ‘poor Miss Taylor’, for she will surely find much happiness in moving from the position of governess to having her own home” (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 7). Instead of being part of the working class, she had ascended to the position of a married woman.

Mrs Weston has lines of her own, for example, to express how she feels towards Frank Churchill, Mr Weston's son with his first wife. She and Emma discuss at first on whether it is a good idea to expect the young man visit and pay respects to the newly wed. In this situation Emma is again in an assertive position of giving advice – to a married woman, who allegedly is in a better social position.

The second chapter, in which this situation is presented, exemplifies Birchall's style. The two following paragraphs are an excerpt that contains both indirect and direct speech:

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<sup>12</sup> Translated from the original in Portuguese: “Dentre as heroínas de Austen, Emma Woodhouse é aquela que tem maior espaço de movimentação, uma vez que possui renda própria e não depende de um casamento para contar com sua independência financeira.”

‘I have heard of this letter,’ Emma confessed. (This could come as no surprise to Mrs Weston, who knew only too well how quickly gossip spread in the village of Highbury.) ‘Do not keep me in suspense of the content any longer! What did the famous Frank Churchill write to his new stepmother to say? I hope he wished you and his father good wishes on your marriage?’

‘That he did,’ Mrs Weston assured her. ‘But the good news I wish to share is that he writes in the hope of visiting us soon! How I long for him to come here to Highbury and meet us all. Do you think he really shall?’ (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 11-12)

Indirect speech, in these paragraphs, is between parenthesis to explain the speed gossip spread in Highbury. Direct speech, on the other hand, is highly present here and in different parts of the novel, so the characters have their own voices portrayed when they speak. In terms of thought, however, there is more of free indirect form.

Right after Mrs Weston’s question, Emma wonders what Frank Churchill looked like. In free indirect thought, Birchall expresses Emma’s mind. She forms an idea of Frank Churchill based on Mr Weston’s comments about his son – but it is not in words only that we see Emma’s imagination. We see how Frank Churchill is imagined in the illustration:

**Image 6 – Frank Churchill**



In the drawing, Ceulemans respected the attire of the time. The addition of Mr Churchill’s head and the “balloons” outlined with laurels show that Emma has him in an esteemed position.



Another of Emma's attitude towards having things her way is when she poses Harriet Smith the idea of marrying the vicar, Mr Elton. Emma's role of pushing Mr Martin, a farmer, away from Harriet shows her disposition to a masculine role, as Harriet evidences the difference between them by becoming the female the early nineteenth century expected her to be. Emma's thought is expressed in the following excerpt:

No matter how kind-hearted they might be, farmers were so far beneath Emma's social status that she could not bear the idea of her dear, sweet friend associating with ill-mannered, unpolished farm workers, who apparently spent their time giving away cows to impressionable young ladies. She must guide her friend away from such danger. (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 24-25).

This excerpt presents not only Emma's thoughts: there is humour when she resumes the situation of Mr Martin "giving" Harriet a cow a few pages before. Emma's thoughts are presented in free indirect thought again, and here remounting to Austen's style of presenting her own opinion through her characters. Birchall's choice here presents what perhaps was so shocking to Emma and appeared through Austen's discourse: in provincial life, farmer workers were below any other respectable social class, and they should not mingle with gentility. With humour, the passage exposes Emma's frivolous opinion under a veiled criticism.

Another aspect about Emma is that, whenever she attempts to make a match between Harriet and a man who she thinks suitable, everything goes wrong. First, she tries to push Mr Martin away for his low situation. Then, she puts Mr Elton close to Harriet – without noticing that Mr Elton likes *her*. When Emma decides to paint Harriet's portrait, she does so by imagining Mr Elton would become interested in Harriet.

In the text, Birchall presents how Mr Elton is annoying through the narrative report of speech acts: "The only problem was Mr Elton's fidgeting. He could not stand still and constantly asked if he could peer over Emma's shoulder and see how the painting was coming on. Emma appreciated his enthusiasm, but it was a tad off-putting." (BIRCHALL, 2019, p.35-36). It is clearer here that the narrative report of speech acts in this case has to be more controlling to plainly expose Mr Elton's character and attitudes.

In the following image, we have the representation of the scene above, in which body language is also portraying the feelings of the characters:

**Image 7** – Emma paints Harriet's portrait



It is noticeable, in his facial expression, that he is interested in Emma. She clearly looks uncomfortable being observed but, as the text shows, she believes he is interested in the painting only. Harriet, portrayed as naïve and a bit ignorant of what happens around her, looks disconnected from the rest of the scene while posing for Emma. This scene, however, does not match the text perfectly: on page 38, Mr Elton says Miss Smith is sitting down.

As well as with Mrs Weston, Emma is dotted with the last word in advising Harriet too. When Harriet receives Mr Martin's first proposal, she seeks Emma to ask if she should accept him or not. Although Emma says it is Harriet's decision, she gives hints of what Harriet's answer should be. First, Emma directs Harriet by acting coldly when her friend leans towards acceptance. Then, she gives direct advice:

When more silence followed, Emma thought it best to offer some kind of guidance so they were not sitting here for the rest of the century.

'I believe that if a woman has any doubts about a marriage proposal, then she should not accept it,' Emma stated. 'One must never enter marriage with half a heart.' (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 46-47).

After Harriet refuses Mr Martin, Emma expresses relief, exposing the social view behind it: if Harriet accepted Mr Martin, she would no longer belong to good society. Emma helps Harriet to write the answer.

Emma's power situation appears again when she expresses her opinion on Miss Bates. Talking to Harriet about her privileged situation of marrying only if she wishes to, she is compared to Miss Bates, a spinster who is poor and depends on others:

'I should never be like Miss Bates! She is ridiculous, for a start, and never stops talking. One can only feel sympathy for unmarried old maids who are poor. I am not

poor. A single woman of good fortune is always respectable,' Emma concluded. (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 62)

Miss Bates, poor and unmarried, is always thankful for her generous neighbours and friends. Emma's lack of humility, however, puts Miss Bates as the personification of ridicule, for not accomplishing what was desirable for the ladies of that time. Unlike her, there is Miss Jane Fairfax, her niece. Jane Fairfax's situation is less explored in Birchall's retelling, focusing little on her mysteriousness and more on Emma's jealousy.

Regarding Mr Elton, he is considered a character of ridicule. According to Lascelles, as we saw before, Austen chose to give elaborate language to certain characters. Mr Elton's wishes of improving his social status appears in the original *Emma* through his linguistic choices when speaking, being exaggerated and sometimes too gallant (LASCELLES, 2002). In Jane Austen's *Emma*, maybe such soft nuances would not appear as much as a more concrete situation. Birchall chooses to exaggerate Mr Elton by making him funnier:

'Miss Woodhouse!' Mr Elton suddenly cried with such passion that Emma slammed back in her seat. 'I must tell you how I love you!'  
 'Good heavens! Mr Elton, what—'  
 'I have longed to tell you how I love you! And that I wish to marry you! I must take this opportunity of being alone with you to reveal it all! If you refuse me, I am ready to die!' (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 80-81)

Mr Elton's attitude, represented through the exclamations, the exaggerated declaration of love, and the illustration below, is made explicitly funny in a ridiculer form. Unlike nineteenth-century Austen, Birchall is open to ridicule men.

**Image 8** – Mr Elton says he is in love with Emma



Ceulemans' ability to exaggerate Mr Elton through his body language makes him even funnier. The addition of the hearts around his head makes him seem deeply in love. As Emma reflects on the subject later, she realises "His addresses to her in the carriage had been too dramatic and arrogant to be founded in real love. [...] He had sought to marry well and set his eyes on Miss Woodhouse of Hartfield, an heiress of thirty thousand pounds" (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 87).

Not much after this disastrous situation, Mr Elton travels to Bath seeking marriage to a rich woman. Miss Bates gossips on the subject when Emma takes Harriet to the Bates' home to distract her. While they are there, Birchall explains that Emma does not associate herself with the Coles, for they "had made their money through trade [...] but it did not make them members of the truly genteel class" (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 99), revealing the views of certain classes towards trading and the bourgeoisie.

Miss Bates' lines, although not so long as to make her too boring, contains exclamations and gasps and other types of interjections. Changing the subject to talk of Jane Fairfax, she tells of when Mr Dixon saved her:

'Yes! I wonder that myself, indeed. Mr Dixon saved Jane's life, you know. Yes, they were once out on the water at Weymouth and what should happen, but a gust of wind, a very bad gust of wind and oh! The thought of it makes me feel quite dizzy. Yes, I must sit down. Oh! I am already sitting down! How pleasant. Oh yes, the wind and the sails blustering about. Jane almost fell into the sea! It was Mr Dixon who grabbed her and prevented her from going in!' (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 103)

Later, both Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill arrive at Highbury, to visit their families. Emma believes Jane' visit regards the avoidance of Mr Dixon, as she is probably in love with him. She does not hide, however, that she is jealous of her and her accomplishments. Mr Knightley, reasonably, says "You cannot be jealous when Jane Fairfax deserves your compassion and generous friendship" (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 107) when Emma defends herself by saying she was not jealous of a governess-to-be. Concerning Frank Churchill, he gets along well with Emma. They talk of Emma's suspicions regarding Jane and Mr Dixon, then Frank suggests the making of a ball in Highbury.

The Coles organize a party – Emma first says she would not attend, then changes her mind when her invitation arrives. The Weston's persuasion led her decision to go. There, she learns of Jane's mysterious pianoforte, a gift without a note. Emma is called to evaluate the gift later, as her opinion keeps being valued.

As well as Mr Elton, his wife is also the target of ridicule. She pretends to be superior to who she actually is, which makes her the subject of laughter:

Mrs Elton had fooled herself into thinking they were of equal standing. Not only her situation was inferior to Emma's, but her manners appalling. She was self-satisfied, overly familiar and deeply ignorant. Her conceited, obvious pride in her sister's advantageous marriage was also in very bad taste. (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 145)

From the first moment, Emma notices how poor in manners Mrs Elton is – manners that she keeps, and to those Emma has no response.

**Image 9 – Mrs Elton**



Here, the exaggeration of the cartoon again exposes Mrs Elton's character as inelegant, and Emma's silent reaction to it. Mrs Elton decides to give her attention to Jane Fairfax.

Harriet has been, so far, trying to forget Mr Elton after her heartbreak. It gets hard, however, when the ball takes place at last. Mr Elton humiliates Harriet by refusing to ask her to dance, so Mr Knightley dances with her instead. The next day, Frank Churchill rescues her from the "attack" of a family of beggars. She tells Emma that she believes she is falling in love again, and Emma believes it is with Frank Churchill.

An episode that is humorous in *Emma* is the picnic at Box Hill. "It was a beautiful sunny day in June and Mrs Elton had organised a party to travel to Box Hill, a delightful spot for a picnic" (BRICHALL, 2019, p. 173), and the omens had everything to be good. However, the

day goes bad all the way. It is in this occasion that Frank Churchill proposes the game of saying three statements, being at least one of them dull.

‘Oh, what a fun game!’ Miss Bates cried, giggling before saying in a self-deprecating and good-humoured manner, ‘And how fortunate that we are allowed to say three dull things. For I shall be sure to say three dull things, like I always do!’

Emma could not resist.

‘There may indeed be a difficulty for you, Miss Bates,’ she replied, ‘for you will be limited to say only three dull things.’ (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 178)

Emma’s line to Miss Bates is almost unaltered in the retelling, and here Emma humiliates the woman. The tension flashes into the eyes of the reader, especially when Mr Knightley reproaches Emma.

A relationship is hidden behind all social occasions of Highbury. Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill have been secretly engaged since Weymouth, where they met. Small hints appear throughout the novel – especially through the illustrations. The ball and the picnic at Box Hill contain drawings of scenes in which Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill exchange glances. And the same happens between Emma and Mr Knightley.

