DEBORAH MONDADORI SIMIONATO

COMING OF AGE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: AN ANALYSIS OF FEMALE SPACE IN *MANSFIELD PARK* AND *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*, BY JANE AUSTEN; *JANE EYRE*, BY CHARLOTTE BRONTË; AND *NORTH AND SOUTH*, BY ELIZABETH GASKELL

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Aos meus pais, Aldérico e Beatriz.
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"As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world."

Virginia Woolf***, Three Guineas***

RESUMO

O presente trabalho propõe uma análise do processo de formação, ou *coming of age*, feminino em quatro romances do século dezenove que se passam na Inglaterra, com o propósito de verificar como tal processo está intrinsicamente ligado à exploração do próprio espaço pessoal, seja ele físico, social ou metafórico. Formam o corpus dessa pesquisa os romances *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) e *Mansfield Park* (1814), de Jane Austen, ambos publicados durante o Período Regencial (1811 – 1820); *Jane Eyre* (1847), de Charlotte Brontë e *North and South* (1854), de Elizabeth Gaskell, publicados durante as primeiras décadas do Período Vitoriano (1837 – 1901). Os romances são pareados devido a suas semelhanças: *Mansfield Park* e *Jane Eyre*; *Pride & Prejudice* e *North & South*. A análise desses dois pares permite que paralelos sejam traçados entre os dois períodos do século XIX em que eles foram produzidos, focando na vida dessas protagonistas femininas criadas na primeira metade do século, especialmente considerando os espaços que elas podem ou não ocupar, e como elas navegam esses espaços; oferecendo, assim, uma janela através da qual pode-se observar a vida no século XIX. O presente estudo começa com Austen, no Período Regencial, e continua através das primeiras décadas do longo Período Vitoriano, examinando os mundos fictícios e personagens criados por essas três escritoras, além de examinar os espaços físicos, sociais e metafóricos em que as personagens mulheres circulam – ou não circulam. Além de analisar a transição das protagonistas para a idade adulta, o presente estudo tem como objetivo olhar para a relação delas com suas casas, e para como o processo de se tornar adulto, de crescer, está intrinsicamente ligado ao processo de encontrar um lar, um lugar ao qual se pertença. Isso é feito com o suporte de pensadores como Mary Poovey, Leonore Davidoff e Catherine Hall, entre outros, cujo entendimento de como a sociedade funcionava na Inglaterra do século XIX são ferramentas valiosas para possibilitar as análises empreendidas nessa tese. Visando contribuir para com os estudos e a fortuna crítica das três autoras, através da análise dos romances selecionados e suas protagonistas, essa pesquisa pretende entender o que significava para mulheres crescer nas primeiras décadas do século XIX: como essas mulheres lidavam com a ideologia das esferas separadas; como elas questionavam o status quo e o ideal do anjo do lar, a fim de atingir seus objetivos, ou como elas aceitavam tais ideais; e finalmente como essas representações femininas criadas por escritoras seguem influenciando movimentos sociais e literários até hoje.

Palavras-chave: Literatura inglesa do século XIX; Espaço feminino; O anjo do lar; Jane Austen; Charlotte Brontë; Elizabeth Gaskell.

ABSTRACT

The present work analyses the process of female coming of age in four nineteenth-century novels set in England, so as to verify how this process is intrinsically linked to the exploration of one's personal space, be it physical, social, or metaphorical. The novels that form the corpus of the research are Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Mansfield Park* (1814), both published during the Regency Period (1811 – 1820); and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854), published during the Early Victorian Era (1837 – 1901). The novels are paired according to their similarities: *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre*; *Pride & Prejudice* and *North & South*. The analysis of these pairs allows me to draw parallels between the two periods of the nineteenth century in which they were produced, focusing on the lives of these female protagonists created in the first half of the century, especially when it comes to the spaces they are allowed – or not allowed – to occupy, and how they navigate such spaces, offering a glimpse into the nineteenth century itself. The study starts with Austen, in the Regency Era, and continues through the early decades of the long Victorian Era, examining fictional worlds and characters created by the three authors, and the social, physical and metaphorical spaces in which female characters circulate – or do not circulate. In addition to analysing the protagonists' transition into adulthood, this study aims to look at their relationship with their homes (or lack thereof), and how the process of growing up is intrinsically linked to that of finding one's own home, or a place where one belongs. The research is carried out with the scholarly support of scholars such as Mary Poovey, Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall, amongst others, whose grasps on the innerworkings of the nineteenth century are valuable as a reading support to the aforementioned novels in order to fulfil the objectives of this work. As well as furthering the studies and critical fortune of the three novelists, through the analysis of the works selected and their protagonists, this study intends to appreciate what it meant for women to come of age in the first half of the nineteenth century: how these women coped with the ideology of separate spheres, how they challenged the *status quo* and the angel in the house ideal in order to achieve their goals, how they often conformed to it; and how these first portrayals of womanhood by female authors influence literary and social movements to this day.

Keywords: Nineteenth-century English literature; Female space; Angel in the house; Jane Austen; Charlotte Brontë; Elizabeth Gaskell.

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INTRODUCTION:
"A NATURAL SEQUEL OF AN UNNATURAL BEGINNING"[1]

> ***Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without farther expense to anybody.***
> Jane Austen, ***Mansfield Park***

The nineteenth century is the source of countless works of fiction that helped shape the way we think and write today. Through the creations of its authors, we are allowed glimpses at what the world was like nearly two hundred years ago. The United Kingdom has been prolific in producing novelists and artists who had the ability to portray the world around them, and who are still an essential part of syllabuses and reading lists. Despite preceding the Women's Right's movements that agitated the early decades of the twentieth-century, the nineteenth century nurtured female novelists whose novels have become classics and who have paved the path to the authors who came after them, as well as having shed light on what it was like to be a woman in a world strictly dominated by men. Thus, in the present research I propose to analyse four nineteenth-century novels to understand how their female characters lived in the first half of the nineteenth century, in England, especially regarding how women navigated society, comparing and contrasting what it meant to be a woman and how it determined the places in which they circulated – and *how* they circulated in them – both in the Regency period and in the early Victorian times, comprising a timespan of about fifty years. Moreover, I look at the process of coming of age of these female characters, and how these journeys and developments are linked to finding one's place in the world.

The 1800s in Britain are often labelled as "the Victorian Era", neglecting that Queen Victoria only acceded to the throne in 1837, and that the Georgian Period that preceded the young queen's reign had its own characteristics and left unique marks. The name of the period comes from the fact that the four kings who reigned between 1714 and 1820 were all called George (I, II, III and IV). Another expression often employed to talk about the period in which Jane Austen, amongst others, produced her novels is "The Regency Era", and it refers to the time when the Prince of Wales took over his father's role, after King George III (who, it is believed, suffered from porphyria) became mentally incapacitated. The Regency lasted from

[1] From Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, the focus of my Master's Degree thesis.

1810 to 1820, after which the Prince Regent became King George IV. His reign ended in 1830, but the expression "Regency Era" is usually extended to include the reign of King William IV, who was on the throne for only seven years, from the death of King George IV in 1830 to the ascension of Queen Victoria, in 1837.

Much changed between the Prince of Wales' regency and the rise of Queen Victoria – not only did the monarchs change, but society transformed. From an intellectual perspective, the rise of the novel meant that more people read books; consequently, the demand for new writers grew, propelling a greater exchange of ideas and knowledge; economically, the Industrial Revolution was gaining strength. By the time Queen Victoria came to power, the English landscape had been altered by enclosures, factories and mills, not to mention the dramatic changes brought by the railways.[2] The political scenario was, again, in constant transformation: King George III had lost the American colonies, but Napoleon had finally been defeated, and the British Empire continued to grow, reaching its peak during Victoria's reign. Socially, the changes were subtle, but ever-present, especially for middle-classed women and those of the landed gentry. These latter changes are the ones in which I am interested, and hope to have a better look at in this study.

The research is conducted through the analysis of four works of fiction, namely Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Mansfield Park* (1814), both published during the Regency Period; and Charlotte Brontë's and Elizabeth Gaskell's works, focusing on *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *North and South* (1854). The novels have been paired according to their similarities when it comes to certain elements of the plot and characters: *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre; Pride & Prejudice* and *North & South*. The analyses of these works allow parallels and comparisons between the two periods of the nineteenth century in which they were produced, focusing on what life was like for women in the first half of the nineteenth century, especially when it comes to the spaces they were allowed – or not allowed – to occupy.

The study of the spheres women were permitted to occupy is of relevance to the twenty-first century, when discussions on such subjects are carried out with increasing frequency, as the world strives for equality in the midst of constant setbacks, in an attempt to deconstruct some of the binaries established centuries back. There is still a long way to go, especially when it comes to what is attributed to a woman's place and duties, and what is socially expected from them. As scholar Mary Poovey argues, "because gender roles are part of familial, political, social, and economic relationships, the terms in which femininity is publicly formulated dictate,

[2] Except when expressly referred otherwise, factual references presented in this section come from the work *The Victorians,* by A. N. Wilson (2002).

in large measure, the way femaleness is subjectively experienced" (POOVEY, p. x, 1984). That is true about what it means to be a woman both in the twenty-first century and in the early decades of the nineteenth century. As it is hard to look at events while they are happening, the proposal here is to look back, through literature, and analyse if and how a few decades can produce changes in the foundations of how things are perceived, altering the form through which women relate to their surroundings.

Another reason for the relevance of this study is that, after carrying a survey on the Lattes databank of theses and dissertations, I found that there are few studies on Austen, Brontë, and Gaskell, and none that combines their works in order to draw parallels. Furthermore, a look at the *PPG Letras* databank of works produced in this Institution indicates similar results: there are not many works dedicated to either of the three authors, and even fewer approaching their works as primary sources. For those reasons, the proposed research serves to broaden the knowledge about these authors and their works, as well as furthering the studies on nineteenth century literature and womanhood. Furthermore, this grants me the possibility to pay homage to three important novelists, whose womanhood has caused them to be, at times, ignored by academics, but whose readership remains loyal and growing throughout the decades.

The present research also comes as a natural sequence to my Master's Degree thesis, which explored the meaning behind three forms of journeys in Jane Austen's last complete novel, *Persuasion* (1817). The themes of womanhood and of how women circulated in different spaces were present in my previous work, and I now intend to delve deeper in those waters. After finishing my thesis, I was left with a strong desire to continue investigating the subject, and the realisation that my passion was for the nineteenth century and its prolific literature meant that whatever I was to produce in future would most likely be centred in the study of works produced in the British Isles during that time.

As I am still very passionate about Austen, and feel there is much more to explore and understand in her body of works, it is my intention to further my studies on that author, especially when it comes to *Pride & Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*, novels with strikingly different protagonists and public response. As well as being keen to further my studies on Austen, I am interested in moving forward with my previous research, expanding it in order to make a more in-depth contribution to the studies about the nineteenth century. For that reason, Austen's works appear twice and always function as a starting point from which to analyse the works of Brontë and Gaskell. The Brontë sisters, Charlotte in particular, have been a strong presence in my life, and have awakened in me an unwavering interest in the Victorians. Brontë's *Jane Eyre* still resonates with the twenty-first century reader, as it continues to offer endless

possibilities of analysis. Through Charlotte Brontë, I became familiar with Elizabeth Gaskell, or Mrs Gaskell, the name under which her works were published, and developed an interest in her works as well. *North & South* is one of her most prominent novels, a realistic portrayal of the changing world in which she lived. These three authors wrote at different times, but are often grouped together, and I hope this research will serve as yet another differentiator between the periods in which they produced, exploring how these distinctions affect their plots and characters.

Thus, one of my intentions with this study is to further my previous research, this time looking transversally at the works produced by the three authors, exploring the society to which the characters belonged, how they placed themselves in their context, how they navigated their situations, and why they made the choices they inevitably did. I am interested in learning and contributing to the knowledge about the first decades of the nineteenth century, as well as better comprehending what was behind the ideal constructed for women, how they accepted that ideal or detached themselves from it, as seen in the literature of the time.

The novels chosen to compose the core corpus of this research were selected due to, firstly, my great appreciation of them as a reader, for they have been my companions for many years, much like Mrs Bennet's nerves were Mr Bennet's constant companions in *Pride & Prejudice*. Secondly, and most importantly to this work, they were chosen for their parallelisms, as well as their many differences. They all touch heavily on the theme of womanhood, at a time when feminism did not exist as a political movement – something which only came about at the end of the nineteenth century, with the concept of the "New Woman" and the fight for the suffrage.

Womanhood and femininity are both important concepts in this work, the first referring to the condition of being a woman, and to our purposes, the condition of being a woman in nineteenth-century Britain: what was expected from women, the ideals against which they were judged, and how they conformed or defied them. Femininity, on the other hand, is part of this ideal, it is prescriptive: it shuns sexuality for angelic behaviour, purity (chastity), and religious values. There was no space for different versions of femininity in the *status quo*, for whatever deviated from the norm was monstrous. As Nina Auerbach explains in her study of the mythology surrounding women, the only female possibility in the nineteenth century was one of extremes: "there is no human norm of womanhood, for she has no home on earth, but only among divine and demonic essences" (AUERBACH, 1982, p. 64), thus, both womanhood and femininity relate to these extremities, the first referring to the very condition of living in the world as a woman, which then informs the second regarding what was expected from women,

an impossible ideal way of being and behaving. The main characters I follow in the four novels analysed here are all women, and all of them struggle in their attempts to conform to societal expectations at the same time as they defy them, for they are impossible to achieve, and being so, all that is left for women to do is to juggle between being true to themselves and their wishes while attempting to be a "proper lady", as suggested by Mary Poovey (1985).

As mentioned before, the four novels examined have women as protagonists, and their journeys are all coming-of-age stories. Coming of age in novels, or *bildungsroman*, refers to the process of growing up and education of characters physically and, especially, emotionally. Here, I will look at this process through the movements and journeys of the novels' protagonists, since the main thread connecting these four women is that they are all, to some extent, homeless – or about to become so. Their search for a home, be it physical or metaphorical, is the propeller of the novels, as well as of this study, and it is my intention to look at how their coming of age is intrinsically linked to this search.

Mansfield Park (1814) is the first novel among what are considered Austen's mature works, alongside *Emma* (1815) and *Persuasion* (1817). In the centre of this work is Fanny Price. Broadly considered mousy and uninteresting, both in the fictional world and by readers, Fanny is a poor relation to the Bertrams. She is taken in by them at an early age, as her parents had too many children to bring up in less than ideal conditions. Fanny grows up in the stately Mansfield Park, surrounded by her mother's sisters, the languid Lady Bertram, and the spiteful Mrs Norris, along with the often absent but somewhat menacing father figure of Sir Thomas Bertram, and Fanny's four cousins: the eldest and reckless Tom; the one who tutors and guides her, Edmund, and the spoiled Maria and Julia, who are constantly reminded, by Mrs Norris, of their importance and high place in society. Fanny has to learn how to navigate the world without much guidance other than her cousin Edmund's friendship, trusting her own judgement and standing up for herself and her beliefs, even when they defy her powerful uncle and what her family and society expect from her.

Fanny Price's early Victorian counterpart is Jane Eyre, the protagonist of the eponymous work published by Charlotte Brontë in 1847, under the androgynous pseudonym Currer Bell. *Jane Eyre* also revolves around another poor relation, product of an imprudent marriage, the ward who has been taken in by more prominent family members, the Reeds. Unlike Fanny, however, Jane is an orphan, and her situation is more dire than that of Austen's heroine, for she is not simply overlooked, like Fanny, she is mistreated. From there through the grim Lowood Institution, we accompany Jane's growth into a quietly strong young woman, but still homeless. Jane Eyre's journey sees her through many houses, never truly belonging. She

has only herself to trust. The several characters who cross her path help her grow, and sometimes challenge her very existence, especially the men who surround her at different times – be it her cousin John Reed, the unforgiving Mr Brocklehurst, the saturnine Mr Rochester, or the missionary St John Rivers. *Jane Eyre* also allows us a glimpse at other interesting characters, such as another ward, the young French girl Adèle; or the (now iconic) madwoman in the attic, Bertha Mason. All three of them are taken from their original place without consultation, becoming homeless each in their specific way.

Back to Jane Austen, with *Pride & Prejudice* (1813), we find Elizabeth Bennet, sparkly and witty, in stark contrast with the unappealing Fanny Price. Elizabeth is one of five daughters of a landed gentleman whose financial situation has seen better days. When we meet her, she seems to know where she belongs, but her house and even position in society are threatened in every page by her parents' lack of a male heir. Mrs Bennet, her mother, lives in hope that one of her daughters will find a well-to-do man with whom to marry, thus securing their future as well as her own. For all her charm and wit, Lizzy, as she is known, needs to overcome her prejudice, and perhaps also her pride, towards many, in particular the stand-offish Mr Darcy, in order to guarantee her future. Here, Austen offers a variety of types of womanhood in the Bennet household, and beyond: from Lizzy's sisters, mainly Jane and Lydia, to her best friend, the practical Charlotte Lucas; to the supercilious Caroline Bingley, the sumptuous Lady Catherine DeBourgh, and the quiet Georgiana Darcy.

Elizabeth Bennet's Victorian parallel is the intelligent and bright Margaret Hale, the heroine of Mrs Gaskell's *North & South* (1855). Margaret is extracted from her quiet and gentlewomanly life in the south of England by her father, who decides to retire from the Church of England (or Anglican Church) and move up to the industrial north. Margaret loathes the idea of leaving her first home, especially when the rented rooms in the grey city of Milton seem so lacking in comparison to the comforts she has known before. Margaret cannot conform to her new life, from the place to its people; she does not accept she has to live in the north, even though the south is no longer her home. However, Milton and its inhabitants provide Margaret with the opportunity to learn about a different side of herself, ultimately causing her to change and grow. Bessy Higgins and her father Nicolas teach Margaret about the new world of factories and cotton mills, as well as poverty and disease. Margaret's relationship with Mr Thornton, a man from a world so completely different to her own, mirrors Elizabeth Bennet's relationship with Mr Darcy in *Pride & Prejudice*: the beginning is made of misunderstandings, prejudice and pride, and those elements can only dissipate when all the characters involved allow themselves to grow and empathise, seeing the world and its events through the other's eyes.

The four female protagonists are, in different ways, either displaced, or facing the possibility of displacement. It is not the displacement of immigrants or refugees, though there is a sense of not belonging anywhere, but the displacement one feels at the threshold between adolescence and adulthood, when one constantly attempts to feel at home within oneself. It is also, in these heroines' cases, a physical displacement that triggers new possibilities and calls for a new way of facing the world. That is why these novels are coming-of-age stories of young women who have to navigate their restrictive societies in order to find the place where they belong – and the people with whom they belong. As David Daiches puts it,

> Victorian novelists reflected in a peculiarly vivid and urgent way the social anxieties of their time, and their concern with the moral and psychological adequacy of the institutions through which social and economic life was organised emerges in their work in a fascinating variety of ways. They were both critical of those institutions and, in varying ways and degrees, trapped in them. Of those institutions marriage and the family were the ones that most directly engaged the novelists' imagination, for the Victorian novel was concerned with domestic relationships above all. (DAICHES, 1976, p. 9)

Due to the importance of homes and places, this study seeks support in Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1994), where Bachelard states that, in fiction, representations of places can affect us on an imaginary level, which can be either conscious or unconscious. Houses and rooms are important entities with which our protagonists interact. Fanny Price's reaction to the change of scenery, for instance, refers to what she feels when she goes from her Aunt and Uncle's house to her parents': she does not belong in the first, but the second is not *home* either. Jane Eyre's red room is symbolic of the fire in her nature, and keeps in store all her childhood fears. Elizabeth Bennet's beloved Longbourn is threatened, and the newcomers to her village make her question the physical and metaphorical place on which she relies. Margaret Hale mourns her intimate relation with her home in the south, in her despair at having to move up north and leave behind the world she knows. The possibility of attributing life-like characteristics to physical structures, as well as analysing the cultural and literary references that said structures carry in the English society of that time are important for this work. The physical houses in the four novels have a life of their own, being characters in their own way. Gaston Bachelard's theory will not dominate this work, but it will help as a layer of theoretical support, enriching the foundations of the research, shedding light on aspects of the novels analysed.

Houses and homes are always in the background of this work, as well as being one of the principal forms from which to look at the corpus. In addition to Bachelard, other scholars also contribute to the subject, as Judith Flanders with *The Making of Home* (2014), in which

she discusses the transformation from houses into homes, and how the concept of home is fundamental to the establishment and maintenance of society as we know it; and Lucy Worsley's *If Walls Could Talk: An Intimate History of the Home* (2012), which paints a vivid picture of how people used to live and how they have organised and related to their spaces from medieval times to the present day.

This work also relies on feminist theory, which I believe is fundamental to the comprehension of the social meanings behind the female protagonists' actions, considering what is expected of them and why, as well as analysing the places they occupy. Annis Pratt's *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (1994) explores the elements (if any) that make a novel written by a woman different from one written by a man, as well as dealing with how women writers approach certain themes. Patricia Meyer Spacks' *The Female Imagination* (1975) dwells on women's narrative of the world, again focusing on what is unique about them, and how these narratives explore what it means to be a woman through the recurring patterns in female stories. The poem "The Angel of the House" (PATMORE, 2013), originally published in 1851, informs the angelic ideal for which women had to strive, and Virginia Woolf's essay "Professions for Women" (1931), in which she references the female figure and the necessity to "kill" this ideal angelic figure, helps in the understanding of women's situation in the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth century.

This dissertation is divided into three parts. Chapter 1 lays the foundations for chapters 2 and 3, bringing the historical background essential to the reading of the four novels. It explores the differences between the Regency and Early Victorian Periods, taking a brief look at the political and social scenario at the end of the eighteenth-century in England, and how this age of enlightenment gave way to the puritanism and imperialism of Victorian times. I comment on the contradictions that permeated society and general thought at the time, the more obvious being the rise of a female monarch in an era that saw women as belonging to the domestic space, helpmates to their male partners. "The Angel in the House", Coventry Patmore's famous poem, refers to the construction of an ideal womanhood through the prescription of femininity that seems to have gained stronger delineations in the first half of the nineteenth century. The first chapter also explores the concepts of private and public spheres, and who belonged – or did not belong – to each, establishing, thus, the important relation between women and the places in which they circulated, essential to this study, especially in what concerns women's relationship to their houses and homes. This chapter also refers briefly to the lives of the three authors, establishing connections with the elements pursued in the research; though authorship is not a topic of discussion in the present research, basic knowledge of the lives of the authors who

penned the novels analysed is important to complete the background in which said novels were produced.

Chapter 2, "Poor, Obscure, Plain and Little", analyses the first pair of novels in the corpus of this research, observing the differences, if there are any, between the freedom women had to deal with their surroundings in the Regency Period as opposed to the early years of the Victorian Era, through an analysis of Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In the examination of *Mansfield Park*, the focus is threefold: firstly, I explore the character of Fanny Price, the most obscure of Austen's heroines despite being often seen as one of Austen's most autobiographical creations. I also delve into Fanny's relationship with those around her, especially her cousins, Maria and Julia, and her aunts (her mother's sisters), Mrs Norris and Lady Bertram. Furthermore, this section inspects Fanny's two houses, Mansfield Park and her parents' house in Portsmouth, and how the transition between them is felt by the protagonist who, for much of the story, longs to "go home", but finds no home when she arrives at the Prices' dwelling. The last goal of this part, perhaps the most important, is to accompany Fanny's coming of age, particularly concerning how she relates to the world surrounding her and finally manages to stand up for herself, becoming, at the end, what many consider to be the true heiress to Mansfield's legacy. John Wiltshire's *The Hidden Jane Austen* (2014), as well as his body of works on the author are of great insight and contributed to my reading of Austen's fourth published novel. Margaret Kirkham's *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (1997) also added to my study through its feminist reading of Austen's works, in particular *Mansfield Park*. Many other scholars and critics will be mentioned in this work as well, for the contribution to Jane Austen's critical fortune is numerous and ever-growing.

Alongside *Mansfield Park* is the discussion of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. This section accompanies Jane Eyre's journey through five different places, exploring the protagonist's relationship with those places and the people she meets there, and how these encounters change her, but also bring her into being more herself than ever before. It is not possible to speak of *Jane Eyre* and ignore the protagonist's double, Bertha Mason. Whereas most men in Jane's life constantly try to hinder her progress, making her their object – or their trapped bird – from her cruel cousin John Reed to the apparently altruistic St John Rivers, the women she encounters are always expertly placed to bring about self-reflection and growth in the heroine, and in Bertha's case, to act out what Jane barely knows she feels. Jane Eyre's pilgrimage is more than just physical moves from one potential home to the next, it is a pilgrimage towards coming of age. The analysis of this novel is aided by Brontë scholars, as well as aforementioned Mary Poovey and other academics whose focus is the Victorian period. The imagery of the angelic

versus the rebellious woman who defies her due place in society is of fundamental importance when discussing Brontë's work. Furthermore, any reading of *Jane Eyre* is enhanced by Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2000).

Chapter 3, "My Courage always Rises with every Attempt to Intimidate Me" similarly to Chapter 2, is divided into two main sections consisting of an analysis of Austen's *Pride & Prejudice* and of Gaskell's *North & South*. The two heroines are, in their own way, outspoken and self-righteous, always willing to have the last word – even when they are not knowledgeable on the subject. The first part is about Elizabeth Bennet: how we meet her, as an important figure in a small village, someone who clearly thinks highly of herself and looks down on the silliness of others (mimicking her father's attitude towards the world), and how she has to rethink the way she sees herself when socially more important people arrive in Meryton. Much like in the aforementioned novels, I explore Elizabeth's relationship with those around her, from her immediate family to her friends and those whose first appearance in her life we as readers witness, at the same time as examining some of the main characters that compose the story, namely the Bennet family, Elizabeth's best friend Charlotte Lucas, Mr Darcy and his sister, Caroline Bingley, and the DeBourgh ladies. Always with places and how women navigated them in mind, this section intends to join Elizabeth on her journey from a house that presents no long-term security, to a home of her own, away from prying sisters and an overbearing mother, from believing herself superior to others to finding an equal with whom to share life. As stated previously, there are a great number of academics who have made important contributions to the study of Austen's works, including aforementioned John Wiltshire and Margaret Kirkham, as well as others such as Deirdre Le Faye, whose contribution to Austen's critical fortune ranges from biographies and collection of letters to works such as *Jane Austen: The World of her Novels* (2003), in which she delves into Austen's work, including *Pride & Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* and looks at what they can factually tell us about life in the Regency Period.

The second part of Chapter 3 focuses on Elizabeth Gaskell's *North & South*. This section follows Margaret Hale's footsteps, from the polite and provincial south and her family home in the sleepy village of Hellstone, to the industrial and grey northern city of Milton, with its different people and manners. This move unleashes a plethora of feelings in our protagonist, making her question her place in society – for this is now a new society she is inhabiting, and she does not know all the rules. In Milton, Margaret encounters and befriends working-class people, namely the Higgins family, and in doing so, she breaches a gap that many women of her standing would never do, as the poor were seen as mere charity cases, not people with whom

one becomes friendly. Bessy Higgins, in particular, brings home to Margaret the fact that there are many women in England who do not have the luxury of being precious ladies, who are essential contributors to the family's economy, even if their efforts are scantly rewarded, both financially and in the eyes of society. Another important relationship in *North & South* is that between Margaret and Mr Thornton. After an uncertain start, reminiscent of that of Elizabeth and Mr Darcy in *Pride & Prejudice*, Margaret and Mr Thornton learn from one another, albeit unwittingly, and in doing so, their paths converge. *North & South*'s background is the Industrial Revolution, and it subtly poses questions regarding what it meant to be a woman in such changing times, perfectly translated into Margaret's behaviour and journey, and her many encounters throughout the novel. In order to carry out the reading of Mrs Gaskell's *North & South*, Carolyn Lambert's *The Meanings of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction* (2013) will help to increase the understanding of the part played by *homes* in Gaskell's works, *North & South* in particular, considering how it differs from the common ideas associated with one's home as being a place of safety, and how Gaskell uses inanimate places and objects as a mirror to her characters' troubles.

For the bibliographical survey of the circumstances of England and the English society of the time, especially when it comes to women, I rely on the aid of scholars and historians as much as Mary Poovey in her works *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984) and *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (1998). In the first, Poovey explores the concept of the "proper lady" and how women, in particular women writers, managed to rebel against it; in the second, she discusses binaries between men and women that dominated nineteenth century society, and how these supposed differences came into being. Amanda Vickery's *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (2009) scrutinises the Georgians through an expert analysis of their grand houses; in her work *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (1999), Vickery once again delves into Georgian England, this time looking at how Georgian women lived. Elizabeth Langland's *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (1995) considers Queen Victoria's ascension to the throne alongside the development of the figure of the angelic woman, pointing to the many contradictions that formed the Victorian Era. Davidoff and Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (1988) is one of the works essential to this study as it is a window into nineteenth-century society, allowing me to explore how people lived and behaved in the period of interest to this research. Furthermore, Leonore Davidoff's *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (1995) as well as Susie Steinbach's *Women in England 1760-1914: A Social History*

(2004), amongst other historical works, will be imperative for the understanding of women's position and how they dealt with the fast-approaching changes in the social and economic scenes. Given my corpus and the sources chosen for a more holistic understanding of it, it should be noticed that I look at British society and examine its middle- and upper-class lives, for despite not composing the majority of the population, it is their testimonies, their novels, and their understanding of life and social norms that interest this study due to the lives depicted in the four novels analysed.

Although the focus of the work is on the characters and their novels, biographies of the authors were read and are occasionally quoted in the work, as they further the foundations upon which the analyses are made. The choice for women writers is only natural when studying womanhood, especially as, through writing, these women crossed the bridges I am interested in scrutinising in this research. As Joanne Shattock affirms,

> Women writers have traditionally written across a spectrum of genres. The opening up of more avenues for a writing life in the nineteenth century meant that the practice became almost routine. […]
> The polarization of the 'public' (male) and the 'private' (female) sphere is part of the Victorian ideology, but, as historians remind us, it was a very real part of nineteenth-century experience. One of the ways in which women negotiated this seemingly rigid barrier was through writing. As work of all kinds gradually moved out of the home and into a public workspace, writing remained one means of employment which could be conducted from within the domestic sphere. (SHATTOCK, 2001, p. 3)

In this sense, among the biographies available, I selected Lucy Worsley's aptly titled *Jane Austen at Home* (2017), for I believe that in it, Worsley manages to explore Austen's life without the common reliance on her male relatives and their versions of her biography. Furthermore, in *Jane Austen at Home*, the focus is Austen's journeys through her many residences, finally settling in Chawton Cottage, and her relationship with the women in her life, figures often in the background in most of her biographies. Inevitably, Austen's nephew's version of her life, published in 1869, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (AUSTEN-LEIGH, 2002) was also considered, mainly due to it having been written in the height of the Victorian Era, portraying a very different woman to the one described by biographers nowadays. In Brontë's case, three biographers stand out: firstly, Juliet Barker's seminal work *The Brontës* (1994), possibly the most extensive and comprehensive look at the lives of the Brontë family; secondly, Claire Harman's more recent *Charlotte Brontë: A Life* (2015), which focuses on Charlotte rather than the whole family. The third biography, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (2009), first published in 1857, is also a portal through which to glimpse at its author, Elizabeth Gaskell. For the life of Elizabeth Gaskell, as well of her version of Charlotte's story, I rely on Jenny Uglow's

comprehensive *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (1999), as well as Winifred Gérin's more concise *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography* (1977), whose publications are an indicative of the surge in interest for Gaskell in the latter part of the twentieth century.

As this dissertation is an argumentative work, it presents my reading of the established aspects respecting the selected corpus, so as to explore the construction of womanhood in the late Georgian, or Regency, and Victorian Periods. The main objective of the research is to analyse the movements of the female characters in the works *Mansfield Park* and *Pride & Prejudice*, by Jane Austen; *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë; and *North & South*, by Elizabeth Gaskell. Through these works, then, I conduct a study of the social possibilities of movement for women in the first half of the nineteenth century, and how these possibilities were – and still are – linked to the process of coming of age, not only looking at these differences from a sociological point of view, but also geographical, as these four novels are set in opposing parts of England, and the rivalry between north and south produces fascinating material for my analysis, for as Steinbach claims, "while fiction should not be mistaken for reality, it can help us understand the culture in which it was produced and of which it was part" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 3).

All in all, this study focuses on the movements of the four protagonists, so as to understand what it meant for these women to come of age in the first half of the nineteenth century: how they coped with the separate spheres ideology, how they challenged the status quo in order to achieve their goals, and how they often conformed to it. In addition to analysing women's transition into adulthood, this study examines their relationship with their homes, and how the process of growth is intrinsically linked to that of finding one's place in the world – where one belongs.

Moreover, comparisons between how women live today, in the early decades of the twenty-first century, to how women lived and coped with the world surrounding them in the period studied in this work are inevitable as well as desirable. What has been achieved and how what is expected of women has evolved throughout the years will feature across this work, but mainly in its conclusion. We have come a long way since Austen, Brontë, and Gaskell wrote their novels, and much has changed, but perhaps the constant search for a place in which we belong is universal and timeless, meaning that these novelists' works have still much to say about coming of age and finding oneself.

1 "IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES, IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES"[3]

1.1 The Age of Revolutions

> ***"I say it's Prince Albert as ought to be asked how he'd like his missis to be from home when he comes in, tired and worn, and wanting someone to cheer him; and maybe, her to come in by−and−by, just as tired and down in th' mouth; and how he'd like for her never to be at home to see to th' cleaning of his house, or to keep a bright fire in his grate. Let alone his meals being all hugger−mugger and comfortless. I'd be bound, prince as he is, if his missis served him so, he'd be off to a gin−palace, or summut o' that kind. So why can't he make a law again poor folks' wives working in factories?"***
> ***Mary ventured to say that she thought the Queen and Prince Albert could not make laws, but the answer was,***
> ***"Pooh! don't tell me it's not the Queen as makes laws; and isn't she bound to obey Prince Albert? And if he said they mustn't, why she'd say they mustn't, and then all folk would say, oh, no, we never shall do any such thing no more."***
>
> Elizabeth Gaskell***, Mary Barton.***

1.1.1 The Georgians

The period known as "the long nineteenth century"[4] spanned from the last decades of the eighteenth century, with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, up to the start of the First World War, in 1914, encompassing nearly 150 years of history and social changes. From the independence of the North American colonies, to the rise in urbanisation and the subsequent expansion of the British Empire, the long nineteenth century changed the face of England. All these changes had important social repercussions, which were documented not only by historians and social commentators, but also, and especially relevant to this study, by novelists, whose works are an essential source of information about the times in which they were produced, even when they do not seem concerned with the world beyond the scope of their plots.

The Georgian Period started in 1714, and could be argued to have ended with Victoria's rise to the throne in 1837. Just like any other delimited period in history, the Georgian Era "is a moment in time that is constantly reviewed and reshaped in relation to the present experienced by historians and their audience" (GOODRICH, 2013, p. 6), and in the present study, it represents the background in which Jane Austen lived, wrote and set her novels. It is the world

[3] From Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities.*
[4] The term was created by Eric Hobsbawm.

she knew, therefore being of utmost importance that we, her readers and scholars, understand the functioning of the society as she knew it and portrayed in her novels.

The year of 1760 marks the beginning of the reign of King George III, around the same time that the Industrial Revolution started. The eighteenth century was a time of revolutions, from the dawn of the Age of Reason – the revolution of ideas was in full swing – to the American Revolutionary War, to the French Revolution. It was a time of change, of political upheaval, and of the beginning of the rise of a new social class, whose money had come from trade, fuelled by the Industrial Revolution, who each day was getting more affluent than the landed gentry, and whose desire to establish their own place in the world – from their names and earned titles, to stately houses about which they could boast – made them even more ambitious and class-conscious. Their class motivations meant they had to be extremely aware of all the divisions and bridges, so they could more easily try to cross them. Not only was the growing middle class in the forefront of the moral and social revolutions, but they were also spearheading the "industrial and commercial development, with a few becoming richer than many of the nobility" (GOODRICH, 2013, p. 8), a fact that would forever change the fabric of that society.

In the political arena, Britain was in constant war during Jane Austen's lifetime, even if "no fighting actually took place on English soil – men sailed away to war at sea and in other lands" (ADKINS & ADKINS, 2013, p. xviii). The reigning monarch was King George III, the first Hanoverian king born on British soil and a man whose reputation was, during his lifetime, much superior to that of his son and successor, becoming known as "Farmer George" amongst his subjects, a term that associated him both with an ever more distant past and with the idyllic countryside to which city dwellers wished to return. George III's loss of the American colonies did not make him hugely unpopular, as one might have expected, for the public seemed to consider that he was a great defender of their interests, as well as a good king, and the lost colonies were a few amongst many over which the Crown presided. Moreover, "in terms of government Britain had, in theory at least, a more 'modern' constitution than any European monarchy. The people of England certainly thought so, celebrating the English liberty they perceived as superior to the absolutism and popery of the neighbouring France" (GOODRICH, 2013, p. 8). Even the liberal ideals of Revolutionary France soon lost their appeal to the British public, as they believed that the motto of *'Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité'* "was nothing but a bloodstained mockery as the paranoid revolutionary leaders massacred and guillotined, without trial, anyone whom they declared to be an enemy of the state" (LE FAYE, 2003, p. 47). The people valued the system they had in Britain, since the extremes of absolutism were no longer

a part of their reality, and the parliamentary constitution was seen to look after the subjects' rights, at least as far as the middle and upper classes were concerned.

In spite of the apparent contentment of the people, it was during the Georgian period that we glimpse signs of discontentment from the lower classes and from anyone whose rights were fewer than those of the landed gentlemen. In order to be allowed to vote, one had to own property, which excluded the majority of the population. No great political reform was achieved during the Georgian period in England, but the presence of thinkers such as Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft meant that the seed for future change had been planted, and, indeed, the nineteenth century, despite its social and moral conservatism, witnessed the foundations of many changes to come.

The upheaval of the French Revolution was followed by a brief interval of peace, which ended in 1803 with the start of the Napoleonic Wars, and lasted until 1815, well into the Regency Period. This series of conflicts affected not only the state of the country, but also the King's health, and the illness that for the past twenty years had troubled him in bouts was now back, meaning that his ability to rule was questioned. The King, being unfit to rule, but still very much alive, meant that his eldest son, George Augustus Frederick, then the Prince of Wales, would act as regent in place of his ailing father. Thus, through the Regency Act on the 5 February 1811, the Regency Period officially started. It would last until the death of King George III, in 1820, after which, the then Prince Regent became King George IV. This period is principally remembered, as far as this work is concerned, for having seen all six of Austen's novels published.

In spite of the Prince Regent's unpopularity, his love of fashion and elegance, as well as his connection with men such as Beau Brummel and the architect John Nash, played an important part in establishing what we know now as the Regency style, a branch of the broader Georgian style; its greatest architectural representative is the Brighton Pavilion, a royal residence built in a combination of fashions for the Prince's pleasure. Marks of the style are still present in English society to this day, especially through its many buildings and pleasure gardens. Furthermore, "the fashionable Georgian architectural style was also adopted by the humbler terraced houses of the middle classes and even those of the better-off skilled workers" (ADKINS & ADKINS, 2013, p. 83), as in cities such as London, the building of new houses was in rapid growth to accommodate the ever-growing population of the city.

The world of the arts, fashion and style saw great expansion and expression during the Georgian period, especially during and after the Regency. As Goodrich suggests, "the Georgian Period was a vibrant and exciting time of considerable change in many areas of life. In

particular, it heralded a new consumer society that was furiously getting and spending, shopping and socialising, and enjoying ever more lavish public entertainments" (2013, p. 6-8). This was a reflection of the revolution of ideas and way of living, for life was more than just a struggle for survival now, and people were in constant search for new ways to pass the time and entertain themselves. As Maggie Lane affirms,

> This revolution in thought was the first of the great revolutions which were to propel English life from medievalism to modernity, and the one on which all the others – agrarian, industrial, social and political – depended. It was also, perhaps, the happiest in its effect. It turned man from a miserable creature, dourly battling against the forces of nature, preoccupied by the state of his soul and reliant for his reward in the life hereafter, to one who came to believe that rational happiness was attainable on earth, through the cultivation of his mind and senses, and the educated enjoyment of the world's delights. (LANE, 1996, p. 15)

People were now leaving the countryside behind and populating the cities, which grew and expanded with each passing day. This urbanization was not only due to the search for better working conditions or just a reflection of the industrial process, but it was also in order to enjoy what the cities had to offer, with their tea houses, pleasure gardens, and balls. The changes were not limited to the numbers in the cities, as the countryside saw a growth in the boundaries between properties, which consequently meant a new sense of privacy and ownership, as "hedges, walls and fences sprang up to mark the boundaries of newly enclosed fields, while new turnpike roads and canals carved fresh lines across the land" (ADKINS & ADKINS, 2013, p. xxiii). The changes in the scenery that started in the Georgian period are very much alive today, and the "chequered pattern of fields" is still a feature of the English countryside.

The side effects of these changes, such as a surge in workhouses and general poverty, would only reach the minds of the wealthier portion of the population during the Victorian times, particularly when exposed by renowned authors such as Charles Dickens and even Elizabeth Gaskell – though she did not speak of London, but described the reality of the north of the country like few before her. For the Georgians, it was all very recent, and progress was probably too exciting to allow space for its gloomier side effects to be dissected. During the period, "the upper and upper-middle classes had reached the stage of sophistication at which they could react against their own civilisation and endeavour to go back to nature" (GIROUARD, 1978, p. 214), and cities started being associated with wickedness and dirt. The countryside, now mostly abandoned by rich landowners during part of the year, was seen with nostalgia, a feeling that extended throughout the nineteenth century as a reaction to the ruthless urbanization that took place.

The rising middle classes strived to copy the established elite, and consumption increased dramatically during the Georgian period. Their shopping habits spoke volumes about who they were and where they wanted to belong in the social scale, especially now that possessions were no longer a simple reflection of one's inheritance, they "made a statement about their own identity" (GOODRICH, 2013, p. 12). With the old elites having their centuries-long domination challenged, there was a "growing concern with stricter controls of admission into the social and political elite […]. Those with incomes which gave them a substantial surplus were able to take part in the elaborate rituals of 'Society' and sport which had become formalised as part of this control" (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 23).

Part of this control had to do with what one looked like to the world, one's choice of appropriate clothes and what rare trinkets adorned one's fireplace. There was no logic in owning many beautiful things and not displaying them, and social visiting increased during this period, not to mention the opening of stately houses to everyone who wanted to see them, so the Georgians started the tradition of touring great houses and their landscaped gardens. Jane Austen was aware of this practice, and in *Pride & Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet and her aunt and uncle Gardiner visit many stately homes in their travels, including Mr Darcy's Pemberley, where she is finally made aware of his true self – and of the extent of his fortune.

Not only was the private home a place to be cherished and exhibited, the Georgians also sought beauty and entertainment in the new-found public spaces. Culture became more accessible, moving into "coffee houses, debating societies, concert halls, theatres, museums, galleries and subscription libraries" (GOODRICH, 2013, p. 14). The increase in commerce and financial dealings meant an increase in literacy levels, for many occupations required skills such as reading and writing, from bank clerks to business apprentices (WHYMAN, 2009). Furthermore, the Georgians were the first to read a novel as we know it, which started as cautionary tales, aimed at young ladies, and developed into the more gripping and lively stories, first in the epistolary form and later more similar to what we are used to today, told by the likes of Henry Fielding, Funny Burney and, of course, Jane Austen, in a tradition that we uphold to this day. Despite their proliferation, novels were considered a low form of art at the beginning, their reading was seen "as frivolous and likely to lead to a dangerous corruption of moral standards" (GOODRICH, 2013, p. 13); reading novels, then, became an activity associated with women, whilst men were associated with poetry and travel journals, though they most certainly read novels as well, a point exemplified by the Prince Regent's predilection for Jane Austen, going as far as 'inviting' her to dedicate a novel to him – her *Emma* (1814) opens with a

seemingly unwilling dedication to the Prince[5], of whom she was not a fan – in fact, her dislike of him was known in her family, and must have been furthered by the suggestion of the Royal Librarian, Mr Clarke, on how the plot of her next novel should be, which not only did she ignore, but also prompted her to write, in 1815, "Plan of a Novel, According to Hints from Various Quarters", mocking his suggestions and the stereotypes of the times, which became a joke amongst the Austen family.

While novels were considered by many as a second-class form of art, poetry was highly valued, thus being one of the principal forms of expression of the Romantic movement, and its reading a widely acceptable activity amongst men, as well as women. Romanticism started as a reaction to the deep rational thinking that overtook Europe during the Enlightenment and the Georgian period, moving "towards great sensibility, emphasising the importance of emotion and imagination" (GOODRICH, 2013, p. 18). The popular imaginary was thus inhabited by Wordsworth's and Byron's words, amongst many others', as well as Turner's paintings. These artists borrowed from the classical world that influenced the Georgian way of living, at the same time that they challenged and pushed the boundaries of these classical rules, increasing the importance that was placed "on the spontaneous expression of emotion, on sensibility rather than sense, on love matches rather than arranged marriages, and on life in the country rather than in the town" (GIROUARD, 1978, p. 214).

Not only were men and women allowed to read different things, at least when it came to the public eye, they were also subjected to many differences in what was expected of them and how they had to behave when in company. A woman was defined in relation to a male relative: she was always someone's daughter, sister, wife, mother. It was through marriage that men "assumed economic and rural responsibilities for their wives and the expected brood of children" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 322). Not only that, but "by marriage, husband and wife became one person in law – and that person was he. He had almost complete control over her body, and their children belonged to him" (PERKIN, 1993, p. 73-74). Furthermore, marriage was the main event that, in the eyes of society, turned a girl into a woman, and it did not always happen early, for most middle-class weddings took place during a person's middle to late twenties – despite this not being the case with the heroines of the novels analysed here. According to Davidoff and Hall (1988), it was common for men to marry older women up until

[5] The dedication of *Emma* reads "To His Royal Highness the Prince Regent, this work is, by His Royal Highness's permission, most respectfully dedicated, by His Royal Highness's dutiful and obedient humble servant, the Author". Claire Tomalin (2000) draws attention to the prolific use of the term "Royal Highness" and the emptiness of the sentiment behind the dedication.

the seventeenth century, but this practice changes by the end of the eighteenth century, when younger and dependent brides were more desired, for "such an image of fragility enhanced the potency of the man who was to support and protect her" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 323). This change is one of the factors that culminates in the angelic creature women were often expected to be in the Victorian household.

Marriage was the best option for Georgian women in spite of the risks, for it "carried the potential both for harmonious licence and for miserable servitude" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 86), and more often than not, the woman was no more than goods trading hands as part of a business transaction, especially amongst the middle and upper classes: from being her father's property, she became her husband's, and on most occasions, money exchanged hands as well, for any lady looking for a decent husband had better chances when she came with a substantial dowry. As Amanda Vickery suggests, even during these romantic and sentimental times, the most honourable of love matches "could be subject to considerable constraint, confirming the unhelpfulness of a sharp distinction between freedom and arrangement in matchmaking" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 55), which also makes it hard to ignore the commercial aspect of any union. Not only that, but a bad marriage, that is, one in which the couple's joint fortunes amounted to very little, could have dire consequences to the match and its offspring – as seen in all of the four novels analysed here – to name but a few couples: the Prices in *Mansfield Park*, the Eyres in *Jane Eyre*, the Bennets in *Pride & Prejudice*, and even the Hales in *North & South*, for though they all seem to have married for love or at least attraction, their choices impact the future of their children, since those attributes were overshadowed by a lack of financial stability in all cases, a mistake that the heroines in these novels learn not to make.