**Image 10 – Box Hill**



In this illustration, we see Jane glaring at Frank Churchill, Mr Knightley reproaching Emma with his eyes, and Harriet wandering in her own mind. Miss Bates and the Eltons are portrayed humorously. The former, appreciating her food. The couple, enjoying each other’s company.

After Box Hill, Mrs Churchill, the lady who raised Frank when Mr Weston became a widower, dies. At this moment, Frank feels free enough to tell everyone he had been engaged to Jane Fairfax all along. Emma thinks of Harriet, who might have another heartbreak.

However, when Harriet admits she is in love with Mr Knightley, Emma realizes *she* has been in love with him as well.

Emma is considerate towards Harriet, at least. Instead of wishing her to be miserable, she is simply scared of losing Mr Knightley's friendship. She was aware that, if he were married to someone else, he would not be her friend anymore:

Emma sighed, sitting at the window the next morning and looking out at the rain. How could she have been so mistaken? She had been wrong about everybody, most of all herself. She could not bear the thought of losing Mr Knightley. And what must he think of her? He, who knew all her faults and weaknesses. He could not love her, surely. But how would Emma bear seeing him with Harriet? She could not! (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 192)

So far, Mr Knightley has been put aside. The age gap between him and Emma seems reduced in the retelling. When presented in the family trees, he is "a bit older" than her. Whenever he appears, he voices reason into Emma's head, either by pointing it to her face or mocking her ways. His feelings were shown through his opinions of Frank Churchill, especially when he felt jealous of him:

‘Did you ever guess why I didn't like Frank Churchill, even before I'd meet him?’ Mr Knightley continued anxiously, unsure as to how his words were being received. ‘I knew he was intended for you. I could not bear to watch you together. I, who had loved you for so long. [...] Emma, is there a way... Might I have hope of gaining your affection one day?’ (BIRCHALL, 2019, p. 198-199, highlights by the author)

After Mr Knightley and Emma get engaged, the friendship between Emma and Harriet is preserved. Despite all the heartbreaks, Harriet finds happiness with Mr Martin after all. Jane Fairfax apologises to Emma for being too distant. The novel ends with a sort of happily ever after, without bitterness.

The peritexts in the last pages of the book, "And what was it like in 1815?", regard mostly occupations and education, showing the differences between men and women, and which liberties they had in terms of employment. It also explains what a governess was, and tells that schools were not compulsory until much later, so education was for richer people.

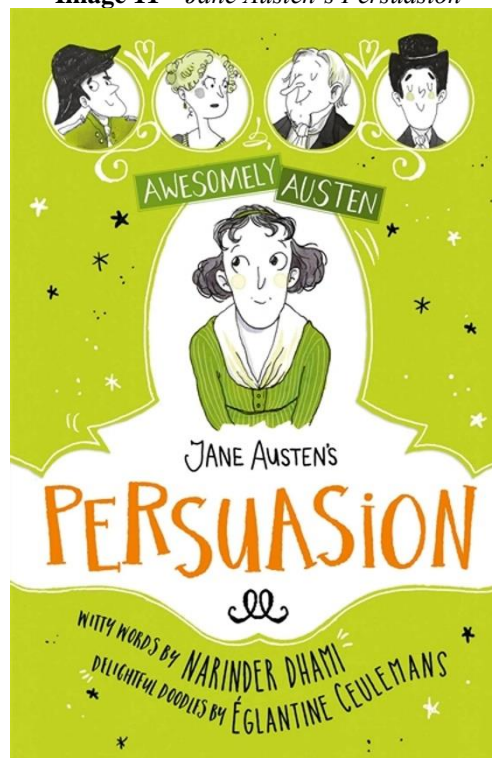
A story such as Emma has a plot hard to notice. Because it is a comedy, the retelling of this novel for children can be appealing. Emma is a character who has several similarities with the reader, who also makes mistakes and believe everything works the way they think. Birchall's techniques are appealing to the young reader as well, since the presence of dialogue

creates dynamism in the text. Ceulemans' drawings dialogue directly with the text, presenting the comedy the text carries.

### 3.2 *Jane Austen's Persuasion*

The next novel is retold by Narinder Dhami. The cover is light green, with the title written in light orange. Light green and light orange, unlike yellow and purple, are not complementary colours, but analogous colours. Analogous colours are reduced in contrast, with less tension and high in elegance, pleasing to look at. The colour scheme represents the main character, Anne Elliot, who learns to unmute herself, increasing tension as she lets her voice be heard – orange and green, although close, are not similar in temperature, green being cool and orange being warm. Above Anne Elliot, we see Captain Frederick Wentworth, Elizabeth Elliot, Sir Walter Elliot, and Captain Benwick.

Image 11 – *Jane Austen's Persuasion*



Narinder Dhami is also an author of children's books, having written many books related to her Indian ascendancy. Her *Babes* quartet are written for children aged between 9 and 14, an age close to the *Awesomely Austen* target audience. Like Birchall, she is an Austenite. In her



words, she felt connected to Austen because “She did what she simply wasn’t supposed to do at the time and broke all the rules” (DHAMI, 2019, p. 218).

As it is the last novel Austen wrote in full, *Persuasion* is a more subtle novel in terms of “mockery of false taste” (LASCELLES, 2002, p. 76). The climate set in the novel is contrasting depending on where Anne Elliot is. It is interesting to notice how Ceulemans uses darker colours in the illustrations in *Jane Austen’s Persuasion*.

Dhami starts the novel with the discussion of the expenses and debts of Kellynch Hall. Sir Walter and Elizabeth open the novel, just like the original. The main changes are the minor value to the baronetage of Sir Walter and when Anne is presented. Because Anne is more reserved and her mind appears more than her voice, direct thought is a resource Dhami uses: “*If only Mama was still here, she thought, her dark eyes filled with sadness. How different things would be!*” (DHAMI, 2019, p. 2, highlights by the author). The image of Kellynch is dark, setting a heavy atmosphere around Anne.

**Image 12** – Kellynch Hall



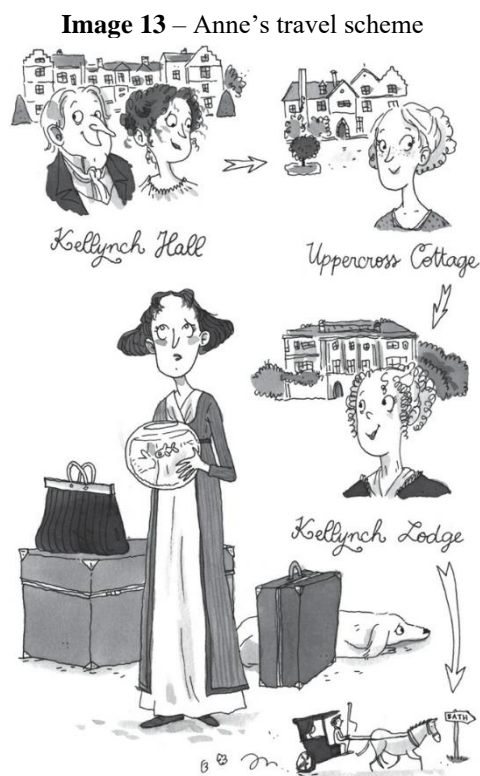
Anne’s life with her family is tough, for neither Sir Walter nor Elizabeth is fond of her – “There was little affection, understanding and friendship between the two of them, which upset Anne. She had a closer relationship with their younger sister [...] although Mary, too, could be difficult at times” (DHAMI, 2019, p. 6). Although Anne loves the memories of Kellynch Hall, its atmosphere is less loving, and fuller of sorrow. Sir Walter, vain, proud, and full of self-importance, is portrayed as comic. Elizabeth is not much different, their bonding

based on looks and being expensive. Lady Russell, the Elliot’s neighbour, is the character who cares about Anne the most.

Mr Shepherd, the family lawyer, suggests the moving of the family to Bath and renting Kellynch. He mentions the end of the war – which will appear only in “And what was it like in 1817?”, at the end of the book – and the navy officers who wish to rent the house. Mrs Clay, his widow daughter, takes the opportunity to call Sir Walter’s attention.

When Frederick Wentworth is presented, most of the story between him and Anne is told through the omniscient narrator. However, Lady Russell’s words of persuasion are expressed in direct speech: “‘My dear, you must see that it would be foolish to enter in such a marriage,’ Lady Russell had told Anne earnestly. ‘This young man has no land or property, and your father has already said that he does not approve of him. [...] You *must* change your mind, Anne.’” (DHAMI, 2019, p. 23-24, highlights by the author). Her words make her look less persuasive and more caring.

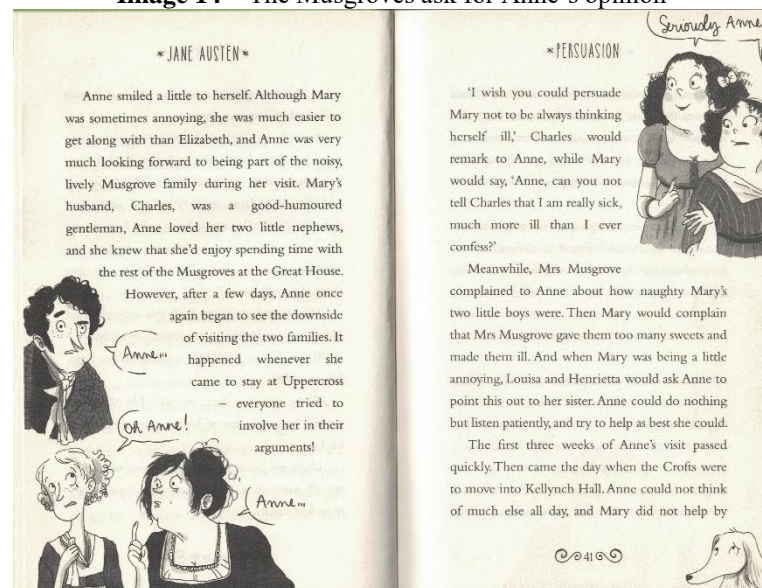
Anne would go to different places from now on. Rather than moving directly to Bath with her family, Mary asked her company at Uppercross Cottage, where she lived with her husband. Then, she would go back to Lady Russell’s house, to be with her until after Christmas, when she would finally move to Bath. Elizabeth’s words to Mary were “Then I’m sure Anne had better stay, for nobody will want her in Bath” (DHAMI, 2019, p. 30).



The scheme above shows a concerned Anne for the trips she would make until she finally goes to Bath. As she does not want to move from Kellynch, her face expresses sadness – and so does the dog with her. Her concerns, however, are diminished as she sees the world expanding ahead of her (LASCELLES, 2002).

At Uppercross, the Musgroves live in the Great House, and Mary and her husband Charles live at the Cottage. Because the two houses were close, all the Musgroves would gather constantly. They were all fond of Anne, unlike her own family. But all the Musgroves were asking for Anne’s opinion on their quarrels and discussions all the time. Ceulemans portrays Charles, Mary, Mrs Musgrove, Louisa, and Henrietta around the text, instead of a corner or a page reserved for the illustrations:

**Image 14 – The Musgroves ask for Anne’s opinion**



The characters call Anne in open speech balloons, suggesting the more they have to say. Their facial expressions, although simple, reveal whether they are worried, upset, or angry and what they will say to Anne.

Anne, at first, is silent, willing to help, and conforming to other people’s wishes. Most of the narrative is either in free indirect speech or free indirect thought, for Anne’s introspection tells the story most of the time. It is when Captain Wentworth visits the Crofts, and they all visit the Musgroves, that things start to change. Anne is agitated, her feelings for him unchanged after almost eight years: “He was still the same kindly, generous man that Anne remembered

so well. This thought gave her both pleasure and pain” (DHAMI, 2019, p. 58-59). The possible marriage between him and one of the Musgrove sisters would distress her even more.