Only after the Married Woman's Property Act of 1882 did married women finally conquer the right to own and control their own property; before that, "unless a marriage settlement arranged things differently, the husband was entitled to all his wife's property, and he could claim any money she earned. Indeed, as soon as a woman accepted a proposal of marriage, her property belonged entirely to the man" (PERKIN, 1993, p. 73-74). Furthermore, entailed properties invariably went to the closest male heir, as seen in Jane Austen's *Sense & Sensibility*, where John Dashwood inherits everything, and is *asked* by his dying father to provide for his sisters and stepmother; and the lack of a binding obligation means the women are left nearly destitute. This is a good example of what happened when male relatives did not think about legally providing for their female family members, and literature of the time is littered with such instances. In *Pride & Prejudice*, Mrs Bennet's obsession with finding her daughters a husband is justified when one remembers how aware she must have been of her

husband's demise and, consequently, the loss of their house and lands, as well as hers and her daughters' destitution. Her disappointment when Elizabeth refuses to marry Longbourn's heir Mr Collins is more than understandable when such a marriage would have secured her and her other daughters' futures, at least insofar as having a roof over her head is concerned. However, according to Davidoff and Hall, "it was never the laws of property alone that prevented the myriad middle-class women who owned capital from using it actively" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 451), but how those laws intertwined with the ideals and expectations of femininity imposed upon women, particularly when any attempt to act independently "was denounced as 'unwomanly', 'unsexed' or 'strongminded', epithets designed to undermine core feminine identity" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 451).

Even when well-provided for in marriage, women still had to deal with the dangers of childbirth. The success of most marriages was measured by the offspring it produced, which meant that most married women spent the majority of their reproductive years pregnant, with the average mother during this time bearing between six and seven children (VICKERY, 1999, p. 97). The fear and the real risk of death in childbirth was such that it comes as no surprise that "women due to give birth were treated like invalids and confined to the house" (ADKINS & ADKINS, 2013, p. 22). The progression of the pregnancy was always unpredictable, but so was its final product, for "no one could predict how easily she would bear pregnancy, how safely she would deliver, how robust would be her infant, or how long and healthy the life of her child" (VICKERY, 2009, p. 96). However, despite its many dangers, or perhaps because of them, the pregnant woman was imbued with romantic and Madonna-like airs. The very act of childbirth belonged to women during this time, with midwives and female nurses taking centre-stage to bring the new life into the world, and in a world where, more often than not, women were shut out of places and opportunities due to their gender, it must have felt powerful to preside over something about which men knew little.

Once the child was safely delivered, motherhood became the business of a woman's life and the prism through which she would be judged. While men would still be associated with business and other matters of importance, to a woman, motherhood meant that the care and upbringing of her child became paramount in her life, and even her friendships and other social bonds were affected; as Amanda Vickery suggests, "the production and rearing of children had a transforming effect on genteel women's lives, all but obliterating their past selves and public profiles" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 122), and in that sense, it is not so different from the reality many mothers know today, when the expectations on them are still doubled compared to those placed on fathers.

On the other hand, fathers were more interested in their children when they were boys rather than girls, possibly because a male heir represented the future security of their property, and because many must have felt like raising girls was nothing more than educating them for another man's benefit, since they were destined to become wives. Not to mention the fact that a female daughter required a dowry in order to marry well and not be a burden to her own family. Society was built in such a way that women were often seen to be bad investments, and "fathers do not seem to have felt the same kind of responsibility for girls" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 332), while the education of their boys was often a task they undertook willingly, especially when the boy was of an age to start learning about the family business or how to administrate the estate. The expectations placed on boys and girls reflected on how they were treated:

> While boys were given hoops, balls and other toys associated with physical activities, girls played with dolls, dolls houses, needlebooks and miniature work baskets. Both sexes took part in activities such as keeping pets and tending small gardens, but the range of boys' pets was wider, including kites and owls as well as the more familiar rabbits, cats and dogs. Girls' gardens concentrated on flowers, while boys might plant trees and ferns. Boys were taught to swim and dive, activities not often encouraged for girls. […] Boys were expected to be physically tougher than girls, naturally tolerant of dirt and personal untidiness. As cleanliness and order became central parts of middle-class culture, girls had to develop a shame about dirt and slovenly behaviour as part of their femininity. (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 344).

These early differentiations extended into adult life and became even more pronounced. While men earned a living (even when they were gentlemen of leisure, and lived off their property's profits), women were responsible for upholding the way of life, which was mainly done through shopping and, as mentioned before, the exhibition of the acquired goods. Furthermore, the management of the household was a woman's responsibility, and despite the continuous constrains imposed upon women by an increasing moralistic society, the home was their domain, though this domain was still subjected to a man's overruling as "men retained the ultimate authority and, except in female headed households, the mistress acted only as deputy" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 391).

The ideal gentlewoman would be trained into household affairs, but the demands on her were constantly growing, and household manuals became essential for her to keep up with the times – and with other mistresses. A woman's success as the lady of the house reflected not only on the household itself, but also on her husband's stance in society, as well as her children's prospects. Being responsible for the image of the household meant that it was also a mistress's job to entertain and make sure guests were comfortable and happy – "card parties, tea-parties and visiting in general were widely associated with women", as Vickery suggests, and despite

its central role in many women's lives, "moralists waxed monotonous on the unfortunate trade of female visiting. Visiting drew women from their duties and encouraged idle chat or worse scandal" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 209). Feminine sociability was seen, then, as essential for the maintenance of the status quo, but too much of it was considered dangerous.

Even the layout of the house started changing during the Georgian period to reflect the shifts in the way of thinking and behaving. There was increasing concern with keeping the inside world private, never allowing the outside world to "pollute" the idyllic hearth. Once again, the obsession with cleanliness makes an appearance, and during this period, "segregating the mess and smell of food preparation became an important hallmark of respectability, and meant that the kitchen became ideally as remote as possible from the living rooms" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 383). As the middle-class wife distanced herself from any physical duties in the household, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the richest ladies would do no more than embroidery and flower arrangements, growing ever more dependent on their servants.

If the way women kept their homes was a reflection on their husbands' status and wealth, so was the way they dressed. A man's social status started to have a lot more to do with the cut and quality of the fabric from which his clothes were made than with the flamboyant colours and silks of the eighteenth century. Women's fashion, as well as their social stance, became progressively more restrictive, as empire waistlines slowly gave way to tight corsets. A woman's appearance extended from her clothes to what was seen as proper behaviour, for she was always expected to present herself as clean and modest; she "should be distinguished by an air of dignified ease and graceful control, taking care to treat others according to their status" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 202). Above all, a gentlewoman's duty was always to appear pious and chaste, without a trace of vulgarity to her, a reflection of the men in her life, first her father, then her husband.

Socialisation was, much like the fashion of the day, dictated by the rules of propriety, a word that makes an appearance throughout our period, and whose definition seems to become more severe with the passing of the years. Women and men learned how to dress, walk and talk to impress, and conversation was one of the most important skills in polite society, as "the whole purpose of conversation was positively to please other people, yet the art had to be well judged" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 212). Despite the high value attributed to a genteel education, both for men and women, an excess of civility could bring a man to the level of women, which was not desired, for, as Amanda Vickery suggests, "politeness was always in danger of collapsing into effeminacy. While mixed company guaranteed civilization, too much time spent

in the company of women alone was seen as effeminizing" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 217). Therefore, so-called "real men" had to find a balance between being polite enough to be respectable, but not so polite that it would harm their sense of masculinity.

The rising middle classes were particularly eager to sustain high standards, for as they were mostly self-made through the Industrial Revolution or the army and navy, they could not claim a genteel education, but they could, on the other hand, uphold genteel manners and values, copying the upper classes and nobility, and often surpassing them in all aspects of perceived life and style. This is true not only of their household standards, but also of their morality and propriety, for it was through these aspects that people were differentiated and their worth calculated, as Davidoff explains, "the need to prove that the advantages of wealth and status were deserved and the disadvantages were undeserving, their lowliness in some sense being their own 'fault', meant that this division between dirt and cleanliness, just as the division between wealth and poverty, was cast in moral terms of good and evil" (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 25). In *North & South*, for example, Mrs Thornton shows herself eager to solidify her family's position in the eyes of the genteel Hales, exhibiting an increased preoccupation with wealth and its display when in their presence, whereas she dismisses a classic education as something for which a manufacturer has no use.

The hustle and bustle of the new consumer society was a constant source of novelties and progress, but it was also fuelled by the slave trade in the colonies, making some men extremely rich as well as being the foundations on which important cities were built. Technically, slavery might not have happened to the same extent on British soil, even though the British were very much involved with its perpetuation abroad, and people were aware of it – it is even mentioned, and rapidly hushed, in *Mansfield Park*, where all seem aware of the source of the family money, but none is willing to discuss it; the mention is, in the story, followed by "a dead silence" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 136).

The Georgian Period witnessed a deep change in British society, and "the essence of the period could be said to be one of exploration and innovation in many areas of life, with the Georgians displaying optimism and enthusiasm in their bold grasp of the new" (GOODRICH, 2013, p. 23). It was a time of revolutions both in the political and the social arenas, for the way people lived was changing; it was also a time of contradictions, anticipating the Victorian period that followed it. "Fuelled by polite ideals, the intellectual horizons of the privileged, provincial women rolled majestically outwards in the course of the eighteenth century" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 287), with women having increasing access to public life and, furthermore, to literary and intellectual life. At the same time that genteel women had more freedom to enjoy public life

and entertainment, their role as the ones responsible for the household, as well as being the perfect wife and mother was getting ever more demanding, and any progress made was also hindered by their dependence on male relatives, as their very existence in the eyes of the law was in relation to the men who surrounded them.

The Georgians paved the way for the progress that followed them, and the seeds of the rights that women started to conquer during this time – even if only to be more present in public events and entertainment – were the first of many yet to be achieved in later decades. The Georgian period, in which are included the transitional years of King William IV's rule[6], lasted for over one hundred years, and the England at its start was a very different one to that which, 123 years later, welcomed a young queen as its head, the living representation of the contradictions of the years to follow.

1.1.2 The Victorians

Due to its relevance, the Victorian period is often thought to encompass the whole of the nineteenth century, but as previously mentioned, Queen Victoria reigned from 1837 to the turn of the century, 1901. Perhaps it is easy to imagine that the Victorian Era lasted even longer than it did because the changes and habits created by the Victorians still affect our lives today. It was a period of perpetual and sweeping transformation, before which "major industrialization was confined to a few towns in Britain. [Afterwards] the whole world was covered with railways and factories" (WILSON, 2002, p. 1). Somewhat similarly to the Georgian period, the Victorian Era is characterized by peace, or at least, peace on British soil, for the rest of the world was in constant, if not major, warfare, as British rule continued to spread around the globe.

Born Alexandrina Victoria in 1819, Queen Victoria, the monarch who gave her name to the period, was only eighteen when her uncle, King William IV, passed away, and her rule lasted for just under two thirds of the nineteenth century. Being the only immediate heir to the throne, Victoria had an extremely sheltered upbringing, for fear of anything coming between her and her accession to the throne, in what was known as the Kensington System, named after the future monarch's residence, Kensington Palace, and devised by her mother, the then Duchess of Kent, and her mother's loyal advisor, John Conroy. Victoria's education was rigid and protected from the outside world, as she was never allowed time by herself or with peers of her age. The system was despised by the young queen, who, according to many reports, grew

[6] He was George III's son, and thus considered a Georgian like his predecessors.

to have a difficult relationship with her mother and Conroy, due to their attempts to guide her forcibly into doing what they wanted, even after she became queen and ruler of the nation.

As soon as she rose to the throne, Victoria tried to free herself from her mother and Conroy's rule, thus accepting the guidance of the then Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne. It was only in 1840, after her wedding to Prince Albert, that Melbourne's help was no longer required, as that role now belonged to her new husband, and it would be seen as inappropriate to rely on the council of anyone other than Albert. "Victoria, herself, was a paradox" (LANGLAND, 1995, p. 63), as she was the epitome of the contradictions that formed the period during which she ruled: at a time when women had very few rights and existed in relation to their male relatives, the country was headed by a female monarch. Not only did Victoria take her duties as queen very seriously, she also took her role as a wife and mother to heart, and "by the time of her death her nine children, thirty-six grandchildren and thirty-seven great-grandchildren, with their spouses, constituted a flock […], enough to occupy most of the remaining thrones of Europe for the foreseeable future" (THOMPSON, 2001, p. xvi). Victoria's marriage to Albert transformed her into the perceived ideal of middle-class femininity, with the added caveat that she was the ruler of the largest empire in the world: the perfect wife and mother, champion of home comforts and womanly virtues, as Elizabeth Langland explains:

> In her reliance on Albert, in her professed inaptitude for public rule, Victoria constructed herself through emergent middle-class values; she presented herself through a scrim of domestic virtues emphasizing home, hearth, and heart. That she should, nonetheless, without disabling or disqualifying self-contradiction, take her place as head of the most powerful country in the world bespeaks her own signal role in the construction of a new feminine ideal that endorsed active public management behind a façade of private retirement. (LANGLAND, 1995, p. 63)

The construction of the image of the Angel in the House, the idealised version of what a woman ought to be, which will be further explored in the following section, was aided by the figure of a monarch who, despite her perceived right to rule, was always a dutiful wife and mother. As Thompson suggests, "it is an odd contradiction that in the period in which the doctrine of separate spheres of activity for men and women was most actively developed and propounded, the highest public office in the land was held by a woman." (THOMPSON, 2001, p. xvi-vxii). Victoria's existence was an oxymoron: a wife and mother, she was also the most powerful person in England, bringing us back to the epigraph at the start of this chapter, a dialogue from Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, which sees two characters discussing the monarch and her husband's relationship and the power dynamics in place, for as much as Victoria wished to be a normal and proper wife to Albert, their relationship was firstly marked by their difference

in power, for as his wife, she was bound to obey him, but as his queen, he was her subject first and husband second, in turn forced to obey *her*. Gaskell's characters struggle to understand this situation, and there is no easy answer as to how Victoria could play her very unique role, since failure was her only alternative when it came to her relationship with Albert: she was either a good monarch, or a good wife. Her attempt to strive for both represents the many contradictions found in this period. Thus, as Steinbach suggests, "the problem of a female monarch – who answered to no man – in an age when women had no formal political rights, were socially subordinate to men, and were legally subordinate to their husbands – was a perplexing one to contemporaries" (STEINBACK, 2004, p. 96) and even to the monarch in question, but it was also a clear representation of a society whose changes and contradictions were part of everyday life, even for the figure at its head.

Queen Victoria came of age on the throne, as the most important woman in Britain, and the most important woman in a world dominated by men. The monarchy was often put in check, and many believe that it was Queen Victoria's womanhood and subservience that helped maintain the British monarchy as we know it today, seen as "it was represented as middle-class, domestic, and patriotic, and because it became a public spectacle"; not only that, Victoria's presence and behaviour were part of this success, for "she was an excellent performer when she chose to be, and as a woman she was easily made to seem both ordinary and an object of display" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 97). Victoria grew into her role as a monarch at the same time that she changed the perceptions of what a ruler should be: the new monarchy was, much like the middle-class housewife, always expected to be on an untouchable pedestal, far from mundane worries, but a constant presence in the family's – or the country's – life, not commanding or leading, but giving advice and being charitable. In many ways, "her youth and gender were probably more important symbols of hope for her subjects" (THOMPSON, 2001, p. xx) than her political leanings, as there was a strong connection in England between prosperous times and female rulers.

At the height of the British Empire, Victoria ruled over 23% of the world population, as well as over a home nation that was fractured by many different issues concerning religion, nationality, property, and poverty. The threat of what had happened in France in 1789 was dormant but still alive, and she was presiding over a society that was more economically and socially divided than before. The United Kingdom was not as united as the name suggested, for "several millions of her subjects within the British Isles, in Wales, Scotland and Ireland, did not speak English and were therefore outside the main stream of politics for most purposes", and the divide between those few who had a say and those who did not was almost impossible to

cross, as “none of her female subjects and only a very small number of her male ones had any direct voice in the politics of the country, whose local and national governmental institutions were controlled by a comparative small number of very wealthy families” (THOMPSON, 2001, p. xix). The Reform Act of 1832 was propelled by the lack of universal representation, and even though its passing meant that more people gained the right to vote, it formalised the exclusion of women from the democratic process, and the majority of the population was still left out of the political arena.

Some of the changes that started during the Georgian Period became even more prominent during the reign of Queen Victoria, such as landed gentlemen having to share the spotlight with the emergent new rich, whose fortunes were not linked to land and heritage, but trade and manufacturing. The aristocracy’s power was dwindling, whereas the self-made-man was getting richer and more important with each passing day, and “there were no legal restrictions on entry into various social strata, and new sources of wealth were being used to build up what was potentially a new definition of legitimate rule outside landowning groups” (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 77). This rise to the higher echelons of society meant that this new emerging class had to prove itself worthy of belonging there. Thus, one of the results of this need to affirm one’s place in society was the intensification of what we had seen in Georgian times: the new rich emulating the genteel, “with few exceptions the new families entered country life anxious to please and be accepted, ready to conform to their new neighbours’ idea of how a gentleman should behave, and full of veneration and respect for the historic country families” (GIROUARD, 1979, p. 13); however, they also quickly started to look down on them, upholding moral values more strictly and judging those of aristocratic birth who did not have to work, and whose worries in life were no more than eating, drinking and finding entertainment. Later in the nineteenth century, these divisions between the middle class and the gentility and aristocracy dwindle further, as the middle classes now occupy their place with more confidence in the social scale.

> The perfect middle-class citizen was therefore a man of business and thus distinguished from the leisured aristocrat, who lacked such a training ground in which to develop the virtues of ‘energy, prudence and integrity’. He was also patriotic and benevolent, always ready to take an active part in the political and social life of his town and nation. He was also civilized, able to enrich the society in which he moved and to fulfil the offices of husband and father, so providing the perfect example to another generation of active citizens. Finally, he was, implicitly but emphatically, a man. (MORGAN, 2007, p. 33)

The increasing worry about being consistently moral and possessing good Christian values, as well as maintaining one's place in society, meant that one's attitude to one's house also slowly changed: whereas the Georgian house was meant to be seen, often open to the public when the family were away, the Victorian abode was more and more considered a refuge from the world: "a Regency gentleman was anxious to put his own taste on display and learn from the taste of others; to a Victorian gentleman his house was (or ought to be) a temple not of taste but of the domestic virtues, its privacy only accessible to his family and friends" (GIROUARD, 1979, p. 15).

Not only that, but the steady progression of the Industrial Revolution meant that the workforce became formalised, and that work was consistently performed outside of the home, while the place where one lived was increasingly seen as a haven from the outside world and its problems. Alongside this separation between home and work life, there emerged the figures of the male breadwinner and his angelic wife, which were hallmarks of the Victorian Period. As Amanda Vickery theorises in her work *The Gentleman's Daughter* (1999), however, this separation between home and the outside world was not quite so new, and it was not as clean-cut as many historians make it to be – yes, women were more restricted to the domestic sphere, which shaped the ideology of the century, but they were not, by any means, completely excluded from public life, for the "genteel home was not in any simple sense 'off-stage', nor were basic assumptions about the conduct of social relations abandoned like muddy boots, at the front door", furthermore, "if the genteel home was a stage, then it was one with many different settings which could accommodate everything from elite conviviality to the dispensation of patronage and the conduct of business, from mixed sex companies to congregations of men" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 202). Women's domain was the household, and ideally the household did not mix with the outside world of businesses and vice, but in actuality, these two spheres did, indeed, intertwine more than the Victorians would like to admit.

Whatever the reality was, the division of spheres was unquestionably part of men and women's imaginary lives during the nineteenth century, and the male bread-winner was the norm, with the sexual division of labour becoming "permanently enshrined in the senses which itself contributed to the equation of masculine identity with an occupation" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 230). Even when women worked, inside their houses, and sometimes outside of them, towards the household economy, their labour was considered unskilled and their contribution often went unrecorded: "many women contributed to their families' income without being recognised as workers. […] A principal contribution was hidden labour; while manual work was seen as unfeminine, women could do almost anything else in the guise of

helpmate" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 47). Moreover, women were also discouraged from joining the workforce in order not to take away opportunities from men, and whenever the question of introducing more female hands into previously all-male occupations arose, the unionists turned to "the belief that women did not belong in the public sphere of work" (JORDAN, 2001, p. 40), spreading even further the idea that male and female work were different and should be kept separate. Moreover, "as the century wore on, a growing rhetoric of domesticity promulgated by more affluent working-class men and middle-class commentators helped to keep women in the home and out of formal employment" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 15), thus furthering the narrative of separate spheres.

The domestic ideology might have dominated the imaginary worlds of the middle-class and upper social echelons, but for working-class women, not working was not an option, even if their work was undervalued and considered to be unskilled, as can be seen through the character of Bessy Higgins in *North & South*. Working-class women are not the focus of this study, but they did make up the majority of the female population, and therefore cannot be neglected. Notably, at the start of the eighteenth century the "most common jobs for women in London were domestic service, making and mending clothes, charring and laundering, and nursing, in that order. A century and a half later, the 1851 census listed the same four occupations in the same order" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 10). These women worked not to challenge the status quo, but to survive.

> We tend to think of the working classes as being made up of working men and their relatives, but women and their work equally helped to define the working classes and industrialisation. Almost all working-class women spent their lives working, and almost all earned money. Their tasks included raising their children, shopping, cooking, cleaning, working in the homes of others, bringing paid work into their own homes, and working for wages outside the home. […] Women were the key workers of the industrial revolution. (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 9)

Lower-class women did not have the luxury of being domestic angels, and despite having to work, they also did their best to appear dignified and God-fearing, for alongside the industrialisation process, religion played a major role in the separation of spheres, and women were seen as the paragons of virtue and morality. On the other end of the spectrum, we have elite, or aristocratic, women, who, like working-class women, are not the main focus of this work, but whom we will encounter in the novels studied here. They were even fewer in number than middle-class women, and at first glance, it would seem that rules did not apply to them in the same way. Their homes were not a completely female space, as business and politics were often done and discussed under their roofs. They entertained and visited as they pleased; those

activities often had agendas behind them, and elite women were well versed in using their influence to help further their and their family's position, and "politics were eminently susceptible to female input. Even as some protested 'petticoat politics', women canvassed, visited, and influenced patronage" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 87). As the century progressed, these women became more centred in the home: their duties as mistresses of imposing households, and moral guides to their family members; however, "they were not constrained by strict middle-class evangelical domesticity; rather, they were empowered by the message of evangelicalism to engage with the public sphere even as they broadened it" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 91). Aristocratic women had no need for the religious zeal of the lower classes, since they believed that "religion was useful for keeping the masses in order, but there was little need, in their opinion, for them to have a personal saviour. They attended church to set a good example, and they appointed the clergy for political or personal rather than religious reasons" (PERKIN, 1993, p. 100) – much like Lady Catherine DeBourgh in *Pride & Prejudice* and her appointment of Mr Collins as parson of Rosings Parish – which is one of the reasons why the middle classes went from copying the elite way of life to looking down on them.

Religion, during this period, was an essential tool in the creation and maintenance of the domestic ideology and the separate spheres; after all, there is no easier way to control half of the population than by keeping them at home and telling them that that is the best and most moral form to behave. Religious belief is seen to have empowered the middle classes, for as mentioned before, they at first aimed at emulating the nobility and aristocracy, to later look down on them and their more liberal behaviours. The Evangelical revival of the late eighteenth century turned religion into one of the most important and defining aspects of middle-class existence, and it is measured not only by an increase in church attendance, especially by women, but also "by the growth of charitable societies, by church building and extension and the recorded activities of the energetic clergy" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 79).

> The extent of the Evangelical drive was associated with the crisis they felt confronted English society, particularly after the French Revolution. The nation, they believed, was suffering from moral degeneracy. Events in France were a warning of what was to come if individuals did not inspire a revolution in the 'manners and morals' of the nation, a transformation which must begin with individual salvation. (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 82)

Not only did religion prescribe how women should behave, which will be explored in more depth in the next section, but it dictated indirectly the ideal of masculinity. Christian preachers and writers were seldom preoccupied with the forms masculine behaviour could take, "since man's nature was seen as in God's image while woman was defined as 'other'"

(DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 110). With the rise of the middle class, however, so rose the Christian middle-class man, whose "Christian manhood had to be created anew from the tissue of ideas associated with masculinity in the eighteenth century" since their lives were not dictated by the same principles as those of the gentry men, whose nature "was based on sport and codes of honour derived from military prowess, finding expression in hunting, riding, drinking and 'wenching'" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 110). The life of a middle-class man was considerably more sedentary due to the type of work he performed, and his influence rarely led to power, but it could lead to salvation. Whereas in Georgian times, a career in the Anglican Church[7] was no more than simply a dignified alternative for a second son, in the Victorian Era the concept of vocation was highly valued, and pursuing a life in the Church was not a mere option, but done only if one felt the call to it – whatever that meant. Moreover, the nineteenth century was marked by a strong religious revival, similar only to the Puritanism of centuries before, which "shaped that code of moral behaviour, or rather that infusion of all behaviour with moralism, which we still call, rightly or wrongly, 'Victorianism'" (ALTHOLZ, 1976, n/p).

Another example of nineteenth century contradictions is this increased religious zeal, accompanied by the greatest scientific advancements. In the first half of the century, these two aspects were seen as working in accordance, as if there were no contradictions between them, the study of God's words and the study of the natural world he was believed to have created walked hand in hand. Publications such as Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1856 would change that, as well as being important catalysts in the Victorian crisis of faith, to come later in the period. According to Altholz, however, it was not only the many contradictions posed by scientific discovery that caused religion's crisis, but also conflicts within its own precepts.

> The real point of the conflict was not the challenge of science but the response of religion. The scientific challenges laid bare certain weaknesses of the Victorian religious revival, and the victory of science was largely due to elements within the religious position. The most important such factor was the latent conflict between the sensitivity of conscience stimulated by the religious revival and the crude and harsh statement of the dogmas to which such sensitive consciences were expected to give their allegiance. The spokesmen of orthodox faith narrowed the ground on which Christianity was to be defended and allowed their scientific opponents to appear more honest than themselves. In these conflicts, the position of orthodox doctrine was, as presented by its upholders, not only less valid but less moral than that of irreligious science. As events unfolded, not merely the intellect but the moral sense, particularly the sense of truthfulness, revolted against orthodoxy. This may be called 'the warfare of conscience with theology'. (ALTHOLZ, 1976, n/p)

[7] The term Church is frequently used throughout this work, and unless stated otherwise, it refers to the Church of England (Anglican), as it was the country's main religion during the nineteenth century.

The rise of other faiths as well as an increasing growth in secularism also posed a threat to the established norms. Religion and religious conflict are present throughout our period, both within the Anglican Church, between the Anglican Church and other religions, and between religion and scientific discoveries, thus making religion, despite its many problems, central to the life of the Victorians. “As they watched the world around them being stripped of its old certainties, many Victorians sought meaning and spiritual refuge elsewhere” (PAXMAN, 2010, p. 239), idealising the more rural past, a time before the Industrial Revolution and all its many changes and contradictions had taken over their lives.

Many people, dissatisfied with the state of affairs and the role the Anglican church played in their lives, found solace in other forms of faith. Catholicism, always present on the island, gained strength during this period, propelled by the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829, which allowed members of the Roman Church to sit in parliament. More striking numbers, however, can be found in the rise of non-Anglican Protestant denominations, such as Methodists, Quakers and Unitarians. The latter is important to this work due to it being the religion of one of the authors examined here, Elizabeth Gaskell, who placed smatterings of Unitarian doctrine throughout her works. Unitarian doctrine differed from the Anglican one mainly through the negation of the idea of Original Sin and the belief that “the human mind and soul were not innately sinful, but instead were born with an immense potential for growth. Unitarians considered the environment as fundamentally responsible for shaping the individual” (WEBSTER, 2012, p. 15), which is an idea fundamental to the undertanding of the many discussions between Margaret Hale and Mr Thornton in *North & South*. Gaskell’s Unitarianism sustains her criticism of her own society and suggests change, not only in *North & South*, but also in her other works, such as *Ruth* – in which a fallen woman is given a second chance.

Religious life was of paramount importance in the Victorian Age, even if only to act as a public façade for the perfect middle-class life. Women were seen as the more moral of creatures, and therefore elevated in the eyes of society – this high morality, however, meant that their elevation came hand in hand with their exclusion into the domestic sphere, for they were responsible for the moral and religious maintenance of their household. Paradoxically, “most theology and religious practice during the nineteenth century was unkind to women or even misogynistic; many religious leaders held that, spiritually and otherwise, women were properly subordinate to men” (STEINBACH, 2004, 133). Despite conflicting messages, women’s church attendance was higher than men’s throughout the century, for it was seen as their duty as wives and mothers to be paragons of virtue, which included being seen practicing

their faith publicly and leading their own children into the same faith. This was also done through one of the activities that would be synonymous with female genteel work in the Victorian Period: charity. Women's domesticity was agreed upon, but ladies from the middle classes and above found ways to bypass it under the guise that helping those in need was nothing more than an extension of their homely and social duties of bringing help and, most importantly, spreading the evangelical word amongst the poor. The then common practice of philanthropy gave women the chance to explore the world beyond their drawing rooms. They joined forces, formed committees, held bazaars and fairs in order to help the poor and further their cause, thus gaining space in the public sphere, which bothered some.

> Although their contribution was often contested, women were able to adapt older traditions of female benevolence to emerging scientific discourses about the 'social' sphere, through emphasizing the importance of female influence as wives and mothers in the elevation of the working classes. Moreover, the association of middle-class women with superior virtue allowed them to claim special responsibilities as moral exemplars. It was therefore seen as natural that middle-class women should be the teachers of working-class children and housewives. (MORGAN, 2007, p. 74)

Through their charitable work, many genteel women had to face, for the first time, the realities later to be described by the likes of Charles Dickens: they witnessed the conditions in which other people, and especially women lived, and as Morgan claims, the "existence of a sizeable, if shifting, population of women in institutions which were often dirty, overcrowded and ill-provided with material and spiritual comforts, provided an easily identifiable cause for early women social reformers and evangelicals" (MORGAN, 2007, p. 93). Nineteenth-century women began to use their influence in the philanthropic arena to further certain reform agendas, such as better education for women and girls, as well as improving their lives when they were in institutionalised situations, and as Steinbach suggests, "the most common way for women to become involved in the lives of the poor was through visiting them, either in their homes or in their institutions, public and private, that cared for them. Middle-class women brought 'domesticity' to the spaces and people they visited" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 55). That being said, charity did not erase the social divide between poor women and middle and upper-class ladies – if anything, it reinforced the differences between them – which is why Margaret Hale's friendship with Bessy Higgins in *North & South* is so important, as it breeches the social barriers.

The prevalent dichotomy between public and private, home and away, went beyond the borders of the British Isles, and functioned as a pertinent metaphor for the relations between Britain and its ever-expanding empire: "home represents civilization, but also order, constraint,

sterility, pain and ennui, while native culture, the far pole of the myth, represents nature, chaos, fecundity, power, and joy" (McNELLY, 1975, p. 9). Furthermore, English women represented respectability, morality and piety, while the native women of the colonies bared the weight of being seen as wholly sexualised creatures driven by passions and immorality. This dichotomy is seen in *Jane Eyre*, where Jane represents English chastity, and Bertha functions as her mirror image, her polar opposite, but someone who is also under the dominance of a patriarchal society, represented by the many male figures throughout the novel, especially Rochester. Also in *Jane Eyre*, the main character is offered the opportunity to become the epitome of one of the sides of this imaginary opposition: the missionary woman, a proper English lady who travels abroad to educate and bring the evangelical word to those they deemed in need. Not surprisingly, the female task to recover morally the poor in Britain, without erasing the differences between them, was extended to the colonies, furthering once again the scope of female space.

Religious men might have been the first to go on missions to the colonies, but it was the women who became important figures in "the myth of Britain's 'civilizing mission' abroad" (MORGAN, 2007, p. 39). Missions and missionaries became firm parts of English society: "children heard and read about them in Sunday school, while adults listened to sermons on them, read fiction and non-fiction on missionary life, and attended bazaars in support of the cause" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 147). In time, women's role became more prominent, and from a background, offstage position of offering support to male missionaries, women started to occupy the forefront through "organisations which invited prominent female missionaries to speak at their meetings and fostered their own connections with those working abroad" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 148).

This increase in female missionaries reflected the work done at home, on the one hand, and a result of the rising numbers of single women – as there were significantly more women than men – whose opportunities were few and far between, on the other. Single women posed a danger to the smooth running of things, as they were seen as a temptation to married men as well as possible competition for their jobs. Since there were more unmarried young women than there were eligible bachelors to marry them, becoming a nun or sister became a viable option, and "sisterhoods were, in this context, thought to solve a social problem. […] Women who chose to enter convents were not necessarily more profoundly religious than other women" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 151), but were in fact just looking for a better life, which contradicts the ideas of vocation perpetuated during this period. Many found purpose and safety in these secure religious spaces, and in the opportunities provided by the many missions to the colonies,

which later resulted in employment, as the colonies offered women the chance to work in exchange for a salary, something that was frowned upon for middle-class women back home. Not only that, but joining a sisterhood had the added benefit of no longer being a burden to one's male relatives.

If women were the paragons of virtue and morality, responsible for the smooth running of their households and their children's education, it was paramount that they started to receive a proper education too. Throughout the nineteenth century, girls and boys were educated according to their class, and after that according to their gender, as girls were seen to have less ability and potential than boys, and were therefore taught different things, as well as having very different expectation placed upon them. Over the course of the nineteenth century, education became increasingly more inclusive, and literacy levels soared amongst all classes and genders. Significantly, women became educators, as teaching was associated to the female side of the spectrum, and the figure of the governess, which will be explored in the section about *Jane Eyre*, became common place and opened many doors to middle-class women, who were then able to earn a living respectably.

In spite of its chaste beginnings, female philanthropy and education planted the seeds for the rise of what was called, later in the century, the New Woman, a figure whose differences to the acclaimed Angel in the Home could not be more pronounced, but who, to some extent, was also a product of this angelic woman. Society was, at the end of the century, more open to women's employment and education, and Mary Wollstonecraft's work was no longer ignored, instead gaining importance and inspiring those who would, in the beginning of the twentieth century, fight for the right to vote.

The realm of King George III was not the same as that of his grandchild, Queen Victoria. By the end of Victoria's life, the world had seen innumerable changes, and so had English society. The Industrial Revolution, the railways, and the enclosures had changed the panorama of the countryside, while urbanization had completely reshaped the cities. The aristocracy did not have the same pull over society as they did in the beginning of the century, and "by 1859 England had undergone a moral revolution, and the middle class had imposed conformity to its own puritan values on the rest of society, at least to the extent of everyone paying lip service to them" (PERKIN, 1993, p. 239). Most importantly to this study, women had become angels, and the construction of the ideal of femininity was such that we feel its repercussions to this day. It is this transformation that I will explore in the next section.

1.2 The Angel in the House

> ***Women ought to try to purify their hearts; but can they do so when their undeveloped understandings make them entirely dependent on their senses for occupation and amusement, when no noble undertaking raises them above the day's little vanities or enables them to curb the wild emotions that agitate a reed over which every passing breeze has power?***
>
> Mary Wollstonecraft, ***The Vindications of the Rights of Woman***

1.2.1 Separate spheres

The nineteenth century was a time of revolutions and contradictions, but above all and paramount to this study, it was a time in which men and women had well-defined roles, and ideals of what it meant to be a woman were more than just loose guides on how to live one's life: they were in fact something for which to aim in order to be a perfectly good woman, even if they were impossible standards. As mentioned in the previous section, the Industrial Revolution changed more than the landscape and business prospects, it also heavily affected how people organised their lives and, furthermore, how society organised itself. In this part, I will focus on the development of the domestic ideology and the separation of spheres, the public and the private, usually associated with men and women respectively, especially amongst the rising middle classes. Much could be said about working-class women, as they comprised the majority of nineteenth-century society, but as the novels composing the corpus of this work are all about middle-class and genteel women, they will be my focus here, despite working-class women (and men) making the eventual appearance.

Family life became the centre of men and women's existence during our period, and all aimed to live up to the ideal of middle-class domesticity: "the family unit, money and influence were inextricably woven together in the process of middle-class self-discipline" (CALDER, 1976, p. 94). The middle classes worked hard to build their ideal home, firstly through the banishment of any work-related activity from the domestic space, which was reflected on the segregation between functions such as sleeping, cooking, washing, and eating from more polite social situations, eventually leading to houses having designated spaces for each of these activities. Secondly came the separation "epitomized by the suburban villa: physically, financially and socially removed from the enterprise" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 359), and this was followed by a greater desire for privacy, which led to the building of boundaries such as gates and fences around the middle-class home. This new hub of family life was the domain of women, who were "mainly responsible for creating and maintaining the house, its contents and its human constituents" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 360).

During the long nineteenth century, domesticity became the rule for women as well as something for which to strive in men, which seems paradoxical when most of the population was actually leaving their homes to work in factories and mills. Not only that, but "middle-class housing had to provide more than just a haven for family withdrawal, for the home was also a stage for social ritual and outward manifestation of status in the community" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 362). Amanda Vickery expertly argues in her work *The Gentleman's Daughter* (1999) that, for one thing, the existence of separate spheres is not a nineteenth century invention, even if it can be observed with more accuracy and precision during that period, but that its intensification during Victorian times is caused by the increasing freedom women had in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and that often the distinctions between public and private did not directly correspond to male and female, respectively. According to Vickery, "the increasing harping on the proper female sphere might just as easily demonstrate a concern that more women were seen to be active outside the home rather than proof that more women were so confined", which led to the spreading of the ideals of domesticity that permeate the century, as a "response to an expansion in the opportunities, ambitions and experience of Georgian and Victorian women – a cry from an embattled status quo, rather than the leading edge of change" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 7).

Vickery's argument is in accordance with one of my findings when researching for this work, namely the fact that as the nineteenth century progressed, women's situation became more confined – at least before female activists begin their fight for women's rights towards the end of the century, as a reaction to decades of forced propriety and impossible standards for women with very little legal recompense. Through the novels published in the period, as it will be explored later in Jane Austen's, Charlotte Brontë's and Elizabeth Gaskell's works, it is possible to infer this change, as Austen's heroines seemed to have had more agency in their society than those of the other two novelists – they were freer to roam the countryside and voice their thoughts, and even the obedient Fanny Price finds strength to go against what is expected of her by her male relatives. Interactions between the sexes seem to be more prominent in the beginning of the century, judging by its literature, than later on in the nineteenth century. Even women's clothes testify to the changes in progress, going from the floaty and easy empire waist dresses to the confining and heavy Victorian ones. While society was prospering and science flourishing, the condition of women was becoming more restricted, their possibilities narrower.

Again, as Vickery suggests in her work, "the dialectical polarity between home and world is an ancient trope of western writing; the notion that women were uniquely fashioned for the private realm is at least as old as Aristotle" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 6); however, the

separation between work and home took on new proportions with the rise of the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of the British Empire: work was no longer a continuation of one's home, it had now moved outside, to factories, mills, and shops. The work carried out in the home was mostly ignored and seen as informal or amateurish, even when it also contributed to the economy of the household. One's home was gradually seen as a sacred space in which to get away from it all, thus establishing a detachment between home and work, as if the home, clean and private, could be protected from the vulgar capitalist society being developed just outside its walls. As suggested by McDowell, "the development of a spatial division between the private arena of the home and the public arena of the world of waged work, politics and power in industrial societies was crucial in the social construction of accepted attributes of femininity and masculinity" (McDOWELL, 2004, p. 96).

> In Britain, as in other Western European societies during industrialization, the home was invested with a spiritual quality […], and the idealization of the home took on religious characteristics. Housework and childcare in particular were seen as women's sacred duty, they and the master of the house being protected in this sphere from the harsh competitive world of capitalism. […] Thus the home was constructed as the locus of love, emotion and empathy, and the burdens of nurturing and caring for others were placed on the shoulders of women, who were, however, constructed as 'angels' rather than workers. (McDOWELL, 2004, p. 75-76)

The ideology of separate spheres does not mean that women were at all times confined to their houses, but that the social roles they were expected to perform were intrinsically linked to the home and its demands, while men were perceived as the breadwinners, the ones who went out to work and supported the family's lifestyle with their earnings. Even in the higher circles, where men did not work, women were still associated with domestic life, while men were linked to outdoor pursuits such as hunting and horseback riding.

Despite of the rise of the middle classes and a new way of life, land was still one of the most important commodities and a symbol of status, which explains why so many strived to buy their own property, much like Mr Bingley in *Pride & Prejudice*, whose father had made money from trade and later tasked his son with finding a stately house where the family can grow roots and join the landed class. So even if land did not come with the claim of inheritance and ancestry, when they purchased it, not only was it a mark of their social rise, but it "was often more of an investment or asset to produce income for enlarging a business or farming operation, as collateral on loans or for paternalistic schemes for their workpeople" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 20). While the established aristocracy despised anything to do with money (at least publicly), "their casual attitude to debt and addiction to gambling […] were an

anathema to the middling ranks whose very existence depended on the establishment of creditworthiness and avoidance of financial embarrassment" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 21). These opposing attitudes to money were one of the contributing factors for distancing the middle class and the aristocracy, allowing the first to look down, for the first time, on the erratic behaviour of the second.

Their new status meant that the middle classes lived under constant preoccupation of losing a position that had been so hard to achieve. In their attempt to maintain such a hard-earned situation, the middle classes established rules for themselves, firstly through emulating the aristocracy, but later deciding the aristocracy's ways were not the most moral or decent, thus surpassing them in their ideals of behaviour and propriety. Amidst these changes and the struggle to sustain a new position, furthering the gendered view of the world was used "to soften, if not disavow, the disruption of a growing class system as the master and household head was transmuted into employer on the one hand and husband/father on the other" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 30). Middle-class ladies and gentlemen had well-defined places in this new social order, for the middle class's "critique of the established dominance of the landed class and their belief in their capacity to control and improve the working class, which was at the centre of their claims, was articulated within a gendered concept of class" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 30). In this plight, women had an essential role as they were, according to Poovey, "visible indices of a man's position in his quest for social prestige" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 10). Not only that,

> Women were crucial pawns in the struggle for landed wealth, upon which both political power and social prestige ultimately depended. Marriages between aristocratic (but often encumbered) land and merchant money enabled the older titled families to maintain or even extend their estates and, simultaneously, permitted the middle classes to improve or establish their families. Because such marriages sent middle-class daughters into the families of the upper classes, this practice helped to infuse bourgeois values into the less-restrained aristocratic "high life". As both representatives and guarantors of property, then, women became objects of men's aspirations and ambitions – a position that implicitly demanded that women desire to be nothing but men's property. (POOVEY, 1984, p. 10-11)

Women were not only a mirror for the patriarch's status, they also became linked with the natural world and with innocence, as far away as possible from the growing capitalist society that polluted the cities: "the romantic imagination indelibly fixed the image of the rose-covered cottage in a garden where Womanhood waited and from which Manhood ventured abroad" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 28), much like, in Austen's *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot had to content herself with her lot in life while Captain Wentworth went out to sea to make his fortune.

His future was his to conquer, while for years, her life was the result of other people's choices for her. Life in the new highly inhabited cities became ever grimmer, dirtier, and full of temptation. Whilst cities gained this sordid association, people started longing for the countryside they had left behind, developing an image of a rural idyll, clean and purged of sins, the opposite of the dirty cities they were now forced to inhabit. The only way to further their rise in society was to take full part in it, and to do that, circulating in the cities was a necessity, making country life even more appealing in contrast.

The separation of spheres, by which men went out and earned a living while women presided over the household, however, "often fell short of the reality and the boundaries between public and private were continually being tested and renegotiated", even if "these divisions became more rigid across the period 1780 to 1850, due to a combination of economic change, the emergence of a middle-class 'public' and the influence of evangelical religion" (MORGAN, 2007, p. 2), helping to strengthen the ideology behind the separation of spheres. This division meant the construction of a 'country of the mind', in which "the idea of domesticity as a general good was intimately tied to the powerful symbol of the home as a physical place. The house became both setting and symbol of the domestic community" (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 51), and it was a woman's job to guarantee everything ran smoothly in this idealised existence:

> The house mistress, ideally the wife, was the linchpin of the static community. It was she who waited at home for the return of the active, seeking man. Her special task was the creation of order in her household, the regular round of daily activity set in motion and kept smoothly ticking over by continued watchfulness; doing everything at the 'right' times, keeping everything and everybody in the 'right' place. (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 52)

This domesticity was composed by, according to June Purvis (1991), three different aspects: firstly, the belief that men and women were so completely different that it was natural that they occupied different spheres; secondly, that women were always defined in relation to the men in their lives, being termed 'relative creatures', completely dependent on and of their male counterparts; and thirdly, and perhaps most shocking to contemporary sensibilities, that women were, simply, inferior to men. A woman's vocation was to take care of the man in her life, supporting him in his endeavours, while she stayed at home and organised family life – even though this power over the hearth stopped where the male power over her began; furthermore, even her power over the household was limited by his power, thus making her a mere second in command even in the instances when she knew best. These ideals were strongly perpetuated by the Anglican Church, and religion played an important role in keeping men and

women in their opposite spheres: “man was independent, woman dependent on man. Man’s sphere was the world, woman’s the home. Man’s duty was to provide materially for the woman, the woman’s to comfort and succour the man” (JORDAN, 2001, p. 42). Furthermore, according to Jordan (2001), despite these oppositions having always been, to some extent, part of Western culture, the nineteenth century saw them become more extreme, for “wives might always have been regarded as helpmates, but before the nineteenth century, the help was […] specifically directed to raising the income of the family, and there was little distinction between home and workplace”. The relationship, which was previously hierarchical between man and woman, husband and wife, was now also one of opposition, for “what the man was, the woman was not, and vice versa” (JORDAN, 2001, p. 43).

The differences between men and women might have been seen as natural, but, paradoxically, behavioural prescription for both men and women only grew. Men were the breadwinners, the explorers and conquerors of the world, expanding their personal empire at the same time that they shielded their homes from outside pollution. As Davidoff and Hall aptly suggest, masculinity “implied the ability and willingness to support women and children. Men would enter the market as free agents but would thus preserve the moral bonds of society in their private and philanthropic capacity” (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 199).

Masculine identity was closely linked with the occupations undertaken by men, as opposed to the lack thereof by women – at least by middle-class women. Even when women contributed to the household economy, their labour was considered nothing but domestic and unlike in status to that of their husbands and brothers, regardless of what they did. Amongst male occupations, there was, however, an important difference relating to what service they were providing or, indeed, selling. As Davidoff and Hall affirm, “from early nineteenth century, the image of the middle-class man had been the manufacturer, the ‘Manchester man’ which so caught contemporary imagination” (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 270). Mr Thornton, in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North & South* is the perfect reflection of this particular brand of masculinity, and the novel’s protagonist recognises him as such, at the same time that she is aware of the differences between the work he performs and that of her father, a former clergyman, and of her then suitor, a lawyer, making explicit an important distinction between middle-class men: those who had goods to sell and those who dealt with abstract concepts and ideas, the latter having more chance of keeping their hands and appearance clean, therefore being seen with higher regard. Men of the professions – namely, the law, medicine, and clergy – made their voices known through sermons, literature, and lectures, “but it was the manufacturer, banker and merchant who usually paid the bills” (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988,

p. 271). Undoubtedly, the images of middle-class men, both then and now, vary immensely, but what they all have in common is "the masculine penumbra of these activities. What men did was defined as men's work; because they did it, they were men" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 271).