Mary’s Elliot pride shows when she wishes Henrietta to marry him. Her other suitor was Charles Hayter, a cousin of the Musgroves, who is a farmer. As Robert Martin in *Emma*, he is considered low class from the point of view of a high-class woman such as Mary: “[...] Charles Hayter is only a farmer! It would be a very bad match for Henrietta” (DHAMI, 2019, p. 65). Later, she does not say the words between the four walls of her home, but outside, so she would be listened: “‘It is very unpleasant to have such low-born relatives,’ she muttered to Captain Wentworth” (DHAMI, 2019, p. 81). Captain Wentworth is openly disgusted by Mary’s words.

Anne overhears all the talking between Frederick and the girls, feeling, and concealing her thoughts. Taken as highly persuaded by Lady Russell, she was afraid Frederick might think she was still the same after she broke off their engagement. The dense atmosphere during their walk to the Hayter’s farm is noticed in the dark shades of the following illustration:

**Image 15** – The Musgroves walk to the Hayters



In this image, the dark shadows show Anne’s feelings – tense, upset, sad – as the rest of the party seems happy and enjoying each other’s company.

At Lyme, when visiting the Harvilles, friends of Captain Wentworth, Anne begins to slowly expose her mind. Speaking with Captain Benwick, she is able to open him up a little by

talking about books. Also in Lyme, they pass by William Elliot, the heir of Sir Walter. Mr Elliot looks at Anne, noticing her appearance, improved by the walk on the beach. The last event the party would have in Lyme was the walk around the Cobb, where Louisa would fall and be injured. Dhami cuts the chapter when Louisa does not get up, letting the reader know whether she is alive or not in the next one.

**Image 16** – Louisa falls at the Cobb



Anne is the person who is cold-minded enough to assist with what should be done next. Ceulemans portrays here Benwick and Wentworth with Louisa, Anne with Henrietta, and Charles with his wife. Mary looks clearly more upset, as in the text she believes Louisa died. The shades are dark, but not much, for Louisa will be alright and Anne has control of the situation.

After things are in order, Anne leaves Uppercross and spends some time at Kellynch Lodge, Lady Russell's home. Then, she moves to Bath at last. There, Mr Elliot gives attention to Anne since the rest of her family would not care for her as much. Yet, she would eventually find out he had schemes of his own when visiting Sir Walter. Pretending he wanted to make amends, he was trying to keep Mrs Clay away from the baronet, so that he would inherit the property for sure. Anne, however, *did* call his attention, and he behaves the most exemplary as he can for both reasons. As Lascelles points out, however, he is too good to be considered real as he shows (LASCELLES, 2002).

The Musgroves also go to Bath. Louisa was going to marry after all, but with Captain Benwick. The Crofts are in Bath too, so all the parties were there at the same time – including Captain Wentworth, who was there to see Anne. They would all see each other in different social occasions. The key moment that begins to reveal his unchanged feelings is the concert, which Anne attends with the Elliots: Wentworth reveals he is jealous of Mr Elliot.

Mrs Smith, a school friend of Anne’s who is very poor, tells her full story. Anne paid visits to her, who told some Bath gossip regarding Mr Elliot. Mrs Smith exposes Mr Elliot’s true character, his intentions regarding Sir Walter: “[...] The reason being, he cannot *bear* the idea of *not* being Sir William Elliot of Kellynch Hall. And as you know, if Mrs Clay becomes Lady Elliot and has a son, then Mr Elliot will never become Sir William” (DHAMI, 2019, p. 188, highlights by the author). Dhami uses the same resource of epistolary novels: characters telling things their interlocutors already know, so the reader can keep up with the particulars of personalities, relationships, and connections.

Anne, intending to show Wentworth that Mr Elliot meant nothing to her, speaks whenever opportunities to say her mind comes. The most important conversation, between Anne and Captain Harville, is when Anne openly says women’s love is long lasting. The scene does not show the debate on who is more affectionate, men or women. As it happens with Louisa’s accident, Dhami closes the chapter with Frederick’s letter. Anne’s response is only known in the next one.

**Image 17** – Anne and Captain Harville speak about love



The image suggests Wentworth’s “half agony, half hope” feelings. He is frowning, eavesdropping as Anne says: “The only difference, I think, is that women keep on loving, when all hope is gone” (DHAMI, 2019, p. 202). Even though the subject of the conversation is not much comfortable, here Anne is not in a sad situation, so the shadows are not predominant.

Their engagement was now reason of joy for everyone. Wentworth was rich, so Sir Walter and Mary felt pleased. He helped Mrs Smith to recover her husband's fortune and improve her quality of life. Mr Elliot left Bath with Mrs Clay. Dhami closes the novel: "Their story, Anne thought, was like a fairy tale, because she and Frederick would certainly live happily ever after" (DHAMI, 2019, p. 214-215). Ceulemans puts a ribbon with the words "happily ever after" below the text.

**Image 18** – Happily Ever After



From Austen's novels, *Persuasion* has a more serious tone, in comparison to the other novels. Anne's point of view is the main narrator, so the text is mostly written in free indirect form. Dhami sustains the seriousness of the subjects, also exposing the characters of Sir Walter and Elizabeth as vain and proud, the character of Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay a bit more veiled, and the Musgroves less contradictory. The subject of the proper age to get married is less concerned in her retelling, perhaps because it is not a great concern in the twenty-first century.

Captain Frederick Wentworth's attitudes towards Anne remain the same. At first, he is cold, distant. Slowly, he reveals his feelings for her. And she does the same. At first, distant, hiding herself, then opening up and revealing how much she has grown in the past eight years, developing her own mind and speaking for herself. Anne's side, however, is less explicit than in the original novel.

"And what was it like in 1817?" has a section about the Napoleonic Wars, and the navy and their social rank. The age matters in marriage appears here as well, but the focus of the novel was the wealth that Frederick lacked when he first proposed to Anne, not their age. Illnesses and injuries, subjects in the novel, are brought as more difficult to treat for the technology required to heal were not yet invented. Last, but not least, there is the topic of free time activities, like the concert and the theatre.

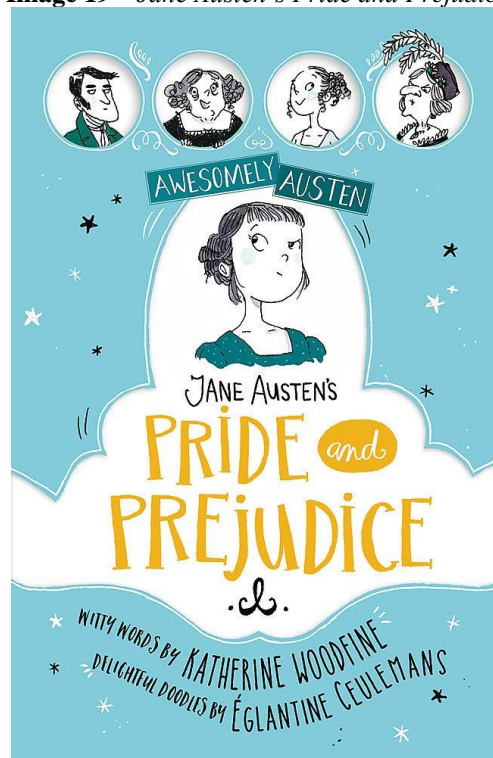
The maturity of *Persuasion* and of Anne's character make the novel not as comic as *Emma*, the novel analysed in the previous section. Dhami captures the essence of the Elliots and transcribes it in dialogue, rather than using reports and narratives. Ceulemans explores the contrast between light and dark to portray Anne's feelings and thoughts. The appeal to the

young reader regards especially the Cinderella vibe that Anne carries, from the disliked sister and daughter to the confident woman who still catches the eye of Captain Charming.

### 3.3 Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

*Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice* is the third of the three books released in 2019. The light-blue cover has the title *Pride and Prejudice* in yellow, a split complementary colour (since the direct complementary colour of blue is orange), representing the boldness of the main character, even though the colours are not saturated. Elizabeth Bennet has the focus on the cover, with Mr Darcy, Mrs Bennet, Jane Bennet and Lady Catherine De Bourgh on top. The retelling of *Pride and Prejudice* was written by Katherine Woodfine.

**Image 19** – Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*



Katherine Woodfine has been an Austenite since she was 12 years old, when she fell in love with the BBC TV series of *Pride and Prejudice*. She studied English Literature and writes children's books since 2015, inspired by history (WOODFINE, 2022). *Pride and Prejudice* is one of her favourite stories, and "Retelling this much-loved story was a daunting challenge, but also enormous fun" (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 236). In her bio, she adds: "This version of the



story has been created with young readers in mind. If you've enjoyed it, I hope you'll one day go on to read the original novel, so you can fall in love with the delicious wit and cleverness of Jane Austen's writing for yourself" (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 237).

*Pride and Prejudice* begins with the most famous quote of all Austen books: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 3). The sentence mocks the families' wishes of marrying their daughters to men with higher income, so their misfortunes would be the smallest possible.

Woodfine's first decision, in her retelling is to put this sentence in the second chapter, after presenting the Bennet family. She introduces the five daughters first, then presents Mr and Mrs Bennet:

Mr and Mrs Bennet did not have very much in common either. What Mr Bennet liked doing best was sitting by the fire in his library reading a book, whilst Mrs Bennet preferred visiting her friends to gossip about everything that was going on in the neighbourhood. But what she loved doing more than anything else was picturing the future weddings of her five daughters, and imagining the rich and important husbands she hoped they would have. (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 1-2)

Right after setting the family climate, Mrs Bennet tells the news of a Mr Bingley moving to Netherfield Park. Mr Bennet teases his wife – as she says herself, "You take delight in vexing me!" (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 3) – and we see the main relationship between the couple. Only then we read the famous quote: "Mrs Bennet wasn't the only one who was excited about the arrival of Mr Bingley. Everyone in the neighbourhood was talking about him, especially because *it was a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of good fortune must be in want of a wife*" (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 7, my highlights).

At the first ball which Mr Bingley, his sisters, and Mr Darcy attend, there is an illustration of Mrs Bennet attempting to introduce her daughters to the newcomers.

**Image 20 – First ball**



From Mr Bingley's group, he is the only one smiling. From the Bennets, Mrs Bennet is exaggerated, pulling Jane's arm. Lydia and Kitty, the youngest girls, act childishly. Mr Darcy's facial expression is curious: in most of the illustrations, Ceulemans kept this face. Later, there will be images of his face changed, in extreme situations.

The relationship between Jane and Elizabeth is valued by Woodfine. Elizabeth has a protective side when it comes to her elder sister:

‘He’s everything a young man should be,’ sighed Jane dreamily. ‘He’s good natured and sensible, lively and cheerful.’  
 ‘And handsome, which a young man ought to be if he possibly can,’ said Elizabeth with a grin. ‘I give you permission to like him. You’ve liked stupider people before.’  
 (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 14-15)

In this passage, Elizabeth “gives permission” to Jane’s liking of Mr Bingley. In a sense, it shows not only her concern but a certain controlling attitude. Her independence appears when Jane visits Miss Bingley and falls ill after riding there in the rain. Elizabeth goes to her on foot the next day and covers herself in mud. In this scene, Woodfine creates a dialogue between Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst to show how the sisters think alike – so alike that the reader cannot identify in the lines which sister is saying them.

The Bennets situation, and why Mrs Bennet is so worried about her daughters getting married, is explained in chapter five. Mr Bennet receives a letter from Mr Collins, the heir of Longbourn. Mrs Bennet is vexed to hear of him:

Jane and Elizabeth exchanged glances. They knew exactly what she meant. When Mr Bennet died, Longbourn and all his property would not be passed on to his wife or daughters. Instead, they would be inherited by his closest male relative – his unknown cousin, Mr Collins – leaving his wife and unmarried daughters without a home. Mrs Bennet thought this very cruel, and Elizabeth and Jane couldn’t help agreeing that it did not seem very fair.” (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 33)

The girls are more understanding of Mrs Bennet’s feelings in the retelling, rather than simply accepting the fact as it was and trying to convince their mother of it. Woodfine chooses free indirect discourse to represent the girls’ opinions, which does not make clear whether they said it, or just thought of it.

Mr Collins’ manners appear in the letter. To highlight which parts of it show his pompous speech, the letter has underlined words and phrases, such as “olive branch”, “delightful daughters”, and the most appealing of them, “the Right Honourable Lady Catherine de Bourgh” (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 34).

The Netherfield ball, promised by Mr Bingley, is a key moment in the novel. It is when Elizabeth tries to find out what Mr Darcy thinks of Mr Wickham, the new member of the regiment. Mr Wickham, finding out Mr Darcy is disliked in Meryton, takes the opportunity to tell his “version” of their relationship, in order to make himself more respectable. During the dance between Elizabeth and Mr Darcy, both partners get annoyed by one another.

The ridicule is a characteristic of Mrs Bennet and the youngest Bennets, Mary, Lydia, and Kitty. The Netherfield ball is the place in which all their actions appear together and are judged at once. Mr Collins introduces himself to Mr Darcy in an inappropriate manner, Mrs Bennet talks of the prospects of a marriage between Jane and Mr Bingley – “‘And so fortunate for the other girls!’ Elizabeth heard her declare loudly to Charlotte’s mother, Lady Lucas. ‘It will throw them into the paths of other rich men!’<sup>13</sup>” (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 57), as Lydia and Kitty romp around the room, and Mary plays the piano poorly.

Although Mr Collins is a character of ridicule in Austen, his portrayal in Ceulemans’ illustration is not as exaggerated. His main appearance in the retelling is presented only after he proposes to Elizabeth, in a scene in which both are seated.

**Image 21** – Mr Collins proposes to Elizabeth

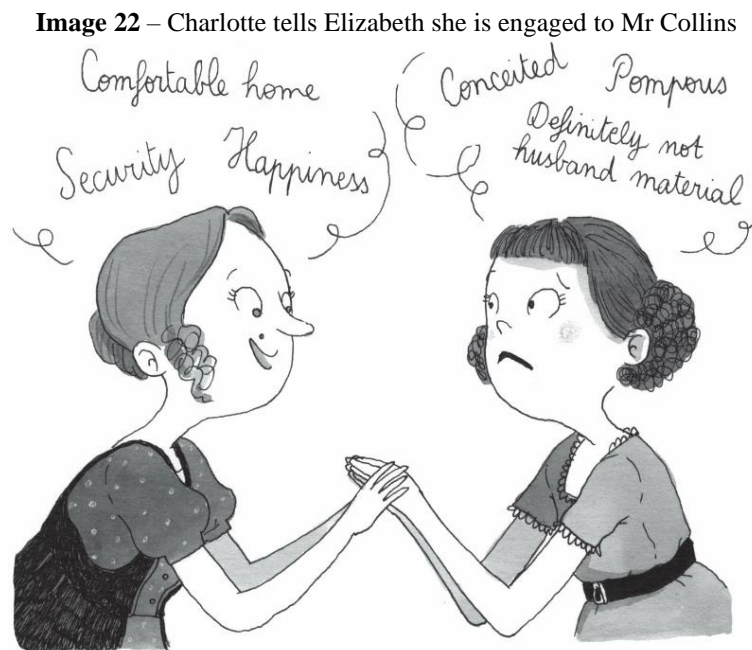


<sup>13</sup> This line appears in the BBC’s production of *Pride and Prejudice* of 1995, starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle. It is spoken by Alison Steadman, who plays Mrs Bennet, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> episode.

In this drawing, it is Elizabeth's reaction that is more enhanced. Her face is not contracted, only her eyebrows are raised. His ridiculous proposal, mentioning more of Lady Catherine, is little shown here.

After Mr and Mrs Bennet disagree on Elizabeth's answer to him, Mrs Bennet tries to convince her daughter to change her mind: "First, she coaxed, then she threatened, then she shouted, and then she wept" (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 68). Woodfine chooses the narrative report of speech acts to portray Mrs Bennet's actions. In this case, "the narrator does not have to commit himself entirely to giving the sense of what was said" (LEECH; SHORT, 2007, p. 259), so she can use the verbs coax, threat, and shout to outline these actions.

Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's friend, is the one who marries Mr Collins instead. She has mentioned before that "[...] Marriage is really about security – happiness is just a matter of luck" (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 16). Here, she says: "[...] I'm not romantic, you know – I never was. All I want is a comfortable home, and I know Mr Collins can give me that. I think my chance of happiness with him is as good as it would be with anyone else'" (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 73-74).



In the image above, we see balloons of thought, in which we see the points of view of the two women. Charlotte is more concerned with the stability that marriage offers, as Elizabeth is considering the personality of the significant other as an important matter for conjugal happiness. Her face shows she is upset for she knows Mr Collins' personality enough to understand he would not be the best companion – and it is represented inside the balloon with

the expression “Definitely not husband material”, an expression more used in the twenty-first century.

After the Netherfield embarrassments, Mr Bingley and his party leave for London. Jane travels there too, with uncle and aunt Gardiner, to distract herself. While she is away, Elizabeth writes her the news of Mr Wickham. Here, she tells Jane of his interest in a woman who just inherited ten thousand pounds:

[...] He no longer spent so much time with Elizabeth, for he had begun paying attentions to a young lady named Mary King, who had recently inherited a great deal of money. But Elizabeth was able to write to Jane about it without much pain or sadness. It was true that she had liked Mr Wickham very much, but she hadn't fallen in love with him. What was more, she could understand that a charming but poor young man might well be tempted by the idea of marrying a pleasant young woman who had ten thousand pounds to her name. (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 88-89)

Here, free indirect speech sustains not only Elizabeth's mind, but also the voice of the narrator, who tells the reader Mr Wickham wishes to marry for money, and Elizabeth takes this situation without being hurt by it. Soon, Elizabeth and Maria Lucas travel to visit Charlotte in her new home.

Not much is known of Charlotte's married life. When Lady Catherine De Bourgh invites them for dinner, little is said about that. The dialogue between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth is narrated both by the narrative report of speech acts and direct speech:

After a while, Lady Catherine turned her attention to Elizabeth, asking a great many questions about how many sisters she had, whether any of them were likely to be married soon, where they had been educated, and even what carriage her father kept. Elizabeth tried to answer her politely.  
 'Do you play the piano and sing, Miss Bennet?'  
 'A little.'  
 'And do your sisters play and sing?'  
 'One of them does.'  
 'Why did you not all learn? You ought all to have learned. Do you draw?'  
 'No, not at all.'  
 'What, none of you? That is most strange! Your mother should have taken you to town to learn from the drawing-masters there. Did your governess not teach you?'  
 'We never had a governess.'  
 'No governess! How is that possible? [...]' (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 95-96)

Here, the narrative report of speech acts at the beginning poses a Lady Catherine who loads her guests with questions that might be intrusive. Then, the representation of speech through direct speech shows the conversation between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth without the interference of the narrator. Elizabeth's answers are short, perhaps concealing her feelings towards Lay Catherine's questions. Then, Elizabeth answers Lady Catherine's comment on all

Bennet sisters being already out in society: “But I think it would be hard on younger sisters to stop enjoying society and amusement, just because their elder sisters haven’t married early” (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 96). Elizabeth’s revealed opinion is a point which makes Lady Catherine suspects of her.

Mr Darcy and his cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam visit Lady Catherine at Rosings Park. Both paid visits to the parsonage together. Not much after Elizabeth knows that Mr Darcy interfered in the relationship between Jane and Mr Bingley, he proposes to her. The proposal is cut in half, so if the reader decides to pause the reading between chapters, they do not know Elizabeth’s answer. The suspense may instigate the reading of the next chapter.

Elizabeth and Mr Darcy argue regarding Jane’s feelings and Mr Wickham’s story. Mr Darcy’s response letter is displayed uninterrupted, without the interference of Elizabeth’s thoughts. Those are shown after the letter, with the acknowledgment of her disliking of Mr Darcy: “The more she thought about it, the more ashamed Elizabeth felt. She had always prided herself on being a sharp observer of those around her – now, she felt like a fool!” (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 116). Elizabeth acts differently towards Mr Wickham now that she knows more of who he is. She is then able to talk to him and read his expressions, noticing he gets anxious when Mr Darcy is discussed.

Mr and Mrs Gardiner invite Elizabeth to go on a trip to Derbyshire with them. There, they visit Pemberley, and talk to the housekeeper. Elizabeth keeps acknowledging her prejudices towards Mr Darcy as the woman tells them what kind of master Mr Darcy is:

**Image 23**– The housekeeper talks of Mr Darcy



As the housekeeper looks smiling at Mr Darcy's miniature, Elizabeth's frowned face shows some remorse for her feelings: "But hearing the housekeeper's praise of him had made her see him differently. Was it her imagination or was there a spark of kindness and perhaps even a little shyness in his expression, as well as pride?" (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 146-147). Meeting him and his friends there both make her feel ashamed and curious, for she notices a different behaviour of him.

Mr Darcy also is helpful when the news of Lydia's elopement with Mr Wickham is discovered. She told a friend that their elopement and wedding would be a good joke, since she would go back home as a married woman, surprising her family. But Elizabeth knows this means the ruining of her reputation: "Now that she had gone away with him, no other respectable man would consider marrying her. She would have to stay at home with her parents for ever, her reputation quite ruined. Marriage to the dastardly Mr Wickham was Lydia's only hope" (WOODFINE, 2019, p. 171). The consequences of the elopement are seen in the image below:

**Image 24** – Mr and Mrs Wickham visit Longbourn



After Mr Darcy's arrangements (which Elizabeth would find out later), Lydia and Mr Wickham visit the Bennets. Only Mrs Bennet and Kitty seem happy for her. Mr Bennet is portrayed angry, Elizabeth looks tired of the situation, and Mr Wickham only wants to get rid of these manners to leave without being judged.

The happy ending starts to take form. Mr Bingley returns to Netherfield with Mr Darcy, and proposes to Jane. Everything seems happy until Lady Catherine De Bourgh comes to see Elizabeth after she hears she might marry Mr Darcy. She and Elizabeth argue on the subject, for Lady Catherine is intrusive and bad mannered, so Elizabeth feels she does not have to be polite in her responses. On the account of Lady Catherine, Ceulemans' idea of her appearance must be considered:

**Image 25** – Elizabeth and Lady Catherine



Lady Catherine's features resemble those of evil witches of fairy tales. She seems inspired by the Evil Queen's look, from Disney's *Snow White*. Her face is crumpled, her nose is big and aquiline, and the darker shades show the unfriendly and superior position she occupies. So, when she confronts Elizabeth, the reader keeps in mind she is not concerned with Mr Darcy, but mean to Elizabeth.

Of all events at the end of the book – the reaction of Mr and Mrs Bennet to the engagement of Elizabeth to Mr Darcy, the double wedding of Jane and Elizabeth, and the Wickhams asking for money –, Woodfine chose the calming of Mrs Bennet's nerves to close the novel.



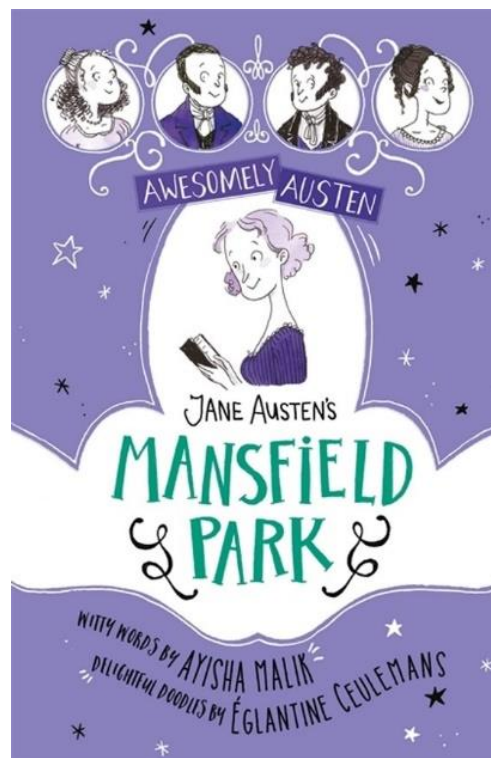
“And what was it like in 1813?”, at the end of the book, regards the types of houses people would live, and how they were inherited. Clothing and travelling are also subjects that appear in this section.