The prescription of what men should act like was certainly restrictive, but by no means was it comparable to the restrictions imposed on women. Men had the freedom to come and go, while women depended on them, and it was believed that if a woman had to search for an income of her own, the men in her family were not doing enough to support her, thus limiting female possibilities of work and ascension in the world, and at the same time strengthening the idea that men were the sole providers of the family, responsible for supporting women and children. The lack of opportunities to earn a living meant that women's options were more limited, and marriage was the most viable route, "as illustrated by the metamorphosis of the term 'spinster', from one who spins to an unmarried woman" (DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988 p. 273). As Mary Poovey (1998) suggests, unmarried women were seen as an evil twofold: not only did they compete with men for work, impacting on the economy, they also posed a threat to the moral order with no husband to 'control' them.

Despite the bad connotations associated to their working, most women had to leave their homes to work, especially if they were unmarried, even after all the changes caused by the Industrial Revolution – and often, in the case of working-class women, because of those changes. "Domestic service was for most of the nineteenth century the nation's fastest growing occupation category. […] One reason that service was on the rise as an occupational category was the growth of the servant-employing middle classes, as a proportion of the population" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 18), and during the 1850s, one third of young women were in domestic service. For working-class women, having to earn their keep was just a fact of life, and they sought employment in grand households and factories, as well as often conducting business from home, such as sewing and babysitting. Unlike the middle and upper-class homes, the working-class dwellings were still very much a part of the world, not a haven from which to escape it; in *North & South*, the Higgins' household sees comings and goings that go beyond neighbouring visiting, but also include Nicholas's workmates and the troubles faced by all in the mills, thus merging home and work life. The women who inhabited these working-class houses frequently did double shifts, working towards the household economy, often from inside the house, as well as doing all the actual housework. Wives who worked outside the home "were not liked by the upholders of middle-class Christian morality, though the necessity of

employment in some cases was accepted" (CALDER, 1976, p. 73) and undeniable amongst the working classes.

For most middle-class women, the working world was more limited due to ideas of propriety that followed them, and the act of working in itself reflected badly on their male relatives, as mentioned before, and was, therefore, discouraged. In fact, in the early part of the Victorian period, it was nearly impossible for a well-bred woman to work except as a governess, as we will see below. This is not surprising when one remembers that the middle-classes were the most interested in keeping class and gender divisions as the order of the day, becoming "the most zealous in promoting the separation of spheres" (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 151). Middle-class lifestyle, however, was often not affordable, and many whose education and upbringing placed them in that social strata struggled to remain in it, which meant that women were very much part of the domestic economy, even if frequently, and to this day, unrecognised as such.

The ideal of middle-class morality was only truly possible if one had financial means to support the prescribed lifestyle, as "domestic comfort required a relatively spacious house, good furniture, certain amenities and decorative objects regarded as essentials of tasteful living, and, perhaps above all, servants" (CALDER, 1976, p. 83). Despite general misconceptions about middle-class women, "the number of wives who were decorative and idle, like *Mansfield Park*'s Lady Bertram, was very small, since few were wealthy enough to employ servants to do all their housework and childcare", yet

> the ideal of most middle-class wives was to organise their households as efficiently as their husbands organised their businesses, thus making a substantial contribution to the family's well-being and solvency, and also to become the morally superior partner in the marriage. In the period 1800 to 1840, in evangelical Christian circles in particular, women established the home as their own sphere, claiming moral authority over religious and sexual matters. Most women believed […] that they needed to guard the citadel of respectability, to control men's passions and eliminate male profligacy. […] In short, women (particularly middle-class women) were to regenerate society. (PERKIN, 1993, p. 87)

Luckily for them, "the growth of state and commercial bureaucracies, of retail shopping, and of state-sponsored education led to the creation of new jobs for women in clerical work, elementary school teaching, nursing, hospital dispensing, and retail sales work", and these jobs meant a significant departure from previous alternatives, being "especially appealing to lower-middle-class and upper-working-class women because they required education and provided respectability, and were therefore set apart from more menial work" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 33). Certain jobs, therefore, slowly became more acceptable for women, frequently those that men did not feel inclined to do, or that felt like an extension of the duties bestowed upon women

and not a challenge to them. Nursing and teaching, for example, became almost synonyms with acceptable middle-class female employment.

Teaching was one of the ways middle-class women found to earn a living respectably, as they were able to exercise their learned gentility and education in forming and bringing up children – which, in many ways, resembled the responsibilities of motherhood. Furthermore, many families started private schools in their own home, and women were extremely important for the smooth running of the enterprise, seeing as more often than not, these were households run by women. An alternative to school teaching and to turning your own home into a school was becoming a private tutor or a governess. Despite being considered a respectable source of income for women, the role of the governess was one of many contradictions, going beyond the exercise of motherly duties when one was not, in fact, a mother. Not only that, but as explains Mary Poovey, the governess was also not a prostitute, though "she was nevertheless suspiciously close to other sexualised women; not a lunatic, she was nevertheless deviant simply because she was a middle-class woman who had to work and because she was always in danger of losing her middle-class status and her 'natural' morality" (POOVEY, 1998, p. 14). Furthermore, the governess was paradoxical to Victorian moralists since on the one hand, she performed the work of a proper lady, and on the other hand, she earned wages for it, which in itself questioned the pure morality attributed to feminine work in the home, for the very fact that some women were paid to do what the ideal woman was expected to do for free put in question the structure of society and, indeed, that of the ideology of separate spheres. As Charlotte Brontë demonstrates in *Jane Eyre*, and will be discussed further in chapter 2, and her sister Anne Brontë does in *Agnes Grey*, first published in 1847, the life of the governess was harder than appearances led to believe, for she was this contradictory figure, caught between social classes, too low to be accepted into the circle of the family that employed her, too high to mingle with the servants working for said family, as well as posing a challenge to the established status quo.

Nursing was also a viable option for middle-class women, and became more popular after the success of Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War (1853 – 1856). Once again, it fitted with the narrative of femininity, championed by the middle classes, as it was seen as an extension of the common practice of philanthropy amongst middle-class women. While teaching was perceived as a more fluid continuation of a woman's work in the home, and teachers had much more flexibility to come and go, depending on their demands, the same was not true for nursing, a profession that "offered conditions that were more firmly rooted in the past and conformed far more self-consciously to the patriarchal conditions defined as

appropriate by the domestic ideology", that is, "with nursing the fact that the women worked under doctors and with male patients and students made their 'protection' far more of an issue" (JORDAN, 2001, p. 144) than it was for teachers.

An employment without which this research would not exist had women not taken it up was writing. The rise and popularization of the novel, one of the pivotal points of the eighteenth century, brought change to the consumption of stories, no longer only oral, no longer only for morality's sake; it also brought about the proliferation of writers, amongst whom were women, who had decided to tell their stories, and often in order to complement the household income. Writing had for a long time been part of upper and middle-class women's lives through frequent and long correspondences, and some of these women eventually started to write for a living – even if, to get their work published, many of them had to use pseudonyms or be anonymous. Female authors belonged to two distinct groups, "eminently respectable women, who circulated private copies of their writings for the amusement of their family and friends, and distinctively less respectable ones who published their works for profit" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 50). Their writings crossed the walls of their homes not by their leaving them, as it could be done from the safety of their drawing rooms, but because in writing, women – and often middle and upper-class ladies in this case – found their way into the public sphere through their voice, and could not be accused of leaving their prescribed place, thus challenging the status quo.

Even work that was deemed acceptable for genteel young women was a challenge to the reigning ideology, and the aim of most women and the men in their lives was that they should not have to work. For all intents and purposes, the ideal role for a woman was to preside over the household, the queens of the hearth, protecting it – and themselves – from the perils of the outside world. The idleness often attributed to middle-class women was, in the majority of cases, nothing more than wishful thinking, as they were often involved with something or other; however, "all activities carried out within the home were assumed to be for consumption of the family. The women who do this work are not directly related to the economy, since the economy by this definition is located outside the home" (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 153)

If men were responsible for venturing into the world, braving its vices and vicissitudes, the ideology that reigned over women portrayed them as angels, perfect little creatures without passions or desires, whose existence was solely dedicated to the men in their lives and their children. This feminine ideal, however, was also working towards furthering the middle-class agenda, and the perfect angel was not only the perfect wife and mother, but she was also the vessel through which a man could display his new-found wealth and gentility, for being a good woman meant being imbued of middle-class values, as Langland argues "from its inception the

angelic ideal was imbricated in class distinctions. It was never, simply, a womanly ideal; it was always middle class, existing only under the condition and assumption of a supporting cast of domestic servants" (LANGLAND, 1995, p. 79), as it would have been impossible to uphold such standards without a few handfuls of people surrounding her in order to maintain appearances, which is why the mere attempt to uphold such domestic values was only possible amongst wealthier women, widening the gap between different social strata. Despite middle and upper-class women being the only ones able to exercise their domesticity in full, the ideology of separate spheres permeated all social levels, which "meant that for working class women who went 'out to work', it was still their lot in life to do the housework as well" (McDOWELL, 2004, p. 79). Moreover, this ideology was so prescriptive and derivative of the middle classes that it helped create and promote the figure to this day associated with Victorianism and women during the nineteenth century: the angel of the house.

1.2.2 Domestic ideal: Patmore's angel

The ideology of separate spheres created the middle-class domestic angel, perfectly described by Coventry Patmore in his long narrative poem "The Angel in the House", published in instalments between 1854 and 1862, and imbedded in contradiction, for "while Victorian society regarded women as its moral guardians, moral strength was not sufficient protection in itself from society's pitfalls and dangers", meaning that women were, at the same time, "the supporting pillars and the helpless parasites of society" (CALDER, 1976, p. 12). This idealisation of womanhood had such strength that, in the 1930s, Virginia Woolf was still trying to defeat its ghost and fight against its pull. She defines this creature who haunts her work and life as follows:

> She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it – in short, she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all – I need not say it – she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty – her blushes, her great grace. In those days – the last of Queen Victoria – every house had its Angel. (WOOLF, 2009, p. 141)

Women complied to the ideal because, amongst other reasons, it gave them purpose, and arguably due to fear of becoming corrupted by the dangers of the outside world. At a time when middle-class women's lives were being stripped of responsibility, as men took over control, this angelic Madonna, who supervised over the household and furthered her husband's

career by being practically perfect, gave women an outlet as “they were given a reason for their existence which allowed them to maintain their self-esteem in this situation. Though in every practical way inferior to men, they could feel morally superior” (JORDAN, 2001, p. 54). The image of the angel to which middle-class women aspired was often a psychological crutch on which they leaned for a sense of purpose, and any mention of questioning its prescriptions was shocking. As Ellen Jordan argues, many middle-class women might not have been revered as angels, but if they wanted to maintain their social position, “they had to accept the sphere defined for them by the myth, and live within its prescriptive boundaries, no matter how high the price paid” (JORDAN, 2001, p. 56). Furthermore, the doctrine of separate spheres prescribed that women’s chief role was to provide help to the men in their lives; however, it was not only in a physical or practical sense: they were responsible for guiding men spiritually, meaning that “women were shut up in the house not just to do the housework and bring up the children but to be a sort of externalised conscience for men” (JORDAN, 2001, p. 51). No wonder the image of the great woman *behind* the even greater man is perpetuated to this day.

The myth of the angel of the house was not only, as mentioned before, prescriptive of women’s behaviour, but it was also intrinsically linked to class constructs, working towards furthering class difference, not only for the reasons mentioned in the previous section. Being the perfect angelic woman differentiated the lady of the house from the female workers who served her, placing her on a moral pedestal as “social ideology inscribed the lower classes as inherently less moral, less delicate, more physical, and more capable of strenuous physical work” (LANGLAND, 1995, p. 41), and consequently, viewing the angelic woman as the servant’s opposite.

Not unlike women’s situation regarding their sexuality, as will be seen below, their very adoption of the angelic myth was bathed in contradiction. Women were seen to be naturally moral, timid, modest, and selfless, and those who defied these claims were seen as “unfeminine and unnatural”. Nonetheless, it was believed that women had to receive intense training to conform to what was expected of them and their behaviour. That is, “though the potential to be an angel was theoretically born in women, appropriate social conditioning, it was felt, was necessary for its full flowering” (JORDAN, 2001, p. 53), meaning that a young girl’s upbringing was supposed to be sheltered from the evils of the world, as well as from any situation that might call upon her to act unnaturally.

This image of women as angels implies a lack of sexuality. The nineteenth century in Britain was characterised by a loathing to talk about sex and sexuality, as these subjects were connected to uncleanliness and vice. Women were “constructed as in need of control, and

somewhat ironically, given the associations between sexuality and pollution, as pure and sacred, as the angels of the domestic arena whose duty it was to bring order to the homes" (McDOWELL, 2004, p. 78). Anything pertaining to the outside world was seen as the opposite of femininity, and sexuality was one of those things, for proper ladies should, above all, deny the decadence associated with desire of any kind.

> Sex was simultaneously private and a key part of women's public personas. The most important identifying characteristic a person had in the nineteenth century was his or her reputation. Men's and women's reputations were assessed quite differently. While men were judged on many factors, including wealth and work, women were judged by their sexuality […]. Women took their reputations very seriously and recognised that their sexual behaviour was not a private matter. For a young woman from the comfortable middle classes, nothing less than an entire lack of sexual experience before her engagement would do. Middle-class girls were constantly reminded of the importance and the fragility of a good reputation – even flirtation or romance could taint one – and many have not only been aware of, but internalised, these standards, along with the doctrine of passionless. (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 112).

Much like the constant control and need for a proper upbringing in order for women to develop fully what was seen as their nature – the contradiction of which seems to have eluded them – Victorians liked to believe that women were innately sexless and pure, angelic, but, paradoxically, that their passions had to be constantly watched and regulated. The mere fact that women were indoctrinated to be modest and not to show their passions and desires shows there was an effort to subdue sexuality, meaning, therefore, that there was indeed sexuality to be repressed, despite their best efforts to contain it. What this means is that the idea that women were pious angelic creatures was socially and culturally constructed, and a lot of energy and effort went into maintaining it, as Mary Poovey argues:

> Even modesty perpetuates the paradoxical formulation of female sexuality. For a modest demeanour served not only to assure the world that a woman's appetites were under control; it also indicated that female sexuality was still assertive enough to *require* control. That is, even as modesty was proclaimed to be the most reliable guardian of a woman's chastity – and hence the external sign of her internal integrity – it was also declared to be an advertisement for – and hence an attraction to – her sexuality. (POOVEY, 1984, p. 21)

Sex was to be ignored, and in the effort to do so, it gained centre stage, disguised as chastity, for "to define oneself by some other category than the paradox of sexuality/chastity was to move wholly outside of social definition, to risk being designated a 'monster' (POOVEY, 1984, p. 23). The only function of sex, then, was to be reproduction, and deviating from that could have dire consequences, for as Perkin suggests, "sexual love was no longer to be pleasurable or fun, but a marital duty. Women's bodies, hidden in long, voluminous clothes,

were almost as much of a mystery to themselves as to men" (PERKIN, 1993, p. 51). Furthermore, it was women's responsibility to control male sexuality, thus, middle-class ladies, through marriage, acted as "agents of salvation, and with the crisis in religious faith, the image of a desexualised Madonna took on increasing saliency" (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 106). A woman's ability to comply with this image determined her worth, but "equating chastity with value not only required a woman to supress or sublimate her sexual and emotional appetites; it also required her to signal her virtue by a physical intactness that is by definition invisible", which meant that she could only display her supposed chastity in negative terms, "by *not* speaking, by *not* betraying the least consciousness of her essential sexuality" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 24).

> As embodiments of the pure ideals of the middle classes, [women] were celebrated during the 19th century for their superiority to all earthly desires. Depicted as a being completely without sexual desire and delicate to the point of frailty, urged not only to be dependent but to cultivate and display that dependence, the Victorian Angel of the House was to be absolutely free from all corrupting knowledge of the material – and materialistic – world. In her proper sphere, of course, she reigned as queen, for she was held to be an accessible image of God's most sacred mystery: the miracle of the one who, like Christ, finds supreme fulfilment in absolute self-denial. (POOVEY, 1984, p. 34-35)

Being a "woman, so closely defined by her bodily materiality, was a particular case of the universal, while man was both the universal human and the particular male – an asymmetry underlying all claims to rational universalism" (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 231), and the image that most represented this ideal of femininity was that of the selfless mother, the perfect Madonna, who only "had sex in the interest of procreation, marital harmony, or motherhood, but rarely if ever in response to their own desire" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 108). Furthermore, motherhood connected women to the extent that they were all the same in their duties, and their differences were ignored. Unlike their predecessors, who saw the differences between male and female bodies as a spectrum, medical men of this period started to differentiate male and female bodies in a series of dualistic oppositions rather than just seeing them as distinct, especially concerning their reproductive system, setting aside any potential similarities. This practice "also entailed effacing other kinds of differences among members of the same sex, so that the similarity of women's childbearing capacity became more important than whatever other features distinguished them" (POOVEY, 1998, p. 6), as women were easier to control as a uniform group.

A middle-class woman's commitment with maternity was a reflection of her gentility, and, more importantly, a reflection of her family's status. Motherhood might have epitomized the myth of the angel in the house, but conversely, it also worked in favour of women, as early feminists used it to further the belief that women were essential for the proper running and perpetuation of the Empire; thus women were encouraged to think of themselves as mothers of England, spreading the Empire through their offspring and the morality they imbued in their children – much like the Queen herself[8].

Despite its fundamental role in women's lives, it is known that motherhood incurred many risks, the main one being a woman's own life. Childbirth was dreaded by many nineteenth-century ladies, including Queen Victoria. The countless diaries the Queen left behind are proof of it, as shows Lucy Worsley (2018), in her take on the monarch's life. During the nineteenth century, women began to learn more about birth control, and according to Susie Steinbach (2004), they would often employ contraceptive methods without informing their husbands, especially when their procreation duties had already been fulfilled. Any form of control over conception or birth was generally deemed unnatural, since motherhood was seen as one of the most natural occurrences in a woman's life. Even the reduction of pain during childbirth through newly discovery anaesthetics was frowned upon, suggests Poovey (1998), as it meant that the process of birth could be perceived as "unnatural" for being somewhat manipulated, threatening its naturality, and consequently posing a risk to the naturality of motherhood itself, questioning woman's morality and sexuality. During this period, medical men's debates on whether women's nature should be defined "primarily in terms of morality or physiology constituted an important impediment to the professionalisation of medicine at the same time that it exposed the contradiction written into the Victorian image of woman" (POOVEY, 1998, p. 25), meaning that the use of anaesthetics also became a religious debate, for according to Poovey (1998), there was question on whether labour came under God's or men's jurisdiction. A painful labour was seen by some as God's will, the most natural way it could possibly be, and for that reason many people were firmly against the use of any anaesthetic during labour. On the other hand, some saw their use as God empowering men to relieve women's pain – and to this day, the use of painkillers during labour is debated, even if the reasons behind it have changed somewhat.

The Victorian ideology of domesticity equalled women's high morality and purity with their innocence, both characteristics only obtainable when confined in the home sphere, thus

[8] Queen Victoria's children were united in matrimony with important persons throughout Europe, indirectly furthering the power of the English Crown by marrying into royal houses of other nations.

implying that if they ventured outside this domestic space, “women would lose their innocence and subside into sensuality and evil” (CAINE, 1992, p. 52). The opposite of the angelic creature epitomised by the idea of motherhood was the fallen woman, that is, any woman who did not comply with what society expected from her, and who dared to put in check the idea that women were sexless beings – the fallen woman was believed to have lost control of herself, and was seen as unmanageable by society, the opposite of the supposedly highly moral middle-class genteel woman. This contradiction between a sexless and highly moral Madonna and the lustful and sinful Magdalene was fundamental to the creation of the angelic myth. Victorians were reluctant to “believe that women, apart from prostitutes, could, or should, experience sexual pleasure. Sex was a marital duty, and the strictest view was that it was a duty only to be performed for the purpose of procreation” (CALDER, 1976, p. 88).

This morally lacking figure was often represented by the prostitute. Women were, therefore, divided into two separate groups, the pure and the fallen, the first belonging to the home and propelling bourgeois ideology, while the latter’s domain was the streets, and she threatened the very essence of middle-class society by defying the roles attributed to women and tempting the respectable middle-class men to sin.

> What was called natural was a carefully selected, trimmed, even distorted view as only a very limited form of sexual behaviour could be formally admitted. [...] The elevation of the home to mystical levels of sanctification, the sacredness of the ‘walled garden’, demanded an intensification of the double standard despite marriage on the basis of personal choice and love, not on that of parental arrangements. The carefully cosseted married woman (and her forerunner the even more carefully guarded pure, innocent, unmarried daughter) living at home, never going into public places except under escort and then only on the way to another private home, surrounded by orderly rooms, orderly gardens, orderly rituals of etiquette and social precedent was in stark contrast to the woman of the streets, the outcast, the one who had ‘fallen’ out of the respectable society […].” (DAVIDOFF, 1995 p. 53-54)

With the expansion of cities, prostitution became an alternative, and often the only apparent option for many women to survive. According to Perkin, “Victorian women outnumbered men in moving from the countryside to the towns, as they had done for several centuries and for the same reason: the ease with which relatively young and single women could find employment as servants” (PERKIN, 1993, p. 236). For many of those who could not find work, prostitution often seemed like the only solution, and by 1820 it had become heavily associated with big cities, as “the opposition of pure country girls and abandoned town women was well established” (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 55). Many blamed prostitutes for male weakness, which meant that the control of women was an attempt to protect men from themselves – thus, as mentioned above, protecting the middle-class way of life. Although prostitutes were

considered so far from the ideal of femininity that many saw them as an almost separate species of womanhood, proper genteel ladies had to be kept under constant vigilance in order not to run the risk of "falling", exposing yet again the contradiction inherent to the Victorian outlook: despite being "lauded as men's conscience and repositories of virtue, [women] were also held to be easily corruptible" (PERKIN, 1993, p. 229).

The rising number of prostitutes in big cities represented a much uglier side of a society that had every intention of keeping its moral defects under the rug: the increasing numbers were also due to the increasing demand, a fact that Victorians preferred to ignore, as it takes the responsibility away from women, placing it on the men who procure their services. As Nina Auerbach expertly puts it, "the Victorian imagination isolated the fallen woman so pitilessly from a social context, preferring to imagine her as destitute and drowned prostitute or errant wife cast beyond the human community, because of her uneasy implications for wives who stayed at home" (AUERBACH, 1980, p. 33); not to mention the implications for the man who involved himself with her.

In addition to representing a threat to middle-class ideology, prostitutes also posed "a dangerous public health risk in the form of the moral contagion and venereal disease she passed on to 'innocent' middle-class men and their even more innocent wives" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 126-127). Not only that, but the rise in the numbers of women leading a life of prostitution and its correlation to an increase in the demand for it puts in question the work being done in the home, since "domestic contentment is a woman's responsibility, and any disruption of it necessarily her fault. If she cannot keep her husband at home, she has failed" (CALDER, 1976, p. 22), which implies, then, the failure of the whole ideology behind a wife's very existence. Contradictorily, as has become the norm for the period, prostitutes were often seen as an alternative for the respectable man, as it was assumed by many that "a husband could, and even should, go elsewhere rather than impose his desires on his wife too frequently" (CALDER, 1976, p. 88), thus making prostitution central to the maintenance of the middle-class façade, and as Calder suggests, middle-class dependency on prostitution was such that very little was actually done to control or diminish the increasing numbers of women who sought that life, or the men who procured their services, apart from socially criticising it while, in the case of men, using their services.

Prostitutes, despite the danger they apparently posed, were not the only fallen women worthy of mention during the nineteenth century. Any woman who deviated from the ideals of morality and purity imposed upon them were also excluded from "polite society" and deemed fallen. Seeing as "adult women acted as the gatekeepers for admissible behaviour"

(DAVIDOFF & HALL, 1988, p. 399), their failure to live up to the middle-class ideal was doubly grave, and there were many ways through which women could disappoint.

Religious belief was of great importance for the maintenance of the middle-class ideology, recognising women's moral superiority and spiritual equality, while it defended social and sexual subordination. According to Christianity, the prostitute, and all the other women who willingly fall "become Original Sin incarnate, the corruptible, dangerous figure, who, it can be assumed, was not predestined, and thus beyond societal and redemptive help" (WEBSTER, 2012, p. 14). There was no alternative for middle-class women during the Victorian era: they were trapped either being a perfectly angelic and sexless creature, or an immoral fallen being. Even considerably smaller 'crimes', such as becoming pregnant outside of wedlock (and not formalising the union as soon as the pregnancy was discovered) or having an affair were socially stigmatized as much as prostitution, for they exposed women who did not live in accordance with what was expected of them.

The myth of the fallen woman comes from Eve's biblical fall, and as Auerbach affirms, its main and most feared consequence is its "absolute transforming power" (AUERBACH, 1980, p. 34), as a woman's sin is forever imprinted on her life and on the life of those who surround her. It was infectious like a disease, as can be seen with the homonymous protagonist of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*, who, despite her years of effort, cannot be fully redeemed in the eyes of society while she is living; only death can cleanse her. This near impossibility of redemption is explained, amongst other factors, by Victorians' constant denial of women's sexuality, leading to the belief that if there is no passion, a woman's fall is her own conscious choice, which in turn increases the virtuous woman's responsibility and role as protector of morality and religion inside her home (WEBSTER, 2012), as well as through philantropic work outside of the house. Fallen women were forever tainted by their wrongdoings, while ladies who complied with middle-class ideals had the responsibility of spreading their moral influence to those who had sinned, for many women believed that "the family is the nexus of a woman's power, and to jeopardize that institution is to threaten her very sense of self" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 32). This way, then, "rescue work became an acceptable part of the multiplicity of philanthropic activities in which middle-class women now involved themselves and for which their essentially domestic nature was supposed specially to suit them" (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 55).

Being the paragons of righteousness and virtue, expected to educate their children and keep their servants obedient, women were convinced that the only way they could possibly give their offspring a good upbringing was if they had received a proper education themselves. After

all, how were women supposed to teach what they had never learned? In many ways, women helped further the division of spheres, for they perceived it as a possibility to exercise power and influence at least in the home, and "as superintendents of 'religious principle', and exemplars of 'public morals', women now had the opportunity to inaugurate a spirit of reform that will arouse 'the dormant powers of active piety' and thus make women saviours of all that is valuable in England" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 33). They used their position to maintain the status quo, as well as exploiting their assumed higher morality to ascend to an impossible pedestal, which despite constraining them, also granted them some power.

> As the domestic ideology gained a firmer hold, this demand for moral autonomy began to seem at odds with the belief that a woman should be a 'natural second' dependent on her husband for advice and direction. Yet advocates of intellectual education for women found a way to justify their demands in terms of certain aspects of the emerging Angel in the House myth, in particular the belief that women's primary function was to make of the home a holy sanctum where, under the influence of their purity and piety, men's moral nature would be refreshed and refurbished. (JORDAN, 2001, p. 95)

Consequently, through a seemingly conforming attitude, middle-class women justified their need for a more thorough education, especially considering the strong connection between morality and intellectual prowess: "the main role of wives and mothers was to influence their husbands and children for good, but only an intellectual education made a woman truly moral. Therefore, an intellectual education made women better wives and mothers" (JORDAN, 2001, p. 95). Furthermore, many argued that a well-educated woman made a better wife and companion, implying that educated men would seek intelligent wives, therefore propelling the need to better educate young girls. Thus, as Patricia Meyer Spacks suggests, many of the limitations imposed on women during our period often provided "opportunity rather than impediment in the struggle for moral and economic fulfilment" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 36), and they were able to use the limitation to benefit themselves, even if the difficulties still outweighed the achievements. The type of education they were after was, then, meant to produce a literate, intelligent woman "who might not necessarily have the proficiency in the classical languages provided by the boys' public schools and the universities, but who would probably have a better knowledge of more recent literature, both English and European, and of history, geography and natural science" (JORDAN, 2001, p. 109). While women's education arguably led them to performing better as angels in their households, it also gave them tools to question the system into which they had been inserted, and this was one of those contributing

factors for, in the end of the nineteenth century, the rise of what was then called the “New Woman”.

This “New Woman” was propelled not only by her newfound education, but also by many social issues that made women’s lives harder. The “woman question” was present throughout the period, but as the ideology of the angel of the house grew stronger, the possibilities for women outside the patriarchal family diminished, and dissatisfaction started to grow. Those who deemed themselves as part of the Women’s Movement believed that “if women could only set aside the assumptions about their own nature ground into them from earliest infancy and forge ahead towards any goal they may choose, there was no limit to their possible achievements” (CUNNINGHAM, 1978, p. 8), thus perceiving deviation from the expected form of behaviour as a natural development, rather than an unnatural or unfeminine conduct. The domestic ideology that prevailed throughout the Victorian period was being challenged, then, by the belief that women were not defined by their alleged nature, and the ideals of the New Woman suggest that she should “take up her position freely, protected by law, qualified to achieve financial independence and, perhaps more significantly, with a mature awareness of her own sexuality” (CUNNINGHAM, 1978, p. 155). This New Woman, who grew in strength and presence as the new century approached, was at first seen as a monstrous figure whose purpose was to cause chaos and challenge the preconceived rules. Her existence and causes gained support culminating in many achievements for the rights of women, specifically the suffrage in 1918.

The ideology of separate spheres and the myth of the angel of the house were creations of the middle classes, thus it is not surprising that the first signs of rebellion came from the inside. The preoccupations of working-class women, however, would not be dealt with for many decades to come.

> Intelligent, individualistic and principled, the New Woman was also essentially middle-class. Working-class women, while no longer hauling coal in mines eleven hours a day, still led lives so totally remote from the cosy domesticity and shining feminine ideal against which the New Woman was reacting that this kind of reaction could do nothing for them. It was pointless to warn a working-class woman against the evils of an arranged marriage to a dissolute aristocrat, or to urge her to undertake activities more fulfilling than embroidery and visiting. The problems of working-class women were entirely different from those of the middle classes, and received very little attention from writers on the New Woman. (CUNNINGHAM, 1978, p. 11)

The Victorian cult of domesticity reigned for as long as its Queen, but towards the end of the century, things had begun to change. Despite their general obedience, women did, throughout the nineteenth century, find ways to challenge the existing state of affairs – ways

that at times did not have the subtlety of their request for a better education in order to be better wives. According to Davidoff, "women could, and did, openly or covertly challenge the equation of the public arena as a purely masculine preserve". Their strategies ranged from "food riots to raiding brothels, from acting as an audience to or participating in 'street theatre', to boycotting the shops of political opponents, to writing and publishing across a range of genres" (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 240). Towards the end of the century, women started to insert themselves even more in the forbidden public arena, and they could even be found involved with local politics. Furthermore, "some from middle-class backgrounds literally transferred their private life into public institutions – settlement houses, schools, hospitals, colleges" (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 260).

For the first time since its publication in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was popular again, and not as an example of what proper womanhood should avoid, but as a beacon of light in the way of these New Women who wanted more than to be defined only in relation to men, as wives and mothers, trapped in the domestic sphere. Wollstonecraft's call for a proper education for girls, as well as for seeing men and women as equal in more aspects than the Victorian ideology was willing to recognise, rang true to the emerging Women's Movement of the end of the century. The rise of the New Woman represented a huge step for female emancipation, but more than that, it was the first step towards questioning the ideology of separate spheres, bringing women back to the public arena, and advocating their right to independence. The elitism of the movement, often excluding working-class women and women of colour, would be a concern of future feminists.

1.3 To Walk (In)Visible on a Little Bit of Ivory

> ***I hate to hear you talk about all women as if they were fine ladies instead of rational creatures. None of us want to be in calm waters all our lives.***
>
> Jane Austen, ***Persuasion***

1.3.1 Jane Austen (1775 – 1817)

When seen through the lenses of the countless adaptations the twentieth century has produced of her works, Austen's world often seems like a haven from the trials and tribulations of the Georgian period, and as Lucy Worsley puts it, this is also true of the real places connected to Austen, for "it's an impression you can't help but take up from the pretty, flower-filled country cottage at Chawton in Hampshire that finally provided Jane, her sister and their mother

with a long-sought home" (WORSLEY, p. 1, 2017). However, home – or the lack thereof – was a constant problem for Jane Austen, not only because after her father's death she mostly had to depend upon the favour of relatives or find cheap lodgings, but also because running a house came with many duties, and none of them involved writing novels, so Austen had to find a way to include the writing of fiction in her daily routine. No wonder, then, that the search for a home is central to Jane Austen's novels. Thus, in this section I will explore Austen's life through the places where she lived, as the search for one's home is one of the motors of this dissertation.

> Young people reading Jane Austen for the first time think that the stories are about love and romance and finding a partner. But a happy home is equally as much what all of her heroines don't have, and yet desire. All of Jane's leading ladies are displaced from either their physical home, or from their family. Jane shows, subtly but devastatingly, how hard it is to find a true home, a place of safety in which one can be understood and loved. She is uniquely sensitive to a particular home's happiness – or unhappiness. (WORSLEY, p. 2, 2017).

Austen's characters, then, much like their creator, are always looking for their place in the world, and this will be explored in detail through *Mansfield Park* and *Pride & Prejudice* in the following chapters, as her novels are "full of homes loved, lost, lusted after" (WORSLEY, p. 2, 2017). From Elinor and Marianne in her first published work, *Sense & Sensibility*, to Anne Elliot in her last, *Persuasion*, Austen's heroines are always concerned with finding a home and the security and comfort it entails, even if this home has different shapes and meanings throughout her fiction and her life.

Many consider Austen's writing as a peaceful removal from the real world, remarking on its supposed lack of commitment with the times in which her novels are set, as they allegedly do not include any historical events, but this is not true. The attentive well-informed reader will find much about affairs of state in Austen's novels, often through dismissible comments which go unaddressed by her characters, but whose shadows are a constant in the background of her stories. Furthermore, according to Janine Barchas (2013), Austen is always making references and nods to real-life families and places – most of her locations are fictitious within the boundaries of real counties in England – in her novels. Placing Jane Austen and her work in time is important in order to have a better chance of comprehending her writing and characters. By no means do I intend to draw definitive connections between her actual life and her writings, but those connections are often implied, and certainly present an extra pair of lenses through which look at her novels.

I intend to take a brief look at Austen's life, or as much as we know of it, through the places in which she lived in her search for a home of her own. In the sleepy village of Steventon,

in Hampshire, during the reign of King George III, Jane Austen was born to the Reverend George Austen and Mrs Cassandra Austen in 1775, the seventh child of the Austen family. According to the Reverend, she was to be her sister Cassandra's playmate and best friend, as the two were the only girls in the Austen household, and his premonition became reality, as both women remained unmarried and lived together until Jane Austen's death in 1817. She was never rich, but she "was raised in the heart of the middle-class society; she shared its values, and she owed her own position to the bonds of patronage that cemented traditional society, even though her immediate resources never permitted her fully to emulate the gentry's lifestyle" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 181).

Steventon Rectory was arguably Jane's first home, but many might be surprised by the fact that the Austens adopted what was at the time a common practice: they used to send their babies to be brought up by a dry-nurse in the village until they were socially integrated, and only then they would return to the rectory. For the Georgians, "child rearing was the business of a much wider group than just the nuclear family" (WORSLEY, p. 25, 2017). According to Claire Tomalin, the Austens' practice was rewarding, for in a time when many families lived through the loss of many of their babies, "the Austens did not lose a single one; […]. The Austen children grew up, and grew up healthy" (TOMALIN, 2000, p. 6). Despite the constant visits, being separated from one's parents in the very first years of life can have a lasting effect on one's relationship with them, and in Austen-Leigh's memoir of his aunt, we learn that the Reverend Austen wrote that his children barely noticed when Mrs Austen was absent from Steventon (AUSTEN-LEIGH, 2002, p. 22-24).

> Jane's earliest biographers, members of her family, were keen to stress that life in the Rectory was tightly knit, self-contained and constantly harmonious. But more recently, historians have pointed out that with her early nursing elsewhere, and followed by time away at school, Jane was to spend nearly five years of her first eleven years away from her home and mother. Put like that, it casts a new light on the famously familial Austens. It might also help to explain some of the later coldness that can be detected between Jane and her mother. (WORSLEY, 2017, p. 25).

Not only was Jane surrounded by brothers, her father also ran a school for boys in the Rectory, so her early years were in the company of boys, and the difference in the education they received cannot have gone unnoticed by young Jane. According to Lucy Worsley (2017), Jane Austen was very conscious of what she and her sister Cassandra were missing, becoming envious of her brothers, who attended universities and saw much more of the world than the girls ever did. Despite having gone to school when she was very young – it is said young Jane refused to part from her sister Cassandra – her formal education did not last long, for it had

been interrupted by a bout of deadly fever that caused many of the students to be removed back to their families, and home schooling, as was the norm for girls at the time, became Jane and Cassandra's reality, and their education their mother's responsibility: "although their father was also their teacher, and although they lived in a school, society still insisted that Georgian girls weren't supposed to be clever, or demand too much attention" (WORSLEY, 2017, p. 41). Perhaps for that reason, seemingly uninteresting girls would be the focus of Austen's work, from the quiet Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, to the unheroic Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*. Education, then, might have been the responsibility of Mrs Austen, but Jane's father played an important role in the formation of her mind and thoughts, for as the family tradition tells us, he always encouraged his daughters to read, and his library was open to Jane from a young age, which was not the case for many Georgian ladies of the time, who had their reading material especially tailored to suit what was expected of them.

The Austens were among the few families growing roots in their Hampshire village, and even they were not originally from there. Their neighbours, much like the world they lived in, were in constant change, perpetually shifting, and as Tomalin observes, they certainly "look[ed] like a great rich slab of raw material for a novelist to work on" (TOMALIN, 2000, p. 102). Jane Austen, later in her life, advises her niece to write about what she knows, and that is what Austen herself did, for what she knew consisted of a plethora of different people, and "what Jane Austen wanted from the life around her, she took and used, finely and tangentially" (TOMALIN, 2000, p. 102).

Even though she was surrounded by boys during her early life, her relationship with the women in her life played an important role in the person and authoress she would become, and "despite the protestations of the Austen family that her closest male relatives formed Jane's tastes and aspirations, it's recently been proved that the love and friendship of a number of older women would be equally – if not more – important for her future career" (WORSLEY, 2017, p. 55). From her beloved sister Cassandra to her cousin Eliza, from Martha Lloyd, her sister in law, to her nieces and nephews' governess, Anne Sharp, it is no wonder Austen's novels portray a range of female experience, for throughout her life, she was surrounded by many different women, striking life-long friendships with them, and incorporating what she learned from them into her work.

Jane Austen spent most of her first twenty-five years in Steventon, excepting her short time with the dry-nurse and then at school, as well as visits to friends and relatives. These constant visits were not always according to Jane's personal choice, as she was often "told where to go, and how long to stay. It was the start of what would be a lifetime of being passed

around between relatives like a parcel" (WORSLEY, 2017, p. 133). She had also attended balls, flirted with eligible men, and started working on the manuscripts that would later become her first novels. Her life was a quiet but seemingly happy one, until the moment when, in 1800, her father announced his retirement and the family move to Bath. Twenty-five-year-old Jane was acutely aware of her singleness, and of the fact that Bath was known for uniting young couples – a cheaper version of London, with its season, balls, and musical events. It was blatant that one of the reasons for the move to Bath was to widen Jane's and Cassandra's marital prospects. Austen had been to Bath in the past, but always as a visitor (much like Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*), never as a resident (as she would portray Anne Elliot to be in *Persuasion*).

Several of her biographers, such as Claire Tomalin, claim that "Jane Austen was an unwilling inhabitant of Bath for five years of her life" (LANE, 1996, p. 73), mainly due to the many accounts of family members about how much Jane hated leaving Steventon and the fact that she did very little writing while she was in Bath. The other hypothesis is that she was simply too busy living her life, performing the countless duties required from her by her parents, to write. The Austens travelled much while they lived in Bath, and it was during one of the sisters' visits with friends that Jane received her only known marriage proposal, from the brother of their good friends, Harris Big-Wither. Jane accepted the offer, only to go back on her word the next morning. One is forced to wonder if she would have become Jane Austen, the author, had she become Mrs Big-Wither first. Probably not, as domestic duties would have taken over her life.

During their time in Bath, Reverend Austen passed away, quite unexpectedly. When he died, Jane had in fact been working on the manuscript known as *The Watsons*, but losing her father meant that the story she was working on became too close to her reality and she abandoned it. Reverend Austen's death inflicted a powerful blow on the lives of the Austen ladies, as their time in Bath became a succession of different lodgings, progressively less genteel in quality. No longer affordable, life in the city quickly became unsustainable for the Austen women, which meant that it was time for them to move, and leave the city behind.

In 1806, the Austen ladies finally left Bath, trading its lodgings that were never really a home for an almost itinerant life, going from relative to relative for a few months – not the most ideal situation in which to produce novels. They were joined by their friend Martha Lloyd, whose mother had just died, and who also did not have a home of her own. The three were now four, as Martha would live with them for many years to come. They first settled in Southampton with Jane's brother Frank and his wife Mary, sharing expenses and keeping her company while Frank was at sea. Austen spent two years with her brother's family, but it is possible that she

never really settled, and she certainly did not produce much writing during this time.

When he was a young man, Edward Austen was informally adopted by the Knight family, friends of the Austens who had no heir but a large fortune, and who took a fancy to young Edward. Again, the practice might raise some eyebrows in the twenty-first century, but as the Austens saw it, they were just giving Edward a better chance, as well as potentially guaranteeing their other children would have financial help in the future: "that Mrs Austen had a home in her old age was due to the decision she made years before, to bargain away a son in return for a fortune" (WORSLEY, 2017, p. 231). Edward's inheritance, then, included a small cottage in the village of Chawton, near Winchester and, more importantly, in Jane Austen's beloved Hampshire. Chawton Cottage, today home to the Jane Austen House Museum, "gave Jane the stability and the freedom from domestic care that led at last to the published phase of her relatively late-blooming career as a novelist. The books she either wrote or rewrote in this, the best known of her homes, are the books we know today" (WORSLEY, 2017, p. 231). For the first time in many years, it seemed like the Austen women had found a place of their own – even if behind that feeling was Edward's charity – where Jane finally felt like she had the time and the space to write, and that liberty and appreciation for her home found their way into her novels.

> The significance of Chawton and its modest comforts comes through in the three novels conceived there. Each of them contains strong emotions about home. Jane's early heroines, Lizzy and Jane Bennet, and Catherine Morland, expect to leave their homes upon marriage, and are quite reconciled to the fact. But Fanny Price and Anne Elliot, characters Jane created at Chawton, have more complex feelings. To them, the loss of a home is something like the loss of a limb. It is deeply damaging. But both of them will learn – even the materially blessed Emma Woodhouse will learn – that home isn't a building, it's a state of mind. (WORSLEY, 2017, p. 240)

The Austen women seemed to have loved Chawton, but the fact was that they were living most women's greatest fear during the century: being unmarried and depending on male relatives. Luckily for them, their male relative was able to support them with very little imposition on his own fortune. From 1808 to her death in 1817, Jane Austen lived in Chawton, and there she rewrote her three first novels, and worked from scratch on her three latter novels. There is evidence that she was back to work as an author from as early as August 1809. It was also during this period that she became a published author, an important step for the woman whose family would later claim, most likely incorrectly, that she had no interest in earning a living through writing.

Her family struggled to come to terms with seeing their spinster Aunt Jane as a fairly

successful author. For Austen, on the other hand, it was the reward towards which she had been working all these years, and "as she grew in confidence, and learned more about the publishing business, she became bolder, more professional and more mercenary in her decisions. And she was very, very fond of the money she earned" (WORSLEY, 2017, p. 248). Her family's attempts to domesticate her to match the Victorian ideal can be seen more strikingly in their tailoring of her image in later years. Cassandra's sketch of her portrait, originally quite stern and not all that feminine, was altered to give the Victorian public a more palatable version of Austen, a rosy-cheeked and demure authoress who wrote for private entertainment but who, by chance, ended up published. Her nephew's biography of his aunt depicts Jane Austen's writing as nothing more than domestic and apolitical, in an attempt to reinforce the idea that even if her work was good, it did not go beyond the drawing room walls.

In the year 1816, Jane Austen "began to feel unwell in some unspecified way" (TOMALIN, 2000, p. 259). During this period, she had been working on *Persuasion*, destined to be her last completed novel, and possibly the more mature of her works. In 1817, her illness took her to the city of Winchester to be closer to the assistance of doctors and physicians. On the 18 July 1817, Jane Austen passed away in her bed, Cassandra by her side. At the time, her disease was undiagnosed, and "two hundred years after her death, any diagnosis must be tentative" (TOMALIN, 2000, p. 289).

Many theories about her illness have been put forward since her death, but the truth is we cannot know for certain, and will possibly never know, the real cause of her death. This is also true for a lot of Jane Austen's life, as there is very little factual information about Austen, for not only did Cassandra burn most of Jane's letters after the latter's death, but the Austen family also worked hard to create an image of their spinster aunt, consequently hiding her true self. Perhaps because we know so little, we are so fascinated to learn more about her life, and every year sees the publication of new biographies and texts about her life – and this one is no different.

As Lucy Worsley suggests, "Charlotte Brontë may not have admired Jane Austen; Jane Austen may not have declared the rights of women quite as loudly or clearly as Brontë would do. But she cleared the way for it to happen" (WORSLEY, 2017, p. 323). Austen defied what was expected of her by not marrying when presented with the opportunity, by not despairing at being the spinster aunt who often had to hide her passion and talent for writing. Furthermore, "Jane Austen's irony […] enabled her to reproduce without exposing in any systematic way some of the contradictions inherent in bourgeois ideology"; moreover, through permitting her reader to have the last say on situations and experiences "while controlling the final value

systems through the action as a whole, Austen replicates, at the level of the reading experience, romantic desire and realistic necessity that she believed was capable of containing individualism's challenge to traditional authority" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 205). She created heroines who spoke their mind, even if in a more subdued way than Brontë's, or even Gaskell's, creations would. Jane Austen was a woman of her times, in many ways conforming to what was expected from her, but she also defied expectations by making herself heard through her novels, paving the way for the women who came after her, writers or not.

1.3.2 Charlotte Brontë (1816 – 1855)

The Anglican Reverend Patrick Brontë and his wife Maria (née Branwell) had their third daughter, who was named after one of Maria's sisters, Charlotte, on 21 April 1816. Thus, Charlotte Brontë was born, in the small market town of Thornton, West Bradfordshire. Before Charlotte came Maria and Elizabeth, and after her came Emily, Anne and Branwell, the latter the only boy and, to many, the hopes of the family. In 1820, as the Reverend was appointed the perpetual curate of St Michael and All Angels Church, the family moved to the small village of Haworth, in West Yorkshire, where the children would spend most of their short lives.

Mrs Gaskell's description of life in Haworth gives us the impression of a quiet and isolated place. She claims that the Brontë children were "grave and silent beyond their years; subdued, probably, by the presence of serious illness in the house" (GASKELL, 2009, p. 43), as well as suggesting that "the children did not want society. To small infantile gaieties they were unaccustomed. They were everything to each other. I do not suppose that there was ever a family more tenderly bound to each other" (GASKELL, 2009, p. 46). Furthermore, Gaskell's accounts of the village itself seems to refer to a place untouched by the Industrial Revolution, and "her wonderfully evocative picture of a family of genius, growing up in physical and social isolation, excluded from all normal preoccupations of ordinary life, let alone genteel society, has become the essence of Brontë mythology" (BARKER, 2010, p. 105). According to Juliet Barker, however, Gaskell's version of Haworth was not akin to reality, as the place "was a busy, industrial township, […]. What is more, the period of Patrick Brontë's ministry there, from 1820 to 1861, saw some of the fastest growth and biggest changes that were to take place in Haworth and the surrounding area" (BARKER, 2010, p. 105). If the novels the Brontë sisters produced could serve as evidence, the truth seems to lie with Barker – there was probably much more life in Haworth than Gaskell gave it credit for.