Unlike the previous novels, Katherine Woodfine maintains the proportion of free indirect speech from Austen. The stories that contain a relationship like the one between Elizabeth and Mr Darcy are commonly called “enemies-to-lovers”. The couple starts the novel disliking one another, but then something happens, and their feelings change. As enemies-to-lovers plots are successful among young audiences, there seems to be no need to significantly change any part of the novel. Ceulemans’ illustrations here are not as playful nor humour-related, focusing more on Elizabeth than other characters.

### 3.4 *Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*

As to the releases of 2020, the first under analysis is *Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*. The bluish-lilac coloured cover contains “Mansfield Park” in bluish green. Both colours are analogous and in cool tones. Above Fanny’s face are the faces of Maria Bertram, Henry Crawford, Edmund Bertram, and Mary Crawford. This novel is retold by Ayisha Malik.

**Image 26** – *Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*



Most of Ayisha Malik’s work is meant for an older audience. She has written only one more other book for children – *Seven Sisters*, published in 2021. Her culture and life experiences made her realize that “being Pakistani was often like being in an Austen novel; [...] not to mention intrusive families and an obsession with how much money the man you’re marrying has” (MALIK, 2020, p. 228). In more ways than most readers realize, different cultures still live in ways like Austen’s time.

*Mansfield Park* tells the story of Fanny Price, the poor relative who lives with her aunt and uncle at Mansfield Park. Although Fanny is the protagonist, most Austen readers do not like her character the most, and even forget she is the main character, for “Miss Price is an observer, keeping herself away from trouble and controversy, until she is called upon to act and decide her own future, defying family, position, and even the prevailing common sense” (SIMIONATO, 2020, p. 91).

Malik starts the novel by describing the Prices: “Her strong-headed mother had fallen in love with a man who had no education and preferred drinking to work, and so, she’d been disowned by the family” (MALIK, 2020, p. 1). When Mrs Price realises that she has more children than the ability to take care of all of them, she asks her sisters for help. Mrs Norris and Lady Bertram, Mrs Price’s sisters, and Sir Thomas Bertram, agree on adopting the eldest daughter.

**Image 27** – Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park



In the image above, Fanny, the girl in the centre of the image, is received by the Bertrams. The friendliest of them is Edmund, on her right side. Tom, on his other side, is smiling, but his arms are crossed. The reader cannot see the faces of Maria and Julia. All body languages but Edmund's are not much sympathetic.

Despite the Bertram's first attempt to make Fanny feel at home, she always felt self-conscious about her poor upbringing until then, keeping in mind she was not like the rest of them. Growing up, her relatives would remind her of their differences from time to time, especially Mrs Norris:

No one meant to be unkind, but no one went out of their way to make Fanny feel at home, either. The sisters were shocked that Fanny couldn't speak French or play an instrument or three, Lady Bertram's continued silence made Fanny feel like she had done something wrong, Sir Thomas's stern looks scared her, and her boy cousins were intimidating. Mrs Norris only added to all this by repeating how lucky Fanny should feel. (MALIK, 2020, p. 10)

Edmund Bertram ends up being her first and only friend. He offers her the opportunity to write to her brother William, whom she missed the most. Little by little, the rest of the Bertrams become less frightening too. In the second chapter, Malik uses irony to express his opinion on Maria and Julia: "So, the girls had everything except warmth and humility, which some might say is more important than knowing how to put a map of Europe together" (MALIK, 2020, p. 15). This description is helpful to understand the trouble they get into later.

The Bertram children become a complicated matter in Mansfield Park. Tom, the eldest son, is taken to Antigua with his father to prevent him from reckless behaviour. As marriage is the best prospect for a woman – even the daughter of a baronet – Maria seeks a marriage that will be advantageous for her, and she meets a proper suitor: "Maria had met Mr Rushworth at a previous ball and felt he had enough money and property to make him very handsome. Mr Rushworth believed the time had come for him to get married, and so thought he must be in love with Maria" (MALIK, 2020, p. 21-22). The comic effect irony has in this sentence shows that neither of them likes each other deep down.

The comic perception of Mr Rushworth is clearer in the illustration of him:

**Image 28** – Mr Rushworth and Maria Bertram dance



His facial features are exaggerated, such as his teeth and his nose, indicating that he is not as handsome as the rest of the characters. His ridiculous features portray a little of his personality as well.

Mrs Grant, wife of the reverend who lived at Mansfield Park’s parsonage, received her two siblings Mary and Henry Crawford, and set matches to them both: Tom and Julia, respectively. Henry would give his attention to Maria too. As for the bride-to-be, “Maria didn’t see anything very wrong with liking the company of a charming man like Mr Crawford, whether or not she was already engaged to another” (MALIK, 2020, p. 27). Considering Mary Crawford’s situation, she was “ready to get married as long as the marriage entailed money” (MALIK, 2020, p. 26). Their selfish intentions would cause them all trouble and suffering.

Edmund Bertram, Fanny’s best friend and love interest, seems to be sensible. He mentions that Mr Rushworth’s money prevents people from seeing his lack of intelligence, and notices Mary Crawford’s flaws at a first moment. However, as he grows feelings towards her, he takes those flaws at ease, even if she offends his congregational career. His change of behaviour is noticeable when, at Sotherton, he walks with Mary Crawford leaving Fanny behind:

She discovered them, having forgotten her, sitting and laughing comfortably under a tree. It filled Fanny with pain.  
‘Oh, Miss Price,’ cried Mary. ‘It is all my fault.’

‘No, Fanny, honestly, we quite lost track of time – it’s entirely mine,’ added Edmund. (MALIK, 2020, p. 47)

In this dialogue, which does not exist in Austen’s original, both admit guilt, giving them both some considerate appearance – on Mary’s side, as the reader notices with time, selfish and shallow.

Mary returns Edmund’s feelings, despite knowing he is not the heir of Mansfield. As a second son, he is not entitled to receive the same inheritance as the first-born. As for Henry Crawford, he flirts with both Bertram girls. Fanny observes and, because of her position, Malik tells the story through description:

Henry had been called away for two weeks to Norfolk, and what a dull two weeks it was for the Miss Bertrams. They didn’t understand that their feelings – one of which included Julia’s severe jealousy of Maria – were inappropriate. And Henry was too busy feeding his ego to change his behaviour towards the sisters, or to stay away. So, when there were no ladies in Norfolk to compare to the Miss Bertrams, he returned to Mansfield Park to continue his hobby of heartbreak. (MALIK, 2020, p. 53)

In this excerpt, it is clearer to the reader how *Mansfield Park* is “a comedy, with grave implications, of human interdependence numbly unrealized or wilfully ignored until too late” (LASCELLES, 2002, p. 164). Henry Crawford’s bad behaviour is here enhanced by the choice of the words “hobby of heartbreak”. In Fanny’s perspective, we see as well how she perceives the feelings of the other characters more than themselves.

Of the most significant moments of *Mansfield Park*, the putting of a play shows the relations between the characters the most. The narrator’s first comment on this episode is “There was nothing like the theatre to inspire young minds” (MALIK, 2020, p. 56), which seems innocent for the value of theatre to culture, but is ironic: all events that happen next reveal the nature of the relationship between the characters, inspired by *Lovers’ Vows*, the play the group decides to perform.

Edmund Bertram’s attitude towards the theatricals is against maculating the art of the theatre through the make-believe of the amateur activity. In an attempt to make the play necessary, Tom argues that Lady Bertram would benefit from it – and, again, an ironic portrait: “The brothers looked over at Lady Bertram, lying on the sofa, a picture of health, gently nodding off to sleep” (MALIK, 2020, p. 60). The problem is that, instead of making the reader laugh, Lady Bertram is a bit of a bore, monotone, and quite forgotten by the reader.

The assignment of the characters of the play started to reveal Henry’s preference for Maria Bertram, for the relationship of the characters of Agatha and Frederick, and the manner

he tries to dissuade Julia from this role. As Fanny reads the play when she is alone, “She was shocked. Surely they couldn’t know the kind of play they were taking part in. The characters! The language! It was all so improper for modest ladies and well-mannered gentlemen” (MALIK, 2020, p. 66).

As both Fanny and Edmund disapprove *Lovers’ Vows* as the play to be performed, the group asks her to take a part in it. When she refuses to participate, all characters but Edmund and Mary Crawford pressure her to accept. Again, Mrs Norris reinforces in her speech: “Don’t make such a drama when everyone is asking *one* thing of you [...] I’m not *forcing* her, just pointing out that she’s being very ungrateful and stubborn” (MALIK, 2020, p. 72-73, highlights by the author).

Since Edmund did not want to play Anhalt, Mary’s character romantic pair, Tom Bertram decides to ask a friend to take the part. Thus, he indirectly convinces Edmund to participate in the play: “Firstly, it’s as if I’m completely changing my mind, but having a stranger coming into the privacy of our home... such intimacy. Think about poor Miss Crawford, having to act with someone she doesn’t know” (MALIK, 2020, p. 76).

As the group rehearses the play, the real feelings and intentions come to the surface. In the original, “As Jane intended, the sexual tensions created at this time between Maria and Henry Crawford, and Edmund and Mary Crawford, as they rehearse their parts all too enthusiastically, make the production of *Lovers’ Vows* the turning point for the eventual collapse of the Bertram family group” (LE FAYE, 2002, p. 242).

**Image 29** – Henry and Maria rehearse their scene



As shown in the image above, Henry and Maria interact in a dramatic scene. They are considered great actors by the rest of the group. It is Mr Rushworth's face what indicates the scene is improper, and that he is displeased by it.

All rehearsals were interrupted by the returning of Sir Thomas Bertram (Malik calls him "Sir Bertram" here, instead of "Sir Thomas"). He is the character who treats Fanny the best, even though in her childhood she was afraid of him. As soon as he finds out his children were planning the play, Sir Thomas shows displeasure through his gaze, since John Yates, Tom's friend, was present. Mr Rushworth, also present, stays by his future father-in-law's side. Just like Lady Bertram, the constant repetition of "how stupid Mr Rushworth was" (MALIK, 2020, p. 91), as well as the sameness of his lines, makes him annoying, not funny.

Henry Crawford leaves Mansfield, leaving Maria upset. Despite her father's claims that her happiness should be considered before entering a marriage, her decision is to go on with the loveless marriage to Mr Rushworth, the only visitor they have since Sir Thomas returns.

With the departure of Maria and Julia, who went with her sister to Brighton after the wedding, Fanny has more than errands to run. She became the visitor of the parsonage, meeting Mrs Grant and Mary Crawford – to Edmund's delight. Mary shows here she wishes to be wealthy: "Mary laughed. 'I'll be too rich to worry about money. Being rich is the best recipe for happiness'" (MALIK, 2020, p. 105). She and Edmund disagree on the topic, with him wishing for a life with just the necessary amount of money.

The bad behaviour of the Crawfords is revealed again when they are alone. Henry decides to have Fanny fall in love with him. Mary's opinion on this issue is "A little love is okay – it might do her good – but not too much, understood?" (MALIK, 2020, p. 112), which shows (again) she is as unscrupulous as her brother. His actions would convince even Sir Thomas, who had not seen his behaviour to his daughters.

On the occasion of William's visit, Sir Thomas decides to throw a ball in Fanny's honour. For this event, she wishes to wear a cross her brother gave her, but she had no necklace proper enough to put it on. Both Mary and Edmund give her necklaces, and she decides to wear both – Edmund's with the cross. During the ball, Henry gives her plenty of attention, and she is approved by her relatives – perhaps one of the very few times.

One of the things that both Crawfords did not expect was to fall in love with the people they said they would not. As well as Mary has feelings for Edmund Bertram, Henry admits he has fallen in love with Fanny. However, his previous behaviour does not convince Fanny,

despite his effort to achieve William's promotion at the Navy. Her refusal to his proposal got Sir Thomas angry – and he calls her ungrateful, like Mrs Norris.

When discussing the matter with Edmund, he and Fanny talk of Henry's proposal and Mary's attitude. Fanny says "A woman shouldn't be expected to love a man just because *he* loves her" (MALIK, 2020, p. 167, highlights by the author), showing her perception on the matter to Edmund without reservation. Fanny also talks openly about the subject to Mary, when she points out that "well, he'd paid that kind of attention to both my cousins too. I couldn't take it seriously. It's not right to play with a woman's feelings like that" (MALIK, 2020, p. 171).

To make Fanny realize that marrying Henry Crawford is her best option in life, Sir Thomas tells her to visit her parents at Portsmouth. It is the first time she goes back after leaving for Mansfield Park. But it only feels like home until her mother hugs her for the first time. Afterwards, she notices the state of poverty and lacking manners – she, then, "finds no home when she arrives at the Prices' dwelling" (SIMIONATO, 2020, p. 21). Her best efforts are put on Susan, one of her younger sisters, who managed to maintain the Price's house inhabitable.

As Fanny receives news of Mansfield Park through letters, she is told Tom is unwell. Mary Crawford reveals her true self to Fanny in one of the letters, in which she says "[...] but I will only say that should the worst happen, then there will be one less poor man in the world! And no one deserves that wealth more than Edmund. He might not have 'Esquire' after his name, but [...] I could overlook more than that" (MALIK, 2020, p. 204). It is not only to Fanny that Mary shows her true colours. On the occasion of Maria's elopement with Henry, she talks to Edmund as if it was not a serious matter.

The last chapter of *Jane Austen's Mansfield Park* resumes the last events mostly in descriptive form. The only speech line come from Sir Thomas, who praises Fanny's maturity. The description of the rest of the events is mostly an explanation of the characters doings and feelings. The section "And what was it like in 1814?" regards the size of families, the marriage between cousins, and the popularity of theatre and the case of *Lover's Vows*.

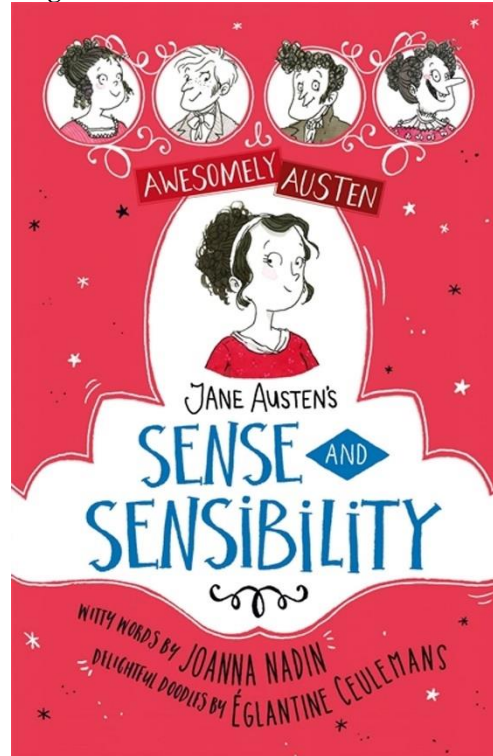
*Mansfield Park* is a novel that has less of the main character and more of the others. Fanny Price grows timidly, building her mind quietly, showing it only when called for. Of Austen's novels, it is different, serious, and worthy of a certain appreciation of who knows Austen well. Retelling this particular novel is a challenge, for many subtleties that contribute to its appeal may escape the attention of young readers. Malik's choices in this first writing to child readers reveal it is her first experience, but she decides which elements of the original *Mansfield Park* to keep well, maintaining the main idea behind it.



### 3.5 Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*

The fifth book, *Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility*, has its cover in pink with the title in blue. As the colours might represent sensibility and sense, respectively, they are not exactly complementary, so they are not that opposite after all – which is noticeable by the end of the novel. Although the back cover and inside say that this novel contains two protagonists – Elinor and Marianne –, in the front cover it is Elinor's face that is in the centre. Marianne, Mr Willoughby, Colonel Brandon and Mrs Jennings are on top.

**Image 30** – *Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility*



Its author, Joanna Nadin, had not read any Jane Austen until she was asked to retell this novel. “Well, it may have taken more than three decades, but I quickly realised the folly of my own pride and prejudice, and have now eaten my ill-chosen words, for Austen is modern and relevant, as well as being funny and, yes, feminist” (NADIN, 2020, p. 231) – her beliefs of Austen being “uncool” and old-fashioned fall apart at her reading. Nadin has written several books for readers of all ages, especially young readers. She has won both Fantastic Book Award and the Surrey Book Award, and has been nominated for many other prizes (NADIN, 2018).

*Sense and Sensibility* contrasts the sisters Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, the first being more sensible, and the latter more sensitive – and both forgetting to consider the other trait. On

the occasion of their father's death, their older half-brother and his petty wife (John and Fanny Dashwood) go to live in Norland, the Dashwood estate, wishing the Dashwoods of the second marriage to leave. With Elinor and Marianne, live their mother and a younger sister, Margaret.

This feeling of injustice is felt by all the girls. They not only have to find another place to live, but to count on a small sum of money they inherited from the late Mr Dashwood.

'Not quite paupers,' said Elinor. 'And anyway, I thought "true love" didn't care about income or status?'

'I suppose,' begrudged Marianne, recalling her own words of a month before. 'But I still don't think it's fair that John gets the house.'

'Not when he already has one in London,' said Margaret, still weighting up the injustice of it all. (NADIN, 2020, p. 3)

Nadin's political views show through the retelling<sup>14</sup>. The position the women have in the early nineteenth century is well explored by the author, focusing on the Dashwoods struggle on having to leave their home and their experience with their suitors. On the scene above, Marianne has her passionate views on love revealed, and her exaggerated attitudes are translated in the illustration below:

**Image 31** – The Dashwood girls



Marianne's movements are exaggerated, as Elinor's are more composed, trying to calm her sister. The rest of the scene contain Mrs Dashwood's worried face and holding the cat, which works as comic relief.

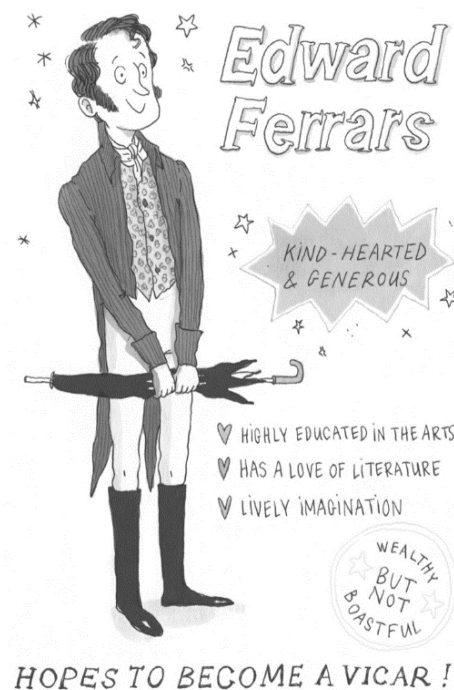
As the girls worry about their future, John Dashwood and his wife are presented. As he thinks of providing his half-sisters and stepmother some money to make some justice to them, Fanny argues against it. Her words reveal not only the greed, but also an aspect of life at that time: "[...] And what will they want with the money when they move to a modest house? There'll be no need for horses, for servants – and when they marry, whose hands will our money

<sup>14</sup> She had been a member of the Labour Party, being one of Tony Blair's advisors by the time he was PM.

be in?” (NADIN, 2020, p. 7). Money is a belonging of the husband once the woman gets married – even though Fanny calls the money as theirs, showing her manipulative power over her husband.

Once the Mr and Mrs Dashwood are settled in Norland, they receive the visit of Edward Ferrars, Elinor’s love interest. He is presented here as Frank Churchill is in *Emma*:

**Image 32** – Edward Ferrars



Ceulemans chose the advertisement layout to present the character, making him more appealing through the list of qualities and highlighting his humility and kindness – qualities that Elinor, Marianne, Margaret, and their mother value. This interest of theirs called the attention of Fanny, who manages to tell Mrs Dashwood that Elinor is not suitable for him.

They move to Barton Cottage, a house that belongs to Mrs Dashwood’s cousin, Sir John Middleton. Although the cottage was small in comparison to Norland, they have all comfort they need. Sir John also wanted them to feel at home, so they become frequent guests of Barton Park.

There, they meet Lady Middleton, her mother, Mrs Jennings, and Colonel Brandon. Colonel Brandon clearly falls in love with Marianne at first sight, noticed by both Elinor and Mrs Jennings, who loved some gossip. The dialogue, resulting from Mrs Jennings’ words, gets Marianne a bit exalted: “He talked about flannel waistcoats. Flannel waistcoats! That’s

precisely the kind of thing old men wear. Besides, he's already had one attachment, and you know very well I cannot entertain the possibility that a heart can love twice" (NADIN, 2020, p. 33). Not only the Colonel's age but also the romantic views Marianne has on love prevents her to treat him more respectfully.

Unlike the Colonel, however, a man who enters the Dashwood lives appears to turn Marianne's head. Mr Willoughby rescues her from a walk in the rain:

[...] Of course, any act of kindness to Marianne would have been greeted with gratitude, but something about his handsome face, his impeccable manners, the cut of his cloak, made it seem all the more... generous, no... gallant.  
 'Oh, thank you!' cried Mrs Dashwood. 'Please, do sit down. You must be exhausted.'  
 'That's too kind,' said the gentleman. 'But I'm wet through and would hate to soak your chaise. Perhaps I may call tomorrow, though. To check on your daughter's health – or is she your sister?' (NADIN, 2020, p. 39)

His behaviour in this scene shows his gallantry, so far unsuspecting. This gallantry makes Marianne think of him as a romantic hero, as well as his gun and dashing looks. Her attitudes towards him are caricatured in the following illustration:

**Image 33** – Marianne is in love



Marianne's exaggerated features make her behaviour comic. Not only her chin resting on her hands, and her hurt foot pointing up, but also the cat and the painting react to her as if telling her to stop such nonsense.

As Marianne and Willoughby grow their attachment, Elinor tries to make her have some sense, since Marianne would not realise how improper her behaviour with her suitor was.

Colonel Brandon, in love with Marianne, admired her romanticism and frowned at Willoughby. The letter he receives from London makes him dislike Willoughby even more. Even Elinor suspects something is wrong when Willoughby leaves Devonshire for London abruptly.

As Marianne recovers from this first heartbreak, Edward Ferrars visits the Dashwoods. Elinor notices he has not been quite happy, and something was going on. Marianne notices he wears a ring with a lock of hair, and Elinor notices the colour is the same as hers – perhaps it was hers? But, as she does with her feelings for most of the novel, she does not tell anyone of her suspicions.

Mrs Jennings receives two cousins as guests – the sisters Steele, Nancy and Lucy. The girls were very different, Lucy being polite, and Nancy being plain in face and words. Nadin focuses on her accent when she speaks of men: “‘I never said there weren’t any,’ said Nancy. ‘And p’raps the Dashwoods an’t interested anyway [...]’” (NADIN, 2020, p. 96). Of the six authors, Nadin concerns with the accent and manners of speaking of different classes the most.