However different these accounts of life in Haworth might be, there is no doubt that the young Brontës met with a lot of suffering from an early age, which must have left its marks.

Just one year after the move to the village, in September 1821, their mother Maria died of cancer. Her sister Elizabeth Branwell then ensured the children had a well-managed home and motherly care. Barker suggests that "their home life was secure and stable, with their father always ready to spend time with them, despite the pressures of his own work. Their aunt, too, was an 'affectionate mother' supervising their lessons and their household work and nursing infant Anne" (BARKER, 2010, p. 128).

The year 1824 saw the four elder children, Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte and Emily, sent to the Clergy Daughters' School, at Cowan Bridge, Lancashire. Later in life, Charlotte would comment on the terrible conditions of the school, which served as inspiration for *Jane Eyre*'s Lowood. It was Charlotte's first time away from home, and the prospect of not being able to return to her family for approximately a year must have been difficult to face. The school was riddled with bad conditions, which were, in Charlotte's eyes, responsible for both Maria's and Elizabeth's illnesses and then their deaths. Charlotte's accounts, both in the form of fiction and also in letters, and her descriptions to friends later in life, shine a light on the inhospitable conditions of many girls' schools throughout the nineteenth century: from cold nights and inedible food, to pupils being overlooked when sick.

The loss of her elder sisters was especially hard on young Charlotte, who "must have felt a bewildering sense of divine injustice in the deaths of sisters she considered so eminently superior to herself. More importantly, having always been one of the 'little ones', her sisters' deaths promoted her to the role of eldest child" (BARKER, 2010, p. 162). Being the eldest shaped Charlotte's personality, as it was a responsibility that remained constant in her life, and "her own sense of inadequacy as to the way she filled that role may help to explain her subsequent veneration of Maria" (BARKER, 2010, p. 162), whom she immortalised in ink and paper as the benevolent too-good-for-this-world Helen Burns.

The Clergy Daughters' School was not to be Charlotte's last experience in formal education, but for the next few years, she was back at home, in Haworth, and must have felt happy to be away from a place whose memories brought so much sorrow. During the following five years or so, the remaining four Brontë children would delve into the world of letters and stories, creating and registering their own contribution. They had "chores to do in the house and study hours, and were encouraged to go out for walks as frequently as possible […] but most of the time they were left entirely on their own" (HARMAN, 2015, p. 51), and this apparent isolation was the perfect setting for the creation of imaginary worlds and characters. The girls were taught by their aunt Elizabeth Branwell, who still lived with them and played the role of step-mother in their upbringing. Miss Branwell instructed them in sewing and household skills,

and “though the girls had some lessons with their father, intensive study of the classics was reserved for the boy, who could read parts of Homer and Virgil by the age of ten” (HARMAN, 2015, p. 52).

The Brontë children had an array of books available to them, both at home and through the use of libraries in nearby towns. Their wide range of reading and their wild imaginations allowed them to create fantastical stories, and they recorded many adventures in writing. During this period, we see the emergence of the Glasstown Confederacy, the imaginary setting that gave origin to Charlotte and Branwell’s Angria, and later propelled their younger sisters, Emily and Anne, to create Gondal. Many accounts, especially that of Elizabeth Gaskell, portray the Brontës as recluse and strange, contented with their little corner of the world, in no need for more friends or any type of novelty. This provincial outlook might be imbued with some truth, but if the children’s creations are taken into account, their young minds dreamed of horizons beyond those of the parsonage.

Roe Head School became Charlotte’s new dwelling in 1831. She was a “quiet, thoughtful girl, of nearly fifteen years of age, very small in figure – ‘stunned’ was the word she applied to herself” (GASKELL, 2009, p. 76). Her antiquated clothes and quiet demeanour painted her as shy and nervous to those who were to become her companions for the year ahead, Luckily for Charlotte, another pupil was starting school at around the same time: Ellen Nussey, whose friendship with Charlotte continued until the latter’s death. During her time at Roe Head, Charlotte also forged a long-lasting friendship with Mary Taylor.

In 1832 Charlotte left school, in the same quiet fashion in which she had arrived months earlier, once again to return home to Haworth and to her family. But the quiet years of home interlude did not last long and Charlotte was to return to Roe Head, now as a teacher. Despite working hard to succeed, Charlotte’s fighting spirit could not settle for a life that did not allow her to exercise her talents, and the life of a school teacher did not allow much room for pursuing one’s creativity or any other aspect that did not relate to the school itself, so when she came home for Christmas, young Charlotte decided she would take her chances into her own hands and write to the Poet Laureate, Robert Southey, in order to solicit his opinion on her writings. Her letter received a late reply that must have at once frustrated and propelled Charlotte: he suggested that being published was not a worthwhile aim, that if she were to write, she should do so for writing’s sake, and that literature should not be the business of a woman’s life, as it would keep her from focusing on real duties.

In 1839 Charlotte received her first known marriage proposal, from Ellen Nussey’s brother, Reverend Henry Nussey. His invitation for her to help him run a school in Sussex, and

the history behind the proposal itself – he had been denied by another woman before asking Charlotte – comes to mind when looking at the character of St John Rivers in *Jane Eyre*, as well as Charlotte's refusal to marry, for she knew she could not marry only for marriage's sake. During this period, Branwell's prospects were still undecided and his debts were growing steadily, meaning his lack of income propelled Charlotte to go out to work once again, this time as a temporary governess. Being a governess meant that she was inferior to the family and superior to the servants, a very lonely position that Charlotte would later explore in *Jane Eyre*. Not long after this first proposal, Charlotte's hand was asked for once again, this time by a man called Mr Pryce, the curate of her father's own parish. This proposal was, like the first, refused.

Branwell's career continued to go nowhere, to everyone's despair. He was burdened by the pressure of providing for his sisters and aging father, becoming another victim of the ideology of the times, which dictated that the male heir (even when there was little in terms of inheritance) was responsible for the women in his life. His efforts were unsuccessful, making him a disappointment to his family and undoubtably himself, leading Charlotte, Emily and Anne to find a way to make do for themselves. Charlotte, tired of being a governess and at the mercy of other people, dreamed of opening her own school, and she worked hard towards getting the funds needed for such an endeavour, even when her heart was never truly in it. However, the opportunity to follow her friends to Brussels presented itself, and it was the perfect excuse to postpone the plan, justified by the apparent need to learn French and improve her Italian and German in order to be better qualified to teach back in England. Emily went with her.

The Pensionnat Héger was now to be their home, and Charlotte's time there would be a constant presence in her future novels, mainly due to one of the school masters, Constantin Héger. Charlotte and Emily struggled to fit in at the Pensionnat as, amongst other reasons, the place catered mainly to Belgian students. Furthermore,

> lessons were taught exclusively in French and no concessions were expected or sought for the fact that the Brontës were as yet not fluent in the language. They were also almost unique in being Protestant […]. At twenty-five and twenty-four, Charlotte and Emily were considerably older than their classmates and this, combined with their foreign ways and religion made them seem remote to their classmates. (BARKER, 2010, p. 448)

Despite their initial difficulties, the women flourished. Juliet Barker deems the time spent in Brussels as having had "the greatest single influence on Charlotte, both as a person and as a writer" (BARKER, 2010, p. 484). Charlotte had to readjust into the role of student, after being herself a teacher and a governess, and despite the occasional bout of homesickness, Charlotte was very happy in Brussels, as she was finally able to indulge, without guilt, in

learning for learning's sake. She returned to Haworth to mourn Aunt Branwell, but she was determined to go back to Brussels and complete her studies. This time, she would make the journey on her own, and it seems clear that this experience is echoed in Lucy Snowe's progress in Brontë's last novel, *Villette*. She was now both a student and a teacher, learning French alongside the pupils to whom she taught English. The in-betweenness of her position is reminiscent of her time as a governess.

In Brussels, Charlotte developed feelings for her master, M Héger: "this was the first time she has someone outside her family, capable of informed judgment and himself of an intellect equal, if not superior, to her own, had recognised and encouraged that talent" (BARKER, 2010, p. 486). Through a number of essays, Charlotte managed to express her feelings to her master, and soon those feelings for this married man would take over her life at the Pensionnat. M Héger distanced himself from his pupil, perhaps because of his own wife becoming aware of Charlotte's feelings towards her husband. Charlotte's loneliness and perhaps even depression became more acute, until in December 1843, she finally finished her studies and left Brussels, more highly educated, both intellectually and emotionally, than when she had arrived. Her relationship with M Héger is, to this day, imbibed in silences and unknowns, but its importance in Charlotte's life cannot go unnoticed, for he was pivotal for her future creations.

Back to Haworth, it was now time to return to the plans of opening their own school, which was to be in the Parsonage itself, so Charlotte could stay close to their father. In spite of the family's efforts to attract pupils, none came. The sisters were running out of choices, as working as governesses did not suit any of them, and Branwell was involved in a local scandal (a supposed affair with a married woman) as well as constantly drinking. While he decided to try publishing his fiction, Charlotte was the force behind the first publication of hers and her sisters' poems. The poetry collection was to appear under pseudonyms: Charlotte was to be Currer Bell, Anne was Acton Bell, and Emily adopted the pen name Ellis Bell. They would walk invisible in a world that belonged to men. The book barely sold and the few reviews were at best lukewarm. This first foray into publishing taught Charlotte that poetry did not sell well, and novels were a better alternative.

Charlotte pushed for the publication of the novels she and her sisters were writing, namely *The Professor, Agnes Grey* and *Wuthering Heights*, and "the dining room of the Parsonage had been turned into something of a book factory, as the sisters paced around the table, reading, listening and discussing each other's, and sat bent over their portable writing desks for hours, writing" (HARMAN, 2015, p. 217). *The Professor* was refused by the publisher, and ended up published only after her death, in 1857. While in Manchester looking

after her ill father, who had just gone through an eye surgery, Charlotte started working on what would be her first and most popular novel even during her lifetime, *Jane Eyre*.

For a while, "the Bells" managed to hide their true identity from the public, but due to a misunderstanding involving Emily and Anne's publisher, they were forced to reveal themselves to save their reputation. Charlotte and Anne went to London to clear their names, meaning that, at least to their publishers, they had to tell the truth about their womanhood. According to letters and biographies of the sisters, Charlotte's publisher, Mr Smith, was excited finally to learn the identity of his star, and fussed over Charlotte and Anne, offering to show them the city and taking them to the opera. Smith recruited the help of his own sisters and mother to show the reluctant Brontës around town, and Charlotte had a taste of the rich life London could provide.

Branwell's life had been slipping away slowly for a while, and in September 1848, he finally passed away. This was to be the first of a few serious blows to strike the Parsonage in a very short period of time, for "Emily had caught a chill, it seemed, on the day of the funeral, and had a persistent, racking cough" (HARMAN, 2015, p. 261). She was not a good patient, and refused to permit herself to "be sick", not allowing doctors or any sort of help to be called to the house. It was only a few hours before taking her last breath that she admitted to having a doctor summoned. It was too late then. As the new year started, so did Anne's cough. In May 1849, Charlotte and Anne set out to Scarborough, in the hopes that the sea air would help Anne recover. Not long after their arrival, Anne also died, away from her beloved home, with Charlotte by her side. Anne is the only one of the siblings to be buried far away from Haworth.

In the months that followed, Charlotte and her father had to adjust to having the Parsonage all to themselves. Charlotte found solace in her return to the manuscript of *Shirley*, whose publication left her "very vulnerable, not just from some of the reviews, which she knew she took too much to heart […], but from the frenzy of interest locally in the identity of Currer Bell" (HARMAN, 2015, p. 281). After the death of her sisters, Charlotte began to feel increasingly like she did not have to keep the secret of their identity from the world. For years, "the fact that their authorship was such a close-guarded secret was a form of empowerment […]. Once her sisters were gone, however, and there was no one to share the conspiracy of silence, Charlotte found that the secret lost all its zest" (BARKER, 2010, p. 679).

Charlotte craved the company of literary people, and finally accepted George Smith's invitation to stay with his mother in town, which later became a habit. She never left her father alone for very long, but delighted in her time amongst the literary society of London. Her visits to the capital brought the admiration both of George Smith and also of James Taylor, who paid

visits to Haworth in order to see Charlotte, and seems to have proposed an engagement to her, which she refused, claiming that his mind was “second-rate”.

After finishing writing *Villette*, Charlotte received a fourth, and not totally unexpected, marriage proposal, this time from her father’s Irish curate, Arthur Bell Nichols. After many months of disagreements with her father, who was offended Nichols had gone to his daughter first before asking him for permission, Charlotte finally accepted her suitor, and they were married in Haworth church, on 29th June 1854. Their honeymoon consisted of a tour of Ireland, acquainting Charlotte with her husband’s family and country. The trip allowed her to discover a new side to her partner, and find more reason to respect him. On their return, Nichols offered to continue as Patrick’s curate, and thus Charlotte’s role became that of the curate’s wife, which shared many similarities to her previous engagements as the parson’s daughter, but which she now performed more willingly.

Sadly, like many Victorian women, Charlotte met her end due to pregnancy. Charlotte convalesced for the last three months of her life, which led many to believe that, like her siblings, she was taken by consumption. However, through her letter exchange with friends, such as Ellen Nussey, as well as information found in Mrs Gaskell’s account of her life, it seems that Charlotte had been pregnant, and her symptoms, we now know, were akin to *hyperemesis gravidarum*, a severe type of morning sickness that lasts for the whole pregnancy. Months of not being able to keep food down were doomed to take their toll, and Charlotte died on 31st March 1855, a few weeks before her thirty-ninth birthday, leaving behind a distraught father. The literary world mourned the passing of Currer Bell, and was eager to learn more about the elusive authoress, thus the posthumous publication of *The Professor*, Charlotte’s first novel, was shadowed by the success of Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

Juliet Barker’s seminal biography of the Brontë family is thorough in its research and dedication to the lives of the siblings and their father. However, Barker’s take on Charlotte, portraying her as selfish and solely responsible for her own unhappiness disregards the time and space in which the family lived, not taking into account the challenges faced by women during the Victorian period. It is especially striking how forgiving the biography is towards Branwell and his lack of success and life of debauchery, seen as he had more opportunity and incentive than any of his sisters. Charlotte struggled to help support her family and pay her brother’s debts, chasing her goals in the process. Unexpectedly becoming the eldest child, and later burying every single one of her siblings must have been difficult for the young woman, and it is remarkable how she defied circumstances to become a well-known and respected novelist, even during her lifetime.

1.3.3 Elizabeth Gaskell (1810 – 1865)

Born on 29 September 1810, in Chelsea, to parents from the north of England (a dichotomy that would be as permanent in her works as it was in her life), Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson[9] was the youngest of eight children, but only the second to survive infancy. At the time, Chelsea, today a fashionable and affluent London neighbourhood, was no more than a village, but it was already home to artists and writers. Elizabeth's parents, Elizabeth and William, were both Unitarians, and this faith would be a constant presence in the author's life. Barely thirteen months' after her birth, her mother passed away, leaving two small children and a rather clueless husband behind.

From Elizabeth's family in Cheshire came the idea to bring the baby to live with them. The proposal could not be more perfect, and William Stevenson seems to have promptly accepted it, and "from now on, despite his evident concern for her, her living father was almost as absent from her early childhood as her dead mother" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 13). The baby was then sent to the Lumbs, and not long after, tragedy struck again: the young Mary Anne passed away before coming into her inheritance, and baby Elizabeth was left under the care of Mrs Hannah Lumb, Mary Anne's mother, who was not a beneficiary of her late husband's will, meaning that Elizabeth was entering a household of 'elegant economy' in Knutsford, a place that many decades later would inspire her fictional village of Cranford. Gérin (1977) suggests that the death of Mary Anne robbed young Elizabeth both of a more comfortable life, and also of being cared for by someone who was in fact keen to do it. Elizabeth, or Lily as she was known to those close to her during her childhood, found a home at Sandlebridge, the house where she lived, as well as an extended family in the Hollands, in Cheshire.

In 1814, William Stevenson married a woman called Catherine Thomson, with whom Elizabeth did not have the best of relationships. She did visit her London family, but she was a country girl at heart, and being in the big city must have felt lonely. Furthermore, in later years, she would talk of her unhappiness while with her father's new family, whose only member who seemed to really care for her was her brother John, with whom she kept in constant correspondence. When Elizabeth was twelve, John went out to sea for the first time, and the Chelsea home became even less attractive to his younger sister, and her annual visit was nothing more than an obligation. Her new stepmother found Elizabeth to be "impulsive and outspoken

[9] I will refer to the subject of this chapter as Elizabeth and, later, Mrs Gaskell when appropriate. She was, however, born Stevenson, even if she rose to fame anonymously, and then as a married woman, carrying her husband's name.

– not at all her model of a feminine young lady" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 21), her half-siblings were then too young to forge a meaningful friendship, and even her relationship with her father failed to blossom, as his long working hours, and "her sense of deprivation of maternal love increased rather than diminished with the years" (GÉRIN, 1977, p. 17). Motherless girls would become central to her work – Ruth, Mary Barton, Mollie Gibson – and perhaps that is not without reason; in fact, our novelist rarely delves on the lives of 'traditional' families in her works, possibly deriving from her childhood experiences.

In 1822, Elizabeth was sent to school in Warwickshire. "A blend of progressive and conservative was a feature of Elizabeth's more formal education" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 34), and she stayed at the Miss Byerleys' school for five years. Her experience seems to have been considerably better than both Jane Austen's and Charlotte Brontë's, and according to Jenny Uglow, "life at the Byerleys' was undemanding" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 37), and furthermore, it provided her with the companionship of girls her own age, pulling her away from the realities of her family life. Elizabeth's education was more balanced and less crushing than that of most young girls during the period.

As soon as she left school, just before turning seventeen, Elizabeth went on a six-week holiday with her Holland relatives to Wales, a place that would forever be imprinted on her mind and feature in her novels. In later years, the Welsh scenery would be the background of her Ruth's downfall, as well as the place where she found help. Her constant journaling, letters and keen interest in places and people made her into a "superb social reporter and collector of oral history, traditions and customs […]. She began this tactful – or not so tactful – delving for detail when she was a girl. All the time she was noting the life of the town, its traditions and its intricate rules" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 48).

While she blossomed as a young woman and writer, she kept in touch with her beloved sailor brother John, who, sometime in 1828, disappeared at sea during a voyage to India, and whose memory would be recreated in several of her novels, especially in the image of Frederick Hale, in *North & South*. Elizabeth Gaskell, the mature author, disliked implications of original sources having served as base for her creations, but knowledge of her life means that "it is impossible to read those passages in her works describing the sea and seamen without associating them with her early experience of her brother" (GÉRIN, 1977, p. 34). The news about John prompted Elizabeth to go to London in order to give comfort to her father, and while she was there, Mr Stevenson suffered a fatal stroke, dying in March 1829. We do not know how she dealt with her father's demise, but in her works, "fathers would often be ambivalent figures, whose strength conceals weakness and who are viewed by their children – especially their

daughters – with mingled tenderness and resentment, longing and anger" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 54). Mr Stevenson's death broke the connection with the house in Chelsea and her stepmother, whom Elizabeth would only visit again twenty-five years later.

Being still a minor at the time of Mr Stevenson's death, Elizabeth had technically become Catherine Stevenson's responsibility, but, their relationship being what it was, the Hollands once again intervened, and over the next two years, she would move around from relative to relative, furthering her education in the process. In the autumn of 1831, Elizabeth accompanied a friend on a visit to her sister, who had married a Manchester minister. During this visit, Elizabeth met the minister's assistant, the Reverend William Gaskell, a graduate of Glasgow University, distinguished classical scholar, and five years her senior. Within five months of meeting him, they found themselves engaged to each other. By March the following year, William was heading to Knutsford to be introduced to Elizabeth's beloved Aunt Hannah. She was delighted to have found William, and their differences were the making of their relationship.

Despite their many differences, the Gaskells were good to each other, and their Unitarianism connected them. Unitarians were slightly more liberal than was the usual norm for the times, and yet, in the first years of her marriage, Elizabeth found herself caught between "the Unitarian call for independence and the conventional appeal to submission" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 83). Elizabeth was reluctant to adhere to the doctrine of separate spheres, at the same time that she believed she should adapt her life to her husband's (UGLOW, 1999).

On the day of her twenty-second birthday, the newlyweds arrived in their first house in Manchester, after honeymooning in Wales. Their house was far enough away from the centre of the city to allow them the privacy and rural joys to which Elizabeth was accustomed and which she loved, at the same time as being undeniably Mancunian, and the young Elizabeth could not keep away from the news and sheer speed of the manufacturing town. Manchester became a character in two of her most famous novels, *North & South* and *Mary Barton*, and "when she writes of [it], she vividly conveys the feel of its streets, courts and houses, the crowded pavements, the slap of wet washing in the face as girls hurry through cobbled courtyards, the twang of its mingled accents" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 85). She does not romanticise the city, but treats it with equal admiration and dread.

Soon after their move to Manchester, Elizabeth gave birth to a still-born girl, and struggled to get over the pain of this loss: "it was the first of many griefs and cares that darkened her early married life and which stirred a certain morbid vein in her which threatened at times to upset the finely adjusted balance of her nervous temperament" (GÉRIN, 1977, p. 52). By the

next year, she was finally a mother, having successfully birthed her second baby, Marianne. Elizabeth delighted in motherhood, and it must have felt doubly rewarding to watch her children grow, knowing how easily they could have been lost. She spent most of Marianne's childhood worrying she could die, as well as being concerned about the reality of her own death – her own mother had died when she was barely a year old, and Mary Anne Lumb also passed away soon after adopting her. Concern about death of mother or child was ever-present in Victorian women's lives, and Elizabeth was no strange to it.

She started reading and writing poetry, but, like Jane Austen before her, "her literary interests were almost a guilty secret, to be hidden away, just as she scrunched her paper and scuttered her pencil out of sight when people came near" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 100). She was influenced by the life surrounding her, as well as by poets such as Wordsworth and Crabbe, although poetry was not to be her medium: it was in prose, not verse, that she would bring her vivid characters to life. A poem from this period, however, cowritten by Elizabeth and William, "appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* the following January" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 101), one of her first forays into being a published author. The year of 1837 also brought the happiness of the birth of her second daughter, Margaret Emily, known by all as Meta, as well as the deep sorrow of the loss of Aunt Lumb after a severe stroke. Despite the sadness of her death, Hannah Lumb left Elizabeth an annuity of £80, thus marking the start of Gaskell's much desired financial independence.

In the late 1830s, Elizabeth was writing as much as she could for a Victorian wife and mother, and the fruits of her labours were starting to show in small publications. Her proper literary life would have to wait a few more years, however, as family life was demanding much from her: the Gaskells moved house, from Dover Street to the neighbouring Upper Rumford Street, where they stayed for eight years: "Elizabeth loved it with a stronger feeling than for any of her other homes, because it was there she experienced both the greatest happiness and its profound sorrow" (GÉRIN, 1977, p. 71). In 1842 Elizabeth gave birth to her third daughter, Florence Elizabeth, known as Flossy, and merely two years later, she was also the mother of a son, named William, after his father, born in October 1844. During the summer of 1845, the Gaskells went to holiday to Wales, and Marianne, then eleven, caught scarlet fever, but as soon as the girl was out of the woods, baby William became sick, and died a few days later. The death of her infant son weighed heavily on Gaskell, and although accounts from the time of his death do not survive, in later years she would write of her pain, a "sorrow that nearly crushed her" (GÉRIN, 1977, p. 73). She struggled to recover, but recover she must, and her husband, who knew of her need to escape, suggested that she started working on her writing, which she

did. Elizabeth immersed herself in her novel, and "it was not only the prostration of Willie's death which led to much of *Mary Barton* to be written from her couch: by the spring of 1846 she was pregnant again" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 155). By the end of the year, she was devoting her time to her four girls, Marianne, Meta, Flossy and Julia, as well as her writing.

The next year brought the publication of her first piece of fiction writing, three short stories in the *Howitt's Journal*. Even in this first fictional publication, she was already making important remarks about the society she knew well, as well as the condition of women in that society. The Howitts had become her literary sponsors, and she told them about her ambitions to get her novel published; William Howitt helped with the negotiations, and Elizabeth was happy with the arrangements to get her *Mary Barton* into print. She escaped to Wales when the book was due to be published in order to escape the immediate criticism. Despite incurring the rage of mill owners and the London Tory press, *Mary Barton* gained much praise from readers and literary figures. Undeniably, this first publication changed Elizabeth's life, forcing her "into the ranks of professional writers; it brought her the acquaintance of an ever-widening circle of celebrities whose demands on her were the measure of her success; and it brought her a wealth of personal friends whose importance to her emotional life cannot be reckoned" (GÉRIN, 1977, p. 90). Elizabeth Gaskell now had a new connection with London, this time, with its prosperous literary scene.

The year of 1850 was a busy one for Elizabeth. The lease of their house in Rumford Street was due to expire, and the Gaskells' search for a new home started. The new house was near the previous one, on 42 Plymouth Grove, and the move happened in the summer of 1850. This was to be the family's final home during Elizabeth's lifetime. It was also during that summer that Elizabeth met the future subject of the only biography she would ever write: Charlotte Brontë. They both admired each other's work – Elizabeth was fascinated by *Jane Eyre*, and Charlotte thought *Mary Barton* was a clever, if painful story. Meeting with authors such as Gaskell helped Charlotte to feel less alone in her pursuit and better prepared to handle the criticism, and the same was probably true of Elizabeth: they were two of the few women in the literary scene, and each other's presence must have felt reassuring.

Still in 1850, Charles Dickens, another one of Elizabeth's literary acquaintances was so impressed by her writing that he invited her to contribute to his new periodical *Household Works*. The promise of an anonymous publication that served humanitarian purposes, as well as the flattering invitation in itself were impossible to deny. 'Lizzie Leigh', a Manchester tale reminiscent of the recent success *Mary Barton* was well-received by Dickens, whose editorial comments, "then and after, show the degree of his involvement even in fiction that was not his

own; so all-pervasive was his creativity" (GÉRIN, 1977, p. 107). It was also in *Household Works* that the first, stand-alone at the start, two chapters of *Cranford* appeared. The whole collection would be published in 1853, and it is still very political, in spite of its subtlety – *Cranford* is "an appeal against separate spheres, an argument for preserving the independence and the precious qualities of this female community, while opening the gates to the boys who gaze at the flowers through the railings" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 288).

The years between the publication of the first part of *Cranford* in Dickens's paper and its complete version found Elizabeth immersed in the writing of *Ruth*, published in 1853. Elizabeth Gaskell's second published novel approached a subject that even the loudest social commentators of the time did not dare to touch, namely, the redemption of a fallen woman. "Writing was Gaskell's most effective form of philanthropy" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 318), and *Ruth* makes a case for poor motherless girls who were never taught better, as well as advocating against the crucifixion of those women's children, who would, in Victorian society, be tainted for life because of their mother's sins. *Ruth* is imbibed with unitarian beliefs, mainly concerning the inexistence of original sin, and acknowledging that a person's situation in life was often responsible for his or her mistakes. The novel's controversial theme meant that critics were not forgiving, but Elizabeth retained the support of her husband, always so important to an author who called herself Mrs Gaskell, as well as retaining the belief that she had written about something worthy. *Ruth* was followed by *North & South*, a more conciliatory novel than her previous two, but still very politically and socially engaged, being one of the "earliest novels of industrial alienation, tellingly linked to the plight of nineteenth-century women" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 386).

The following year was marked by the death of Charlotte Brontë and by Patrick Brontë's request for Mrs Gaskell to write his daughter's biography in order to have some control of her legacy. The invitation to write about her friend's life was naturally accepted, for Elizabeth had been collecting information about Charlotte since before their first meeting, as "Charlotte's life already fell easily into the patterns of Gaskell's fiction, with its suffering daughters, profligate son and stern father, and its emphasis on upbringing and environment, female endurance and courage […]" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 399). Elizabeth conducted an extraneous research of her friend's life, from visiting Haworth to talking to her father and husband, to travelling to Bristol to meet Ellen Nussey. She went as far as Brussels in order to have a better understanding of Charlotte's relationship with the Hégers and her time at school, and even then, the biography is very subtle about how it presents its subject's feelings towards the older and crucially married professor, supressing anything that could fuel more speculation about her deceased friend.

The time in-between novels consisted of much writing, as well as one of Elizabeth favourite activities: travelling. She had always loved to travel, and had more access to it than most, especially if compared to Austen and Brontë, her life being filled with travels both around the United Kingdom and abroad. From Rome, to weeks in Normandy and Brittany, to Heidelberg, accompanied by her daughters in different configurations. Mrs Gaskell saw much of a world that was in permanent change. She was still very much engaged with the English literary world, and a great admirer of George Eliot – the two women exchanged letters and support, and despite their many differences, they shared a non-idealised view of womankind, and in the fiction of both "the maternal positive has a dark, sexual negative. If women can be creators, they can also be destroyers – or, more often, the destroyed" (UGLOW, 1999, p. 467), a view that was rebellious for not adhering to the angelic perception of womanhood.

Towards the end of her life, Elizabeth returned to the scene of her youth in her novels, and that "may have added to the impression created later – by the very excellence of the 'Knutsford' novels – that she was at heart a provincial woman" (GÉRIN, 1977, p. 240). In her private life, however, city life was never far away, and she was deeply involved in relief work during the Manchester Cotton Famine (1862 – 1863). Despite her involvement with the city both in real life and in her fiction, Elizabeth did grow tired of Manchester as she aged, and in 1864, after the publication of *Sylvia's Lover's* and the serialised *Cousin Phyllis*, she bought a house in Jane Austen's home county, Hampshire. In true independent fashion, she hid the purchase from her husband, as it was to be a surprise, having saved half of the cost and borrowed the other half from her publisher. In November 1865, during a visit to her newly-acquired house, Elizabeth suffered, quite unexpectedly, a heart attack, passing away suddenly, during tea with some family members. *Wives and Daughters*, which was being serialised at the time in *The Cornhill*, was fully published posthumously, but left unfinished. She was buried in Knutsford.

Gaskell was, like Austen and Brontë before her, a woman of her time, imbued with contradiction. She was a writer, in a period when women should be domestic angels; at the same time, she was tenderly known by her readers as Mrs Gaskell, a sort of pen name that implied a homely matronly figure. She adored being a mother, but she also felt the need to go away from home, evidenced by the amount of travel she did during her life. For much of the twentieth century, her works were disregarded as old-fashioned and provincial, until she was rediscovered by academics and readers alike, who found in her a spokeswoman for Victorian minorities, exploring women's places in society, as well as the new world being built by the Industrial Revolution and its effects. Unlike Dickens, whose focus was London life, Elizabeth Gaskell wrote about the north of the country, often neglected to this day, and she always endeavoured

to build a bridge between these different worlds, as she herself was constantly travelling between them.

2 "POOR, OBSCURE, PLAIN AND LITTLE"[10]: *MANSFIELD PARK* AND *JANE EYRE*

2.1 The Vindication of the Rights of Fanny Price

> ***"Her own thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions."***
>
> Jane Austen***, Mansfield Park***

Amongst Jane Austen's best-known heroines, Fanny Price is the one most people seem to dislike, and *Mansfield Park* is frequently quoted as the Austen novel readers most struggled to get through. In Fanny's story, one tends to forget she is the protagonist, for she does not shine like Elizabeth Bennet, nor is she outspoken like Emma Woodhouse – other characters' actions are often more exciting than Fanny's, and it is no wonder this is the case, as 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 prevaling common sense. This section will, thus, explore Fanny's journey from the mousey and forgettable poor relation, to the symbolic heiress of Mansfield.

2.1.1 The poor relation

The opening pages of *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen's fourth novel, published in 1814[11] and part of what is deemed her mature phase[12], are more revealing than a quick reading would give them credit for being. It is in these first paragraphs that we come to understand the intricate situations of three sisters who made very different matches in their early years, and how these matches have altered forever their relationships to each other and their place in the world, as well as determining how our protagonist, Fanny Price, stands. These three women, the Ward sisters (wards even in name, to their male relatives) might not seem relevant to the study of our protagonist; it is their choices, however, that culminate in Fanny's living with the Bertrams, away from her parents and siblings, in the first place, thus determining her future.

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[10] From Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.
[11] *Mansfield Park* was published in 1814, but this work will use the Norton Critical Edition of the text, from 1998.
[12] *Emma*, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* are considered Austen's mature novels, for they were all written later in her life, when she was settled at Chawton Cottage.

Maria Ward "had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 5). Despite the title of baronet not being as ancestral as other titles, having been created by King James I, as well as being a low-ranking one[13], marrying one, while with a dowry of only seven thousand a year to tempt him, was a great feat for the former Miss Maria Ward, now Lady Bertram. Marriage was the end goal in the 1800s, and Maria Ward hit the nineteenth-century jackpot. Her luck was admired by all, and her influence and connections were expected to provide similar marriages to her sisters. As the narrator of *Mansfield Park* makes sure we know, however, "there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 5), and the remaining Ward sisters make very different matches to that of Maria. In many ways, Miss Ward's[14] match was influenced by her sister, for she married the Reverend Mr Norris, a friend of Sir Thomas Bertram. Mr Norris was not the rich man all had hoped for, but after many years of waiting, he became her best option, as "for most genteel women, the assumption of their most active material role coincided with marriage, when they became the mistress of the household" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 8), and the new Mrs Norris was very likely aware that she would become a dependent of her male relations (much like Austen herself had become after the death of her father) if she did not marry. Her sister's influence got Mr Norris an appointment as vicar of Mansfield, and thus "began their career of conjugal felicity" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 5) – notice here how Austen uses the word "career" to refer to happiness in marriage, implying a sense of marriage as work or a business, whose success depends on the application and disposition of the parts, not only on love. As Vickery suggests,

> Contemporaries were convinced of the determining role of 'temper' and 'disposition' in marriage; a belief in the significance of personality which novels only reinforced. Amiability, generosity and good sense recommended the pleasant husband. Yet these sterling qualities were hardly distributed equally amongst the male population, so a shrewd evaluation of a suitor's character was crucial. Friends and family drilled young women on the monumental importance of making their marital beds such that they could lie in them for a lifetime. (VICKERY, 1999, p. 40)

Miss Frances Ward, on the other hand, married "to disoblige her family" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 5), meaning that her match was thought to be inferior to her and her family's means and status: her husband had no education, no fortune, no connections. Miss Frances married a

[13] Baronets were only just above commoners, but they were not considered peers of the realm regardless.
[14] The eldest sister had the distinction of being called "Miss" plus the family name. The younger sisters were called "Miss" plus their own name and then the family name. Thus, Miss Ward was the eldest of the three, while Miss Maria Ward and Miss Frances Ward were the younger ones.

Lieutenant of the Marines, Mr Price, an apt name for a fortuneless man, someone beyond the reach of Sir Thomas's influence – despite the baronet's desire to help his wife's sister, "from principle as well as pride, from a general wish of doing right and a desire of seeing all that were connected with him in a situation of respectability" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 5). Mr Price's situation was unalterable at the time, and before Sir Thomas, as the patriarch of the family, devised a new method of helping his brother-in-law, the rift between the sisters was in place: "the natural result of the conduct of each party, and such as a very imprudent marriage almost always produces" (AUSTEN, 1988, p. 6). The new Mrs Price only informed her sisters of her marriage after the deed was done, causing the split that would affect the lives of the Price children until Fanny. For eleven years, the misjudged marriage of the now Mrs Price meant that the sisters were not in contact. They moved in very different circles, making it easy to sustain the self-imposed separation; their homes where not near – Lady Bertram and Mrs Norris lived in Northampton, while Mrs Price resided in the seaside town of Portsmouth.

Mrs Price experienced the reality described by Susie Steinbach, who affirms that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, "women bore more children and saw more of them live to adulthood than had been the case previously; this meant that mothering was more time-consuming than it had been and helped to promote the new social convention that women's lives were focused on the home" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 46). After over a decade, the weight of many children and a husband disabled for service meant that Mrs Price had to swallow her pride and seek her better-off sisters' help, reaping the consequences of her imprudent marriage by having to resort to family members for help. It was not uncommon, during our period, to "lend" one's child to a wealthier family, as happened with Austen's own brother, as a means of guaranteeing the child's future would be brighter and, if that were the case, that the child would then have the means to help his or her parents and siblings. Male children were usually favoured, and Mrs Price was surprised when her "offer" of a child was accepted, but a girl was chosen instead of her eldest boy.

As Vickery suggests "it was a truth universally recognised that a childless marriage was a sad marriage and most mothers paid lip-service to this maxim" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 97), and childless Mrs Norris, in her role as eldest sister with no children of her own, arranged everything for one of the Price's children to come live at Mansfield, as well as being the one who suggests they take in the girl. She takes responsibility for Fanny always knowing her place amongst her cousins, as it was essential that a differentiation of status was maintained. Jane Austen does not delve into the subject of childlessness in *Mansfield Park*, but motherhood itself is present in many forms, not only here, but in all of her novels to some extent. Despite Mrs Norris'

'condition', she acted as a mother to her nieces and nephews, more so than their actual biological mothers, and with more responsibilities. On the other hand, Lady Bertram's "beauty shapes her career as a wife and mother. Much has been made of Lady Bertram's physical stasis […]. Her lack of physical activity is consonant with her role as a beautiful object […] and literalises her psychological inertia as a parent and a wife" (FRANCUS, 2014, n/p); she leaves her maternal obligations in the hands of others, namely Mrs Norris, while playing the role of languid and pretty wife, defined by her husband choice and title, and to whom having children was nothing but an obligation she had to fulfil. Lady Bertram's children do not respect her, nor do they confide in her, and she proves herself the perfect ornament in Sir Thomas's dining room, her only accomplishment being her beauty.

> Lady Bertram's failure to mother leaves a vacuum that her sister, Mrs Norris, attempts to fill. At first glance, these sisters could not be more different: Lady Bertram is fertile, passive, and deferential, while Mrs Norris is childless, active, and aggressive. But both are selfish—Lady Bertram in her indolence, and Mrs Norris in her incessant activity—and both are monstrous mothers, demonstrating their deviance from expectation. Mrs Norris abuses Fanny, and spoils Maria and Julia, damaging all three. (FRANCUS, 2014, n/p)

Despite being the one who most pushed for Fanny to come live at Mansfield, Mrs Norris makes it clear that the girl cannot become her financial responsibility, surprising Sir Thomas, who thought Fanny's presence would be beneficial to his sister-in-law now that her husband had passed away and she was alone. Mrs Norris is also the one who seems to dislike Fanny the most, taking pleasure in making sure she knows her place in relation to those in the house, particularly her cousins, Maria and Julia. Unsurprisingly, it has not gone unnoticed by scholars such as Elvira Casal (2006) that Mrs Norris also depends on relatives to continue exercising her style of life and maintaining her place in society (even if that society is Mansfield and its environs), allowing one to infer that her treatment of the other dependent, Fanny Price, is a form of creating a distinction between the two of them, establishing her as the more powerful of the two, even though her prudent marriage also ended up leaving her in someone else's dependency.

Thus, Fanny's coming to Mansfield is an act of charity by relatives who think they are superior to her and therefore should offer help – as long as she does not start thinking too highly of herself, something of which Sir Thomas and Mrs Norris are conscious from the very start:

> "There will be some difficulty in our way, Mrs Norris," observed Sir Thomas, "as to the distinction proper to be made between the girls as they grow up: how to preserve in the minds of my *daughters* the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a *Miss Bertram*. I should wish to see them very good friends, and would, on no account, authorise in my girls the smallest degree of

> arrogance towards their relation; but still they cannot be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations will always be different. It is a point of great delicacy, and you must assist us in our endeavours to choose exactly the right line of conduct." (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 10)

Young Fanny Price, then, joins her previously unknown relatives at Mansfield Park, worlds away from the reality to which she had been accustomed so far, and at only ten years old. Though "there might not be much in her first appearance to captivate, there was, at least, nothing to disgust her relations", and the girl did not really know what to expect. Unlike other bubbly Austen heroines, Fanny was "small for her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty; exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice but her air, though awkward, was not vulgar, her voice was sweet, and when she spoke her countenance was pretty" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 11). At first glance, the differences between Fanny and her cousins are obvious, the distinction in rank extending to their appearance and manners – all think of her as being the inferior, whilst her cousins, who have had the advantage of a good education and overall upbringing, are seen as perfect examples of youth. At her arrival, nobody seems to care that she could be missing her family, for everyone is adamant that she is the luckiest girl in the world for having been chosen to grow up with her betters. Fanny silently struggles to settle in her new house, and though "nobody meant to be unkind, […] nobody put themselves out of their way to secure her comfort" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 12). Mansfield Park was grander and more prosperous than the house from which Fanny came, but its size was as oppressive as any cramped lodgings to the young girl – "the rooms were too large for her to move in with ease: whatever she touched she expected to injure, and she crept about in constant terror of something or other; often retreating towards her own chamber to cry", her new house was far from being home "and the little girl who was spoken of in the drawing-room when she left it at night as seeming so desirably sensible of her peculiar good fortune, ended every day's sorrows by sobbing herself to sleep" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 13).

Mrs Price's plight, and more specifically Fanny's – that of being the poor relation in need of charity from wealthier relatives – was fairly common in the nineteenth century, resulting either from a bad marriage or from no marriage at all. Women's dependence on male relatives is a hallmark of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as "a woman's legal status was as a dependent, and her life and property were in the hands of her father or her husband" (McDOWELL, 2004, p. 16), and they usually went from 'belonging' to a man from the former to the latter. This was expected dependency, whereas depending on other male relatives, such as brothers and uncles, was somewhat shameful. Female dependency might have been the norm,

and “within the ideal a woman should always remain in the home of a male relative, yet the single, dependent woman was in a particularly deprived state within that home” (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 61). Marrying badly was almost like not marrying at all, and Mrs Price, despite being a wife, had to rely on Sir Thomas for help. Not only did Sir Thomas take Fanny in, “he assisted [Mrs Price] liberally in the education and disposal of her sons as they became old enough for a determinate pursuit” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 17).

As John Wiltshire suggests, since Fanny “is taken in by the Bertrams at an age when she has already formed ties to her home and her birth family, hers is a narrative of displacement” (WILTSHIRE, 2014, p. 94). Fanny spends years without seeing anyone from her nuclear family – apart from a couple of encounters with her favourite brother, William – theirs being “the novel’s only sound, uncomplicated family relationship. […] It anchors part of her in the past” (WILTSHIRE, 2014, p. 95). Nobody in Mansfield thought of her as wishing to visit Portsmouth, and no one in Portsmouth “seemed to want her” (AUSTEN, 1998 p. 17). Through her connection with Edmund, Fanny starts to feel more at ease at Mansfield Park – he is the first in the family to look truly at her for what she is, rather than for what she is expected to be. Maria and Julia, on the other hand, think her simple and stupid, failing to recognise that she has not had the same education as they have. Her lack of knowledge and accomplishments shocks her female cousins, who have been trained their whole lives to be the epitome of womanhood – or, at least, to be as lucky as their mother in marriage. They are surprised when Fanny claims she does not have any interest in learning either music or drawing – a first show of independent thought from the girl – to which Mrs Norris replies that it might be a good thing that Fanny never matches her cousins’ accomplishments, for “it is much more desirable that there should be a difference” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 16).

> Fanny, with all her faults of ignorance and timidity, was fixed at Mansfield Park, and learning to transfer in its favour much of her attachment to her former home, grew up there not unhappily among her cousins. There was no positive ill-nature in Maria or Julia; and though Fanny was often mortified by their treatment of her, she thought too lowly of her own claims to feel injured by it. (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 17)

Fanny’s dependence on her uncle meant that she was always expected to do his bidding – and that of her aunts’ – without much thought to her feelings on the matter. After the death of Mr Norris, who is so often neglected in the novel that we as readers also forget about his existence, when Fanny is fifteen years old, Sir Thomas expects that Mrs Norris will have Fanny move in with her, as he sees her as the perfect companion for the childless widow. This news “was as disagreeable to Fanny as it had been unexpected. She had never received kindness from

her aunt Norris, and could not love her" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 20). However, it was not her choice where she went, for she was the poor relation, thoroughly dependent on Sir Thomas, who thinks it will make little difference to the girl whether she lives at Mansfield Park or at the White house with her aunt – her feelings on the subject are of little relevance to him.

The prospect of leaving the place where she so struggled to belong to go live somewhere where she is even less wanted is daunting. Having been snatched away from her family home in childhood, the possibility of another change, and this time to live not with unknown relatives, but with one she actively dislikes, is unsurprisingly scary. Her love for Mansfield Park blossoms, in spite of being mostly unrequited by its inhabitants. Here, we have an insight into Fanny's thoughts, which she voices to Edmund, her only friend in the house: "I can never be important to anyone" and "*here*, I know I am of none, and yet I love the place so well" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 21). These are examples of Fanny's ambiguity toward Mansfield and its inhabitants, for she is aware of her place in Mansfield Park – or lack thereof – as well as the fact that in the past few years she has been learning to make a refuge out of her little attic room, a place where the "integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams" (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 6) was possible. Furthermore, the room has become *hers*, and as Bachelard would argue, it is *in* her (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 226). The little attic room is, to Fanny, the place where oneiric possibilities have a chance to take flight, even if in imagination.

Mrs Norris, to Fanny's relief and Sir Thomas's bemusement, has no intention of bringing her niece to live with her, and she justifies this by saying that not having a dependent will allow her to save money in order to leave a small inheritance to Lady Bertram's children – as if having Fanny living with her would not have the same result by saving Sir Thomas's from spending on the girl.

Depending on richer relatives means one does not have much of a say on where and when to go, as seen in the threat of removal from Mansfield. Not only that, but Fanny was also kept away from certain forms of entertainment in which her cousins partook. Maria and Julia were eager participants of the season, a period of festivities, dinner parties and balls. Accompanied by their aunt Norris, for Lady Bertram was "too indolent even to accept a mother's gratification in witnessing their success and enjoyment at the expense of any personal trouble" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 26), the girls established themselves among the belles of the neighbourhood, while Fanny was left to keep Lady Bertram company, entertaining her as best as she could, which once again differentiates her from the other young ladies of the house. Fanny had to find some sort of activity to occupy herself, and the natural thing to do was to be a companion, a helpmate to her aunt; as Spacks suggests, "for women, whose sphere of action

is limited, the possibility and the necessity of acting so as to be useful to others are more pressing than for men", and she goes further to theorise that this is perhaps "the explanation for the traditional feminine role as guardian of morality: women occupy themselves with being good not because men force them toward virtue, but because the struggle for goodness is the most viable alternative to simple passivity" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 86), that is, the search and maintenance of virtue is a form of action, especially for Fanny, whose life is limited and controlled; all she ended up with were descriptions of the parties, and she "thought too lowly of her own situation to imagine she should ever be admitted to the same" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 27). Fanny does eventually experience the pleasures of a dance, a small family affair at Mansfield, "without the preparation or splendour of many a young lady's first ball" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 83) when Tom returns from town. All dance but Fanny, until her cousin Tom asks her to stand with him in order to avoid playing cards with the 'old people'. While the young people fall in love with the wrong suiters and act inappropriately, their elders are oblivious without the presence of Sir Thomas. The pleasures of a true ball are not yet hers.

Fanny's lack of participation in society might be one of the reasons why she struggles so much when asked to leave her comfortable position of observer and listener – judging others on their behaviour but never being judged – throughout the novel. There are glimpses of her true feelings when she is called upon to defend those she loves, for example when contradicting Mary Crawford on the constancy of brothers, to defend William's competence and care as a letter writer. Writing long letters was seen as the business of women, and to have a male family member who was a constant and diligent correspondent was something of which to be proud. Therefore, while Mary berates her Henry's poor communication, Fanny feels compelled to step up for William's character: "'when they are at a distance from all their family,' said Fanny, colouring for William's sake, 'they can write long letters'" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 44). She overcomes her shyness to defend a loved one. Fanny knows her place too well, however, and she is afraid of losing the closeness she shares with Edmund; thus, she tries to silence her harsher opinions of Mary and, consequently, of Edmund's choices. Internally, however, Fanny displays surprise at his fascination for Miss Crawford, someone so different and holding such scandalous opinions about the church he intends to join, and she does not understand how "he could spend so many hours with Miss Crawford, and not see more of the sort of fault which he had already observed, and of which she was almost always reminded by a something of the same nature whenever she was in her company" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 48).