Of the engagement of Edward to Lucy Steele, Nadin creates a suspense until Lucy reveals it to Elinor. Not only the couple had been engaged for four years, but Lucy also believes their bond is still strong – and “Elinor found, to her profound belief (for she had worried in her anger, that she was becoming a tad too like Marianne), that however much it saddened her, she did agree” (NADIN, 2020, p. 110). Elinor’s concern to keep her senses is highlighted here and in other moments of the novel. It does not show at first, but this characteristic will change in Elinor.

The Dashwood sisters are invited by Mrs Jennings to spend part of the winter in London with her. I would like to show here an interesting nod Ceulemans makes as she illustrates Marianne looking for Willoughby in the streets:

**Image 34** – Marianne looks for Willoughby



As Marianne anxiously looks at people, not at the windows of the stores, one of the shops is called Bingley – a nod Ceulemans makes to *Pride and Prejudice*.

Before Marianne's second heartbreak, Colonel Brandon visits them at Mrs Jennings' house. He tells Elinor that he hopes Willoughby deserves Marianne. Elinor does not understand at first, growing suspicious of him again: "Was Willoughby less of a gentleman than they had all supposed?" (NADIN, 2020, p. 127). Her doubts on him would be answered soon, as he got engaged to someone else. Not only that, but he also sends a letter to Marianne in which he says she was mistaken for believing he was interested in her.

Colonel Brandon, acknowledging Marianne was sad, visits them again and tells Elinor his story. Nadin mixes free indirect speech with direct speech, the first focusing more on Colonel's youth. As his story progresses, she slowly changes to direct speech. When Willoughby enters his story with a scandal, Elinor realises it was best for Marianne to stay away from him – and Colonel Brandon becomes a better prospect.

The Dashwoods stay in London also has another shake when they meet their half-brother. John tells Elinor Mrs Ferrars wishes to make Edward marry a rich woman. Elinor notices how John had been influenced by his wife and mother-in-law, as he says "[...] She and Mrs Ferrars were most concerned that you were keeping company with... unsavoury types. Mrs Jennings,' he added. 'I suppose you know her husband got his money in a... low way'" (NADIN, 2020, p. 161). Mr Jennings, as Elinor answers him, worked for his wealth, so Nadin uses John Dashwood to expose a prejudiced view on working classes – as seen in *Emma*, with the Coles.

At this point on, Elinor's feelings become the centre of the reader's attention. The Steeles also go to London, to visit Mrs Jennings, and they are all invited to dine at Mrs Ferrars. Because Mrs Ferrars and Fanny like Lucy, she has some privilege among them, and Elinor feels jealous of her. Nadin anticipates again, engaging the reader further: "Signs, however, have a tendency to be misread, especially by lovelorn young ladies. And in this case, both Lucy and Elinor had misjudged the situation terribly" (NADIN, 2020, p. 176).

Mrs Jennings tells the effects of the truth being revealed: Lucy was not regarded by Mrs Ferrars as a daughter-in-law. Elinor tells Marianne at last what she had been concealing, trying to convince herself it was all over. She finds out Edward was disinherited, and so does Colonel Brandon, who offers him his parish. Mrs Jennings, so fond of gossip, notices the smiles in Elinor and Colonel's faces. She believes they are in a relationship.

Going back home, Elinor and Marianne stop at Cleveland, Mrs Palmer's house. Mrs Palmer is the second daughter of Mrs Jennings, and is married to an angry Mr Palmer. These two characters are not much explored in the retelling, other than now. Marianne walks in the rain and falls ill. Unable to go home soon, she stays in bed. Mrs Jennings' gossip spreads, and Willoughby visits, trying to see her one last time, and regretting his choices. Elinor's attitude to him is firm, noticing all his lies and attempts to make himself less guilty. She finishes the conversation with him by sending him away: "'Oh, Willoughby.' Elinor almost laughed at the audacity. 'Don't you see? She is lost to you already,' she said, and slammed the door firmly in his face" (NADIN, 2020, p. 208). Once Marianne gets better and they go back home, she admits to Elinor she had been blind for her want of passion.

As for Elinor, Edward visits her, and tells Lucy married his brother Robert, the heir of the Ferrars' fortune. Elinor and Edward get married at last. And "as her sister had discovered her own romantic sensibilities, Marianne had, at last, become exceptionally sensible" (NADIN, 2020, p. 226), marrying Colonel Brandon.

The section "And what was it like in 1811?" explores inheritance, such as the ways in which it was passed on, preventing younger brothers and daughters to have a share of the greater valued property, and disinheritance. Second homes and poorhouses are also present in this section.

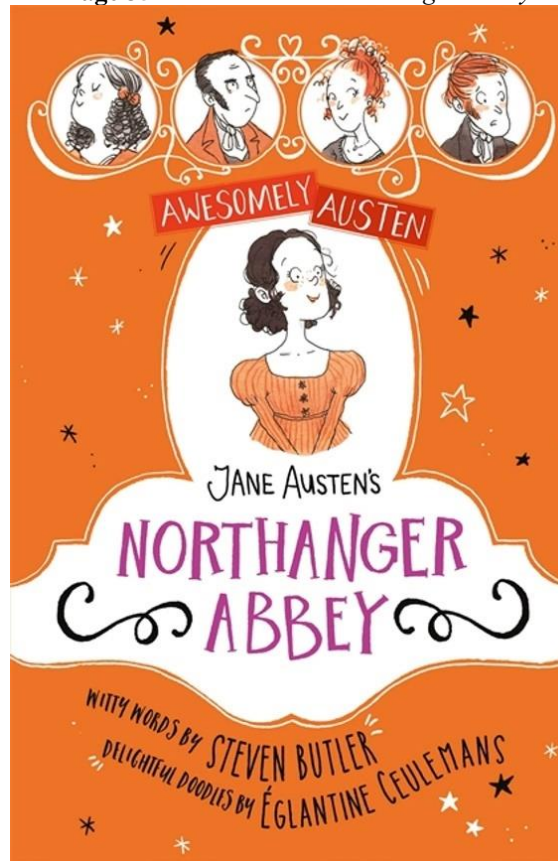
The retelling of *Sense and Sensibility* contains more of Marianne's passions than Elinor's senses – perhaps because those passions lead to many events in Marianne's life, and they lead to Elinor's learning from them. Both let sense and sensibility be shared within themselves, a balance that makes Elinor and Marianne happy. For child readers, *Sense and Sensibility* has this lesson, but also carries the notion of the female place in a society that is both distant and close to the twenty-first century society. Nadin's political views are a skill useful for this, and her experience in writing children's books makes it less a protest and more an acknowledgment.

### ***3.6 Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey***

The last book presented in this section is *Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey*. The orange cover contains the title in purple, with Catherine Morland's face in the middle, and Isabella Thorpe, General Tilney, Eleanor Tilney, and Henry Tilney on top. The colours orange and

purple are analogous and, being warm, they are more vivacious than the cool tones in the cover of *Jane Austen's Mansfield Park*. Orange and purple help to set the happy tone of *Northanger Abbey*.

Image 35 – Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*



The author who retells the adventures of Catherine Morland is Steven Butler. As well as an actor, he is a writer of children's books, for which he won the Sainsbury's Fiction Prize (BOOKSHOP, 2022). As well as Joanna Nadin, he admits in his note that "I, Steven Butler, didn't read an Austen novel until I was thirty-seven years old" (BUTLER, 2020, p. 229), and praises the young reader for doing so. In this section, he also puts together his own writing with Austen's *Northanger Abbey* once it contains mischief and impishness.

The original novel is one of the early writings of Austen, and it was "written as a deliberate parody of the popular 'horrid' novels of the period" (LE FAYE, 2002, p. 205). The mocking tone of Austen begins with a narrator who speaks with the reader, a choice maintained by Butler: "If you had met Catherine Morland when she was young, my dear reader, you wouldn't think in a million years that she might one day grow up to become the heroine of her own strange and exciting story" (BUTLER, 2020, p. 1). The idea of the heroine of the "horrid



novels” is maintained here as well, as it carries the idea of heroism that children see in superheroes.

Having grown up mainly with her older brothers, Catherine would behave much like them. However, as the teenage years approach, “she was showing signs of turning into a... a... POLITE YOUNG WOMAN!?” (BUTLER, 2020, p. 3). This writing in capital letters to emphasize certain behaviours and absurdities is one of the marks of Butler’s writing.

Catherine’s adventures begin with Mr and Mrs Allen, a childless couple who travel to Bath and invite her to go with them. Mr and Mrs Allen are caricatural people, him for having gout, and her for caring about nothing but fashion. They are presented in a dialogue at the beginning of the second chapter, with an opening line by Mrs Allen: “‘Too much wine and cheese,’ Mrs Allen sighed, shaking her head at her husband’s round belly. ‘And not enough exercise!’” (BUTLER, 2020, p. 6). Witty sentences such as this appear both through narrative report and through dialogue.

Despite her wishes of great adventures in Bath, what Catherine lives through is quite ordinary. In the first ball, nothing extraordinary happens, as the group lives in a stablished routine. Mrs Allen starts to show what she is (not) concerned with, repeating how she longed to have friends in Bath, which irritates Catherine. It changes when she meets Henry Tilney in another ball.

Beyond being lively and pleasing, he is funny as well: “I haven’t asked you any of the *terribly important* questions a partner *has* to ask. Can you ever forgive me for being so neglectful?” (BUTLER, 2020, p. 21, highlights by the author). The highlighted words imply a different tone of voice, as Catherine’s reaction is to giggle and ask herself “Could Henry also be someone who thought the rules of high society seemed a little... she could barely bring herself to think of it... stupid?” (BUTLER, 2020, p. 21). In this sense, both characters mock society manners as they dance and make small talk.

Finally, Mrs Allen finds an acquaintance in Bath: Mrs Thorpe, who was a school peer in their youth.

**Image 36 – Mrs Thorpe**



In the image above, Mrs Allen and Catherine are seated on the right side, as Mrs Thorpe is seated on the left side. In the back, the three Thorpe daughters are standing. Ceulemans portrays the scenario of the Pump Room as well and it looks like the real room. The lack of uniformity in the lines shows that what is in the back is not as important as what is in the front. In the text, the two women engage in a conversation about Mrs Thorpe children, and, as Mrs Allen does not add on the subject, she stares Mrs Thorpe’s dress – noticeable in the drawing since their eyes do not meet.

Isabella Thorpe, the eldest daughter, befriends Catherine at that moment. They talk of many subjects, one of them being books. Isabella presents Catherine the world of horror novels. Butler anticipates that the next events of the story depend on Catherine’s interest in these novels: “Let’s not forget, my dear reader, books are to blame for everything that happens over the next few hundred pages. Just as you are reading this story now, Catherine is so inspired by the heart-stopping adventures she reads in her novels, that she gets into all sorts of trouble” (BUTLER, 2020, p. 37). Here, he suggests the reader to pay attention to Catherine’s actions, of how related to novels they are.

Even though they meet and hang out many times, Catherine does not notice how much Isabella is unreliable. The attention-seeker says one thing, and does another. In pages 54 and

55, she says she will not dance with James Morland until Catherine has a partner to dance as well, just to tell her James protests they should dance. “Catherine hadn’t noticed James protesting at all, but she smiled and nodded” (BUTLER, 2020, p. 55). As Catherine gives in, Isabella maintains the behaviour. It is the same with Isabella’s brother, John Thorpe. He does not curse as in the original novel, but has a bad behaviour that is not properly discouraged.

Catherine reacts to the selfish attitudes of Isabella, John, and James Morland, her brother, as they wish to visit Blaise Castle. The place caught Catherine’s attention, for it reminded her of the novels she was reading. However, she preferred the company of Henry and Eleanor Tilney, to whom she wished to be acquainted and become friends. The selfishness of the group causes Catherine’s reaction: “‘I don’t care!’ Catherine said furiously. ‘Mr Thorpe had no right to lie to her. Isabella, LET ME GO!’” (BUTLER, 2020, p. 100). The capital letters have the effect of yelling, when combined to the adverb “furiously”.

A few days later, when Isabella is calmer, she tells Catherine her brother proposed.

**Image 37** – Isabella Thorpe gets engaged



In the image above, Isabella dances with the letter of approval by the Morlands. Mrs Thorpe cries, filled with emotion. Such happiness is not sincere, though, since Isabella later dances with Frederick Tilney after claiming she would not dance with anyone. Also, she gets upset that her wedding not only would not happen soon, but also James would not receive more

than four hundred pounds a year (Butler cares to explain that this amount is a lot of money at the time the story passes).

After seeing the Tilneys for a few times and becoming friends with Eleanor, Catherine is invited to visit them at Northanger Abbey. The prospects of getting to know an actual abbey makes Catherine wonder what the place looks like – maybe it was haunted, like the stories she reads. Ceulemans portrays Catherine’s imagination in the image below:

**Image 38** – Catherine imagines Northanger Abbey



The drawing of Catherine, the desk, and the objects of real life, there and now, are drawn in ink, coloured in black. The image of the ghost and of the vampire are still in pencil, meaning they are not physical – nor real. But her imagination is fed during the journey there, as Henry tells her nightmarish stories.

Catherine takes the night to explore her room. In the morning, she realises the foolishness of her actions: “She felt her cheeks blush when she saw Henry sitting at the table, even though he had no idea of the idiotic things she had got up to last night [...] Even talking about last night seemed to betray her stupidity” (BUTLER, 2020, p. 168-169). Using free indirect thought, Butler exposes Catherine’s opinion on her own doing.

Even though she knows that such a belief is not realistic, she investigates the abbey to find out more about Mrs Tilney and whether she was murdered by General Tilney. When Henry finds her in Mrs Tilney’s room, he confronts her for thinking their life was like a novel. Despite being hurt, he treats her well afterwards.

It is while Catherine is at the abbey that she notices how ambiguous Isabella is. First, James sends her a letter to tell her he broke off his engagement with Isabella. Then, she sends Catherine a letter to ask her to make amends with James for her. “Such a lot of lies could not even appeal to Catherine’s kind heart. The letter was full of them! It was stuffed with falseness and inconsistencies right from the first line” (BUTLER, 2020, p. 206), bringing especially the topic of Frederick Tilney.

When Catherine is sent away from Northanger Abbey (as General Tilney is told by John Thorpe that she is not rich, but very poor), she has to go back to Fullerton by herself. The heroine idea is mentioned again: “You think there should be trumpet fanfares and parades and feasting for weeks to come, and here we are bringing our heroine home in misery and disgrace” (BUTLER, 2020, p. 218). Butler speaks directly to the reader again, both conflicting their expectations and telling them there is a twist to come: Henry goes after her, and she finds out it was all John Thorpe’s fault. Butler reminds the reader of specific moments of the narrative that are key to the end: “You remember the night at the theatre, when Catherine had seen him talking to General Tilney?” (BUTLER, 2020, p. 224).

The dialogue with the reader is maintained until the end, when Butler presents a moral to the story:

I suppose the message of this tale, if it has one at all, is that love does not come from being quiet or docile, well-to-do or empty-headed, pretty or poised. No... love comes from a delicious mix of wild fancies, too many books, friendships, tyranny, kindness, tantrums, beating hearts, foolishness, tenderness, looking at the world with sparkling eyes, laughing until you cry and lots and lots of disobedience... (BUTLER, 2020, p. 226-227)

Unlike the general moral of children’s stories, the one added by Butler is not parent-approved, but realistic and related to Austen’s ideas.

The context section “And what was it like in 1817?” brings reading as pastime, how common it was (not) for people to travel to other countries, and curiosities on the Bath Assembly Rooms and the Pump Room.

Steven Butler, the only male author, works well with the parodic Northanger Abbey. His use of capital letters and specific uses of punctuation suit the retelling, despite looking childish. The focus on the Tilneys increases at the abbey only, as it happens with the illustrations. This novel has many appealing aspects to children, especially the (mockery of) Gothic and the idea of a heroine.

## 4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

When I purchased the *Awesomely Austen* collection, I did not imagine what was to follow, not what I was about to find. As I read the books, I started to ask myself what purposes Hachette UK had when it created this collection. Then this research took form. Reading about children as readers, I reached literature about the field of retellings, and learned that authors who do retellings must take into consideration that they are dealing with very special readers, who are still developing reading skills, both in terms of language and in terms of narrative nuances. In the same way I, when analysing a book for children, should not behave as if I were working with a book for adults.

Jane Austen is an author who still has things to say about her society, and ours as well. As she questions the morals of her society, she questions the role of women, of social class. This reminds me of Colomer's considerations about the access to cultural traditions, for such traditions shape our society, being either kept or changed as time passes and different views are adopted. After reading the retellings, my impression is that the six authors of the *Awesomely Austen* collection feel how bold Austen was in the treatment of her themes and characters. She pokes haughty people for mistreating their inferiors. Do not we do the same things nowadays? When we trace the history of feminism we find Mary Wollstonecraft as a milestone, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and Jane Austen, some decades later.

The fact that Austen's novels are very popular now attests that the twists of her fictional world still reflect our present-day preoccupations, and young readers interact so well with the text of Austen's original that there seems to be no need for retellings of her novels. So, the conclusion I get is that Hachette UK is not aiming at young readers (teenagers and young adults), it is aiming at children. The texts are considerably shortened, the types are bigger, the pages are thicker, the drawings and the cover appealing. For such readers, the originals would certainly seem enormous. They would be even difficult to unravel if we consider an unexperienced reader. What Hachette UK did in triggering this collection was to extend the range of Austen's texts to readers four or five years younger, children whose reading habits are being developed, who are not yet ready to notice the subtleties of Austen's irony. Irony is the weapon Jane Austen uses to expose the contradictions of her characters and of the society they live in. With irony and subtlety, she clearly conveys meanings that would be shocking if stated. The authors of the retellings, however, are addressing a different reading public, who are not ready to deal with understatement. Therefore, it would be unethical on their part, for instance,

to manipulate the reactions of an eight-year-old reader with the use of free indirect speech. According to Hunt, free indirect speech is a refinement that should be used with caution in children's books. A concern regarding narrative in children's literature is the author's uncertainty about whether the child will or not decipher the meanings of the text. So, the author's decision is to control the way events are reported – including the representation of speech. Free indirect speech allowed Austen to insert her own opinion without shocking the readers of her time. However, the voice of a woman questioning society nowadays is something perfectly acceptable, so it is more convenient for the six authors of the *Awesomely Austen* collection to state things directly in their retellings.

Hunt's list of criteria to be adopted in retellings was important for this analysis and set light on the different strategies used by Birchall, Dhimi, Woodfine, Malik, Nadin and Butler. Each offers different readings of the originals according to their own perceptions of childhood, children's literature, and Austen. Ceulemans' illustrations and the graphic pattern of the collection offer the unity of the collection, whose books are not numbered and therefore can be read in any possible order. One thing all authors involved have in common, though, is the fact that they agree on what roles Austen represents to our society. Besides being acknowledged professionals, they are also good readers of her novels. They know when to be light or heavy in the narration, and how to translate aspects of Austen's society into our present-day reality. In spite of their different styles, all authors accomplish their tasks and explain what they have to explain.

Other aspects of Austen's fiction are conveyed through the peritexts, which provide complementary information about each of the respective books. As for the narrative and presentation of speech, none of them underestimates the intelligence of their readers, or fear the children might not understand the text. They all present irony to a certain point, although in a lesser degree in relation to Austen's original. After all, without a touch of irony that would not be Austen. They add dialogues whenever it is convenient, using more the voices of the characters than the explanations of the narrator, so that the children may interact more comfortably with the story.

Another important point is the plot of each story. The novels finish with a happy ending, when the female protagonists manage to fulfill their social duty of getting married without having to go against their nature or betraying their values. What happens before that is what varies in each novel. The development of the protagonist is a theme that makes the young reader interested in the novel, and as Austen has the development of her protagonists as a central point,

the readers very easily interact with the retellings. Out of the six novels, perhaps *Mansfield Park* is the harder to interact with, as in the retelling Fanny Price's development happens in the shadows, as most of the events in this novel concern other characters rather than the protagonist. Also, this is the first retelling for children done by its author, Ayisha Malik. These two facts may account for the fact that *Jane Austen's Mansfield Park* looks different from the rest – it seems more reduced in length than rewritten.

On the whole, although the different authors approach and see Austen in their own way, they all follow the general guidelines of the Hachette UK project. And the physical format of the books added to the fact that the whole series – covers included – is illustrated by the same artist avow for the unity and identity of the collection. The simplicity of style in Églantine Ceuleman's trace marks a deliberate choice, triggering a deliberate effect in the children's reading process. Although the drawings follow the same techniques and style, they work differently in different retellings. In *Jane Austen's Emma*, the illustrations concentrate on funny scenes, with exaggerations to mark some characters' actions, emphasizing important scenes in the story. In *Jane Austen's Persuasion*, the opposition of dark and light in the images reflects Anne Elliot's mind and moods. In *Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*, the predominant trace favours facial expression features, especially in the case of Elizabeth Bennet. *Jane Austen's Mansfield Park*, differently from the other cases, has fewer illustrations with the function of complementing the meaning of the text. In *Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne's romantic approach to life is favoured in the illustrations. In *Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey*, Butler's text uses resources that make the text predominate over image.

The peripheral information provided in each book, in the section “And what was it like in the 18...?” may be suggestive of a possible order for the reading of the books, as the content introduces social practices of Austen's time considered necessary to understand certain aspects of the stories. Readers are introduced to Georgian society, Rural England, and the Austen concerns about female circumstances concerning life, marriage, money, considered relevant to the understanding of the logic behind each novel. Since money and independence are the main concerns of women – especially single women at a marriageable age – inheritance and education are important to be considered first. The retellings of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* contain complementary information about such themes in the last section of the book. The other three, *Persuasion*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Northanger Abbey*, address themes more specific of the books, rather than general aspects of Austen's time.

Although the books can be sold separately, the uniformity in the internal and external



features of the collection shows that they work better as a set. The complementary harmony in the pastel colours of the covers also suggests that they could be bought together. Ceulemans' drawings and graphic display of the covers are meant to be attractive both to the children who will read the books and to the adults who will buy them. And the effect of the books displayed on a shelf might slightly tend to be considered more appealing to girls than to boys – this because of the colours used in the covers, the curved lines used in the drawings, and the general idea that Austen is predominantly read among women. The pattern of the book covers, the material, and the illustrations, produced to resemble watercolour, make nods to the books of Austen's time. The style of the drawings and the colours draw the attention of young readers. It is only natural that the editing companies would seize the moment and profit from this favourable season.

From the 1990s onwards, the critical fortune of Jane Austen's works has been growing steadily, accompanied by the release of TV series and film adaptations, and exponential growth in communities of fans. It is only natural that the editing companies profited from this special moment. It is no wonder that Hachette UK decided to create a collection of retellings of an author so dear to many readers across the world. The *Awesomely Austen* collection is appealing to children, to adults who want to introduce their children to literary texts, and to the Austenite community as well. The novelty of the project is the idea of selling Austen as a product to younger readers, from the age of eight, who are likely to buy the originals when they grow older. The industry set in motion to accomplish this plan offers jobs to experienced authors, who specialize in children's literature and in Austen studies, to a great number of professionals from the editing area, here represented by the work of the illustrator Ceulemans, widens the reading public of Jane Austen, and provides material that can be used at home and in schools. The care with the young readers is visible at different levels, making each retelling unique. Personally, I would love to meet Jane Austen at such a tender age, and I believe that the project proposed with this collection achieves its purpose. The *Awesomely Austen: Illustrated and Retold* collection is a commercial product that establishes connections with young readers, and hopefully will make them develop an interest in the literature of this remarkable English author.

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