Fanny is perpetually controlling her emotions to sustain a semblance of peacefulness and acceptance, for she always feels obliged to be grateful for what the Bertrams have given

her. Of course, this is tested time and again, in situations such as Mary's selfishness with Fanny's riding time, using her mare so much that it stops Fanny from being able to exercise. Mary's antagonism is shown through their different dispositions, for while Fanny is mousy, weak, and timid, Mary is, at first glance, the typical heroine of an Austen novel – outspoken, charming, healthy, "the contrast between two different aspects of potential modes of womanhood" (TAUCHERT, 2005, p. 104). It is only through Fanny's quiet observation that we perceive Mary's real fickleness of character, and as Paula Byrne explains, Austen "transposed the role of the witty stage-heroine to the anti-heroine, Mary Crawford, and depicted the heroine, Fanny Price, as a reliable but dull understudy waiting in the wings" (BYRNE, 2017, p. 166). Or, as Perkins (1993) suggests, Mary represents the 'laughing' whilst Fanny represents the 'sentimental' comedy. Furthermore, Mary is as active as anyone can be, while Fanny's passivity is central to the story, "an embodiment of femininity; expressed as modesty, reserve, caution, stasis, inaction, yielding to authority and self-sublimation" (TAUCHERT, 2005, p. 104). Fanny must learn how to express *her* wishes, and not just comply with other people's, in order to find happiness.

Mansfield Park is always asking that the reader be attentive to what is beneath the surface, and the attempt to put on a production of the controversial play *Lovers' Vows* rather than hiding the characters, gives them the masks they needed to be themselves and act upon their desires. The choice of play is not random, as *Lovers' Vows* "raises considerations about the right of women to choose their own husbands, about a father's responsibilities to his children, and, perhaps most radically, about the validity of innate merit rather than social position" (BYRNE, 2017, p. 171). At first, Edmund opposes the private theatricals, and Fanny stands by his side, however, it does not take him long to be persuaded by Mary Crawford and the others that his taking part is the only way to ensure that this will run with any semblance of propriety. Eventually, Fanny is also made to take part, accepting it despite better judgement, to please others, mainly Edmund, and avoid reproach, since she sees it as being her place to adhere to their wishes as much as possible.

This acceptance does not come easily, and it is Mrs Norris who calls upon her to join the others, telling her "she must do what was so impossible as to act; and then to have the charge of obstinacy and ingratitude follow it, enforced with such a hint at the dependence of her situation" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 105), that is to say that Mrs Norris made Fanny take part in the play by playing the inferiority card, implying that she owes so much to Mansfield and its inhabitants that it would be ungrateful of her to deny them this wish. Put in her place, Fanny finally accepts it, but she finds acting impossible, implying that she is the only person there

who is true to her feelings and actions. At this point, when what is asked of her feels like too much to bear, Fanny takes refuge in the only room of the house she can call her own – and that is only due to it being often neglected by the other members of the household: the little white attic room. The place, previously used as the girls' school room, was now disused by the rest of the family and taken over by Fanny.

> The room had then become useless, and for some time was quite deserted, except by Fanny, when she visited her plants, or wanted one of the books, which she was still glad to keep there, from the deficiency of space and accommodation in her little chamber above: *but gradually, as her value for the comforts of it increased, she had added to her possessions, and spent more of her time there; and having nothing to oppose her, had so naturally and so artlessly worked herself into it, that it was now generally admitted to be hers*.[15] The East room, as it had been called ever since Maria Bertram was sixteen, was now considered Fanny's, almost as decidedly as the white attic: the smallness of the one making the use of the other so evidently reasonable that the Miss Bertrams, with every superiority in their own apartments which their own sense of superiority could demand, were entirely approving it; and Mrs Norris, having stipulated for there never being a fire in it on Fanny's account, was tolerably resigned to her having the use of what nobody else wanted, though the terms in which she sometimes spoke of the indulgence seemed to imply that it was the best room in the house. (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 105-106)

At 10 years old, the young Miss Price was taken away from her family to be "put in the little white attic, near the old nurseries" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 9). The symbology of the attic is pertinent both here and in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, later to appear in other novels depicting women who have been shoved away from the goings-on around them, to be dealt with only when those responsible for them thought it appropriate. Gaston Bachelard (1994) views the attic as a space of light and rationality, despite its literal function as the space for hiding things one is not happy to display with any frequency. Fanny's placement in the attic links her to reasoning and clarity of mind that is not possible for other characters, at the same time that it hides her from a family to which she does not quite belong. Furthermore, throughout the novel, people come to the attic to hide from the world at the same time that they unveil previously concealed desires. The attic, here, is a place that nobody else wants, and where, even without a fire in its hearth – Mrs Norris does not think Fanny needs a fire, after all – Fanny finds the warmth of a nest; it is where she goes to try to find comfort for her "agitated, doubting spirit" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 107). The attic room is the highest place in the house, possessing "the verticality of the tower rising from the most earthly, watery depths, to the abode of the soul that believes in heaven" (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 25). Despite not fully belonging to Mansfield Park, Fanny manages to make the small physical space her own, mostly undisturbed by outside interference – though,

[15] My italics.

whenever other characters join her in this space, it always feels like an invasion to an unprotected but forgotten kingdom.

Throughout her first years at Mansfield, Fanny struggles to find her feet, she is the poor relation not only because of her financial dependence to the Bertrams, but she is also considered lesser when compared to Maria and Julia, and then later, to Mary Crawford: Fanny is timid, quiet, less well-educated in the accomplishments a young lady should have. She assumes the position of listener to all, and even during the theatricals, it is for her all the 'actors' look when they need to unburden and share their qualms, as "Fanny, being always a very courteous listener, and often the only listener at hand, came in for the complaints and distresses of most of them" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 114). She is deemed trustworthy for not only does she not talk much, she is also perceived almost as if she were not part of that world: Fanny is not worldly enough to belong to the confined setting of Mansfield Park, that is to say, she is believed to lack the knowledge of society and people that her housemates think they possess; however, she is the only keen observer of her surroundings, the only one who sees danger in Maria and Henry Crawford, for example.

Fanny Price is as well-read and as judgmental as *Pride & Prejudice*'s Elizabeth Bennet, but unlike Elizabeth, a gentleman's daughter (however bad the financial situation of that gentleman might be), Fanny is at the mercy of her uncle, thus having much more to lose when expressing herself. She lacks Elizabeth's confidence, but she is a better judge of character, despite rarely having the opportunity to voice her thoughts. There is a lot more at stake for Fanny, she is not free to act as she chooses, and for that reason she feels obliged to do what others ask of her, to go where they order her, to prove herself worthy of all the Bertrams have done for her – Fanny wants to please. For these reasons, her embrace of propriety is "intimately bound up with her defence against rejection" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 217). She "is outwardly everything a textbook Proper Lady should be; she is dependent, self-effacing, and apparently free of impermissible desires" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 212), but in order to find her place, she must first learn to defy expectations, to disappoint, to say "no", all things that are much harder to achieve when one is dependent upon the "charity" of others.

2.1.2 From Mansfield to Portsmouth

Life at Mansfield Park is by no means bad for Fanny – she is, many would say, lucky to have been taken in by her richer relatives, and to have the benefits of a better education and society, things her parents would have been unable to provide. Her position, as discussed previously, is secondary to all members of the household bar the servants, and for much of the

novel, she never contests this reality. Fanny asks for very little and prefers to be left to herself; she misses her parents and siblings very much, especially her favourite, William. For years, nobody ever thought that she might want to visit them – for why would she leave the luxuries of Mansfield for the cramped lodgings at Portsmouth? Even Fanny herself never voiced her homesickness.

William's visit to Mansfield is the first time we see Fanny interacting with one of her nuclear family members, and she is "elevated beyond the common timidity of her mind by the flow of her love for William" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 159). The sheer happiness she feels at her favourite brother's arrival, with whom she shared her early life and memories, is telling of how much she was in need of a family member whom to love and by whom she would be loved in return, with no strings of dependency attached. She had never known such happiness, "as in this unchecked, equal, fearless intercourse with the brother and friend, […] who was interested in all the comforts and all the little hardships of her home at Mansfield; ready to think of every member of that home as she directed" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 161). Fanny finally had an ally.

Edmund might have been a good friend and mentor, but there was nothing like the freedom she had in her relationship with William to raise Fanny's spirits and allow her to express her true self. As the quotation above suggests, William brings news of her parents and siblings; he is a confidant about the matters at Mansfield, and obliges her by thinking about each member of the household as she does – crucially, he is less cautious in expressing extreme views on those who mistreat her, which must have a cathartic effect on Fanny herself, since she feels she cannot abuse them so. Moreover, and as the narrator says "perhaps the dearest indulgence of the whole", in his presence "all the evil and good of their earliest years could be gone over again, and every former united pain and pleasure retraced with the fondest recollection. An advantage this, a strengthener of love, in which even the conjugal tie is beneath the fraternal" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 161). Furthermore, their family ties are unequal to what can be experienced at Mansfield:

> Children of the same family, the same blood, with the same first associations and habits, have some means of enjoyment in their power, which no subsequent connexions can supply; and it must be by a long and unnatural estrangement, by a divorce which no subsequent connexion can justify, if such precious remains of the earliest attachments are ever entirely outlived. Too often, alas! it is so. Fraternal love, sometimes almost everything, is at others worse than nothing. But with William and Fanny Price it was still a sentiment in all its prime and freshness, wounded by no opposition of interest, cooled by no separate attachment, and feeling the influence of time and absence only in its increase. (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 161)

William's presence sees Fanny more at home than she had ever been during her time in Mansfield. She is much happier and her "attractions increased – increased two-fold – for the sensibility which beautified her complexion and illuminated her countenance, was an attraction in itself" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 161-162), a change noticed even by Henry Crawford.

The departure of the Bertram girls (Maria has married and Julia has joined her in town) means that Fanny becomes the centre of the ball held at Mansfield to celebrate William's visit, fulfilling the role her female cousins used to play. Apart from the small family gathering before the theatricals, Fanny had never been to a ball, and this event can be seen as her "coming out". This was an important moment in a young woman's life, but more than that, it placed her in "the social class that employs the ritual of coming out as a certification that its young women are marriageable and have sound family connections", furthermore, it "bestows the freedom to speak, to express oneself, to take part in the unembarrassed social intercourse with the other sex" (WILTSHIRE, 1994, p. 62-63). The ball is, thus, an act of permissiveness for Fanny, granting her more freedom of expression and acknowledging her entrance into adulthood, at the same time that it adds another facet to her array of dos and don'ts: she now must adhere, more so than before, to societal expectations of what it means to be a woman in the world, not just a member of Mansfield Park's household – she needs to gain approval as a woman, not only as the dependent relation. This is Fanny's coming out ball and, to her bewilderment, she is asked to open it with the first dance, an action that not only exposes her further, but takes her out of her neglected position: "She could hardly believe it. To be placed above so many elegant young women! The distinction was too great. It was treating her like her cousins!" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 189). And when Edmund asks her to dance, she finally comprehends some of Maria and Julia's enthusiasm for balls, as "her cousins' former gaiety on the day of a ball was no longer surprising to her; she felt it to be indeed very charming, and was actually practising her steps about the drawing-room […]" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 187).

Interestingly, it is when Fanny starts to feel more at home at Mansfield Park, more herself, that she is taken to Portsmouth. Her disobedience of Sir Thomas's wishes for her to marry Henry Crawford (to be explored in the next section) gives him reason to believe that she has become too secure in her place at Mansfield, and it is time, in his opinion, she appreciated the life she has been lucky to have and how a bad marriage, or no marriage at all, could ruin her future.

> It was a medicinal project upon his niece's understanding, which he must consider as at present diseased. A residence of eight or nine years in the abode of wealth and plenty had a little disordered her powers of comparing and judging. Her father's house

> would, in all probability, teach her the value of a good income; and he trusted that she would be the wiser and happier woman, all her life, for the experiment he had devised. (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 250)

Thus, once again without being allowed to choose differently, Fanny goes to Portsmouth. This time, unlike the dreaded move to Mrs Norris' house, she wants to visit her family and is happy with the journey. The prospect of spending time with her favourite brother, William, again is a happy one, as well as seeing her parents and other siblings: "had she even given way to bursts of delight, it must have been then, for she was delighted, but her happiness was of a quiet, deep, heart-swelling sort" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 250). Fanny is to stay two months in Portsmouth – shorter stays seemed pointless at a time when it took anyone so long to get anywhere – and she has high expectations for what awaits her.

> The remembrance of all her earliest pleasures, and of what she had suffered in being torn from them, came over her with renewed strength, and it seemed as if to be at home again would heal every pain that had since grown out of the separation. To be in the centre of such a circle, loved by so many, and more loved by all than she had ever been before; to feel affection without fear or restraint; to feel herself the equal of those who surrounded her; to be at peace from all mention of the Crawfords, safe from every look which could be fancied a reproach on their account. This was a prospect to be dwelt on with a fondness that could be but half acknowledged. (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 251)

Fanny looks forward to feeling "herself the equal of those who surround her", and she assumes her longed-for homecoming will be as pleasurable for her family as it will be for her. Furthermore, she is aware it will be good for her to be separated from Edmund for the duration of the period, for "unassailed by his looks or his kindness, and safe from the perpetual irritation of knowing his heart, and striving to avoid his confidence, she should be able to reason herself into a properer state; […] What might have been hard to bear at Mansfield was to become a slight evil at Portsmouth" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 151). That is to say that not only would Portsmouth, in Fanny's eyes, be a welcome change from Mansfield, it would also be a refuge from her love and disappointment from her cousin, who was infatuated with Mary Crawford, a woman of whom Fanny could not approve. Her expectations of a pleasant and fulfilling trip home are enhanced when she receives her mother's reply to her letter, for "though short, [it] was so kind – a few simple lines expressed so natural and motherly a joy in the prospect of seeing her child again, as to confirm all the daughter's views of happiness in being with her" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 251-252). This heartfelt reply convinces Fanny that she would find "a warm and affectionate friend in the "mama" who had certainly shewn no remarkable fondness for her formerly; but this she could easily suppose to have been her own fault or her own fancy"

(AUSTEN, 1998, p. 252). Fanny hopes for an ideal mother-daughter relationship to blossom between them, and blames herself and the "helplessness and fretfulness of a fearful temper" (her own) for not having had the perfect relationship from the start, and for being unreasonable in expecting a larger share than any child (one among so many) could deserve. She wants to believe that now, "when she knew better how to be useful, and how to forbear, and when her mother could be no longer occupied by the incessant demands of a house full of little children, there would be leisure and inclination for every comfort" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 252), allowing them to be as close as they ought. Despite having had three maternal figures in her life – her own mother, Mrs Norris, and Lady Bertram – Fanny craves the motherly affection she has never received from any of them.

Departing Mansfield Park is a sad affair for Fanny, for "though going as she did willingly and eagerly, the last evening at Mansfield Park must still be wretchedness. Her heart was completely sad at parting" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 254). Fanny's ambiguity towards Mansfield has been present from the start, and her sadness at leaving it for her parents' home is another sign of that fact:

> She had tears for every room in the house, much more for every beloved inhabitant. She clung to her aunt, because she would miss her; she kissed the hand of her uncle with struggling sobs, because she had displeased him; and as for Edmund, she could neither speak, nor look, nor think, when the last moment came with him; and it was not till it was over that she knew he was giving her the affectionate farewell of a brother. (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 254)

The arrival in the coastal town is nothing like she had expected. Little did she know that over ten years of absence would make her close to an alien in Portsmouth, where people have different accents and different manners. The Prices are all more preoccupied with a boat going out of harbour than with the arrival of their sister: even amongst her nuclear family she is secondary. Her mother, however, does receive her "with looks of true kindness, and with features which Fanny loved the more, because they brought her aunt Bertram's before her" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 256) – Mrs Price's likeness to Lady Bertram makes her more lovable to Fanny, a nod to the love she has developed for the family at Mansfield. Fanny also meets two of her sisters, Susan and Betsey, the youngest of the family, "both glad to see her in their way, though with no advantage of manner in receiving her. But manner Fanny did not want. Would they but love her, she should be satisfied" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 256). There is a hint of desperation in Fanny's desire to be loved by her family, a deep need for belonging that has not yet been satisfied at Mansfield Park, and which she hopes can be fulfilled by her parents and siblings.

Her father is nothing like the paternal figure encountered in Sir Thomas, for rather than patriarchal and imposing, he is absent and weak. He at first ‘forgets’ she is present when he arrives from the harbour, having to be reminded of it by William, only then to receive her and “having given her a cordial hug, and observed that she was grown into a woman, and he supposed would be wanting a husband soon, seemed very much inclined to forget her again” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 258). This reaction is not what Fanny had expected after years of absence, and thus she “shrunk back to her seat, with feelings sadly pained by his language and his smell of spirits” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 258). Mr Price, like many other fathers in Austen’s novels, is negligent towards his children, his cares are far away from the household.

Fanny’s sojourn in Portsmouth reflects better than any other part of the novel her non-belonging. She “is in a liminal state, ‘betwixt and between’, neither in nor out, neither fully accredited adult, nor fully protected dependent, cut off from society, isolated in a place which is neither, it turns out, home nor holiday” (WILTSHIRE, 1994, p. 103). She tries to make herself useful so as not to appear “above her home, or in any way disqualified or disinclined, by her foreign education, from contributing her help to its comforts” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 265). Here, too, she struggles to fit in, despite her hopes for an easy resettling into her old home. Her parents’ house is unlike the one to which she has become used: the parlour is so small “that her first conviction was of its being only a passage-room to something better” (AUSTEN, 1998, 256). There is a sense of a chaotic sort of living in the narrator’s description of the house – everyone talks at the same time; they are loud and scarcely listen to one another. Despite having lived there for some years before Mansfield, “Fanny was almost stunned. The smallness of the house and thinness of the walls brought everything so close to her, that, added to the fatigue of her journey, and all her recent agitation, she hardly knew how to bear it” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 259). Fanny’s homecoming is less than satisfying, and does not feel like a coming home at all.

> She was at home. But, alas! it was not such a home, she had not such a welcome, as—she checked herself; she was unreasonable. What right had she to be of importance to her family? She could have none, so long-lost sight of! William's concerns must be dearest, they always had been, and he had every right. Yet to have so little said or asked about herself, to have scarcely an inquiry made after Mansfield! It did pain her to have Mansfield forgotten; the friends who had done so much—the dear, dear friends! But here, one subject swallowed up all the rest. Perhaps it must be so. The destination of the Thrush must be now pre-eminently interesting. A day or two might shew the difference. She only was to blame. Yet she thought it would not have been so at Mansfield. No, in her uncle's house there would have been a consideration of times and seasons, a regulation of subject, a propriety, an attention towards everybody which there was not here. (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 260)

Her previous home had lost its status. The comforts of Mansfield compared to those of Portsmouth are a surprise to Fanny, as “there was nothing to raise her spirits in the confined and scantily furnished chamber […]. The smallness of the rooms above and below, indeed, and the narrowness of the passage and staircase, struck her beyond her imagination”, and she “soon learned to think with respect of her own little attic at Mansfield Park, in that house reckoned too small for anybody's comfort” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 263). These physical comforts are, however, secondary to the treatment she has thus far received from her family. Having been overlooked at her uncle’s house for over ten years, Fanny did not expect the same to happen in her own home. Her idealised past costs her much when she realises her parents do not live up to her wishes, and her siblings, apart from William and Susan, treat her as almost a stranger – which, in many ways, is understandable seen as she has spent most of their lives away from them.

Fanny goes to Portsmouth fully hoping to find affection and care in her family, but what she finds is that she cannot respect her parents. Being disappointed in her father was not as troubling as the feelings she harboured towards her mother: “on her father, her confidence had not been sanguine, but he was more negligent of his family, his habits were worse, and his manners coarser, than she had been prepared for” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 254). Mr Price might have the abilities to execute his profession well, but he had no passion beyond it, as “he read only the newspaper and the navy-list; he talked only of the dockyard, the harbour […]; he swore and he drank, he was dirty and gross”. Fanny could not find in her father “anything approaching to tenderness in his former treatment of herself. There had remained only a general impression of roughness and loudness; and now he scarcely ever noticed her, but to make her the object of a coarse joke” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 254). Mr Price is unlike other sailors in Austen’s fiction, such as Captain Wentworth and his fellow navy brothers, and William Price himself, who are, to some extent, idealised and presented as the best and most wholesome of men. Fanny could almost reconcile herself to the disappointment caused by her father, but with her mother it was a different story, as “there she had hoped much, and found almost nothing. Every flattering scheme of being of consequence to her soon fell to the ground” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 265). Fanny did not find the mother and friend for whom she so longed.

> Mrs Price was not unkind; but, instead of gaining on her affection and confidence, and becoming more and more dear, her daughter never met with greater kindness from her than on the first day of her arrival. The instinct of nature was soon satisfied, and Mrs Price's attachment had no other source. Her heart and her time were already quite full; she had neither leisure nor affection to bestow on Fanny. Her daughters never had been much to her. She was fond of her sons, especially of William, but Betsey was the first of her girls whom she had ever much regarded. […] Her days were spent in a

> kind of slow bustle; all was busy without getting on, always behindhand and lamenting it, without altering her ways; wishing to be an economist, without contrivance or regularity; dissatisfied with her servants, without skill to make them better, and whether helping, or reprimanding, or indulging them, without any power of engaging their respect. (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 265)

Having not encountered paternal devotion, Fanny must settle for the reality she had come to know. Mrs Price is not the ideal mother, and fares badly even when compared to her aunts. Fanny seems to have unwittingly assimilated Mrs Norris and Lady Bertram's standards, "which further alienates her from her mother. Fanny assesses her mother's beauty (like Lady Bertram would) and her mother's economics and organization (as Mrs Norris would), and finds her mother lacking on all counts" (FRANCUS, 2014, n/p). All these views and feelings are never voiced, but she is fully aware of their factuality. Mrs Price is "a partial, ill-judging parent, a dawdle, a slattern, who neither taught nor restrained her children, whose house was the scene of mismanagement and discomfort from beginning to end". Not only that, she saw her mother as having "no talent, no conversation, no affection towards herself; no curiosity to know her better, no desire of her friendship, and no inclination for her company that could lessen her sense of such feelings" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 265). This is a harsh judgment from a character who is often criticised for having few opinions or wishes of her own, indicating how much she actually feels, thinks, and, most importantly, morally qualifies people of her own free will. Fanny's morality is never stronger than when criticising, albeit internally, her mother. Her moral judgements of the members of her family and their household are akin to the morality that will find its height during the Victorian period, expecting from women not just accomplishments such as drawing or playing the piano, but religious piety and family pride, being somewhat knowledgeable of the world, while living a controlled existence. Not only that, but after many years of yearning for proximity, Fanny expects her mother ideal and perfect, a friend and a confidant. Mrs Price, or indeed no woman, can live up to such high expectations.

Whereas Fanny had hoped that this time spent with her family in Portsmouth would be of reunion and happiness, putting "Mansfield out of her head, […] she could think of nothing but Mansfield, its beloved inmates, its happy ways" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 266). Her parents' lack of interest in her, as well as their apathy towards anything that did not refer to the navy were shocking to Fanny. Life in Portsmouth with her parents was in full contrast to life at Mansfield Park, "the elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony, and perhaps, above all, the peace and tranquillity of Mansfield, were brought to her remembrance every hour of the day, by the prevalence of everything opposite to them here" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 266). Fanny goes as far

as admitting to herself that “though Mansfield Park might have some pains, Portsmouth could have no pleasures” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 267).

Her stay in Portsmouth feels like an exile from polite society, for not only is she away from Mansfield, she also finds herself in a much simpler house, whose conditions are nothing like those to which she had become accustomed while living with her aunt and uncle: the family live in cramped lodgings, there does not seem to be enough space for all of them, both physically and in affections of her parents, making her presence an extra burden on her family; the food is not abundant, and the very state of the lodgings are substandard. At this point, the contact with Mansfield and its inhabitants is maintained through letters; and Fanny, who always seemed above the mere trifles of society, more often than not, reluctant to participate and happy to be an observer, is eager for news. She felt that the society in Portsmouth had nothing to recommend itself, having no attractions to make her attempt to overcome her natural shyness and reserve, for “the men appeared to her all coarse, the women all pert, everybody under-bred; and she gave as little contentment as she received from introductions either to old or new acquaintance”, unlike the society found at Mansfield. Notably, in Portsmouth, Fanny’s shyness is seen as pride – and it probably is, to some extent, pride – and “the young ladies who approached her at first with some respect, in consideration of her coming from a Baronet's family, were soon offended by what they termed ‘airs’” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 268): as Fanny was not accomplished in music or dancing, nor did she wear fine clothes, her supposed prideful nature had no right to exist in their eyes, thus leaving Fanny with only her family for company, though amongst them she was also misunderstood.

Having to dedicate herself to her parents and siblings meant that Fanny started paying close attention to her sisters, Susan in particular. In observing Susan and thinking of the many ways in which her sister could improve, Fanny feels, for the first time, like she can impart knowledge rather than being the recipient of someone else’s influence. She quickly realises that her sister admires her and looks up to her, always striving to have her good opinion; “and new as anything like an office of authority was to Fanny, new as it was to imagine herself capable of guiding or informing any one, she did resolve to give occasional hints to Susan” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 269), allowing Fanny to exercise a new side to herself, a side that so far she has only seen and thought possible in others. She realises that she has been the beneficiary of superior education and “juster notions of what was due to everybody”, being now capable of becoming someone else’s mentor – in this case, her sister’s, hoping to improve her character like she herself had been improved by the education received in Mansfield through her schooling and, most importantly, through Edmund.

This opportunity to improve her sister allows for several moments of self-discovery for Fanny, whose knowledge so far felt subjected to others' better opinions or thoughts, and now had to be exercised in order to help improve her sister. Thus, Fanny is called upon to go beyond her comfort zone, to teach rather than be taught, to take charge in someone else's development. Her parents' house had no books for her to recommend to Susan, and the little money she had "found its way to a circulating library. She became a subscriber; amazed at being anything in *propria persona*, amazed at her own doings in every way, to be a renter, a chuser of books! And to be having any one's improvement in view in her choice!" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 271). In her subscription to the circulating library, Fanny was not protected by Mansfield or made dubious by who her parents are, she is herself. The act of choosing her own books as well as those which could help Susan improve, that is, the act of picking one's own influences as well as influencing others is novelty to Fanny, but essential in her development perhaps more so than it is in Susan's.

Furthering this development, Susan's love for books is nothing like Fanny's ever was, but the girl has implicit trust in her sister's judgement and words, meaning that Fanny, in educating her sister, has very little to hide behind, for it is her knowledge that is called to action, her views and experiences being of the utmost interest to young Susan, who

> had so strong a desire of not appearing ignorant, as, with a good clear understanding, made her a most attentive, profitable, thankful pupil. Fanny was her oracle. Fanny's explanations and remarks were a most important addition to every essay, or every chapter of history. What Fanny told her of former times dwelt more on her mind than the pages of Goldsmith; and she paid her sister the compliment of preferring her style to that of any printed author. The early habit of reading was wanting. (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 284)

Apart from her blossoming relationship with Susan, however, Portsmouth does not bring Fanny many pleasures. Henry Crawford's visit has the effect of making it even plainer how bad-mannered her parents and siblings are, and how dingy and small their house is, for she sees it all through his worldly eyes and despairs even more. Nevertheless, she is at her uncle's mercy regarding her return to Mansfield, the two months slowly become three, and "her days had been passing in a state of penance, which she loved them too well to hope they would thoroughly understand; and who could yet say when there might be leisure to think of or fetch her?" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 292), especially now that Tom was ill and all the efforts at Mansfield were directed at making him better. She feels impotence at the impossibility to move as she pleases, to quit Portsmouth of her own will, rather than depending on someone else's wish to have her or not. Her lack of money combined with her womanhood prevent her from going far

of her own accord; her desire to return to Mansfield is such that she nurtures resentment for Maria and Julia, who have the means to return to the manor and be of service to their parents and brother during his illness, but choose to remain in London. Despite having been as good as forgotten by Sir Thomas, her desire to leave Portsmouth did not diminish, and her longing for Mansfield only increased.

Sir Thomas's plan, then, not for the reasons he expected, succeeded, for her feelings now, after over ten weeks of being in her father's house again, were very different from those at the prospect of travelling there, for "when she had been coming to Portsmouth, she had loved to call it her home, had been fond of saying that she was going home; the word had been very dear to her, and so it still was, but it must be applied to Mansfield. That was now the home. Portsmouth was Portsmouth; Mansfield was home" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 292), and Portsmouth never lived up to what she dreamed it would be; her parents were never loving and caring as she had hoped. Thus, after many years of struggling to find her place amongst her wealthier relations at Mansfield, a visit to her parents' house is all it takes for her to realise that, perhaps, she does belong with the Bertrams – even if they do not recognise her importance and, what is more, her worth, yet.

2.1.3 Mansfield's true heir

A common misconception when reading *Mansfield Park* is that, at the end, Fanny will inherit Mansfield through her marriage with Edmund. This is not factual – she actually moves into the parsonage, on the grounds of the estate – but symbolically speaking there are many reasons to believe she, the worthiest of its daughters, will forward its name and reputation, for Fanny "is the bearer of the novel's key values" (WILTSHIRE, 1994, p. 107), and, thus, deserving of it, unlike the rest of Sir Thomas's offspring.

Mansfield Park opens with the background story of the Ward sisters, as seen previously, but the largest part of the novel is told during a period when other young women were, themselves, facing the world beyond their protected surroundings for the first time. Unlike Fanny Price, the poor relation, whose condition in life is seen by her relatives as a stroke of luck for which she has to be grateful every day of her life, Maria and Julia, the daughters of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, as well as their sons, are seen and taught to think of themselves very differently, "for Sir Thomas has raised his children with an unhealthy combination of restraint and indulgence that has given them – especially his daughters – an idiosyncratic education instead of the principles of 'duty' they should have learned" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 213).

The Miss Bertrams have had the advantage of the best education women of their social class, brought up for marriage with a good – rich – man could hope to have, but more than that, they have been brought up fully aware of their status in the world and of their worth in comparison to others. There is never a question of their belonging or not to Mansfield and its society, they are the daughters of the house by blood, and thus must be worthy. Fanny's arrival does not change their status – if anything, it increases their belief in how superior to their poor cousin they are, a belief that is not dismissed by their elders – it is, in fact, reinforced. Maria and Julia know that if their lives go according to plan, Mansfield is nothing but a temporary abode, for it is with their future husbands, in their richly ornated houses, that they are destined to live. They were, as was the custom in the early nineteenth century, brought up to be ladies of leisure, much like their mother. Their goal was to find wealthy husbands who could support a lifestyle of balls and new dresses; their only real worry was to appear accomplished and pretty in order to *catch* them.

Whilst Fanny's relationship with Sir Thomas is one of fear and respect – something that she has to challenge later in the novel – his own daughters are almost glad when told the news that he is to go to Antigua[16] for several months, and as the narrator suggests, there is an aspect of sadness to not caring about one's parent: "the Miss Bertrams were much to be pitied on the occasion: not for their sorrow, but for their want of it" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 25). Fanny also struggles to feel any real sadness at his departure, but her reaction is of a different nature. As for Maria and Julia,

> their father was no object of love to them; he had never seemed the friend of their pleasures, and his absence was unhappily most welcome. They were relieved by it from all restraint; and without aiming at one gratification that would probably have been forbidden by Sir Thomas, they felt themselves immediately at their own disposal, and to have every indulgence within their reach. Fanny's relief, and her consciousness of it, were quite equal to her cousins'; but a more tender nature suggested that her feelings were ungrateful, and she really grieved because she could not grieve. (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 25)

There is a prevailing sense of freedom after Sir Thomas's departure, for it is the departure of the patriarch whose presence is controlling and imposing. His daughters attend balls and dinner parties; Maria forms an attachment with Mr Rushworth; they put on a play, quite literally. It is during his absence that the Crawford siblings arrive, the outsiders who pose

[16] Much has been said about Sir Thomas's dealings in Antigua, undoubtedly related to the slave trade. Edward Said, in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), analyses *Mansfield Park* through this lens, observing the analogy between Fanny's treatment as a commodity, going from Portsmouth to Mansfield and back at other people's will, and the transport of slaves from Africa to the West Indies.

a question mark over the apparent organised life at Mansfield while its patriarch is away. Their arrival represents many threats, including that of the decay of the gentry, but as Poovey suggests, "the danger is not confined to a single avaricious male or to a female who indulges anarchic desire; instead, internal decay undermines the health of the landed gentry even as dangerous outsiders invade Mansfield's expansive grounds" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 2013), and the very fact that Sir Thomas is not there to guard its gates means there is room for novelty – whatever novelty might mean.

Before the Crawfords' arrival, Maria seemed to be content, if a little bored, with her lot in life. She was brought up to become someone's wife, a prized possession, instead of a thinking and feeling woman. Mr Rushworth is not exciting, but he is a sensible choice who will permit her to maintain her current living standards, both economically and socially. Henry Crawford's arrival prompts unexpected feelings, making her question her commitment to marry Rushworth. Henry's charms play upon the Miss Bertrams, and Fanny is the only person to notice the danger his attentions pose to Maria's engagement to Mr Rushworth. Maria becomes jealous of Julia's proximity to Henry, a sentiment that is momentarily forgotten when the Mansfield party arrives at Sotherton, Mr Rushworth's estate, for there, "Mr Rushworth's consequence was hers" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 59). Despite her attraction to Henry Crawford, she does end up becoming Mrs Rushworth, going off to London, and, for a while, leading a life of dinner parties and balls as the wife of a respected gentleman. In spite of her decision to go ahead with the wedding, she later succumbs to Henry's charm and becomes a cautionary tale for young ladies, a fallen woman who has to live away from society – especially from the company of other women – so she does not taint them with her immorality.

Mary Crawford is everything Fanny is not: she is bright, healthy, outspoken. She is also ambitious and disingenuous. Her good looks and bold claims make her attractive to all, and she quickly becomes well-liked amongst the Mansfield inhabitants – all apart from Fanny, that is. At her arrival, Mary intends to set out for Tom, the eldest son and heir to Mansfield Park and his father's title, but it is for Edmund that she develops feelings, and it is with him, the better of the two brothers, that she strikes several arguments on religion and male occupations – arguments in which most ladies would refrain from participating. Edmund is bewitched by her however, and seems to think more highly of preserving propriety for and around her than she herself does – for example, his justification to act in the play is that his acting will protect Mary from having to play opposite someone she does not know, as well as being "the means of restraining the publicity of the business, of limiting the exhibition, of concentrating our folly" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 108). For much of the novel, Edmund blames Mary's upbringing for her

outspokenness and often crude words, as he likes to believe those are “the influence of the fashionable world” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 286), and can be overcome with a sensible influence. It is only after Mary’s reaction to Maria and Henry’s running away together that Edmund realises what Fanny has known all along, that “it had been the creature of my own imagination, not Miss Crawford, that I had been too apt to dwell on for many months past” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 311).

The Crawfords represent the temptations and dangers that the outside world poses to the future and maintenance of Mansfield Park. They are not alone in this, as Tom, the eldest son and heir, has been living a life of vice even before they come; it takes him a brush with death in order to settle and assume his position. Fanny is, more often than not, the voice of reason and propriety in the novel, having internalised society’s expectations, and she is the only one who resists the Crawfords, quietly at first, openly later. By saying ‘no’ to Henry, she is not able to save Maria from him – Fanny and Maria were never close, and the latter would not have taken Fanny’s advice even if Fanny had felt she were in a position to give it – but she does protect Edmund from Mary, for through Mary’s reaction, Edmund finally sees her for who she truly is.

According to Mary Poovey, Fanny is subjected to two main tests throughout the novel in order to concede moral authority to her feelings, each putting “her hard-earned principles against what should be a bulwark of patriarchal values. In the first of these trials, Fanny must choose between the principles Edmund has inculcated in her and the love he has aroused” (POOVEY, 1984, p. 218); however, she is as good as spared having to make a decision, for before the theatricals actually take place, Sir Thomas returns, putting an end to the whole affair. In her second trial, Fanny must finally stand up for herself, not only against her equals, but against the patriarchal figure of Sir Thomas. Throughout the novel, Fanny must learn “to understand her feelings enough to be able to distinguish between selfishness and self-denying love, and to trust her feelings enough to be willing to act on them, even when they contradict more traditional, but less authentic, authority” (POOVEY, 1984, p. 219).

Henry Crawford, like most people surrounding her, dismisses Fanny at first – she is quiet and forgettable, as well as not being one of the Miss Bertrams and thus not having much of a dowry to tempt him. However, it is her perceived weakness that attracts him, for Fanny does not pretend to be frail and delicate, like it was the norm for young ladies; she, in fact, is: “a genuine fragility of body and spirit, largely the result of oppression and neglect” (KIRKHAM, 1997, p. 105) are defining aspects of Fanny’s existence. When Henry first reveals his plans to make Fanny Price fall in love with him, in chapter six of volume II, it is his point of view guiding the exchange with Mary. He confides in his sister, telling her that making “a

small hole in Fanny Price's heart" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 157) is his goal, for he has already caused friction between the Miss Bertrams, and now it was Miss Price's turn, giving him a real trickster likeness. Henry is fascinated by his new prey, for she is not outspoken or coquettish, not as easy to understand as other young women of his acquaintance. Furthermore, Fanny's indifference to him makes her even more attractive in his eyes, and he must have her heart, even if he has no intention of keeping it.

Fanny, who might be quiet but is no fool, notices the difference in treatment towards her immediately, "she felt his powers; he was entertaining, and his manners were so improved, so polite, so seriously and blamelessly polite" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 159). Mary Crawford leaves her 'friend' to her fate "without attempting any farther remonstrance" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 158), doing nothing to protect Fanny from Henry's intentions. As the narrator says, had Fanny's heart not been previously engaged, she would have been in danger of him,

> for although there doubtless are such unconquerable young ladies of eighteen (or one should not read about them) as are never to be persuaded into love against their judgment by all that talent, manner, attention, and flattery can do, I have no inclination to believe Fanny one of them, or to think that with so much tenderness of disposition, and so much taste as belonged to her, she could have escaped heart-whole from the courtship (though the courtship only of a fortnight) of such a man as Crawford, in spite of there being some previous ill opinion of him to be overcome, had not her affection been engaged elsewhere. (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 158-159)

William Price's visit has a powerful effect on Fanny's behaviour – she is all attention towards William, and Henry saw "with lively admiration, the glow of Fanny's cheek, the brightness of her eye, the deep interest, the absorbed attention" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 161) while she listened to William talk about his experiences at sea, thus increasing his admiration for her, for he was "no longer in doubt of the capabilities of her heart. She had feeling, genuine feeling" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 162). Seeing a spark of what Fanny usually kept hidden makes Henry wish she could love him, leading him to stay longer than originally planned in order to gain her affection.

What Henry does realise is that Fanny is often reproachful of his words and actions. Moreover, his ways of trying to conquer her love are not fit for one such as she is, and his manner instigates anxiety rather than gratitude. The necklace episode is proof of this, for Fanny has received a topaz cross from her brother, and wishes to wear it for her first ball, but has no chain with which to do so. Mary, pretending to be her friend whilst furthering Henry's cause, suggests Fanny wears one of her chains, given to her by Henry; Mary makes it clear that while wearing it, Fanny "must think of Henry, for it was his choice in the first place. He gave it to

me, and with the necklace I make over to you all the duty of remembering the original giver. It is to be a family remembrancer. The sister is not to be in your mind without bringing the brother too" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 177). Fanny resists the loan, for she does not want to be indebted to Miss Crawford and also because it is improper for women to accept gifts from gentlemen when they are not engaged, and this feels like accepting something from Henry, but it is to no avail: Mary will not be refused.

Fanny ends up with the unwanted chain, so often a symbol of possession over someone else, and takes refuge in her little attic room, where Edmund is waiting for her, with his own offering of a chain for her to wear. Fanny's delight and relief are short-lived, as Edmund, not wishing to offend Mary, insists Fanny should wear the chain she gave her, instead of his, for he does not want her relationship to Mary to be affected in any way, "'he would not have the shadow of a coolness arise,' he repeated, his voice sinking a little, 'between the two dearest objects I have on earth'" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 181). Fanny, despite being aware of Mary's true nature, cannot bear the thought of disappointing Edmund, for "she had all the heroism of principle, and was determined to do her duty" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 181). Fanny decides to oblige Edmund, as she trusts his judgement and does not wish to upset him, but Mary's chain was too large for her cross, and she happily joins his chain to William's cross, "those memorials of the two most beloved of her heart, those dearest tokens so formed for each other by everything real and imaginary" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 186), and because the very presence of these two pieces united represented so much of Edmund and William to her, the threat of Henry's chain via Mary is instantly diminished, and "she was able, without an effort, to resolve on wearing Miss Crawford's necklace too" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 186). Mary's chain was no threat to her devotion to William and Edmund, thus making it easy for her to wear it as well.

At the Mansfield Ball, all the attentions are directed at Fanny; there are no Miss Bertrams with whom to share the spotlight. Fanny was admired by all, she was "young, pretty, and gentle, however, she had no awkwardnesses that were not as good as graces, and there were few persons present that were not disposed to praise her. She was attractive, she was modest, she was Sir Thomas's niece" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 189), and furthermore, "she was soon said to be admired by Mr Crawford", with whom she opened the ball by dancing the first dances, which is enough endorsement to place her in general favour. Here, Sir Thomas sees a different side to Fanny, he is proud of her, and despite being aware that her beauty was not his doing, "he was pleased with himself for having supplied everything else: education and manners she owed to him" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 189). Sir Thomas is aware of Crawford's interest in his niece, and invites the young gentleman to breakfast the next day, without consulting Fanny; he sees this

as an optimal marriage possibility, for Fanny has little apart from her connections to himself, and marrying a rich man could settle her for life. Not only that, but Sir Thomas 'advises' Fanny, in front of Henry, to retire to her room, "but it was the advice of absolute power" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 192), for in sending her away, Sir Thomas "might not be thinking merely of her health. It might occur to him that Mr Crawford had been sitting by her long enough, or he might mean to recommend her as a wife by shewing her persuadableness" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 192-193). That is to say, Sir Thomas is confident that his niece is nothing if not a "proper lady", easily led by her 'betters'; he trusts her obedience, having known her for nearly ten years, and he is showing her off to Henry Crawford as a desirable wife who will follow her husband's orders. His anger, then, when she finally stands up for herself and does not do what he wants, is also due to embarrassment, for not only is she going against him, she is doing so in front of the man to whom he subtly boasted about her 'persuadableness'.

As to Henry, when the narrator takes us to follow his conversations with Mary, it shows us a glimpse of a man who, falling for his own trap, is slowly falling in love with Miss Fanny Price himself. He seems to be enthralled by the aspects of her personality that were so alien to him before, her piety and reserve are attractive now, enhancing her beauty; "her manners were the mirror of her own modest and elegant mind. Nor was this all. Henry Crawford had too much sense not to feel the worth of good principles in a wife, though he was too little accustomed to serious reflection to know them by their proper name" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 201), but undoubtedly, he was in some level aware of her being principled and religious, for "he talked of her having such a steadiness and regularity of conduct, such a high notion of honour, and such an observance of decorum as might warrant any man in the fullest dependence on her faith and integrity" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 201).

For someone who maintains control of her feelings for most of the novel, excepting outbursts of emotion that she regularly manages to contain before she is in the safety of her room, it is Henry's proposal that drives Fanny over the edge, allowing the other characters a glimpse at the turbulent waters running below the quiet surface. When Henry brings Fanny news of how he helped William's career at the same time that he expresses his feelings for her – transforming his help into a selfish act in order to get in her favour – the mix of emotions floods Fanny's heart with joy for William's prospects and anger at Henry for tainting her happiness. She attempts to move away from him while he is declaring his love, she begs him to stop, explains that "this is a sort of talking which is very unpleasant" to her, but to no avail. He keeps on "describing his affection, soliciting a return, and, finally, in words so plain as to bear but one meaning even to her, offering himself, hand, fortune, everything, to her acceptance"

(AUSTEN, 1998, p. 205). Fanny's first reaction to his words is to doubt their veracity, for she cannot believe he truly loves her, that he is not mocking her.

> "*No, no, no!*[17]" she cried, hiding her face. "This is all nonsense. Do not distress me. I can hear no more of this. Your kindness to William makes me more obliged to you than words can express; but I do not want, I cannot bear, I must not listen to such – No, no, don't think of me. But you are not thinking of me. I know it is all nothing". (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 206)

Thus far, nothing had been so invasive to Fanny as this marriage proposal. She will not have him, and she cannot believe his feelings are real. He brought her the happiest of news regarding William, only to dampen it with words that were so unwelcome to her, and which she felt were nothing but a joke to him. More so than before, Fanny shows herself to be a heroine of feeling (POOVEY, 1984): "she was feeling, thinking, trembling about everything; agitated, happy, miserable, infinitely obliged, absolutely angry" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 206). This explosion of sensitivity marks a turning point in the novel and in Fanny's behaviour.

Fanny's resolve to refuse Henry's proposal is put to another test when Sir Thomas visits her sanctuary, the little attic room. He informs Fanny that Mr Crawford had been to his study that same morning, declaring himself the suitor of Fanny and proposing for her hand, entertaining "the sanction of the uncle, who seemed to stand in the place of her parents" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 213), which he had gladly given. What follows Sir Thomas' speech is a chain of refusals from Fanny, finally standing up to her uncle, for she cannot and will not marry Mr Crawford. More than just refusing him, Fanny bravely defends herself against the allegations that she had been encouraging Henry. As Poovey suggests, "Henry Crawford's proposal is in itself easy for Fanny to reject, but disappointing Sir Thomas is extremely painful" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 219). What follows is a passionate speech from Fanny, whose future hangs on her ability to disappoint her uncle.

> "You are mistaken, sir," cried Fanny, forced by the anxiety of the moment even to tell her uncle that he was wrong; "you are quite mistaken. How could Mr Crawford say such a thing? I gave him no encouragement yesterday. On the contrary, I told him, I cannot recollect my exact words, but I am sure I told him that I would not listen to him, that it was very unpleasant to me in every respect, and that I begged him never to talk to me in that manner again. I am sure I said as much as that and more; and I should have said still more, if I had been quite certain of his meaning anything seriously; but I did not like to be, I could not bear to be, imputing more than might be intended. I thought it might all pass for nothing with him". (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 213-214)

[17] My italics.

Being the only one who has seen the Crawford's true colours, and the effect they had on everyone at Mansfield, Fanny is adamant about her decision to refuse Henry. Furthermore, she cannot love or respect him, and thus finds it impossible to consider marrying him. She does not explain the truth of why she thinks ill of Henry to her uncle, as it would mean betraying her cousins, for "her ill opinion of him was founded chiefly on observations, which, for her cousins' sake, she could scarcely dare mention to their father. Maria and Julia, and especially Maria, were so closely implicated in Mr Crawford's misconduct, that she could not give his character" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 215) without exposing her cousins' behaviour. Because she does not have her best defence against Henry, Fanny is at the mercy of Sir Thomas's disapproval, and must learn to tolerate being thought ill of by her uncle, the larger than life patriarchal figure whose rule she was under. Her refusal of Henry, to Sir Thomas, and to all those around her, represents her inability to know her own place, despite the efforts made otherwise, and he proves himself another terrible judge of character with whom Fanny has to contend. He says he had believed Fanny to be "peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 216). Fanny's independence of mind is unthinkable to Sir Thomas, and her ability to think and make choices for herself without asking the advice of those who "have surely some right to guide" her make her wilful and perverse in his eyes. Sir Thomas heavily implies that her marrying Crawford would be advantageous for her parents and siblings – a very good reason for a woman to marry in the nineteenth century. He accuses her of being selfish and imprudent, not taking the time to consider the proposal and her feelings about it. Sir Thomas believes Fanny is "throwing away from you such an opportunity of being settled in life, eligibly, honourably, nobly settled, as will, probably, never occur to you again" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 216).

Fanny has embraced propriety and a sense of obedience throughout her life, but she cannot obey Sir Thomas this time, and it brings her great suffering due to what this means to his opinion of her – she despairs at being seen as "self-willed, obstinate, selfish, and ungrateful" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 217). However, she does not yield, not even when Edmund himself suggests she should reconsider her feelings for Henry – he might have been able to convince her to take part in the theatricals, but this was real life, and Fanny would not be swayed. Even Lady Bertram, whose advice was always scant if there at all, tells Fanny that "it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as this" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 226), and Lady Bertram would know, having, herself, been the recipient of such a proposal many years ago, and married Sir Thomas, foreshadowing what would happen to Fanny if she accepted

Henry: idleness and indolence, an erasure of her own existence to become merely someone's wife.

Portsmouth is Fanny's punishment, and to make matters worse, Henry Crawford follows her there. He is polite to her and her family, and she starts to notice a change in him, so much so that had her heart not been engaged by Edmund, she might have been in danger of accepting him. When Fanny is despairing of being in Portsmouth for so long, she learns about the scandal involving Henry Crawford and Maria – Mrs Rushworth –, who have run away together. Additionally, Julia has gone to Scotland and eloped with Mr Yates, another one of the actors in their defunct play. Sir Thomas's daughters were a disappointment to him, and it was time to call Fanny back to Mansfield, but this time she would not go alone; Susan, the sister whom she was so attentively mentoring during her stay at Portsmouth was to come too. Fanny feels the privilege of having been "sent for so kindly, sent for as a comfort, and with leave to take Susan, was altogether such a combination of blessings as set her heart in a glow, and for a time seemed to distance every pain, and make her incapable of suitably sharing the distress even of those whose distress she thought of most" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 301): Fanny is elated to be going back to Mansfield, and to be allowed to bring Susan with her makes her neglect the distress she should be feeling for her cousins and forget about the months she was left behind in dreary Portsmouth.

Her return to Mansfield, almost as a prodigal daughter, clean of sin, having proved her *price*less attitude in a society where money and status commonly speak louder, certain that her choices had been the correct ones, prompts the narration to describe the park's environs, something rare for Austen, whose descriptions of people and place's appearances tend to be sparse if present at all. Fanny's eyes "fell everywhere on lawns and plantations of the freshest green; and the trees, though not fully clothed, were in that delightful state when farther beauty is known to be at hand, and when, while much is actually given to the sight, more yet remains for the imagination" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 305). The country around Mansfield has bloomed in the months Fanny spent away, and so has she, becoming a more confident young woman, gaining assurance in her own principles and values.

Fanny delights in being of service to her aunt Bertram again, whose first words to her are "Dear Fanny! now I shall be comfortable" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 304), and whose eagerness to have her niece around is repaid by Fanny's devotion, "returning to every formal office, with more than former zeal, and thinking she could never do enough for one that seemed so much to want her" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 305). Mrs Norris, on the other hand, echoing Mary Crawford's words to Edmund, blames Fanny for what happened, for had she accepted Henry Crawford,

Maria would have been saved, a point of view that is disregarded by all. Edmund finally understands Mary's true character; Tom's illness makes him a better man; and Sir Thomas, we are told, aware of his own mistakes as a parent, feels that he should not have allowed the marriage, "that his daughter's sentiments had been sufficiently known to him to render him culpable in authorising it; that in so doing he had sacrificed the right to the expedient, and been governed by motives of selfishness and worldly wisdom" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 313). Furthermore, the baronet is conscious of how he tried to balance Mrs Norris's constant praising of his children with severity, and "how unfavourable to the character of any young people must be the totally opposite treatment which Maria and Julia had been always experiencing at home, where the excessive indulgence and flattery of their aunt had been continually contrasted with his own severity". He saw how his behaviour taught them "to repress their spirits in his presence so as to make their real disposition unknown to him" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 314). He realises, almost as if finally understanding what is wrong with the workings of society, that even though he had strived for his children to be good, decent people, "his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-denial and humility, he feared they had never heard from any lips that could profit them" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 314). He, too, found comfort and cheer in Fanny's presence. She was a balm to all their sorrows; and to Sir Thomas, "Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted" (AUSTEN, 1988, p. 320).

During the course of *Mansfield Park*, Fanny struggles with feelings for Edmund, her cousin and mentor. To Fanny, "the ultimate reward of propriety would simply be to be loved by the man who has made her what she is" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 217). Marriage with Edmund, however, seems farfetched not because of their blood ties, as marrying one's cousin was fairly common in the nineteenth century, but because it would "violate the social hierarchy" (WILTSHIRE, 2014, p. 112). It is almost inconceivable that she, the poor relation, could marry a baronet's son, and Fanny knows this. Many readers find Edmund's shift of affections from Mary to Fanny slightly improbable, but this is only the final representation of Fanny's worth, for despite their being from different social classes, her value came not from her birth, but from her high morals and charitable personality, a shift of understanding that society was going through during our period. As Wiltshire suggests, it is because she has always lived by the rules that Fanny now belongs to Mansfield, is accepted into the family as truly one of their own, loved by her aunt Bertram and respected by Sir Thomas; however, throughout the novel, "she is inwardly breaking the rules, and the self that has needed to belong to Mansfield is at war with this other craving to marry her cousin, which so transgresses, affronts the settled order" (WILTSHIRE, 2014, p. 113). When she returns to the house, she is embraced by her aunt and

uncle as a worthy member of the family, a worthiness that she has always possessed, but that they could not see; she is elevated, and this is what allows her marriage to Edmund to happen. Her judgments of character had been correct, her disposition was proper and right, and in the eyes of the world, she was finally deserving of Edmund, but most importantly, deserving of Mansfield Park and its posterity.

Poovey claims that Fanny's "prominence at the end is perfectly in keeping with what moralists described as woman's proper role: her actions are always indirect, and she finally engages Edmund's love, not by aggressively exposing Mary's treachery, but through the irresistible appeal of her constant love" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 219). However, despite being "in keeping" with the ideal of a proper lady for most of the novel, Fanny only reaches her desired ending because she finds bravery in her to defy Sir Thomas and stand up for her beliefs.

Fanny and Edmund are married, and lead a pleasant life in Thornton Lacy, where he is the vicar. We are told that they are as happy as "earthly happiness can be", and as they were "equally formed for domestic life, and attached to country pleasures, their home was the home of affection and comfort" (AUSTEN, 1988, p. 321). In later years, the couple would move to Mansfield Parsonage, whose memories of the Crawfords would be forgotten, and it would grow "as dear to her heart, and as thoroughly perfect in her eyes, as everything else within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park had long been" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 321). It is no wonder that the novel is titled *Mansfield Park*, the focus of the place not in the house, but in its environs – in the *park* –, a microcosm of society where Fanny will lead her life and watch over its inhabitants. Fanny might not have inherited Mansfield house, but she was under its protection, and it was under hers, for her propriety and righteousness allowed her the happy ending she so craved. As is the case in many nineteenth century works, marriage in this novel becomes a "state of moral possibility, […] both reward and arena for a woman's goodness" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 79). While Fanny is around, Mansfield is saved from the dangers brought by the London society – its uncleanliness, its vice – and the ways of polite society are preserved.

2.2 Reader, She Found Herself

"I would always rather be happy than dignified."
Charlotte Brontë***, Jane Eyre***

Jane Eyre[18] was not Charlotte Brontë's first novel; it came after *The Professor*, a work that never lived up to the expectations of its writer and was not greatly received by critics, only published after her death; this second attempt represented Brontë's second chance at being successful through her work, and, perhaps for that reason, it has her heart and soul poured into it. Published under the pseudonym of Currer Bell, *Jane Eyre* is told as if it were an autobiographical piece, the story of the poor and lonely governess that comes to find happiness after a lifetime of struggle. Its protagonist shares similarities with Austen's Fanny Price, both of them virtually orphans, dependent on wealthier relatives, and trying to find their place in the world. Unlike Fanny, however, Jane Eyre is more broadly loved, for it is easy to, when reading her story, sympathise with her plight and earnestness. Jane has more principles than those who surround her, and happiness is her ultimate goal, but in order to achieve it, she will have to stand up for herself and fight her oppressors, proving that her worth is beyond that of her meek earthly possessions. This section will explore Jane Eyre's journey, following her development from a poor orphan child to the independent woman she finally becomes.

2.2.1 The orphan

The nineteenth century is littered with cautionary tales about young women who marry for love, disobeying their family and their better judgment, and meet an ugly end. Jane Eyre's story, told in a tone of reflection, using hindsight to allow for great understanding from Jane when exploring her feelings, is no different, for early in the novel we learn – alongside young Jane – that her father was a poor clergyman, "that her mother had married him against the wishes of her friends, who considered the match beneath her; that my grandfather Reed was so irritated at her disobedience, he cut her off without a shilling" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 21). If that was not punishment enough, after a year of marriage, her father "caught the typhus fever while visiting among the poor of a large manufacturing town where his curacy was situated, and where that disease was then prevalent: [her] mother took the infection from him, and both died within a month of each other" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 21). Thus, after the death of both her parents, Jane is taken in by her Uncle Reed, her mother's brother. Luck was not on her side, however, and

[18] *Jane Eyre* was first published in 1847. For this work, the quotations extracted from the novel will have as reference its Third Norton Critical Edition, published in 2001.

her uncle passed away too, leaving her to the care of her unwilling Aunt Reed, and the company of her cousins. Jane knows she is only being kept by her aunt because of a promise made to her late husband, but that her aunt was incapable of treating her, "an interloper not of her race" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 13), like one of her own children, and the cruelty with which she is handled is likely a suggestion of the resentment Mrs Reed feels towards her.

As Gilbert & Gubar suggest, throughout the novel we witness Jane making "a life journey which is a kind of mythical progress from one significantly named place to another. Her story begins, quite naturally, at Gateshead, a starting point where she encounters the uncomfortable givens of her career" (GILBERT & GUBAR, 2000, p. 342), starting with a family that is not truly her own – and does not wish to be. The novel begins, then, when Jane is a ten-year-old whose daily life consists mainly of being abused by her cousins and aunt, and trying to escape punishment for things she either did not do, or was forced into doing in order to defend herself. When we meet young Jane, she is hiding from her cousin, John Reed, a boy of fourteen, bigger and stronger than she is; Jane is afraid of him, every nerve she had "feared him, every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 8). He is clever enough not to abuse or strike her in front of his mother, and yet he frequently does it while Mrs Reed is present in the room but could not see it – making it very likely that his mother in fact knows what was happening, but as she resented having been left with the care of her husband's poor niece, she turns a blind eye to the violence happening under her roof. So accustomed was Jane to John Reed's abuse that she "never had any idea of replying to it; my care was how to endure the blow that would certainly follow the insult" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 8). His abuse, however, was not only overtly verbal or physical: he enjoyed putting her in 'her place', below him, a lowly dependent who did not deserve the same respect as him and his family members, and even her beloved books he tried to take away from her. Unlike Edmund's relationship with Fanny in *Mansfield Park,* John Reed was as far from being a mentor to Jane as possible. Moreover, Master Reed, aware of his position as the male heir, felt he could command those around him, especially his poor cousin, as shown in this passage:

> "You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now, I'll teach you to rummage my bookshelves: for they *are* mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years." (BRONTË, 2001, p. 8)

He then proceeds to attack Jane with the book she was reading, but she, never one to accept injustice quietly (a recurring fact throughout the novel), fights back, accusing John of

being a “wicked and cruel boy!” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 8), and her passionate defence of herself brings about the dreaded punishment: being placed in the red room, alone. Jane resists and defies Miss Abbot, the lady’s-maid who tells her she should not have rebuffed her master, by saying “Master! How is he my master? Am I a servant?” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 9). Despite being small and poor, young Jane’s defiance is her most prominent quality, but it is also the one that gets her into the most trouble, for she is a dependent orphan, and her benefactors, if one could call them that, are most unwilling, looking for the first sign of rebellion to get rid of her – which Mrs Reed does.

The red room, the place where her uncle Reed died, is feared by the young girl, whose imagination, inhabited by ghosts and spirits, creates shadows and movement where there are none; it was the punishment for her wild behaviour, a cold, silent, and solemn place – “no jail was ever more secure” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 11). Her imprisonment there, as well as her social status, is echoed later in the novel by Bertha Mason’s situation at Thornfield, both of them moved about at others’ whims, depending on richer people who do not care to know them, preferring to put them out of sight whenever they cause any imbalance to the normal order of things. Jane is aware of the injustice of this, of the unfairness in the treatment she receives from her aunt and cousins, and she escapes a fate similar to Bertha’s because she is lucky to find people who truly care for her, enabling her to become her own person, to have independence of thought and to work for her keep. As the narrator says, “human beings must love something” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 23); furthermore, they must be loved, in order to thrive, and Jane finds love first and foremost in friends and mentors. However, none of this can be achieved at Gateshead Hall, a place where Jane did not, could not, belong.

> I was a discord in Gateshead Hall*: I was like nobody there*[19]; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them. They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathise with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment. I know that had I been a sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, handsome, romping child – though equally dependent and friendless – Mrs Reed would have endured my presence more complacently; her children would have entertained for me more of the cordiality of fellow-feeling; the servants would have been less prone to make me the scapegoat of the nursery. (BRONTË, 2001, p. 12)

There was no affection for Jane at Gateshead, despite it being her starting point, even in name: the head of her journey, though it is no more than a place from which to escape. There

[19] My italics.

was no space there to grow up and into herself – she did not even have the luxury of making a room her own, like Fanny did to the old nursery in *Mansfield Park*. Jane was utterly alone there, as if all were against her – so much so that the mere presence of the doctor, unrelated to the Reeds in any way, brings her comfort and a sense of relief, almost as if she had an ally. To this doctor, Mr Lloyd, Jane feels free to talk about her misery, as if this virtual stranger presented more kindness and empathy than those around her, and when prompted to recognise her luck to live in such a house as Gateshead, her reply is merely: "it is not my house, sir; and Abbot says I have less right to be here than a servant" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 19). Moreover, she tells him of her desire to quit her aunt's house, for "if she had anywhere else to go, I should be glad to leave it; but I can never get away from Gateshead till I am a woman" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 20). Even at a young age, Jane recognises the sort of luck that has her kept in a wealthy family, saying she "should not like to belong to poor people" and that she was "not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 20). When prompted by the doctor, Jane declares she would like to go to school, for going to school means "a complete change, it implied a long journey, an entire separation from Gateshead, an entrance into a new life" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 20), as well as the possibility of some sort of education that will free her from depending on the Reeds for the rest of her life.

Thus, with the school idea in mind, Mr Brocklehurst is called to the house. Jane is thoroughly sanitised before meeting the imposing man: Bessy "hauled me to the washstand, inflicted a merciless, but happily brief scrub on my face and hands with soap, water, and a coarse towel; disciplined my head with a bristly brush, denuded me of my pinafore" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 25). She was to look perfectly proper and clean – Victorians were obsessed with cleanliness, and "even more important than the equation of femininity with cleanliness was, of course, the equation of cleanliness with class position, part of the parcel of behaviour and attitudes bundled together in that imprecise but vital concept *respectability*" (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 80); cleanliness also brought to mind the idea of morality and purity, essential to the expectations of womanhood, even at a young age such as Jane's. Her pristine appearance, however, does nothing to contain her spirit, and when asked about how to avoid going to hell, the girl responds with "I must keep in good health and not die" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 27). Mr Brocklehurst is predisposed to dislike Jane, for she is, after all, nothing more than an orphan with no money of her own. Mrs Reed makes sure he knows Jane is to be treated as pertains to her rank – or lack thereof – and put in, what she believes to be, her proper place. Mr Brocklehurst explains that he prides himself in bringing up all the girls of Lowood School with humility, exemplifying his success through his daughter's observation about "how quiet and

plain all the girls at Lowood look, with their hair combed behind their ears, and their long pinafores, and those little holland pockets outside their frocks – they are almost like poor people's children!" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 28). This sounds ideal to Mrs Reed, who does not even want Jane to return home for the holidays, staying always at Lowood.

After hearing herself being abused in front of Mr Brocklehurst, and with the knowledge she would soon be free from Gateshead, Jane finally expresses her feelings towards Mrs Reed, in a speech that, once again, will be echoed by another speech she makes in adulthood to Mr Rochester.

> "You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so: and you have no pity. I shall remember how you thrust me back—roughly and violently thrust me back—into the red-room, and locked me up there, to my dying day; though I was in agony; though I cried out, while suffocating with distress, 'Have mercy! Have mercy, Aunt Reed!' And that punishment you made me suffer because your wicked boy struck me—knocked me down for nothing. I will tell anybody who asks me questions, this exact tale. People think you a good woman, but you are bad, hard-hearted. *You* are deceitful!" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 30)

The threat of having her proper lady façade exposed scares Mrs Reed, who tries to reason with Jane that she did love her and wishes to be her friend. Mrs Reed tells Jane "children must be corrected of their faults" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 31) – except not her children, it seems – and the fault she hopes will be taken out of the young girl is her passionate nature. For Mrs Reed, Jane was too feisty, too loud, *too much* – characteristics that cannot be further from the angelic ideal of the time, and since Mrs Reed harboured no love for Jane, she finds that the best way to try to correct her is by sending her away. Jane leaves Gateshead, unaccompanied and free of regrets, for she could never be happy there.

Charlotte Brontë lost two of her sisters to the mismanagement and unkemptness of school, and this trauma appears, somewhat biographically, in *Jane Eyre*. Unlike Charlotte, Jane is, from this point onwards, quite alone in the world, despite being in a school filled with miserable girls. Her first few days pass like a blur, no one spoke to her, "nor did anybody seem to take notice of me; I stood lonely enough: but to that feeling of isolation I was accustomed; it did not oppress me much" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 41). Young Jane faces a new world, even though its possibilities seem limited, and the narrator claims that her reflections of this period "were too undefined and fragmentary to merit record: I hardly yet knew where I was; Gateshead and my past life seemed floated away to an immeasurable distance; the present was vague and strange, and of the future I could form no conjecture" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 41).

Life at Lowood is more submission than learning at first, and Jane must endure going from being under John Reed's command to Mr Brocklehurst's. The school, originally built by Brocklehurst's mother, is now under his supervision, and he makes sure the girls there know their place – a place that is very different to that of his genteel wife and daughters. Since the "aristocratic code of honour was replaced by the conception of the Christian gentleman as preached in the reformed public schools" (JORDAN, 2001, p. 33), Mr Brocklehurst endeavours for the girls under his "protection" – or rule – to become the paragons of this new ideal, reflecting *his* goodness. He is the second oppressive man Jane encounters, the first being John Reed, but he is by no means the last. Brocklehurst has clear ideas of how the girls should be brought up at his school, ideas conforming to the social norm. His "charity was a matter of bringing domesticity – in which the moral and the material were inextricably intertwined – to those in spiritual and physical need" (STEINBACH, 2004, p. 52), in order to tame nature, to control vanity. It does not go unnoticed by the narrator that his own daughters were "splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 54), representing the opposite of what he sought for the Lowood girls: he believed his mission was to "teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel; and each of the young persons before us has a string of hair twisted in plaits which vanity itself might have woven; these, I repeat, must be cut off" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 54). His hypocrisy is not lost, but the girls and their teachers can do little but comply.

Despite the adverse conditions of Lowood – the inedible food, the cold rooms, the oppressive figure of Mr Brocklehurst –, Jane is adamant that she "would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations, for Gateshead and its daily luxuries" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 63), which only highlights how unhappy she was at her aunt's house. Thus, even though, as the name suggests, Lowood is a low point in Jane's life, it is still better than the starting point of her journey, for it is at Lowood that Jane makes her first and best friend, Helen Burns. Furthermore, in school, Jane encounters a teacher who genuinely seems to care for the students, Miss Temple. Both girl and woman are mentors to Jane, in different ways; both of them show Jane love and respect, such as she never had before. Miss Temple is, "full of goodness; it pains her to be severe to anyone, even the worst in the school" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 47); she is fair, punishing in order to teach, not hurt – unlike most people Jane had encountered thus far. Miss Temple "had always something of serenity in her air, of state in her mien, of refined propriety in her language, which precluded deviation into the ardent, the eager" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 61). Miss Temple takes her under her wings, a haven – or a temple – in a place where daily life can be difficult and cold, giving Jane the foundations to build her own

space in which to dream and grow. Moreover, she is the only teacher who does not seem to take Mr Brocklehurst's words as law, and when he punishes Jane for being a liar, she investigates the situation, and Jane is acquitted in the eyes of all in the school, regardless of what Mr Brocklehurst, and Mrs Reed through him, has to say.

Jane's relationship with Helen Burns, on the other hand, shows her strength previously unimaginable. Helen is pious and kind, but above all, she is humble, and always ready to take punishment from those she acknowledges as her betters, even if they are not right. Helen believes it is one's duty to bear punishments, for "it is weak and silly to say you *cannot bear* what is your fate to be required to bear" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 47); furthermore, she tells Jane to love and forgive her enemies, which Jane is not capable of doing, at least not yet, as she believes one should be good only to those who are good in return. Helen is the recipient of Jane's admiration and love, but young Jane does not understand her – it will take Jane years to recall Helen's words, on Mrs Reed's deathbed, and finally forgive her aunt. Helen Burns' religiosity is an inspiration to Jane throughout her life, but Jane will always put herself and her happiness before any religious piety, despite all that Helen taught her and what society expects of her.

Not only is Helen her first friend, she is also her first real loss in the novel. Helen is a connection she forges at a time when she needed it most, and whose memories would stay with her for a long time – so much so that Jane talks very little of her parents or uncle Reed in her memoir, but Helen is a key piece in the puzzle that forms the woman she becomes. In the novel, Jane's relationships to other women often have more depth than those she strikes with men, and Spacks suggest that, through their friendship, and later through the closeness with the Rivers sisters, "Brontë conveys her conviction that intimacy between women may be more profound, more balanced, than any union possible between the sexes" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 72).

Death was a constant presence in Lowood, much like it was at Charlotte Brontë's own school, and the novel presents, in contrasting terms, the blossoming brought by spring outside and the deaths happening inside due to a fever that wrecked many of the underfed pupils. *Jane Eyre*, much like the period in which it was produced, is full of contradictions and oppositions, often expressed through imagery such as spring being accompanied by death. One of the casualties of this string of illness and death is Helen Burns, who suffers from consumption[20], a common malady at the time and whose treatment was, more often than not, only palliative. Jane does not fully understand Helen's tranquillity upon the knowledge of her forthcoming death, for Helen is certain she is going to her "last home" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 69), something

[20] Tuberculosis.

incomprehensible to Jane, perhaps because the idea of home itself is yet unknown to her, for she has not had the experience of a place that "shelters day-dreaming, […] protects the dreamer, […] allows one to dream in peace" (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 6) – Gateshead was never the safe haven a home should be, and Lowood is more a means to an end than a home, not where she belongs in the world, but where she will get an education so she can have some independence as an adult and hopefully find her place. Despite not fully understanding her friend, Jane never forgets Helen, nor the friendship they shared, and it is implied that, later in life, Jane still cared enough to keep Helen's memory alive by marking her previously undistinguishable grave with a grey marble tablet "inscribed with her name, and the word '*Resurgam*[21]'" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 70).

While Helen perished due to consumption, it was not the cause of many of the other children's deaths, which had been caused by typhus fever. This prompted an investigation into what had brought the disease to the school in the first place, and thus "the unhealthy nature of the site; the quantity and quality of the children's food; the brackish, fetid water used in its preparation; the pupils' wretched clothing and accommodations" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 70) were discovered, finally exposing Mr Brocklehurst's neglect. "It had always been part of the *noblesse oblige* justification of the wealth and leisure of the upper class that ladies and gentlemen looked after the poor of their parishes, but evangelicalism took this a good deal further" (JORDAN, 2001, p. 99), and in accordance to the propensity for philanthropy witnessed during this period, many rich and "benevolent individuals in the county subscribed largely for the erection of a more convenient building in a better situation; new regulations were made; improvements in diet and clothing introduced; the funds of the school were entrusted to the management of a committee" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 70). Mr Brocklehurst, whose mother had founded the school, and whose wealth and family connections could not be overlooked, remained the treasurer, but "he was aided in the discharge of his duties by gentlemen of rather more enlarged and sympathising minds: his office of inspector, too, was shared by those who knew how to combine reason with strictness, comfort with economy, compassion with uprightness" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 71). Lowood, thus, became a better place in which to live, and Jane remained an inhabitant of the school after the reform "for eight years: six as pupil, and two as teacher; and in both capacities I bear my testimony to its value and importance" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 71) – school was essential to Jane, as well as to many other girls in her position, and later in life she will try to repay the education she received by having pupils of her own.

[21] Latin, meaning "I shall rise again".

In the next eight years spent at Lowood, the connections Jane established there made the school resemble a home, and "Jane's relief in being accepted as a worthy member of the community at Lowood, and her sense of belonging to it, is reflected in the subject matter she chooses for her drawings: happy scenes of domesticity, and the benign aspects of nature" (LINDER, 1978, p. 39). However, with Helen's death and, years later, Miss Temple's marriage and subsequent departure[22], was also gone "every settled feeling, every association that had made Lowood in some degree a home to me. I had imbibed from her something of her nature and much of her habits: more harmonious thoughts: what seemed better regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind". Miss Temple's influence and Helen's lessons had educated Jane for life at the school, and beyond it, making her give in "to duty and order; I was quiet; I believed I was content: to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 71). Miss Temple had made Jane feel settled at Lowood, content with her life, disregarding the outside world and accepting her lot. Her departure, a second loss for Jane, now in the early years of adulthood, reawakened in her the "stirring of old emotions", and Jane, realising that her whole world had been in Lowood, now "remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 72). She starts to long to be free again, outside the walls of Lowood Institution.

The options for young women were not the most inviting during the first decades of Queen Victoria's reign. There were certainly more paths than before from which to choose, but they all lead to some sort of servitude – even marriage. Jane is aware of that, and in her desire to leave, she prays for "at least a new servitude" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 72), for a new way to be useful:

> "A new servitude! There is something in that," I soliloquised (mentally, be it understood; I did not talk aloud), "I know there is, because it does not sound too sweet; it is not like such words as Liberty, Excitement, Enjoyment: delightful sounds truly; but no more than sounds for me; and so hollow and fleeting that it is mere waste of time to listen to them. But Servitude! That must be matter of fact. Any one may serve: I have served here eight years; now all I want is to serve elsewhere. Can I not get so much of my own will? Is not the thing feasible? Yes—yes—the end is not so difficult; if I had only a brain active enough to ferret out the means of attaining it". (BRONTË, 2001, p. 73)

[22] Marriage meant that Miss Temple would not continue in her position as a teacher. We see this in many nineteenth-century novels, for instance, in Jane Austen's *Emma*, when the protagonist's governess, Miss Anne Taylor, marries, she too leaves her position in order to dedicate herself to family life, which greatly concerns the hypochondriac Mr Woodhouse. For middle-class ladies, where there were the means to do so, marriage and work did not mix, and marriage was preferable to working.

For the first time in her life, the orphan girl, who had thus far been taken here and there according to other people's wishes, had the chance and strength to think about where *she* wanted to go, what *she* wanted to do within the limitations of what was possible to be done for a woman of her class and education. Never before had she had the chance to think about what she truly desired, and she concludes that her wish is for "a new place, in a new house, amongst new faces, under new circumstances" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 73): Jane Eyre wants to see more of the world and its people.

Lowood might have been a difficult place where to grow up, but it did give her the means to become a teacher, and also the experience to recommend her; there, aided by Helen Burns and Miss Temple, she grew in respectfulness while she developed as a woman. Nevertheless, she knew nothing beyond the walls of Lowood, and she was hungry for what the world had to offer her, even if her options were restricted. Of all the occupations possible for middle-class women – for Jane was a middle-class woman regarding education and family connections, notwithstanding the relationship she had with such family or the means in which she had been brought up – "private teaching was widely considered the most genteel, largely because the governess's work was so similar to that of the female norm, the middle-class mother" (POOVEY, 1998, p. 126-127). Furthermore, being a governess meant one's work was "located in a private home and could be regarded as a pseudo-familiar position with either very little or even no cash reward to degrade her family" (DAVIDOFF, 1995, p. 61). Thus, considering her options and her knowledge, Jane decides to advertise for the position of governess, despite the fear that, having to be her own guide for the first time, she "ran the risk of getting into some scrape; and, above all things, I wished the result of my endeavours to be respectable, proper, *en règle*" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 75).

Jane only received one response to her advertisement, from a Mrs Fairfax of Thornfield Hall, to teach a little girl under the age of ten. Her disappointment at the single reply, however, is surpassed by the joy of having found a position. Jane is desperate for a change of air, for movement and life, and the thought that Thornfield was near Millcote, a large manufacturing town, "a busy place enough" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 75) fills Jane with excitement for where life will take her. Nevertheless, the excitement is mixed with fear, for Jane finds herself alone for the first time in many years. Gateshead and Lowood might not have been the most welcoming abodes, but there she was always surrounded by others, not a mistress of her will, but constantly told what to do. Now, on her way from the school where she had spent the last eight years to the new life she hoped to find at Thornfield, she was quite alone in the world, "cut adrift from

every connection, uncertain whether the port to which it is bound can be reached, and prevented by many impediments from returning to that it has quitted. The charm of adventure sweetens that sensation, the glow of pride warms it; but then the throb of fear disturbs it" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 79-80).

Jane might be alone, but she has found a new purpose, and a new house. Life at Thornfield Hall thus begins, and it is marked as being the first place where she actively chooses to live – despite the lack of options, she could have stayed in Lowood, where she was known and respected. Mrs Fairfax is immediately kind to her, and her first impression was that "a fairer era of life was beginning for me, one that was to have its flowers and pleasures, as well as its thorns and toils, My faculties, roused by the change of scene, the new field offered to hope, seemed all astir" (BRONTË, 2001, p.83), a thought aided by her first view of her new bedroom: "the chamber looked such a bright little place to me as the sun shone in between the gay blue chintz window curtains, showing papered walls and a carpeted floor, so unlike the bare planks and stained plaster of Lowood, that my spirits rose at the view" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 83). The move to Thornfield is accompanied by hope for what the future will bring. Jane Eyre is no longer an inmate and teacher at Lowood Institution, she is now a private governess at Thornfield Hall.

2.2.2 The governess, the angel, the prostitute, & the madwoman

From Jane's arrival at Thornfield, through her departure and her eventual return, it was not the figure of Rochester who had been always present, but that of his wife, Bertha Mason, even when her presence was yet unknown to Jane. In a novel so characterised by its use of opposite images, Jane and Bertha are the most important contrasting figures in it, even if their differences often just seem as the two sides of the same coin. Bertha is a living and breathing foreshadowing of what could happen to Jane if she submitted to Rochester – or St John, or even John Reed and Mr Brocklehurst before them. She, too, is mostly alone in the (old) world, having had major life decisions removed from her hands before she could voice an opinion. Bertha is trapped in her marriage, trapped in the attic, trapped in herself. Jane must strive to avoid the same traps. However, there is an argument to be made that Jane is the one who is imprisoned by convention, by the Victorian ideal of British womanhood, while Bertha is untamed, foreign, wild, even while she is locked up in a room, she finds avenues through which she can express her feelings and passion. Jane strives to hide them.

In between Jane and Bertha, is Celine Varens, the woman with whom Rochester had an affair – thus, placing her as the fallen woman – and Blanche Ingram, an apparently socially

adjusted lady, whose goal in life it to attract a rich husband, as per her upbringing. These four women share more similarities than the Victorian society would like them to believe, for as Poovey suggests, the "boundary between such aberrant women as lunatic, prostitute, and governess and the "normal" woman – the woman who is a wife and mother" (POOVEY, 1998, p. 143) is unstable and fragile. They are, in essence, victims of the same society that dictated that there is only one way of being a proper woman – the angel in the house – and whatever deviation was wrong, to be avoided, and if not avoided, to be corrected.

Jane Eyre learned at a young age how to behave properly and repress her feelings of anger and revolt in order to maintain a façade of propriety and demureness – lessons she took from both Helen Burns and Miss Temple, and which have allowed her to get an education and leave Lowood, for she became a model young woman, and being anything other than that would mean she would most likely never be considered for the post of governess and teacher to young girls. As mentioned previously, the life of a governess in the nineteenth century was that of a creature in-between places: too lowly for the masters, too important for the servants. Not only that, but her in-between state is also apparent through her work in the household, for the governess breached the divide in the separation of spheres: like the working-class woman, she earned wages, but like the middle-class mother, she was preoccupied with the education of the future generations.

Jane is brought to Thornfield to educate young Adèle, a French girl who could not be further from the ideal image of an angelic little girl – she is outspoken, loud, materialistic, coquettish even. As a governess was "expected to preside over the contradiction written into the domestic ideal – in the sense both that she was meant to police the emergence of undue assertiveness or sexuality in her maturing charges and that she was expected not to display wilfulness or desires herself" (POOVEY, 1988, p. 128), Jane is expected to tame Adèle, Mr Rochester's ward, to make her into a proper little English lady, giving her the attention her benefactor does not care to bestow, bending her into swapping her French language for English, implying that what are seen as her French manners also must be abandoned.

Adèle is, like Jane herself, an orphan – there is a case to be made about her paternity, but as Rochester does not recognise her as his daughter, she will be treated, for the purpose of this analysis, as parentless. Jane only hears about her background and how she came to be living at Thornfield from Mr Rochester after months of working as her governess. At first, all the information she has, other than Adèle's being Rochester's ward, is what Adèle herself volunteers: her mother is now dead, she used to teach Adèle to "dance and sing, and to say verses. A great many gentlemen and ladies came to see mamma, and I used to dance before

them or sit on their knees and sing to them" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 87). The resolution is an indication that her mother was some sort of artist, but more importantly, that she lived a life of sin, and Adèle was, unwittingly, part of that life too, and must be "saved" by a proper education. More than teach Adèle, Jane starts to genuinely care for her, worrying about her more than Mr Rochester himself does, for his worry concerning her education goes only as far as hiring someone else to do it, a common practice during the nineteenth century, reinforcing the centrality of the figure of the governess.

For someone whose supposed sexlessness was so paramount, the governess was frequently linked to the figures of the lunatic and the fallen woman (POOVEY, 1988), implying the awareness of the dangers the presence of a woman of her class and education in a "proper" household presented. It is not surprising, then, that Brontë explores the relationship between governess and employer in her novel, as well as portraying the paths said relationship could take when there is any inequality between the partners, which is bound to be the case in an employer-employee relationship, for "Jane is vulnerable to Rochester's advances because, as his employee, she lacks both social peers and the means to defend herself against her attractive, aggressive employer" (POOVEY, 1988, p. 136).

From the start, Jane feels "solicitude for Adèle's welfare and progress, and a quiet liking for her little self: just as I cherished towards Mrs Fairfax a thankfulness for her kindness, and a pleasure in her society proportionate to the tranquil regard she had for me, and the moderation of her mind and character" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 92), but she soon starts to long for more: more than Thornfield, more than being a governess, more interactions with new people, different places – she valued "what was good in Mrs Fairfax, and what was good in Adèle; but I believed in the existence of other and more vivid kinds of goodness, and what I believed in I wished to behold" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 93). This wishing for more is known to Jane to be frowned upon by society, but as she states herself, she has a restless nature, and it has brought her pain sometimes (BRONTË, 2001, p. 93), since restless was not an adjective to be associated with proper ladies.

> It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless

> to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (BRONTË, 2001, p. 93)

This restlessness, however, finds an outlet, according to Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2000), who claim Bertha is Jane's double, both women tormented by the same man – a man who traps Bertha and wants Jane all to himself. They suggest that "every one of Bertha's appearances – or, more accurately, her manifestations – has been associated with an experience (or repression) of anger on Jane's part" (GILBERT & GUBAR, 2000, p. 360), and I argue further that, before Rochester's arrival, the only place where Jane does not feel stagnated at Thornfield Hall is in the third floor, where Bertha lives, as if the life and expression that exist in Bertha calm Jane's restless spirit. It is no coincidence, then, that Jane chooses the third storey corridor to wander when her mind feels trapped, for Bertha's prison – more than the literal room, but her madness, her release of societal boundaries, her untamedness – is where Jane finds the possibility of freedom, and a space for her thoughts and feelings to question and defy the *status quo*. During her first explorations of Thornfield, before Rochester's return, Jane finds the third storey[23], a place removed from the rest of the house, frozen in time, full of relics that gave it "the aspect of a home of the past: a shrine of memory" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 90). Jane compares it to "some Bluebeard's castle"[24], foreshadowing the prison it hides behind its doors – and perhaps, too, the prison it becomes for her. Bertha is the storm hidden behind Jane's seeming calmness, and the "magnitude of unexpressed female anger implies the danger of madness: once a woman allows herself to reveal her rage, where will it ever stop?" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 65); thus, while Bertha is fully mad for trying to be louder and stronger than society wants her to be, Jane expresses herself through bursts of annoyance or depression, and the desire to unleash her feelings are always kept at bay, expressed through her counterpart.

Because life at Thornfield Hall is quiet and a little stifling for Jane, she does not waste the chance to go to Millcote and run errands for Mrs Fairfax. It is then that she meets Rochester, who hides his identity from her even when she tells him she comes from Thornfield. Jane does not allow the incident in the road to bother her much, for it was "of no moment, no romance, no interest in a sense; yet it marked with change one single hour of a monotonous life. My help had been needed and claimed; I had given it: I was pleased to have done something" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 98); the event brings her out of the stupor of a passive existence, and "the new face,

[23] Interestingly, Bertha is never mentioned to be in the attic, as has become popularised. She is guarded by Grace Poole in a room in the third storey, far away from the main rooms of the house, right above Jane's own bedroom – so even if not an actual attic, the room is still above the rest of the rooms, she is still separated from the household.
[24] In the French fairy tale, Bluebeard is a rich nobleman who has married countless times to women who simply disappear after the wedding, and whose dead bodies are later found in his castle by his latest wife.

too, was like a new picture introduced to the gallery of memory; and it was dissimilar to all the others hanging there: firstly, because it was masculine; and, secondly, because it was dark, strong, and stern" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 98-99) – a reminder that there is still more life out there than what Lowood or Thornfield could offer. Jane dreads the idea of returning to the quiet of Thornfield, for "to cross the silent hall, to ascend the darksome staircase, to seek my own lonely little room, and then to meet tranquil Mrs Fairfax, and spend the long winter evening with her, and her only, was to quell wholly the faint excitement wakened by my walk" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 99). Little did she know that what expected her back in Thornfield was the return of her master, and a transformation of how she viewed the house. Rochester's presence turns Thornfield into a different place, "no longer silent as a church, it echoed every hour or two to a knock at the door, or a clang of the bell; steps, too, often traversed the hall, and new voices spoke in different keys below; a rill from the outer world was flowing through it; it had a master: for my part, I liked it better" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 100).

Jane finds solace in the activity brought by Mr Rochester's company. The two of them quickly become more than master and servant, as Jane's situation as Adèle's governess sees her near Rochester often, and he is curious about her life before Thornfield. Furthermore, he confides in her about his past and his regrets, never telling her the full story – Bertha's existence and status only come to light when he and Jane are about to get married later in the novel. Rochester and Jane's relationship blossoms; they share a mutual understanding that she has never before encountered. He seems to understand some of the shackles that bind her, finding explanation for her seriousness in the constraints put on her by the years at Lowood, claiming that the behaviour she learned at school "still clings to you somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice, and restricting your limbs; and you fear in the presence of a man and a brother – or father, or master, or what you will – to smile too gaily, speak too freely, or move too quickly" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 118). Rochester, despite his many flaws, starts to see Jane for who she really is, but the gulf between them is still too large for equality of mind or situation. She is, after all, working for him. Nevertheless, according to Poovey, Brontë makes "Jane's dependence a function of family and personality", thus individualising "her problems so as to detach them from her position as governess" (POOVEY, 1988, p. 137), explaining why it is easy to forget Jane is in an inferior position to Rochester until other members of the gentry visit Thornfield and she is put in her place, overlooked by the gentlemen and purposefully ignored by the ladies. Poovey furthers her argument by suggesting that "when Rochester appears in Thornfield, Brontë completes what seems to be a dismissal of Jane's employment by subsuming the economic necessity that drove Jane to work into the narrative of an elaborate courtship"

(POOVEY, 1988, p. 137), only to remind us later of their positions and the difficulties that any sort of relationship between them would inevitably entail.

This attempt at erasing the difference in status between them is clear when Rochester confides in Jane about Adèle's background, about his former lover and mother to Adèle, Céline Varens, recognising the strange impulse that leads him to choose his ward's governess as a confident, and the improbability that she should listen to him quietly, "as if it were the most usual thing in the world for a man like me to tell stories of his opera-mistresses to a quaint, inexperienced girl like you!" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 122). This closeness they share prompts the start of Jane's realisation of her attraction to Rochester, until then quietly supressed. For Jane, his ease in talking to her helped free her "from painful restraint: the friendly frankness, as correct as cordial, with which he treated me, drew me to him. I felt at times as if he were my relation rather than my master: yet he was imperious sometimes still; but I did not mind that; I saw it was his way" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 125). This freedom of interaction with Rochester infuses contentment into Jane's life, so much so that she "ceased to pine after kindred: my thin crescent-destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were filled up; my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 125). Even his appearance becomes more likeable to her, who no longer thinks of him as ugly; she sees him as a better man than he believes himself to be, with "higher principles, and purer tastes than such as circumstances had developed, education instilled, or destiny encouraged" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 125). Jane's bond with Rochester deepens, and she starts to dread his departure from Thornfield, not only because it means the absence of their conversations, but also the return of the quiet and stale life, as well as the possibility that he will encounter a woman from his own social class with whom to marry.

Rochester's presence also seems to have a triggering effect on Bertha's behaviour – and if one is to consider Bertha's wildness to be an expression of Jane's repressed desires, as suggested by Gilbert & Gubar (2000), it is no wonder that his presence, and Jane's subsequent growing feelings towards him will bring Bertha's existence to the foreground, even if yet unknown to Jane, who believes all noise and distress is caused by Grace Poole (Bertha's carer). The end of the first volume sees Jane falling in love with Rochester; Bertha wandering the corridors of the house at night, setting fire to Rochester's bedroom, and Jane being the one who saves him. This episode brings Jane and Rochester closer, and yet the secret he carries grows. The more intimate she becomes with Rochester, the more joy she feels. Thornfield no longer seems like a Bluebeard's castle – at least if she ignores the noises coming from the third storey.

Bertha, however, is not the only contrasting figure in the novel, and as Rochester brings his genteel friends to a house party at Thornfield, Jane encounters one of the first 'proper ladies' she has ever met, Blanche Ingram, a perfect model of the nineteenth-century ideal, whose beauty and accomplishments were designed to 'catch' a wealthy husband. Upon hearing about her from Mrs Fairfax, Jane becomes obsessed with knowing more, and the older lady's description of Blanche unwittingly paints her as Jane's physical opposite, much like Mary Crawford is to Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*: "tall, fine bust, sloping shoulders; long, graceful neck: olive complexion, dark and clear; noble features; eyes rather like Mr Rochester's: large and black, and as brilliant as her jewels. And then she had such a fine head of hair; raven-black and so becomingly arranged" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 135). Blanche's beauty is alien to Jane, who experiences jealousy for the first time, thinking herself a fool for ever entertaining the idea that she could be something else to Mr Rochester, as if she forgot who she is and what she looks like. Her drawing of herself alongside a picture of the perfection she imagines Blanche to be is her own punishment for her supposed folly, so that if she ever again came to fancy the idea that Rochester thinks well of her, she could compare the two pictures and tell herself that "'Mr Rochester might probably win that noble lady's love, if he chose to strive for it; is it likely he would waste a serious thought on this indigent and insignificant plebeian?'" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 137), thus forcing her feelings to submit to what she believes to be the reality.

The encounter with Rochester's wealthy and powerful friends inserts him in a society of which Jane cannot take part, in which she does not belong. They are loud and spacious, voicing opinions that speak volumes on their feelings of superiority towards servants – including governesses. Blanche is particularly loud in expressing her dislike of governesses, perhaps because she senses the threat to her plans posed by Jane's very presence, or because governesses were, indeed, seen as dangerous since their very existence suggested the possibility of a woman who earns her keep as well as is the central figure in a child's upbringing – a mixture of the working woman and the angel in the house. They do not spare words to badmouth governesses, despite Jane being present in the room – and perhaps because of it, in the case of Blanche's mother – who says to Rochester that she hopes hearing all of their views "'may do her good!' Then, in a lower tone, but still loud enough for me to hear, 'I noticed her; I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class'" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 151). What these faults are, however, Mrs Ingram refuses to explain to Rochester when asked, but Blanche has no scruples in saying governesses are "a nuisance". She follows with a speech about the dangers of friendship between servants, for it can lead to "mutual alliance and reliance; confidence thence resulting – insolence accompanying – mutiny and general blow-

up" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 152) – ideas that were in the forefront of manufacturers and business men's minds, for if their workers united, strikes could ensue – and, in fact, did. Blanche expresses several conservative views, or perhaps one could just call them contemporary, and many of them seem to be in an attempt to attract Rochester's attention, even if they disagree on it: Blanche is very similar to *Pride & Prejudice*'s Caroline Bingley in her efforts to get Mr Darcy's attention. Having been brought up to play the role of the angel in the house, Blanche shies from change in that aspect, claiming that men should not dwell on their own appearance or even try to be 'lovely', for loveliness is "the special prerogative of woman – her legitimate appanage and heritage! I grant an ugly *woman* is a blot on the fair face of creation; but as to the *gentlemen*, let them be solicitous to possess only strength and valour: let their motto be – Hunt, shoot, and fight: the rest is not worth a fillip" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 153). Blanche's upbringing, both as a genteel lady and as the ideal Victorian woman is so ingrained on her very existence that she cannot see when her words and beliefs are actually hurting herself and perpetuating a prison for so many women.

The visit of people who are seen as superior in rank and status to her make Jane realise that she is different from them, and, in her opinion, so is Mr Rochester. Her love for him was now in full flow, and Jane realises there is no way to go back on that love. Even though she believes Mr Rochester would marry Blanche because her connections and rank suited him, Jane can no longer feel jealous, for she believes Miss Ingram to be too inferior to excite jealousy, since Blanche was "very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness"; Jane saw Blanche as not being good or original, "she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. She advocated a high tone of sentiment; but she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity; tenderness and truth were not in her" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 158). Despite all this, Jane is aware of the society in which she lives, and how both Miss Ingram and Mr Rochester, unsuited as she believes them to be to each other, could end up together in marriage, acknowledging their upbringing and the traps imposed by it.

> It surprised me when I first discovered that such was his intention: I had thought him a man unlikely to be influenced by motives so commonplace in his choice of a wife; but the longer I considered the position, education, &c., of the parties, the less I felt justified in judging and blaming either him or Miss Ingram for acting in conformity to ideas and principles instilled into them, doubtless, from their childhood. All their class held these principles: I supposed, then, they had reasons for holding them such as I could not fathom. It seemed to me that, were I a gentleman like him, I would take to my bosom only such a wife as I could love; but the very obviousness of the advantages to the husband's own happiness offered by this plan convinced me that

> there must be arguments against its general adoption of which I was quite ignorant: otherwise I felt sure all the world would act as I wished to act. (BRONTË, 2001, p. 160)

Jane's love for Rochester grows into admiration, making her blind to his flaws, while she is, as seen above, quick to judge others. When it comes to her employer, Jane finds justification for that which she dislikes, even when Rochester pretends to be a gypsy woman in order to torment his guests and herself. His "reading of her future" is revealing of his own feelings towards her, for he places her as different from other women in her situation – being in employment – because she is "very near happiness" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 168). Later, when his secret is revealed, this proximity to happiness and her growing love for him will have to be put aside in favour of herself and her principles.

Amidst this near happiness, Jane is called to Gateshead one last time, where Mrs Reed is on her deathbed. She finally manages to forgive Mrs Reed for her treatment of her. There, too, she finds that John Reed has passed away, but not before losing much of the family's money through gambling and drinking. She re-encounters her two cousins, Eliza and Georgiana, who were also unkind to Jane when they were young, even if not as abusive as their brother. Brought up to be proper ladies and make good matches, the two women are nothing like she remembered.

> […] one very tall, almost as tall as Miss Ingram – very thin too, with a sallow face and severe mien. There was something ascetic in her look, which was augmented by the extreme plainness of a straight-skirted, black, stuff dress, a starched linen collar, hair combed away from the temples, and the nun-like ornament of a string of ebony beads and a crucifix. This I felt sure was Eliza, though I could trace little resemblance to her former self in that elongated and colourless visage.
>
> The other was as certainly Georgiana: but not the Georgiana I remembered – the slim and fairy-like girl of eleven. This was a full-blown, very plump damsel, fair as waxwork, with handsome and regular features, languishing blue eyes, and ringleted yellow hair. The hue of her dress was black too; but its fashion was so different from her sister's – so much more flowing and becoming – it looked as stylish as the other's looked puritanical. (BRONTË, 2001, p. 194)

Even though we are later told by the narrator of the fate of these two cousins – Georgiana made the good match she was destined to achieve, despite the lack of a large dowry, and Eliza became a nun –, it is remarkable how the Reeds' offspring bear resemblances to the Bertrams' children in *Mansfield Park*. Whilst Jane was doing well for herself, John has passed away from causes similar to those that nearly took Tom Bertram's life – and fortune. Georgiana and Eliza Reed echo Maria and Julia Bertram, all of them brought up to be the ideal proper ladies but struggling in their prescribed roles. Jane, like Fanny Price before her, despite being the poor

relation, finds happiness for being true to herself more than she is willing to bend to society's will.

After a long month away, Jane longs to be back with Rochester, for as she says to him on her return, wherever he is, is her home (BRONTË, 2001, 209). Yet, despite her openness of heart, he teases and provokes her regarding his imminent wedding to Miss Ingram, suggesting Jane will have to find another post, for Adèle will be sent to school upon his marriage. Jane struggles to accept the possibility of leaving Thornfield, explaining that she loves it because there she has lived a full life, she has "not been trampled on. I have not been petrified. I have not been buried with inferior minds, and excluded from every glimpse of communion with what is bright and energetic and high" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 215), making a reference to all that has come before, from the abuse at Gateshead to the silence at Lowood.

Rochester toys with her feelings by allowing her to believe that he will marry another (despite already being married), and Jane, who learned to be quiet at school, but whose passionate nature the school could not "correct", does not accept his torture silently, standing up for herself and her happiness: Jane Eyre is no automaton without feelings; and she faces this trial, of having to confront the man she loves, who is not only socially superior to her, but also her master, by placing herself as his equal, knowing full well that had she beauty and wealth, she would have been the one who could play with his feelings, making it hard for *him* to leave *her*. More importantly, Jane cries for equality of souls, for as she says, "I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh;—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal,—as we are!" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 216). The intensity of her speech prompts him to speak his heart, to ask her to marry him: he proposes all the things she thought she could not possibly get, even if she believed herself worthy of them.

Being loved by Rochester alters the way she sees herself, and the same Jane who drew pictures of herself and the angelic Blanche Ingram in order to guarantee she knew her place is the person who now feels her face was no longer plain, that "there was hope in its aspect and life in its colour; and my eyes seemed as if they had beheld the fount of fruition, and borrowed beams from the lustrous ripple" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 2019). She is confident her looks are pleasing to Rochester now, a thought that fills her with joy and excitement for the bright days ahead. She refuses his offers of jewellery and dresses, for she shall not be *his* Jane Eyre any longer, "but an ape in a harlequin's jacket – a jay in borrowed plumes. I would as soon see you, Mr Rochester, tricked out in stage-trappings, as myself clad in a court-lady's robe; and I don't call you handsome, sir, though I love you most dearly: far too dearly to flatter you. Don't flatter

me" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 221). Jane refuses to be called an angel by him, a rebuttal that speaks volumes of who she will be as wife and mother: "I will be myself. […] you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 221) – she is no bird, nor is she an angel, in fact, she "would rather be a *thing* than an angel" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 223). Jane accepts Rochester in her own terms, even setting her rules for their short courtship before the wedding, and "in displaying her weakness and passivity, Jane manifests her strength. Once betrothed to her employer, she delights in manipulating him, teasing him to the point of anger because she thus maintains his interest and suits his taste" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 63), causing an apparent shift in the balance of power.

The first damper to her happiness is Mrs Fairfax's reaction to their news. The older woman alerts Jane to the unlikelihood of a master marrying his governess. Mrs Fairfax warns Jane because she sees her as "young and little acquainted with men" (BRONTË, 2001, 226), but also because she knows he has a secret, even if she is unaware to what degree said secret could affect Jane's life. She is a motherly figure in Jane's life, at the same time that she is a reminder that Jane had no mother to teach her to be more careful when dealing with men; like many mothers, Mrs Fairfax is doomed to be ignored by her 'child'.

The second warning sign comes the night before the wedding, when Jane dreams of children again, and as Mary Poovey argues, when this happens, some disaster follows: "*Jane Eyre* becomes at these moments what we might call a hysterical text, in which the body of the text symptomatically acts out what cannot make its way into the psychologically realistic narrative" (POOVEY, 1988, p. 141). This dream, and the fears it represents, has repercussions in reality, for when she wakes up in the morning, her wedding veil is cut in pieces – an indication that the wedding itself could fall apart; more than that, Jane catches a glimpse of Bertha for the first time in her room, and her description of what she saw to Rochester is of a woman, "tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging long down her back. I know not what dress she had on: it was white and straight; but whether gown, sheet, or shroud, I cannot tell" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 242), and she furthers the report by saying that the woman's lips "were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed; the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 243). Jane compares the image she saw in her semi-awake state to the "*vampyre*", a thought-provoking comparison, for it is another mythical reference in a relationship that started with "a fairy tale meeting" (GILBERT & GUBAR, 2000, p. 351), and now is marked by the mythical presence of a blood-sucking creature, even if in all ways metaphorical – the demonic figure appears here, as in many Victorian novels, as Jane's "familiar, the source of her ambiguous holiness" (AUERBACH, 1943, p. 1). Bertha's destruction of the veil represents all

the doubts Jane has been having regarding the rushed wedding, Rochester's attempts to change her appearance with fine clothes, including the veil itself, Mrs Fairfax's silent disapproval, and what life will be afterwards, what her new position will be. Bertha's monstrosity, the opposite of the ideal Victorian angel, allows her to act as she does, working as a sort of release for Jane, who is trapped in society's constraints: through Bertha, Jane enacts the nineteenth-century impossibility of women's anger. It is not surprising, then, that as Jane is getting ready for the wedding ceremony, she looks at herself in the mirror and sees a "robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 244), not unlike the image she saw splitting her veil in two the night before.

The rushed wedding ceremony is interrupted when a certain Mr Briggs arrives to announce Rochester's secret: that he is married, and his wife is alive. Jane's "nerves vibrated to those low-spoken words as they had never vibrated to thunder […] but I was collected, and in no danger of swooning" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 247). Rochester is extremely defensive about it all, he feels wronged by the Mason family, who, according to him, have married off their mad daughter in order to get rid of the problem, exclaiming that not only is she mad, she also came from a mad family, a family of "idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard! – as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 249). He takes them all back to Thornfield, to the third storey to be precise, determined to show them to whom he is married: "whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 250). Like many women Jane encounters, Bertha is all that she is not: "she was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest – more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 250), a description that feeds into the idea that Bertha does not conform to the Victorian ideal of womanhood, for her virility and bodily strength is almost the opposite of the fragile angel, it is masculine, and thus wrong for a woman. Furthermore, Bertha's alleged insanity is an outlet for her passionate nature, and passion of any kind is another undesirable feature in a woman.

The blow of this discovery is almost unfathomable for Jane. She, who felt herself to be on the brink of happiness, found herself alone once again – her prospects, so bright the day before, had dissipated with the revelation of Rochester's secret. There is no more life for her at Thornfield, Jane realises. All the love and trust she had placed in Rochester were shaken – she

could no longer find a haven in Mr Rochester's arms. And despite having been lied to, Jane does not blame Rochester, she "would not ascribe vice to him; I would not say he had betrayed me; but the attribute of stainless truth was gone from his idea, and from his presence I must go: *that* I perceived well" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 252). She blames herself, her weak conduct, and she decides there is no other way but to leave Rochester and Thornfield behind, as there is no place for her there, with him. Rochester, on the other hand, tries to convince her to stay, to run away with him. His hatred of Bertha is too much for Jane to bear, and she reproaches his behaviour, telling him he is "inexorable for that unfortunate lady: you speak of her with hate – with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel – she cannot help being mad" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 257). Jane's pity for Bertha's condition and situation is clear even if the woman's very existence represents all that she cannot have.

Rochester's proposal, for the two of them to escape to somewhere remote in continental Europe, might be tempting at first glance, but Jane cannot and does not accept it. In his attempt to convince Jane of how different she is to the other women he has met throughout his life, Rochester tells her of his disdain for Bertha, whom he could never truly love as he was "not sure of the existence of one virtue in her nature" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 260), for Bertha had none of the qualities a dutiful and angelic wife ought to have. He narrates his fruitless search for the "antipodes of the Creole[25]" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 265) all over Europe, having only found lovers who could never become wives – until Jane, that is. Poovey suggests that "this distinction is reinforced by both racism and nationalist prejudice: that Bertha is West Indian explains her "madness", just as Celine's French birth "accounts for" her moral laxity" (POOVEY, 1988, p. 145-146); furthermore, Jane tries to differentiate herself and her passion from the other women and theirs, claiming she is "not 'mad' like a lunatic; her principles are 'worth' more than the pleasure of becoming Rochester's mistress would yield" (POOVEY, 1988, p. 136), but realises that if she were "to forget myself and all the teaching that had ever been instilled into me, […] *to become the successor of these poor girls*, he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 266). Moreover, Jane sees that, if she joins him outside of wedlock – their only available solution at the moment – she, too, will become a fallen woman, potentially driven to madness, always seen as the servant

[25] *Creole* was the term used for people born of British or European parents in the West Indies. Those were considered to not belong either amongst the colonisers nor the colonised. When analysing the character of Antoinette Manson (Bertha) in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (2000), the novel that functions as a prequel to Jane Eyre, Silvia Capello suggests that "Antoinette belongs to the creolised white community which was a minority group and regarded negatively by both British whites and local blacks. Antoinette's position in relation to the blacks is not well defined and is contradictory" (CAPPELLO, 2009, p. 49), explaining to some extent the social world in which Brontë's Bertha comes from, and what Rochester means when he refers to her as a creole.

who joined in sin with her employer. Consequently, she refuses to be his in those terms, she refuses to be the one whose morality redeems Rochester's sins at the cost of her own peace of mind. Thus, the only alternative is to leave Thornfield and Mr Rochester behind.

2.2.3 No bird

Jane's departure from Thornfield is accompanied by days of hardship, a physical representation of the difficulty she finds in leaving Rochester and all they could have had behind. She is about to start a new life, physically and metaphorically going down a road she had "never travelled, but often noticed, and wondered where it led: thither I bent my steps. No reflection was to be allowed now: not one glance was to be cast back; not even one forward. Not one thought was to be given either to the past or the future" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 273). Not for the first time in her life, Jane feels adrift, with no connections, nothing to tie her to people or to a place. She was alone, and destitute: "not a tie holds me to human society at this moment – not a charm or hope calls me where my fellow-creatures are – none that saw me would have a kind thought or a good wish for me. I have no relative but the universal mother, Nature: I will seek her breast and ask repose" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 275). In nature she finds a temporary motherly comfort, but to no avail: she is so hopeless of the future that she wishes to die, but Christian as she is, she cannot take her own life, and "with all its requirements, and pains and responsibilities", life would carry on for her; "the burden must be carried; the want provided for; the suffering endured; the responsibility fulfilled" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 277).

Jane roams without aim, she has no money, all of her belongings were left behind on the coach she had taken, and she is forced to start looking for work. No longer a governess, she has lost the status that distinguished her somewhat from others of her sex, especially the fallen women, and thus "her irreducible likeness to other women returns with stark clarity – and in the very form that relieving Jane of her economic dependence should theoretically have displaced: the sexual vulnerability and class uncertainty epitomised in the lunatic and the fallen woman" (POOVEY, 1988, p. 142), despite having been the very thing she tried to escape. Her destitution and anonymity render her potentially dangerous, not of physical violence, but of being seen as a fallen woman, bringing her sin to the other women in the villages she passed, making finding work or help of any kind extremely difficult. Charlotte Brontë portrays with clarity how hard it was for women to start a new life, to get employment and thus become independent – for, during this period, women joining the workforce were seen as a threat to the position men held, thus "if only women would remain in the home, men of all classes argued, work would be available to men who needed it and both the family wage and morality would

be restored" (POOVEY, 1988, p. 128). This argument, however, falls flat for women like Jane, who are their sole providers, and who have no family to support them; it is not surprising, then, that the very existence of this type of womanhood, of people like Jane, was often denied or ignored.

This is the lowest point in her life, she is close to giving up; too hungry to continue, but Jane sees begging for food as the extreme end of her degradation. The narrator, in hindsight, claims that, despite of what some say, pleasure can be found in looking back at difficult times of the past, but she "can scarcely bear to review the times to which I allude: the moral degradation, blent with the physical suffering, form too distressing a recollection ever to be willingly dwelt on" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 280). She did not blame those who denied her employment, for she was a beggar, and beggars, according to her, are frequently the object of suspicion, and "a well-dressed beggar" such as she, would inevitably raise eyebrows. She crossed the marsh, her hopes dwindling with every passing second, and found herself watching women by a fire, longing for the warmth and companionship they seem to share. She tries her luck in that house, but is rejected by the servant, the tipping point in her long journey.

> This was the climax. A pang of exquisite suffering – a throe of true despair – rent and heaved my heart. Worn out, indeed, I was; not another step could I stir. I sank on the wet doorstep: I groaned – I wrung my hands – I wept in utter anguish. Oh, this spectre of death! Oh, this last hour, approaching in such horror! Alas, this isolation – this banishment from my kind! Not only the anchor of hope, but the footing of fortitude was gone – at least for a moment; but the last I soon endeavoured to regain. (BRONTË, 2001, p. 286).

And this is how she is found by St John Rivers and his sisters, who take her in and restore her to health and, most importantly, to society. The Rivers treat her like a family member – at a point when they did not know they are all related – and Jane feels the joy of being welcomed to a family's hearth, recovering her good health and industriousness under their care. These first few days at Marsh End, or Moor House, as it was also known – both names are apt choices to reflect Jane's journey thus far: Marsh End denoting the conclusion of her then fruitless peregrination through the marsh fields, and Moor House carries *house* in its name, its very nature as a shelter and haven expressed through the word – are described in a way that makes the place feel more homely than any of our protagonist's previous dwellings: warmth, the smell of bread, kindness. The Rivers were a unit, three siblings who loved and respected one another, a novelty to Jane; "they had been in London, and many other grand towns; but they always said there was no place like home; and then they were so agreeable with each

other—never fell out nor 'threaped'[26]. She did not know where there was such a family for being unite" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 292). The Rivers sisters treat Jane like one of their own, but despite their hospitality, she feels the need to hide her true name from them, calling herself Jane Elliott, for this is how much she does not want to be found by Rochester.

Life at Marsh End is comfortable, Jane settles easily into the flow of her new existence with the Rivers, and her friendship with Diana and Mary only grows. Being treated as an equal is more than she has ever had, and its effects are seen in how she perceives the house itself: "in the grey, small, antique structure, with its low roof, its latticed casements, its mouldering walls, its avenue of aged firs […] and where no flowers but of the hardiest species would bloom" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 298) Jane finds delight and pleasure. She admires the Rivers sisters, who were better read and more accomplished than she was, and sees their superiority of mind as inspiration to strive to learn and better herself. This sisterhood they form was soon to end, however, for Diana and Mary were to go their separate ways, to be governesses in different houses, like so many ladies in their situation.

The Rivers sisters' departure prompts Jane to seek employment for herself, for she has never been idle and has always found dignity and independence in work. St John, the only remaining sibling, proposes she teaches at the village school, which Jane accepts with all her heart. She knows the position is a humble one, "but then it was sheltered, and I wanted a safe asylum: it was plodding – but then, compared with that of a governess in a rich house, it was independent; and the fear of servitude with strangers entered my soul like iron: it was not ignoble – not unworthy – not mentally degrading" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 303). It would be different from working at a rich man's grand house, and perhaps that very reason was what made it look so appealing to Jane. More importantly, with the school came Jane's own place to live, a place where, for the first time, she could be mistress, no matter how humble the construction. Here, she uses the word *home* to describe her new abode, for it was a home to her, a place of safety, a nest for her dreams and pursuits.

> My home, then, when I at last find a home, – is a cottage; a little room with whitewashed walls and a sanded floor, containing four painted chairs and a table, a clock, a cupboard, with two or three plates and dishes, and a set of tea-things in delf. Above, a chamber of the same dimensions as the kitchen, with a deal bedstead and chest of drawers; small, yet too large to be filled with my scanty wardrobe: though the kindness of my gentle and generous friends has increased that, by a modest stock of such things as are necessary. (BRONTË, 2001, p. 305)

[26] Argued.

When challenged by St John about not being satisfied with her situation – he seems always to expect women to disappoint him when it comes to their strength of character and their wishes – Jane interrupts him to correct his assumptions.

> My cottage is clean and weather-proof; my furniture sufficient and commodious. All I see has made me thankful, not despondent. I am not absolutely such a fool and sensualist as to regret the absence of a carpet, a sofa, and silver plate; besides, five weeks ago I had nothing – I was an outcast, a beggar, a vagrant; now I have acquaintance, a home, a business. I wonder at the goodness of God; the generosity of my friends; the bounty of my lot. I do not repine. (BRONTË, 2001, p. 307)

Jane starts to find new contentment in life, something that seemed nearly impossible when she left Thornfield. She has a small place of her own and she has her teaching, which despite being challenging and difficult at first, some of the children having never had any sort of education before, it slowly becomes easier and pleasurable. She strives to keep in mind that "these coarsely-clad little peasants are of flesh and blood as good as the scions of gentlest genealogy; and that the germs of native excellence, refinement, intelligence, kind feeling, are as likely to exist in their hearts as in those of the best-born" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 306). Her devotion to her pupils and her teaching do not go unrewarded: she finds, amongst her students, some who really cherish the information she is relaying, and some parents who value the education she is providing their offspring, inviting her to dine and spend time in their houses. Jane has not only found a family in the Rivers, she has also found a place in this community, being respected and well-liked by all: she is aware she has become a favourite in the area, and whenever she "went out, I heard on all sides cordial salutations, and was welcomed with friendly smiles. To live amidst general regard, though it be but the regard of working people, is like 'sitting in sunshine, calm and sweet;' serene inward feelings bud and bloom under the ray" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 306). Working again, making herself useful, and through her teaching improving the lives of so many was rewarding to Jane. However, despite the contentment she found there, she still dreamed about Rochester.

When St John finally finds out about who she really is, the news comes with yet another revelation: their uncle, for they are all cousins, left Jane all his fortune, and she is now a rich woman: she could finally have the independence she sought, and "that only the coincidence of a rich uncle's death can confer on a single woman autonomy and power, after all, suggests just how intractable her dependence really was in the 1840s" (POOVEY, 1988, p. 142). Not only has Jane gained a fortune, she has also gained three family members in the Rivers, who were already like family, and now were family in fact – Jane's happiness is not due to the money she had inherited, even if that allowed her freedom and independence like she had never had before

–, but the finding of her own kinspeople, for “this was wealth indeed! – wealth to the heart! – a mine of pure, genial affections. This was a blessing, bright, vivid, and exhilarating; – not like the ponderous gift of gold: rich and welcome enough in its way, but sobering from its weight” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 328). She decides to share her good fortune with her cousins, for she never had anything to share with others; therefore splitting the inheritance with the Rivers siblings is, to Jane, the obvious thing to do, giving each of them five thousand pounds, freeing all from their dependence. She sees her fortune as only being worth having if she can share it with her newfound cousins, which releases Mary and Diana from servitude, bringing them home to Moor House; as well as allowing St John to marry Miss Oliver if he liked, instead of going away as a missionary. St John, always patronising, implies that her desire to share her fortune is due to her becoming confused after such news, to which Jane replies, “Mr Rivers! you quite put me out of patience: I am rational enough; it is you who misunderstand, or rather who affect to misunderstand” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 329). He does not understand what it means for her to have a family, to have connections and companionship of her kin; he “cannot imagine the craving I have for fraternal and sisterly love. I never had a home, I never had brothers or sisters; I must and will have them now” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 330). Sharing her money is an indulgence in which Jane had not had the pleasure of partaking, and that this can be done through extending her good fortune to the people who have been so kind to her is an added bonus. Money makes Jane an independent woman like she never could dream of being, and knowing the shackles of servitude and dependence, Jane is eager to spread its antidote. She starts turning Moor House into a home once again, preparing for the return of Mary and Diana, who are away as governesses, and she delights in the domesticity this activity provides.

The obstacles to Jane’s freedom are not yet crossed, however, as Jane “must symbolically, if not literally, behead the abstract principles of this man [St John] before she can finally achieve her true independence” (GILBER & GUBER, 2000, p. 365). At first, he assumes that her new status as an heiress will bring about the abandoning of her post as a teacher; and after witnessing her tenacity and determination, he hopes to bring her with him, as his wife, as a missionary in India. He implies she will soon tire of life at Moor House and the “selfish calm and sensual comfort of civilised affluence” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 333). St John despises the “humanities and amenities of life […] – its peaceful enjoyments no charm. Literally, he lived only to aspire – after what was good and great, certainly; but still he would never rest, nor approve of others resting round him” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 334). Even before he suggests they should marry in order to lead a life in God’s name, Jane realises that he would not make a good

husband, not for her, not for Miss Oliver, nor anyone else, since “the parlour was not his sphere” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 335).

Christmas comes and with it the return of Mary and Diana, as well as St John, to Moor House. Jane wishes to be treated like a sister, as she sees them all as her siblings, but St John is incapable of doing so, for his designs for their relationship is of a different nature. He becomes even colder and more reticent in her presence, and as Jane explains, “now that I was acknowledged his kinswoman, and lived under the same roof with him, I felt the distance between us to be far greater than when he had known me only as the village schoolmistress” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 337). In some sort of perverse game, St John’s treatment of her induces Jane to wish to please him further, but doing so meant disowning her “nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation. He wanted to train me to an elevation I could never reach; it racked me hourly to aspire to the standard he uplifted” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 339-340). Unwittingly, Jane’s relationship with St John becomes one of servitude, and she struggles to escape it and him.

> I found him a very patient, very forbearing, and yet an exacting master: he expected me to do a great deal; and when I fulfilled his expectations, he, in his own way, fully testified his approbation. By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: his praise and notice were more restraining than his indifference. I could no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by, because a tiresomely importunate instinct reminded me that vivacity (at least in me) was distasteful to him. I was so fully aware that only serious moods and occupations were acceptable, that in his presence every effort to sustain or follow any other became vain: I fell under a freezing spell. When he said “go,” I went; “come,” I came; “do this,” I did it. But I did not love my servitude: I wished, many a time, he had continued to neglect me. (BRONTË, 2001, p. 339)

St John is essentially preparing Jane for life as a missionary’s wife, even if she cannot see it yet. Despite not knowing his true intention, she is aware, to some extent, of how he is treating her, and she is also conscious of her own form of dealing with characters such as him, whose antagonism called for obedience: Jane either submitted completely or rebelled – or, more likely, submitted until she could no longer take it, and then revolted “with volcanic vehemence” (BRONTË, 2001, p. 341). Finally showing Jane his true wishes, St John proposes to her, a marriage of convenience so she could come to India with him. He wants a companion, not necessarily a wife, but only as a wife he believes she could come. St John, in a speech that grossly misunderstands Jane, tells her that “God and nature intended you for a missionary’s wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary’s wife you must – shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you – not for

my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 343). His reasons for the union are almost exactly the opposite of what Rochester had offered her: St John proposes a loveless marriage in order to have a life of principle and spirituality, whereas Rochester's offer consisted of a union for passion's sake, ignoring morality and societal expectations. As Jane realises, St John asks her "to be his wife, and has no more of a husband's heart for me than that frowning giant of a rock, down which the stream is foaming in yonder gorge. He prizes me as a soldier would a good weapon; and that is all" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 344). This is not enough for her, whose passionate nature might have been forced into "an imitation of passivity by the limitation of her social roles" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 63), but was never truly gone.

Jane cannot marry St John in the same way she could not become Rochester's mistress. The idea of going to India and becoming a missionary has its appeal, however, for "the philanthropic activities of women were therefore a key element of their contribution to middle-class identity and their association with ideals of civic virtue" (MORGAN, 2007, p. 75), and Jane was keen to make herself useful, as "is not the occupation he now offers me truly the most glorious man can adopt or God assign? Is it not, by its noble cares and sublime results, the one best calculated to fill the void left by uptorn affections and demolished hopes?" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 344). She realises that accepting his offer of marriage would mean abandoning half of herself, unless she were indeed to follow him to India, as a free woman, unmarried, as his sister: Jane questions if she has it in her to "receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love […] and know that the spirit was quite absent? Can I bear the consciousness that every endearment he bestows is a sacrifice made on principle?", concluding that "such a martyrdom would be monstrous. I will never undergo it. As his sister, I might accompany him – not as his wife: I will tell him so" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 344). She sees him as a brother, and hopes the feeling is mutual, so she proposes to accompany him in his mission, *their* mission, as his sister; not only that but "Jane's emotions keep her from accepting St John's cold-blooded proposal" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 58): there is no feeling in his words, just practicality, the opposite of Rochester's proposal, and yet equally impossible for her. He is adamant, however, that they must marry, that it will not do to travel as siblings, for they are not siblings. He inadvertently strengthens her decision by explaining he wishes to marry the missionary, not the woman. St John "demands that she control her passion in order to participate in heroic action as a missionary; he takes her seriously […] as a fellow human being. He also dominates her utterly" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 65). More than ever, his controlling nature is on show – St John is yet another male figure in Jane's life who wishes for her to be something she cannot. Jane believes she could become a missionary, dedicating her life to a cause.

> As his curate, his comrade, all would be right; […] my body would be under rather a stringent yoke, but my heart and mind would be free. I should still have my unblighted self to turn to. […] There would be recesses in my mind which would be only mine, to which he never came, and sentiments growing there fresh and sheltered which his austerity could never blight, nor his measured warrior-march trample down: but as his wife – at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked – forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital – *this* would be unendurable. (BRONTË, 2001, p. 347)

Jane would "always rather be happy than dignified" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 349), and marrying St John would mean relinquishing the possibility of happiness in marriage, but more than that, it would mean accepting a union of unequal souls, which in turn would lead not only to the loss of the potential for happiness, but also to the submission to a life without passion and without freedom. His reaction is a taste of what Jane would face as his wife: St John assumes she will change her mind, he does not understand her, and upon asking why she refuses him still, she tells him that before it was because there was no love between them, and now it is because he almost hates her, for there is abhorrence in his treatment of her, and she is fully aware of this – she is merely in the way of his objectives by refusing to become his wife, bringing out his worst side. Jane tells St John that were they to marry, he "would kill" her (BRONTË, 2001, p. 351), meaning he would stifle her passion and control her, for this is the very essence of a loveless marriage. In rejecting him and his offer, Jane is making a choice of a life of passion rather than a life of action as a missionary; furthermore, she is choosing feeling over practicality.

Jane's refusal angers St John, who accuses her of being "unfeminine", which is possibly the worst insult a woman could receive in our period, and worse even, as Jane suggests, "because [his words] touched on the truth" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 352). His blows do not shake her resolve, however, and she stands up for herself against the most tyrannical man she has to face in her journey – even worse than Mr Brocklehurst, whose power did not reach beyond the walls of Lowood, and for whom she had no affection, and yet, "she escapes from his fetters more easily than she escaped from either Brocklehurst or Rochester. Figuratively speaking, this is a measure of how far she has travelled in her pilgrimage toward maturity" (GILBERT & GUBAR, 2000, p. 366).

St John is patronising and pretends to misunderstand Jane's resolve, choosing to interpret it as a mistake on her part, a belief that is easily debunked by her, and she explains that "God did not give me my life to throw away; and to do as you wish me would, I begin to think, be almost equivalent to committing suicide" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 352). St John heavily

implies that Jane's refusal to marry him and join him on his mission will eventually take her to hell. His words, his persuasiveness playing upon her insecurities and fears tempt Jane to accept him, despite her resolve: "his look was not, indeed, that of a lover beholding his mistress, but it was that of a pastor recalling his wandering sheep – or better, of a guardian angel watching the soul for which he is responsible" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 356). Jane "felt veneration for St. John – veneration so strong that its impetus thrust me at once to the point I had so long shunned. I was tempted to cease struggling with him – to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose my own" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 357), that is until she hears her name being called in Mr Rochester's voice, a reminder of who she is and whom she loves: "I broke from St. John, who had followed, and would have detained me. It was *my* time to assume ascendency. *My* powers were in play and in force" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 358).

More than recalling to Jane her true self and passion, Rochester's call is, according to Gilbert and Gubar, a plot device that informs Jane that "the relationship for which both lovers had always longed is now possible. […] For to the marriage of Jane's and Rochester's true minds there is now, as Jane unconsciously guesses, no impediment" (GILBERT & GUBAR, 2000, p. 367), thus making accurate Jane's summoning during Rochester's proposal, in chapter XXIII, when she says that it is her spirit that addresses his spirit (BRONTË, 2001, p. 216). Jane knows she must return to Thornfield in order to learn what is happening to those there, and more importantly, to see if Mr Rochester is well. Diana and Mary's reaction to her going is one of support, the women treat one another with trust and space for independence and freedom to do as they wished: "they kindly and wisely acquiesced in the silence with which I pursued them, according to me the privilege of free action I should under similar circumstances have accorded them (BRONTË, 2001, p. 359). The three women formed a sisterhood in fact, for they lived as if they were all sisters, but also a metaphorical one, where women respect one another and their individual wishes without questioning or trying to convince each other to act differently – which could not be further from Jane's relationship with St John, whose brotherhood had always been conditional to duty.

Thus, Jane leaves Marsh End, the literal end of a journey started many years before. She is now ready for her future, to initiate her homecoming. The journey is long but she braves it with the confidence of a woman who is now free of the shackles of dependence, who has found a place for herself in the world with her kin, who is at liberty to make choices for herself. Arriving at Thornfield, Jane encounters the old house in ruins, there is "the silence of death about it: the solitude of lonesome wild" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 362). She hears from the Rochester Arms' landlord what happened to the house and its inhabitants, and without realising Jane's

true identity, he tells her of the governess who lived there, for whom Mr Rochester searched far and wide to no avail after she had run away; he says Rochester had become a hermit, sending Mrs Fairfax away to her relatives and young Adèle to school, "breaking off acquaintance with all the gentry" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 364). Mr Rochester had been at home when the fire started, when the "lunatic" had first set fire "to the hangings of the room next her own, and then she got down to a lower storey, and made her way to the chamber that had been the governess's […] and she kindled the bed there" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 364). The first sign of his redemption comes from his trying, against all odds and the heat of the fire, to save the servants and Bertha, despite having kept her locked up in a room for so many years, and despite her death being his ticket to freedom: "he went up to the attics when all was burning above and below, and got the servants out of their beds and helped them down himself, and went back to get his mad wife out of her cell" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 364-365). Rochester's heroism comes not only from a selfless sense of duty, but from the guilt he feels in having kept Bertha trapped, turning her into a potential hazard to herself and all who inhabit his house. Bertha's final moments bring to mind a bird-like creature, ensnared for so long and wishing for freedom – she was "waving her arms, above the battlements, and shouting out till they could hear her a mile off. […] She was a big woman, and had long black hair: we could see it streaming against the flames as she stood", and as Rochester approached her, "she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 365). The striking figure against the flames setting flight towards her future, death her only release from her chains – both literal and metaphorical. Bertha's death is the ending of the splitting in Jane's personality suggested earlier, for now she can finally act upon her wish to be with Rochester, who is no longer a married man – Jane does not have to settle for being his governess or his mistress, she can become his wife without sacrificing her morality.

The fire that freed Bertha punishes Rochester, destroying his house, blinding him and taking one of his arms. As Spacks suggests, Bertha is no longer needed now as a symbolic embodiment of female anger, for "that anger has been satisfied, the balance righted, by Rochester's maiming, a shocking accident which provides a masculine equivalent for the wasting disease that punishes women's moral flaws" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 65). Mr Rochester is now living at Ferndean, isolated from the world not in a field of thorns any longer, but in a den of fern, where, unlike the surroundings of the imposing Thornfield, the ground is covered in foliage, hiding the house and its inhabitants from society – incidentally, Ferndean is also the place where Rochester had at first planned to hide Bertha away from his life at Thornfield, but due to it being "unhealthy" with "damp walls" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 256) he could not bring

himself to put her there; and yet, it is to Ferndean Manor where he recoils after the fire. This is the setting for Jane and Rochester's reunion and for their final understanding of minds; the location is "stripped and asocial, so that the physical isolation of the lovers suggests their spiritual isolation" (GILBERT & GUBAR, 2000, p. 369), for they are almost unique in their union of equals in a world where such unions are rare. Rochester's blindness allows him to see what truly matters, beyond the smoke and mirrors of society life.

Their roles have somewhat shifted in their journey towards each other, for now Jane does not need him at all, not financially, and not as family, for she is an heiress and has the Rivers. On the other hand, Rochester has lost much of what he thought made him, but turned out to be less than essential. Jane tells him that "I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector" (BRONTË, 2001, p. 379); in fact, "the maimed husband […] makes possible a marriage of ideal reciprocity" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 66), since through depriving of his former physical power means equalising their situation, "expressing the feminine need to be needed and revealing again the intimate connection between helping and controlling" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 67). Thus, Jane assumes the role of a proper Victorian wife to him, conforming, in many ways to the *status quo* of her times; but "even though Jane marries Rochester, she does so as an expression of her desire, not as the self-sacrifice St. John advocates" (POOVEY, 1988, p. 147). Jane found equality and mutual respect in their union, which go beyond societal expectations for married couples – he relies on her, not only because she can take care of his maimed physical body, but also because she cherishes his mind. Furthermore, theirs is a marriage in which equality presupposes a lack of the separation of the spheres so prevalent in Victorian times: Jane and Rochester are made of the same stuff, occupying the same spaces.

> No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character – perfect concord is the result. (BRONTË, 2001, p. 384)

Thus, reader, she married him, and towards the closing of the novel we find Jane married for ten years, feeling blessed for the life she leads. In their isolation, Rochester even recovers his sight, and they have children together. Rochester and Jane find home in one another, and

together they have space to dream; as Bachelard suggests, “an entire past comes to dwell in a new house” (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 5), and for them, the joining of their lives represents the coming together of all that they were and are, a base from which to build their joint future. Brontë has created a world in which masters marry their governesses, but most importantly, it is a place where husband and wife can find true union of minds, instead of living separated by society’s constraints. Her Jane Eyre goes through a journey in which men try to crush her, from John Reed to St John Rivers, but she fights back with the characteristic that nineteenth-century society most tried to stifle in women: passion.

3 "MY COURAGE ALWAYS RISES AT EVERY ATTEMPT TO INTIMIDATE ME": *PRIDE & PREJUDICE* AND *NORTH & SOUTH*

3.1"Till This Moment, I Never Knew Myself"

> ***"There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me"***
>
> Jane Austen, ***Pride & Prejudice***

It is a truth universally acknowledged that Jane Austen created many memorable characters, but for many reasons – be it successful adaptations to television and film, or her own charisma – Elizabeth Bennet is one of the most beloved of Austen's creations. Her bubbly personality, her wit, and her charm are such that it is easy to forget her shortcomings, her *prejudice* and even her *pride*. However, to ignore this part of her is to ignore her journey and, consequently, her growth in one of the most famous coming of age novels in the English language. In this section, I explore the novel whose working title was *First Impressions*, later published as *Pride & Prejudice*[27], and its main character, looking at her status in her small social circle and how she deals with the changes that are soon coming; as well as exploring the Bennet women's uncertain situation due to Mr Bennet's lack of a male heir; and finally I analyse Elizabeth's change of heart, growing in worth as she grows as an adult.

3.1.1 Excessively diverted

Pride & Prejudice takes place in the fictional, provincial and, as the name suggests, happy town of Meryton, in which as many as "four and twenty families" dine together: according to Mrs Bennet's boasting, "there are few neighbourhoods larger" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 30); Mr Darcy's indifference to that claim leads us to believe that the lady is exaggerating and that they live, in fact, in a small village, despite her delusions of grandeur and importance. Surely her excitement at the new arrivals, from the Bingleys to the militia, is proof enough that they could all benefit from meeting new faces and striking new conversations, most of all her pretty and eligible daughters. It is no wonder, then, that most of the major action in this novel occurs due to comings and goings of new and old characters.

[27] *Pride & Prejudice* was published in 1813, but this work will use the Norton Critical Edition of the text, from 1993.

Austen is famous for setting her scene in fictional places and houses, but within the constraints of real geography, so even though the town of Meryton and the Bennet's house, in the village of Longbourn, were inventions of the author, these places are located in the county of Hertfordshire, just outside of what today encompasses the city of London. This choice of dwelling for the Bennets, alongside many other examples dotted in her novels show that "from the more vulnerable position of the lower levels of the gentry, Jane Austen was able to see with particular clarity the marked differences between the two components of the middle class: the landed gentry and the new urban capitalist class" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 181). Austen's placement is rarely random, and it is not surprising that she situates the Bennets just outside the reach of genteel society, belonging to it in name but not so much in financial position: "Mr Bennet's property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year, which, unfortunately for his daughters, was entailed, in default of heirs male, on a distant relation; and their mother's fortune, though ample for her situation in life, could but ill supply the deficiency of his" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 19-20). Furthermore, as it has been said previously, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, being born into a certain class "no longer exclusively determined one's future social or economic status, the vertical relationships of patronage no longer guaranteed either privileges or obedience, and the traditional authority of the gentry, and of the values associated with their lifestyle, was a subject under general debate" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 180). Like many genteel and aristocratic families during this period, the Bennets had seen their fortune decrease but maintained their respectability – at least amongst friends and acquaintances – and this is reflected in the treatment they receive from the inhabitants of Meryton, as well as their sense of entitlement amongst them. As well as being a landed gentleman, Mr Bennet thinks himself intellectually superior and does not care about anyone's approval, an attitude that speaks of independence, but also of neglect, and it is something that has dire consequences for the family later in the novel; Mrs Bennet's self-importance means that any ideals of propriety do not seem to apply to her, for she does what she likes, without care if it is or is not appropriate. Both parents' characteristics are passed on to their daughters, to some extent, and even Elizabeth, arguably the most sensible of the five girls, – at least according to her father –, believes in her own intellectual superiority, much like Mr Bennet, and often shows independence of action regardless of propriety, not dissimilar to her mother.

Lizzy, as she is known amongst her friends and family is admired and respected in her little merry town. She is not the most beautiful amongst her sisters, that role falls to Jane, but she is the cleverest, her father's favourite, and generally recognised to be charming and outspoken. At first glance, she is as different as can be from *Mansfield Park*'s mousy Fanny

Price, but throughout the novel, Lizzy demonstrates to be a harsh judge of character, having strong opinions about her sisters, parents, and friends, as well as frequently being prejudiced towards anyone who acts unlike she would. Much like Fanny, Lizzy is judgmental and prone to rely too heavily on her first impressions of others, but she has the charm of Mary Crawford to balance that trait. It is difficult not to love Elizabeth, her sparkling personality, her laughter and her self-assured stance against the world, and the witty way through which she observes society and its people. Always encouraged by her father, who believes he is, essentially, surrounded by idiots, it is not surprising that she has grown up to be a confident young lady who sees herself to be superior to those surrounding her. Poovey suggests that "the juxtaposition of Elizabeth's lively wit with this pretentious and repressive society cuts both ways; for if the vacuity of her surroundings highlights energy, it also encourages her to cultivate her natural vivacity beyond its legitimate bounds" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 195), meaning that the merry and simple folk of Meryton become reason for mockery and laughter, which, if unchecked, could go too far. Encouraged by her father, "as the outspoken champion of the prerogatives of individual desire, Elizabeth Bennet should jeopardise both the social order, which demands self-denial, and the moral order which is based on absolute Christian principles" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 194): she flirts with crossing the boundaries of propriety just like her mother and sisters, but thinks too highly of herself and of her intelligence to believe this is what she is doing. As Wiltshire suggests, "together with her wit, her delight at 'whims and inconsistences', her pleasure in the absurdities of her acquaintances, her ability to make fun even of otherwise painful occasions […], her smiles invite the reader into a private selfhood both amiable […] and disposed to satire" (WILTSHIRE, 2014, p. 55). Elizabeth's self-importance is finally challenged when new, fashionable, and educated people take her domain, the small provincial town, by storm: Netherfield Park is let at last.

Not unlike other Jane Austen novels, in *Pride & Prejudice*, it is not only the journeys the protagonists take that propel the plot, but also the journeys taken by others into the protagonists' sphere. Elizabeth's place in Meryton is still secure; she and her sisters are known and respected members of that society, and life is what is has always been, until the Bingleys and Mr Darcy arrive with their fortunes and worldly knowledge to challenge the local *status quo*. Mr Bingley, with his five thousand a year, and his family are representatives of the new rich, whose fortune was made through trade, an effect of the Industrial Revolution. They do not have a pompous name, nor are they in possession of an ancestral house, and this last fact is the very reason why they come to Netherfield Park: Bingley is investigating its suitability as a family house, for as was the habit amongst the rising middle classes, acquiring property and

announcing their financial success through the possession of an estate, joining the ranks of the landed rich was to be expected in order to increase their acceptance into a world where they had not always belonged.

> Mr Bingley inherited property to the amount of nearly a hundred thousand pounds from his father, who had intended to purchase an estate, but did not live to do it. Mr Bingley intended it likewise, and sometimes made choice of his county; but as he was now provided with a good house and the liberty of a manor, it was doubtful to many of those who best knew the easiness of his temper, whether he might not spend the remainder of his days at Netherfield, and leave the next generation to purchase. (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 11)

For the purpose of helping him decide the appropriateness of Netherfield, then, he brought his good friend, Mr Darcy, along. The two are almost extreme opposites when it comes to personality, but "on the strength of Darcy's regard Bingley had the firmest reliance, and of his judgement the highest opinion" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 12). Darcy's importance and status, despite the lack of a title, are marked not only from his ten thousand a year and his imposing and haughty attitude, as well as being the grandson and nephew of an Earl, but also through his name – d'Arcy is an old Norman name, denoting ancestry and social importance. The new arrivals initially seem to be dismissed by Elizabeth, whilst her sisters swoon at the possibility of a rich gentleman in possession of a good fortune taking one of them for his wife, for as the second paragraph of the novel, steeped in irony, states: "however little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 3). For the small-town folk, new arrivals immediately meant new additions to the marriage mart, and not only is Mrs Bennet aware of this, she is also conscious of the competition that undoubtedly will ensue amongst the matchmaking mamas.

The Bennet women's first encounter with the Netherfield party, at the Meryton assembly, is nothing short of eventful. Beyond an introduction to new characters, we are given a glimpse into Elizabeth's inner feelings, for despite her brave face, Mr Darcy's famous slight of her – "she is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 9) – functions as more than a show of his pride, but also a way to display hers, since despite telling the story "with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous", in private it was a different matter, and she admits that she "could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified" *hers* (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 14). Even Mrs

Bennet, quick to judge Elizabeth on her actions and blame her if things do no go according to plan, jumps in defence of her daughter, as any slight on her children – even Lizzy – is considered a personal afront towards herself; Mr Darcy's large fortune is forgotten, and she exclaims that "he is a most disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing. So high and so conceited that there was no enduring him! He walked here, and he walked there, fancying himself so very great! Not handsome enough to dance with! […] I quite detest the man" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 10). To offend one of her daughters was a personal offence to herself.

Despite Lizzy's apparent nonchalant attitude, her innermost feelings must be taken into account, both to understand her and her position. She too was excited about the dance and the new acquaintances, she too was aware of Darcy's fortune and position, and, above all, she too must have fancied herself worthy of a rich husband. Elizabeth's intelligence is not only a source of conceit, for it also permits her to be aware of her family's situation: five unmarried daughters with little to no dowry, an aging father who is so care*free* that he is care*less*, a frivolous mother, and the perpetual threat of becoming homeless as soon as her father passes away. Darcy's words, then, represent more than just a rejection of herself, they are also a symbol of the perpetuation of hers and her sisters' situation. Furthermore, Lizzy might have thought highly of herself, but she was no fool, thus being aware of what it meant to have the admiration of a man like Darcy (rich and well-connected), and the disappointment of not receiving it. Additionally, later in the novel when he separates Bingley from Jane, "he proves himself capable of bringing the Bennet family face to face with undeniable reality" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 197), and yet again Elizabeth finds it hard to forgive him, both his insult and the side effect of forcing Lizzy to face her family's real situation.

Darcy's slight, therefore, was not to be easily forgotten or forgiven, and he must live with the consequences of his words for a good portion of the novel, but so must Elizabeth. Her pride is so hurt, that she becomes prejudiced against Darcy, finding fault with him whenever possible, even after his admiration for her is clear to most, from her best friend Charlotte Lucas to her "nemesis" Caroline Bingley. She privately mocks Caroline for her sycophantic behaviour towards Darcy, trusting that she knows his true character from the merest of interactions, and that Caroline is a fool to indulge him – all this completely out of spite. When Jane is taken ill at Netherfield, in an almost unbelievable ploy of Mrs Bennet to make Mr Bingley fall in love with her eldest daughter, Elizabeth comes to the manor to nurse her sister back to health, and has the opportunity to interact with all in the Netherfield party, which is equal parts entertaining and despicable for her, allowing her the "enjoyment of her original dislike" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 24). This dislike is mutual, and the Bingley sisters do not waste any opportunity to abuse her

behind her back, and sometimes when she is present too, but more covertly. According to Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst, "[Elizabeth] has nothing, in short, to recommend her, but being an excellent walker"; and even her walking is criticised, for "what could she mean by it? It seems to me to show an abominable sort of *conceited independence*[28], a most country-town indifference to decorum" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 24-25). It was unacceptable for a lady to walk alone, especially one of the rising middle classes, like the Bingley sisters were: Elizabeth's financial situation might be lower than theirs, but she was still a gentleman's daughter, as she herself declares later in the novel, thus having more confidence in the place that is believed to be her due, whilst the Bingleys' fortune came from trade, theirs being the first generation to lead a life of leisure, and as Langland explains, "middle-class women were produced by domestic discourses even as they reproduced them to consolidate middle-class control" (LANGLAND, 1995, p. 11). Furthermore, being new to the higher echelons of society meant that one had a lot more to prove to maintain one's place there, and adhering to the prescribed behaviours was one such way of doing so, as well as disparaging of whoever did not comply with them. Thus, Elizabeth's dirty petticoat was declared an abomination, "her manners were pronounced to be very bad indeed, a mixture of pride and impertinence" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 24), and her relations were deemed "vulgar".

In a novel made of conversations, such as *Pride & Prejudice*, as John Wiltshire suggests, the reader is "continually invited to notice how a word is being used and to assess whether it is being used justifiably, sloppily or mischievously" (WILTSHIRE, 2006, p. 5). Taking that into account, it is not surprising that a discussion about accomplishments, more specifically ladies' accomplishments, takes up a section of the novel, and that many different views on the meaning of the word are debated. Mr Bingley is all compliments to ladies, claiming that all women of his acquaintance "paint tables, cover screens, and net purses. I scarcely know anyone who cannot do all this, and I am sure I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 27). Darcy, on the other hand, with Caroline's support, has harsher opinions on what constitutes an accomplished lady, saying that he cannot "boast of knowing more than half-a-dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished", and he goes on to list what truly constitutes an accomplished lady: "a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions,

[28] My italics.

or the word will be but half-deserved"; furthermore, to all this she must "add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 27). A thorough list and, as Elizabeth is quick to point out, an extremely unrealistic one. It is no wonder, she says, he only knows half a dozen women who could claim the title of accomplished. Elizabeth's claim that she "never saw such a woman. [She] never saw such a capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance" united in a single lady (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 27) is seen by the Bingley sisters as a display of her low opinion of her own sex in order to recommend herself. It could be argued, however, that Elizabeth is merely commenting on the unrealistic expectations placed upon genteel women, and the unlikelihood of any one person being as perfect as Mr Darcy and the Bingleys seem to expect.

Throughout the novel, Elizabeth flirts with impropriety, but only insofar as her actions shock the more prudish and uptight Bingley sisters: Lizzy is confident of her place in society, whereas Caroline and Mrs Hurst desire to climb higher, and it is that confidence that allows her to speak her mind when others would keep quiet. She has no qualms about mocking Darcy when the opportunity presents itself, whilst Caroline is careful to please and not offend him: when Elizabeth suggests Darcy should be teased and laughed at for his comments, Caroline jumps to his defence, saying "tease calmness of manner and presence of mind! No, no; I feel he may defy us there. And as to laughter, we will not expose ourselves, if you please, by attempting to laugh without a subject" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 39). What follows, once again, is a battle of minds between Elizabeth and Darcy, leaving out Miss Bingley, despite her best efforts. Elizabeth's "failure in pleasing – that central feminine obligation – troubles her only slightly", especially since she sees pleasing others regardless of circumstances as "losing herself. She sees that the will to please is often an aspect of hypocrisy" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 118), as well as denoting deep-seated insecurity, such as with Caroline Bingley, and later with Mr Collins.

In spite of her confidence, even Elizabeth is not immune from "blushing for her mother" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 30) when Mrs Bennet makes a spectacle of herself – so much so that she finds herself compelled to defend Darcy when her mother does not understand him. Byrne argues that her "blushes for her mother's social indiscretions reveal not simply a refined sensibility […] but a deeper, more complex sense of the requirements of social conduct" (BYRNE, 2017, p. 155). Elizabeth's awareness of her family's improper behaviour increases as the novel progresses, for she sees them through the eyes of the Bingley sisters and, especially, through Darcy's. As John Wiltshire explains, "Elizabeth may be clear-sighted about her family, but she is certainly much less so about herself, about Darcy and Wickham, and her closest

friend, Charlotte Lucas" (WILTSHIRE, 2006, p. 7-8), and she is quick to judge them all before truly understanding them.

The arrival of officers to a small town like Meryton had an even bigger effect than the arrival of the Bingleys and Mr Darcy, for the officers were many, and most of them willing to partake in the local entertainments. Unsurprisingly, the officers were immediately implicated as the new interests of the ladies, who "every day added something to their knowledge of the officers' names and connections. Their lodgings were not long a secret, and at length they began to know the officers themselves". The young ladies, especially Elizabeth's youngest sisters, Catherine (Kitty) and Lydia, "could talk of nothing but officers; and Mr Bingley's large fortune, the mention of which gave animation to their mother, was worthless in their eyes when opposed to the regimentals of an ensign" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 20). Elizabeth allows herself to be lured by the most charming and attractive of all officers, Mr Wickham, and his appeal only grows when she finds out about his own strained relationship with Darcy – which he volunteers, despite the impropriety of gossiping about a common acquaintance. This offering of information should have been the first sign of his ungentlemanlike behaviour, but since Elizabeth had already been predisposed against Darcy before learning what Wickham had to say, his words only serve to further her sympathy for him, and increase her dislike of Darcy. Wickham plays the innocent man well enough for Elizabeth to believe him, and she "found the interest of the subject increase, and listened with all her heart; but the delicacy of it prevented further inquiry" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 53) – not that she needed to question him further when he was more than willing to volunteer information. He is even clever enough to have an excuse on why he does not expose Darcy in his wider circles: his alleged love and respect for the late Mr Darcy. Elizabeth, poisoned by her dislike of Darcy, "allowed that [Wickham] had given a very rational account of [his troubles]" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 57), and she goes as far as judging young Miss Darcy, a young girl she does not know, based on Wickham's wicked words.

When Elizabeth retells his story to Jane, her elder sister "knew not how to believe that Mr Darcy could be so unworthy of Mr Bingley's regard" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 57), and despite being prone to believing a man so amiable as Mr Wickham, she tries to think of an explanation for Darcy's supposed actions, suggesting that both men had "been deceived, […] in some way or other, of which we can form no idea. Interested people have perhaps misrepresented each to the other. It is, in short, impossible for us to conjecture the causes or circumstances which may have alienated them, without actual blame on either side" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 58). Elizabeth is quick to dismiss her sister, as her pondered views do not suit Lizzy's opinion of Mr Darcy. Jane, who throughout the novel is considered nothing more than just a pretty face, shows herself

to be a reasoning voice against Elizabeth's willingness to misunderstand Darcy. Even Mr Bennet, the most cynical of men, is "partial to Mr Wickham" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 95). With her father's endorsement and the Netherfield party's removal from Meryton, it is not surprising that Lizzy holds on to her opinion of them all, especially of Darcy, and despite her sister's reluctance in being too quick to judge, Elizabeth herself still needs to go on a journey of her own in order to be shown the error of some of her hasty judgements that were clouded by wounded pride.

Even the fact that Wickham does not attend the Netherfield ball is seen, by Elizabeth, as more evidence against Darcy – she is so adamant of his character that it never occurs to her that it could be the guilty man who was avoiding confrontation. Her dance with Darcy is another duelling session, and despite being advised by Charlotte "not to be a simpleton, and allow her fancy for Wickham to make her appear unpleasant in the eyes of a man ten times his consequence" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 61), Elizabeth, however, is too indignant to stay silent, and broaches the subject about her new-formed acquaintance with Wickham as soon as she dares, to which Darcy replies, that "Mr Wickham is blessed with such happy manners as may ensure his making friends – whether he may be equally capable of retaining them, is less certain" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 62); yet, Elizabeth does not go any further in questioning his meaning, but she defends Wickham and brings Darcy to silence in the hopes that she will change the subject. Darcy, on the other hand, makes an effort to please Elizabeth in his choice of topic – books – but she dismisses him out of hand, and insists on analysing his character, suggesting he is prejudiced when judging people (clearly referring to Wickham), and Darcy asks her not to sketch his character "at the present moment, as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no credit on either" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 63-64). Understandably, to Elizabeth, Darcy is being difficult and secretive, whilst Wickham was friendly and open, thus her opinion of both men does not shift after this conversation. John Wiltshire suggests that one should "avoid interpreting the novel 'backwards', that is to say, reading the characters' speech and behaviour through knowledge of their ultimate outcomes"; he goes as far as arguing that "if we do this, the danger is that we find ourselves in an artificial position of superiority to Elizabeth Bennet, through whose eyes most, though not quite all, of the action of the novel is seen. And her understandings make perfect sense whilst we are reading" (WILTSHIRE, 2006, p. 8). Thus, Elizabeth's actions and judgements of the people around her are often understandable, and it does seem incomprehensible that Darcy would not defend himself against the accusations defaming his character – only later do we, and Elizabeth, find that he was protecting his sister, who was also a victim of Wickham's misdeeds. However, being able to look at these interactions with the knowledge of their outcomes is important, at least when setting out to

analyse the novel and Elizabeth herself, in order to understand how her prejudice is fuelled by her hurt pride, otherwise one runs the risk of being extremely prejudiced against Darcy ourselves, since the story is mainly told through her point of view.

The departure of the Netherfield party after the ball is followed by the arrival of the Gardiners, Mrs Bennet's brother and his wife, and we have the opportunity to see our protagonist interact with an older woman whom she actually respects and whose opinions she values. Relationships between women are as important in Austen's novels as they were in her real life, but often they are built between women of a similar age, for older women in her novels tend to be portrayed either as silly or wilfully attempting to misguide their charges[29]. Mrs Gardiner is different, and even though she is Lizzy's aunt, she is treated more as a friend – perhaps because she is not old enough to be Elizabeth's mother, nor is she young enough to be as naïve as Elizabeth's other companions. She cautions her niece against falling in love with a man of low means, since her dowry is small and her circumstances could have been better; furthermore, Mrs Gardiner suggests Lizzy is too sensible "to fall in love merely because you are warned against it; […] You must not let your fancy run away with you. You have sense, and we all expect you to use it" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 95), expert words directed at someone who is on the verge of falling in love out of spite. So expert, in fact, that soon after the Gardiners' visit, Elizabeth finds out that Wickham is now "the admirer of someone else", the new heiress, Miss King, and proceeds to reason herself out of her infatuation. Not only that, but she is quick to forgive him his wish to marry for money and settle well – a grace that she will struggle to grant to her best friend Charlotte later in the novel.

> Her heart had been but slightly touched, and her vanity was satisfied with believing that she would have been his only choice, had fortune permitted it. The sudden acquisition of ten thousand pounds was the most remarkable charm of the young lady to whom he was now rendering himself agreeable; but Elizabeth, *less clear-sighted perhaps in this case than in Charlotte's*[30], did not quarrel with him for his wish of independence. Nothing, on the contrary, could be more natural; and while able to suppose that it cost him a few struggles to relinquish her, she was ready to allow it a wise and desirable measure for both, and could very sincerely wish him happy. (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 99)

Thus far, I have looked at Elizabeth's reaction to having her certainties and place challenged by the arrival of new people in *her* town: she is witty and lively, laughing away any

[29] To cite a few examples, in *Sense & Sensibility*, Elinor and Marianne are the best of companions, but their mother is a little clueless and so are the other older women they meet. In *Persuasion*, on the other hand, Anne Elliot's only mother figure is Mrs Russell, whose advice leads to years of sadness and resentment, while Anne's school friend Mrs Smith is a sensible and friendly companion.

[30] My italics. Even the narrator makes it clear that Elizabeth is biased.

disappointments, yet holding on to her pride when it is wounded by a man of consequence. Elizabeth thinks too highly of herself – and with reason – to marry the sycophant Mr Collins, but when her best friend does it (someone whose situation and nature of her decision will be explored in the next section), she cannot but disapprove, even though she does promise to visit the newlyweds when they are settled. Visiting the Collinses means being on the grounds of Lady Catherine DeBourgh, who not only is a great lady of large fortune, but also happens to be Mr Darcy's aunt. Mr Collins is under Lady Catherine's patronage, and not only is he extremely deferential to her, he expects and assumes everyone else will be also – but he should have known better than to suppose Elizabeth would be silent while being verbally attacked by the owner of Rosings Park.

Elizabeth had never, until this visit to Rosings, been in contact with such grand figures, but she is confident of her status: she is, after all, a gentleman's daughter, and though she is aware of the gaps in her upbringing when compared to what was expected of the women of her times, she still finds herself "quite equal to the scene" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 106). Her confidence is maintained even when facing Lady Catherine's speech on the importance of strict female education: "'no governess! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without a governess! I never heard of such a thing. Your mother must have been quite a slave to your education'" (AUSTEN, 1993 p. 109), assuming that Mrs Bennet had taken it upon herself to thoroughly educate her daughters, as was still the fashion amongst many families. Elizabeth, not being one for shying away from shocking truths, implies that her mother was not, in fact, that bothered about giving them a proper upbringing, once again scandalising Lady Catherine. Not only that, but the grand lady is also shocked at all Bennet girls being out at once, to which Elizabeth has the perfect answer:

> "I think it would be very hard upon younger sisters, that they should not have their share of society and amusement, because the elder may not have the means or inclination to marry early. The last-born has as good a right to the pleasures of youth as the first. And to be kept back on such a motive! I think it would not be very likely to promote sisterly affection or delicacy of mind." (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 109)

Lady Catherine is not used to being defied, for a lady of her status – and with her personality – is never questioned, and she is further offended when the "nobody" Miss Elizabeth Bennet answers back. Elizabeth's time at Rosings, as well as her next encounter with Lady Catherine towards the end of the novel, reinforce what had previously been seen with Caroline Bingley: "true propriety and delicacy are indicative of manners rather than rank". A grand education is not a synonym to kindness and politeness. Furthermore, Paula Byrne argues that

"although Elizabeth refuses to be bullied by authority and exhibits courage and frankness in her private encounter with Lady Catherine, she also has a heightened awareness of the importance of observing social forms in public" (BYRNE, 2017, p. 161). Later in the novel, the practise gained in confronting Lady Catherine at Rosings, and the low opinion of the grand lady that Lizzy develops are essential in order to defend herself and her deepest wishes against the same lady.

During the novel, Elizabeth goes through many changes, and that of her place and status in society is one of the most important ones, for she has the opportunity to interact with different people, from various backgrounds – many of them her social superiors – and to understand better her role and the part she plays in society. Being a gentleman's daughter still matters, and it allows her certain graces that other positions would not forgive, but it alone is no longer a symbol of unwavering importance. She is confident of herself and of her place – despite the looming danger of losing her very home – and acts with what she perceives as propriety and delicacy; certain of her opinions, she knows how to behave in public, at the same time that she refuses to be bullied in silence. Despite being able to make fun even of Darcy's hurtful words after their first encounter, it is her wounded pride that leads her to act with prejudice and informs much of her choices during the novel. She must learn, in the course of her journey, to let go of her preconceptions in order to see and understand people for who they truly are.

3.1.2 "Obstinate, headstrong girl"

Pride & Prejudice is, first and foremost, about the marriage plot, that is, the comings and goings of courtship, of which marriage is the final goal, and this is made clear in the first paragraph, with its famous statement of a truth universally acknowledged. All characters in the novel are, to some extent, considering marriage, thinking about the consequences of marriage, or, indeed, getting married. As I mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation, marriage was the best option for women in the nineteenth century, it "measures a woman's success; mothers value themselves for marrying off their daughters; girls value themselves and are valued for their ability to attract and hold eligible men. Bad marriages are thought preferable to no marriage at all" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 116), though our authors would have disagreed with that maxim. Through marriage, wives gained a semblance of independence, their own household, the possibility of becoming mothers, and most importantly, they stopped depending on male relatives, becoming now their husband's responsibility. Marriage was not as romantic as one might wish to believe when reading the happy endings Austen offers us without paying close attention to the rest of her novel, and it was often, especially amongst the middle and upper

classes, a business transaction: “for all the poetry of courtship, marriage remained a social and economic contract written in sober prose” (VICKERY, 1999, p. 83). That being said, however, “courtship was the supreme adventure for an agreeable young lady with a genteel fortune. Perhaps for the only time in her life, a woman was the absolute centre of attention, and often the protagonist of a thrilling drama” (VICKERY, 1999, p. 82).

The Bennet family is, indeed, the protagonists of their own very thrilling drama. Mr and Mrs Bennet have five daughters: Jane, the eldest and generally agreed to be the prettiest and most delicate. Elizabeth, our protagonist, whose lively personality captivates all, from other characters to readers. Mary, the solemn one, who enjoys playing the piano and reading sermons, being what many would call a “proper lady” if only she also had Jane’s beauty and delicacy; Mary is often a source of laughter to her sisters and to the narrator. Kitty, whose personality is shadowed by the boisterous ways of the youngest one, Lydia, both obsessed with balls and men in redcoats. All of them have small dowries, and live under the constant threat of losing their house upon Mr Bennet’s death, as his property is entailed to a line of male heirs, and since he has none of his own, Longbourn house is destined to go to his closest male relation. The concept of entailment is an important one when reading Jane Austen and other nineteenth-century authors, for oftentimes, it is the very fact that this or that property is entailed that propels the narrative. The Bennets’ “inhabited space transcends geometrical space” (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 47), for Longbourn and its state of ownership represents more than the owning of property, as it shows the very cracks in the law that does not protect women, leaving them at the future mercy of male relatives. Entailment is a difficult concept to grasp, and even Mrs Bennet struggles to understand why her marriage did not capitalise on the promise of lifelong security. Jane and Elizabeth – not Mr Bennet – “had often attempted to [explain] it before, but it was a subject on which Mrs Bennet was beyond the reach of reason, and she continued to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five daughters, in favour of a man whom nobody cared anything about” (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 42).

> English land law traditionally struggled with attempts to keep property within the family and restrict the ability of one member of the family to sell it. One such device was the entailment (also known as the fee tail), which allowed the patriarch of a family to pass property to one line of the family. If that line failed to produce descendants or if the descendants were not of the right sex (generally, male), the land would pass to another, more distant line of the family. The entailment figures prominently in English literature to illustrate the struggle of this dynastic desire against the emerging social mores of the eighteenth century and later years. (APPEL, 2013, p. 661)

As well as protecting the property from the hands of the up and coming classes and keeping it within the family – for the danger of allowing a female heir to inherit is that, upon marriage, it would inevitably belong to her husband, thus changing hands and blood ties –, entailed properties indirectly showed disregard for female relatives, since they ended up, like the Bennet women, at the mercy of whoever was to inherit their property, and these relatives were often not close or friendly. In order to prevent the women in their lives to be destitute, it was the duty of any man who inherited an entailed property to make provisions for their female dependents, such as arranging good marriages, which often relied on the ladies having considerable dowries, or making substantial savings. Mr Bennet married a woman whose family came from simpler means, her father "had been an attorney in Meryton, and had left her four thousand pounds" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 20). It was a marriage between two persons who could not have been more different from each other, both intellectually and socially – her interests were very different from his, and he could never respect her: a clear warning about the importance of equal partners in a relationship, something that at least Lizzy and Jane take to heart. More than their differences, however, it is their joint inability to thrive at household economy that has a profound impact on their future and that of their daughters'.

Having five daughters could be seen as the result of a loving relationship or just a normal occurrence in the early nineteenth century, but in the case of the Bennets, it seems to be the case that with each pregnancy there was also the hope for a male heir to "save" them, until it was too late to have any more children: "when first Mr Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless, for, of course, they were to have a son. The son was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as he should be of age, and the widow and younger children would by that means be provided for" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 196). Five girls had been born, and many years after Lydia's birth, Mrs Bennet was still hopeful the desired son would come, until "this event had at last been despaired of, but it was then too late to be saving. Mrs Bennet had no turn for economy, and her husband's love of independence had alone prevented their exceeding their income" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 197). Mr Bennet, Elizabeth's beloved father, and frequently judged in contrast with his silly wife, is seen as a sarcastic and witty commentator of life around him, whereas Mrs Bennet is obsessed with marrying her daughters and willing to go as far as necessary to achieve her goals. It is tempting to like him and think her insufferable and crass, but a closer look at their situation shows a man who has failed to do his duty toward his family, and a woman who is desperate to curb the consequences of their failings, both to the constant despair of their daughters.

Throughout the novel, it is easy to forget that the Bennet women live under the persistent threat of losing their home; it is the apparently silliest of characters, Mrs Bennet, who constantly worries about it, and this concern comes in the shape of her unrelenting wish and machinations to get her daughters married. Meanwhile, Mr Bennet, the one who in the eyes of society is the main responsible for the family's predicament – despite the entail, good administration could have made the estate prosper, thus allowing for better provisions for his wife and children – isolates himself in his library, where he had always been "sure of leisure and tranquillity" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 48), not involving himself with the family troubles – or perhaps hiding away from them. As for Mrs Bennet, women were chiefly responsible for the household economy, as discussed in chapter 1, so the running of affairs in the house and how it is administrated were, or should have been, her concern; but, as suggested above, she had no mind for household economy. Mrs Bennet at least actively tries to fix their situation, mostly to the detriment of her daughters.

Luckily for Mrs Bennet, however, Longbourn's heir is a young man in possession of a good position under the patronage of a grand lady[31], and he is willing to marry one of his cousins, something that would get him a wife, as well as mean that the Bennet family would be provided for and perhaps even allowed to remain at Longbourn after the demise of the patriarch, especially if none of the other girls had made good matches, if any at all. Mr William Collins' arrival is preceded by a wordy letter explaining his situation, trying to repair the strained relationship between the two branches of the family (we are led to understand that there was some sort of disagreement between Mr Bennet and the late Mr Collins, who is likely to have been Mr Bennet's brother-in-law). As a young clergyman, Mr Collins felt it was his duty "to promote and establish the blessing of peace in all families within in the reach of my influence; […] and that the circumstance of my being next in the entail of Longbourn estate will be kindly overlooked on your side, and not lead you to reject the offered olive-branch" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 43). His letter goes on to suggest a visit, and he mentions the entail as a good reason to breech the divide between the families. Elizabeth is the first to question the intentions and meanings behind his words: "'he must be an oddity, I think,' said she. 'I cannot make him out. – There is something very pompous in his style. – And what can he mean by apologising for being next in the entail? – We cannot suppose he would help it if he could. – Could he be a sensible man,

[31] In the early nineteenth century, it was common for landowners to build churches and support them, setting aside land for a rector of their choice, a so-called "living", like what Mr Collins has, and what Wickham claims was his due. Back in the early decades of the century, being a part of the Church of England was not necessarily a matter of vocation, but merely an option for the younger son or the gentleman without property or fortune.

sir?'" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 44), to which Mr Bennet replies that he does not believe their cousin to be sensible at all, and that "there is a mix of servility and self-importance" in his letter that brings promise of entertainment to all.

Despite the indifferent reactions from most of her family, in Mrs Bennet's opinion, the letter "had done away much of her ill-will, and she was preparing to see him with a degree of composure which astonished her husband and daughters" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 44): she seems to be the only one acutely aware of the meaning behind Mr Collins' words, or at least willing to entertain him, and the plot to get one of her daughters married to him in order to provide for all of their futures was likely the first thing on her mind – it is no wonder she becomes so obsessed with it, for nobody else, not even Mr Bennet, seems to care about their future. She takes it upon herself to talk to Mr Collins about his intentions; Mrs Bennet has no qualms in being open about their situation, suggesting to him that the entail situation is "a grievous affair to my poor girls, you must confess. Not that I mean to find fault with *you*, for such things I know are all chance in this world. There is no knowing how estates will go when once they come to be entailed", to which Mr Collins, with intentions similar to hers, replies that he is "very sensible, madam, of the hardship to my fair cousins, and could say much on the subject, but that I am cautious of appearing forward and precipitate. But I can assure the young ladies that I come prepared to admire them […]" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 44). It would look good for a young curate to take a wife, especially if their marriage was seen as not only proper, but also charitable, and Mr Collins seems to enjoy both the prospect of being married and that of doing a good deed in the eyes of his patroness.

> Having now a good house and a very sufficient income, he intended to marry; and in seeking a reconciliation with the Longbourn family he had a wife in view, as he meant to choose one of the daughters, if he found them as handsome and amiable as they were represented by common report. This was his plan of amends—of atonement—for inheriting their father's estate; and he thought it an excellent one, full of eligibility and suitableness, and excessively generous and disinterested on his own part. (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 48)

His plans, however, do not suit his cousins – at least not the majority of them – Mary, the middle child, might have married him had he asked her. His first aim was at Jane, but he was told by her mother that she was "likely to be very soon engaged" – Mrs Bennet is certain of a wedding between her Jane and Mr Bingley. Thus, the narrator tells us sarcastically that "Mr Collins had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 48), and on the morning after the infamous Netherfield Ball, Mr Collins, with Mrs Bennet unwavering support, finds the opportunity to propose to Lizzy.

This first proposal – out of the three Elizabeth is to receive throughout the novel – is as lacking in passion as it could possibly be. Mr Collins lists his reasons for marrying, a thorough explanation that, if nothing else, highlights that love is not one of them:

> "My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced that it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly—which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness". (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 71)

He goes on to describe in detail why and whom Lady Catherine suggested he should marry, reasons that, he explains, are now also his own. Furthermore, he openly tells Elizabeth that he is indifferent to fortune "and shall make no demand of that nature on your father, since I am well aware that it could not be complied with; and that one thousand pounds in the four per cents, which will not be yours till after your mother's decease[32], is all that you may ever be entitled to" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 72). Mr Collins has no doubt of his acceptance, not only because he is conceited, but also because Elizabeth, in his eyes, is in no position to refuse his suit, since the very roof over her head might one day depend on his charity. Elizabeth is doubly outraged, both by his proposal and his assumption of her acceptance, and despite attempting to behave as expected from her, insofar as she thanks him for the compliment of his address, affirming that she is "very sensible of the honour of your proposals", she finds it impossible "to do otherwise than decline them", as not only does she not love him, she thinks he is a fool. Mr Collins wrongly assumes she is simply being coy, as he believes it is the norm for young ladies to reject the "addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second, or even a third time. I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said, and shall hope to lead you to the altar ere long" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 72). Elizabeth is shocked to hear this, assuring him that she is not one of such young ladies, "if such young ladies there are", and that she would not risk future happiness in the hope of being asked a second time, were she tempted to accept him. Their back and forth continues for some time, as Mr Collins refuses to accept Lizzy's words, constantly *informing* her about the general behaviours of *her* sex, and how she is obviously doing just as other young ladies would do. The interchange ends with Elizabeth giving a speech that is nothing short of feminist, claiming she "would rather be paid the compliment of being

[32] The Bennet girls' dowry comes from however little their mother brought into the marriage as her own inheritance, which shows, again, that Mr Bennet has done virtually nothing to secure the future of his daughters.

believed sincere. […] My feelings in every respect forbid it. Can I speak plainer? Do not consider me now as an elegant female, intending to plague you, but as a rational creature, speaking the truth from her heart" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 73-74). Like Jane Eyre, asking Mr Rochester to treat her as a human being, so does Elizabeth here, asking Mr Collins to grant her the benefit of believing her when she says something that does not suit him and his ego. This is the first time, but not the last, that Elizabeth's reply to a marriage proposal will encounter the disbelief of her interlocutor.

Mrs Bennet does not accept Lizzy's decision, claiming that her daughter is "a very headstrong foolish girl and does not know her own interest; but I will *make* her know it" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 74). She is acutely aware that this could mean that Longbourn will soon be some other lady's domain, leading her and her five daughters to become destitute, possibly depending on her brothers' charity to survive. When she tries to muster Mr Bennet's help, he does not come through, siding with his daughter, telling Elizabeth that "from this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr Collins, and I will never see you again if you do" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 75), thus "excessively" disappointing his wife, but gaining the gratitude of his favourite child. This is another instance in which Mr Bennet appears to be alienated from the family problems, at the same time that it is his genuine wish not to see his daughter married to a buffoon of a man she does not love or respect, for he understands what it is like to be one half of an unequal relationship.

While Elizabeth is not willing to compromise her happiness in exchange for fulfilling a social and familial obligation, her best friend Charlotte Lucas, being older[33] and feeling the pressure of remaining unmarried and dependent on her father and brothers, has no such hesitations. Having learned of her friend's refusal, Charlotte attempts to engage Mr Collins' address towards herself, which works faster than she could have hoped, and she is rewarded with a proposal of her own, even though "the stupidity with which he was favoured by nature must guard his courtship from any charm that could make a woman wish for its continuance; and Miss Lucas, who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment were gained" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 82). Charlotte's family are delighted with her news, and her sisters look forward to their turn to

[33] At 27 years of age, Charlotte fears that her marriage prospects are all but gone. Interestingly, she is the same age as Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*. This more mature woman goes from being a secondary character in one of Austen's first works to being its protagonist in her last.

come out, that is, to enter adult society, attend dances and balls, and be recognised as marriageable.

For Charlotte, "without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 82); she has a very practical view on matrimony and what it entails, unlike our protagonist – so much so that breaking the news to Elizabeth is what Charlotte dreads the most, for she knew her friend would not understand her and her motives for marrying. Lizzy is, indeed, stunned at the news. It does not surprise Lizzy that Mr Collins would redirect his attentions after such a short period of time, but Charlotte's acceptance of him is almost unfathomable to her. Charlotte feels the need to explain herself, "I am not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr Collins's character, connection, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 84). Elizabeth forgets that "freedom is a relative concept, and for many women, marriage meant release from a childlike and humiliating dependence on parents" (PERKIN, 1993, p. 75), and that this is the case for Charlotte, whose age and family situation propelled her to marry whoever offered a decent life. Love was not part of that equation. Elizabeth pretends to understand her friend's choice, but she still does not fully accept it; she is a romantic – despite, as mentioned previously, easily forgiving Wickham when he decided to pursue a more advantageous match than she would have been – and the possibility of marrying someone like Mr Collins is, to her, impossible to fathom.

> She had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she had not supposed it to be possible that, when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage. Charlotte the wife of Mr Collins was a most humiliating picture! And to the pang of a friend disgracing herself and sunk in her esteem, was added the distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen. (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 84)

Not only does Charlotte have to deal with Elizabeth's disapproval and misunderstanding, she is also the victim of Mr Bennet's judgement: "it gratified him, he said, to discover that Charlotte Lucas, whom he had been used to think tolerably sensible, was as foolish as his wife, and more foolish than his daughter" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 87), whereas Mrs Bennet despaired at the future loss of Longbourn, now more certain than ever, since none of her daughters could marry its heir. From her engagement on, whenever Miss Lucas came to visit her friend at Longbourn, Mrs Bennet promptly "concluded her to be anticipating the hour

of possession; and whenever she spoke in a low voice to Mr Collins, was convinced that they were talking of the Longbourn estate, and resolving to turn herself and her daughters out of the house, as soon as Mr Bennet were dead" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 87).

Charlotte's choice aside, it is easy to dismiss Mrs Bennet and her over the top concerns, but once again, she seems to be the only member of the Bennet family to worry about their future, even if she goes about it in an extreme fashion, exclaiming, rather sensibly, to her husband, that she could "never […] be thankful, Mr Bennet, for anything about the entail. How anyone could have the conscience to entail away an estate from one's own daughters, I cannot understand" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 88).

Only later, when Elizabeth visits her friend and witnesses her new married life, does she understand a little better why Charlotte decided to marry Mr Collins and how she was coping with such choice. Her friend had, in a few months of married life, learned how to manage her house and her husband. The parsonage was "rather small, but well-built and convenient; and everything was fitted up and arranged with a neatness and consistency of which Elizabeth gave Charlotte all the credit"; furthermore, not only was the house appropriate, but "when Mr Collins could be forgotten, there was really an air of great comfort throughout, and by Charlotte's evident enjoyment of it, Elizabeth supposed he must be often forgotten" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 103). Elizabeth finally considers "Charlotte's degree of contentment, to understand her address in guiding, and composure in bearing with, her husband, and to acknowledge that it was all done very well" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 104). Her friend's life was not what she hoped for herself, but it was better than being a dependent on her father for the rest of her life, and Elizabeth starts to understand this. Furthermore, being a clergyman's wife meant that one's role in society was an extension of his, thus giving Charlotte more purpose and activity. The new Mrs Collins had fulfilled society's expectations of women, perhaps relinquishing any chance of love in order to do so, but likely being happier than she would have been had she remained single and at the mercy of the charity of male relatives, since a woman's proper place was considered to be "in a monogamous marriage; as the legal state necessary to make children legitimate, the transfer of property patrilinear, and female sexuality controllable, marriage is the source of women's 'respect and value'" (POOVEY, 1998, p. 43).

Although Elizabeth disappointed her mother – who later forgives her since marrying Mr Darcy is far more prestigious and lucrative than marrying Mr Collins, regardless of Longbourn's situation – and Jane was unlucky regarding Mr Bingley at first, Mrs Bennet favourite daughter, the one most like herself, her youngest Lydia, is a constant source of joy, and is the first one amongst her sisters, despite being the youngest, to marry. Lydia Bennet is

boisterous and loud, she does not worry about propriety, all she cares about are balls and officers, a stance that is often defended by her mother. The departure of the militia is the only dark cloud on Lydia's sky, but Mrs Forster, the wife of the Colonel of the regiment, invites the girl to accompany her to Brighton, where the militia will be during the summer: "this invaluable friend was a very young woman, and very lately married. A resemblance in good humour and good spirits had recommended her and Lydia to each other, and out of their three months' acquaintance they had been intimate *two*" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 148). Mrs Bennet's reaction to this invite mirrors Lydia's, but for Elizabeth, at this point fully aware of Wickham's true nature, this offer was "the death warrant of all possibility of common sense" for her sister, and attempts to convince her father not to let her go. Elizabeth tries to explain to him about all the "improprieties of Lydia's general behaviour, the little advantage she could derive from the friendship of such a woman as Mrs Forster, and the probability of her being yet more imprudent with such a companion at Brighton, where the temptations must be greater than at home" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 148), but Mr Bennet, always more preoccupied with his own peace of mind and relaxation, selfishly insists that Lydia "will never be easy until she has exposed herself in some public place or other, and we can never expect her to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to her family as under the present circumstances" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 148). Mr Bennet, as has been made clear here and in the novel, has ceased to care about propriety too, for even though he is not loud like his wife and youngest daughters, he has relinquished his duties as a husband and father, opting for the solitude of his library instead of being involved with the household and family life. Elizabeth, who "had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 152), suggests that a "great disadvantage to [them] all which must arise from the public notice of Lydia's unguarded and imprudent manner – nay, which has already arisen from it, I am sure you would judge differently in the affair" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 149). Despite her warnings, her father dismisses her as if she were nothing more than a little disappointed in love for Wickham and upset not to be invited herself, to which Elizabeth replies, full of righteousness and with a sense of propriety now enhanced by having seen her family through the eyes of others:

> "It is not of particular, but of general evils, which I am now complaining. Our importance, our respectability in the world must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character. Excuse me, for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her character will be fixed, and she will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made herself or her family ridiculous; a flirt, too, in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person; and, from the

> ignorance and emptiness of her mind, wholly unable to ward off any portion of that universal contempt which her rage for admiration will excite. In this danger Kitty also is comprehended. She will follow wherever Lydia leads. Vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrolled! Oh! my dear father, can you suppose it possible that they will not be censured and despised wherever they are known, and that their sisters will not be often involved in the disgrace?" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 149)

Mr Bennet feels for his daughter and even tries to reassure her that she and Jane will always be respected and valued, in spite of having silly sisters, but his words still feel like a dismissal, both of Elizabeth's concerns and of society. His wish to be left undisturbed – and being released of one daughter for the summer certainly goes towards that purpose – trumps any concern he might have had about allowing Lydia to do whatever she likes. It could be said that had Elizabeth told him what she knew about Wickham, his reaction and ultimate decision regarding Lydia's sojourn in Brighton would have been different. This is certainly what Lizzy herself believes when Lydia elopes, forgetting that Mr Bennet's role demanded more responsibility over his daughter and concern for the consequences the lack of propriety could bring, regardless of Wickham. His disinterest, then, leads to Lydia and Wickham's elopement and, later, their marriage.

Unlike other characters in nineteenth century fiction who are punished for their misconduct, such as the title character in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*, Lydia is not actively penalised for her elopement. Mary, the middle and often forgotten sister, exposes that the "loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable; that one false step involves her in endless ruin; that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful; and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 184), and this is very much the belief dominating the *status quo* of the period. With Mr Darcy's interference, however, what could have transformed her into a fallen woman, tainting her sisters by association, as Elizabeth had predicted, does not happen, for before it turns into a scandal, Lydia and Wickham become first engaged and then married, and although they are somewhat ostracised in the north of England, Lydia could still be considered as rare example in nineteenth-century literature of a young woman who behaved 'badly' and yet is rewarded for it – if marriage with Wickham can be considered a reward.

Mrs Bennet rejoices in the marriage of her youngest, unaware of Wickham's character and of the amount of money it was required for him to agree to marry her favourite girl: "no sentiment of shame gave a damp to her triumph. The marriage of a daughter, which had been the first object of her wishes since Jane was sixteen, was now on the point of accomplishment", and as if not realising the quiet and hushed nature of the wedding, "her thoughts and her words

ran wholly on those attendants of elegant nuptials, fine muslins, new carriages, and servants" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 197-198). No pomp or circumstance surrounded Lydia's wedding, and her family were not even in attendance, apart from the Gardiners, for it took place in London, and Lydia married from Gracechurch Street. The new Mrs Wickham does visit her parents and sisters before heading to the north of England, where her husband will now be stationed[34], and Elizabeth finds that "Wickham's affection for Lydia […] was not equal to Lydia's for him" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 203). Thus, in spite of her happy ending, Lydia's marriage to Wickham was a solution to an error, not the partnership an Austen heroine often gains at the end – Lydia's mistakes made sure of that.

As mentioned before, marriage was the best alternative for young ladies during this period, and Elizabeth encounters many different examples of marriage throughout her journey. "Had [her] opinion been all drawn from her own family, she could not have formed a very pleasing picture of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort", for "her father, captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 152). Her best friend Charlotte, on the other hand, sacrificed the possibility of love for the reality of material comfort, a practical decision that Elizabeth does not condone, but grows to understand and even respect. Her youngest sister engaged herself to a man whose credibility was low, whose character was tainted, throwing herself in the hands of someone who could not be respected, but also could not respect his wife. Luckily, however, the marriage of her Aunt and Uncle Gardiner was one of love and respect, the one we are led to see as the best one, that for which to aim, as it is founded on respect and equality of character. The Gardiners are the constant foreshadowing to Elizabeth's happy ending, as well as being responsible for bringing her and Darcy together. Austen will do this again in *Persuasion*, where Anne's observations of Admiral and Mrs Croft show that the two of them are equal partners in their marriage, and again theirs is the relationship the protagonist hopes to achieve. Marriage in Austen is more than a happy ending, it is a prize for her heroines, who are rewarded for growing up and into themselves.

3.1.3 The Mistress of Pemberley

Pride & Prejudice is often used as a prime example of the coming of age story. Elizabeth starts full of pride and prejudiced against those whose choices are not the ones she would make;

[34] As part of the marriage settlement, Mr Darcy purchases a new commission in the army for Wickham, stationing him in the north of England, far away from the Bennets.

she "struggles with her narcissism, needs to please others and rebels against the need, suffers from self-conciseness and exaggerated embarrassments; and survives all these feelings to learn humility and restraint as well as the full value of self-assertion" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 116), developing her understanding of the world and of the people surrounding her, gaining fuller knowledge of herself and becoming worthy of a truly happy ending. In order to do that, she must abandon the lure of first impressions, and allow her judgement to be changed and contradicted, while remaining true to herself. This transformation begins with the new arrivals in Meryton, as well as her observations of the unions that surround her, as discussed previously, but it goes on to have deeper ramifications, as will be seen now.

Despite being adamant that one should write about what one knows, as well as avoiding scenes that only included men since she herself did not know what men talked about when women were not present, in *Pride & Prejudice* Austen gives us a male coming of age of sorts too, as Elizabeth is not the only one who must learn: Mr Darcy needs to step off his pedestal and look at people for who they really are, regardless of class or situation in life since those things do not inform character; to be with Elizabeth, he also must learn to take himself less seriously.

Pride & Prejudice is a source of many dichotomies, not only those present in the title. The struggle between town and country, here with the town being brought into the country, is present throughout, as well as class distinctions, and opposing views on marriage and behaviour, some of which were explored in the previous sections. The two protagonists, Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy, are themselves representatives of opposing sides of most arguments, which is one of the reasons why they are two of the of the most memorable characters in literature, as we, as readers, are bound to side with one or the other at different times. Their appeal is also due to, amongst other aspects, their lively relationship, which is fuelled by their differences before they can reach an understanding. Theatre and theatrical references are present in all of Austen's novels, and this particular relationship owes much to the late Georgian theatrical tradition, not only because in it, Austen "celebrates her most upwardly mobile heroine in Elizabeth Bennet, and mocks the almost anachronistic social pride of the well-born Mr Darcy" (BYRNE, 2017, p. 150-151), as well as showing herself to be sympathetic towards the new middle classes, and using the contrasts between 'high' and 'low' characters[35] in order to create amusing situations, but also because their relationship allows parallels to be drawn with another famous couple's, mainly Shakespeare's Beatrice and

[35] That is, the upper class or educated versus the lower class and uneducated.

Benedict, from *Much Ado About Nothing*. According to Byrne, "Austen's first critics admired Elizabeth as a Shakespearean heroine" (BYRNE, 2017, p. 147). Not only that, but the relationship between Jane and Elizabeth could be seen as having been based on countless dichotomic examples also derived from the theatre, in which the "so-called 'lively lady' and her more serious foil (Beatrice/Hero, Rosalind/Celia) were established character types" (BYRNE, 2017, p. 147). Jane and Mr Bingley's relationship is intertwined with that of Elizabeth and Darcy, despite their many differences, and while the solemn Jane is given a more boisterous husband, Elizabeth, in accordance with the tradition that precedes her, chooses a sensible one.

Before they can come to an agreement and put aside the erroneous first impressions, Elizabeth and Darcy go on a journey of learning from one another and from their own mistakes, and even though preconceptions and hurt pride are their first obstacles, class with its vicissitudes is their main one. Their relationship goes through three defining moments, the first is the bad impression he makes at the Meryton Assembly, setting the scene for Elizabeth's dislike of him; the second is his misguided proposal and the explanation letter that follows it; and the last is Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley, when she is finally able to see him for who he truly is. The three acts of their play. The first of these moments was explored in the first section of this discussion, and the other two will be analysed here.

At the beginning of the novel, Mr Darcy sees class in very definitive terms, and associates social position to education and gentility, such as was the norm during this period. He might not have a title, but he is the proud carrier of an ancient name and property, his fortune consists of enormous amounts, and he seems certain of his place in society, both as a landowner responsible for tenants and farmers, and as the head of his family, guardian of his younger sister, and dutiful nephew. At first, his attraction for Elizabeth – as if his words at the Meryton Assembly were nothing but the comments of a grumpy creature who had not even looked at the lady about which they were made – is shadowed by how much he despises her family and their overall behaviour. In spite of what he thinks of the Bennets, however, when Caroline Bingley and Mrs Hurst are abusing Elizabeth and her female relatives, Darcy "could not be prevailed on to join the censure of *her*" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 31). Caroline, a woman whose own family background was trade and whose place in society needed constant reaffirmation, is incessant in her mockery of Darcy's admiration for Elizabeth, highlighting the lady's undesired connections as a means to draw attention to herself. She goes as far as suggesting a possible union between Darcy and Elizabeth, only to ridicule the Bennets, which, despite her best efforts, backfires.

> "I hope," said she, as they were walking together in the shrubbery the next day, "you will give your mother-in-law a few hints, when this desirable event takes place, as to the advantage of holding her tongue; and if you can compass it, do sure the younger girls of running after officers. And, if I may mention so delicate a subject, endeavour to check that little something, bordering on conceit and impertinence, which your lady possesses."
> "Have you anything else to propose for my domestic felicity?"
> "Oh! yes. Do let the portraits of your uncle and aunt Phillips be placed in the gallery at Pemberley. Put them next to your great-uncle the judge. They are in the same profession, you know, only in different lines. As for your Elizabeth's picture, you must not have it taken, for what painter could do justice to those beautiful eyes?"
> "It would not be easy, indeed, to catch their expression, but their colour and shape, and the eyelashes, so remarkably fine, might be copied." (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 35-36)

He might have been somewhat immune to her comments about Elizabeth; however, despite his defence of her in front of Caroline, the latter's words about Elizabeth's connections as well as her sisters and mother's lack of manners certainly make an impact, especially as their indiscretions had most likely been considered by him before. His attraction set aside, he chooses to focus on the Bennets' flaws, and works towards separating Bingley and Jane.

Later in the novel, when he proposes to Elizabeth during her visit to Charlotte, Darcy finds the object of his affection predisposed to dislike him even more, as she had just learned about the role he played in Jane's future happiness. His proposal would probably have been received equally as badly had he been courteous, but his own choice of words did nothing to help his cause, and is reminiscent of Mr Collins before him: even though he spoke well, he did not stick to his feelings for Elizabeth, and "his sense of her inferiority – of its being a degradation – of the family obstacles which had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 123). Elizabeth is aware of the compliment a proposal of marriage by a man such as Darcy represents, and she cannot help but feel flattered by it. She aims for civility in her reply, but her feelings are too strong, and when he accuses her of being uncivil towards himself and his declaration of love, she asks him "why with so evident a desire of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character? Was not this some excuse for incivility, if I was uncivil?" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 124).

In reply, Elizabeth proceeds to accuse him of his misdeeds, his treatment of Wickham being one of them, but nothing compared to his treatment of Jane. Darcy, blinded by rage and disappointment, offends her further by suggesting that her wounded pride is the real reason why she thinks so badly of him, alleging that his deeds might have been overlooked had he been more complimentary towards her and her family, saying that "these bitter accusations might

have been suppressed, had I, with greater policy, concealed my struggles, and flattered you into the belief of my being impelled by unqualified, unalloyed inclination; by reason, by reflection, by everything. But disguise of every sort is my abhorrence"; Darcy is not ashamed of his feelings and thoughts regarding the Bennets, for as he sees it, his status in life justifies his views, for how could Elizabeth "expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections?—to congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 124).

As Paula Byrne suggests, "Elizabeth's most damning condemnation of Darcy is that he hasn't behaved like a gentleman" (BYRNE, 2017, p. 152), as not only was he rude to her and her family, but additionally his very actions towards Jane and Wickham (at this time she still thinks him responsible for Wickham's failures) reflect a lack of consideration for others and disregard for commitments, which is very ungentlemanlike. Elizabeth uses the word gentleman here as it is used predominantly throughout this novel and as it would become more common during the century, as will be seen in the discussion about *North & South*: the word gentleman starts to be used not as a determinant of social class, that is, meaning a landed man member of the gentry, but as an adjective to mean honourable, respectable, and genteel both in manners and education which, despite Darcy's best efforts, he fails to be when he places himself in a morally superior position to others. Since "gentry and professionals were often linked by blood and friendship to the supreme country families; many commercial and gentry families had relatives struggling in lesser trades", meaning that there was "minute discrimination within the elite itself […] but snobbery was not a powerful enough solvent to separate into distinct landed, professional and commercial fractions families who had so much else in common" (VICKERY, 1999, p. 32), it is not surprising that the Bennets are no different; in fact, Mr Bennet married 'beneath' his station, but to his credit, he treats his wife's family with respect, despite all their differences.

More than referring to their social status, however, in his proposal, Darcy was principally alluding to the behaviour of Elizabeth's mother and sisters, denoting that he, too, links class with education – even if he fails to realise when *his* manners leave much to be desired. As he explains in his letter, his reasons to separate Bingley from Jane have little bearing on the Bennets' relatives, but actually is grounded on propriety, something that, as we have seen, is very important to Elizabeth: "the situation of your mother's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison to that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father", he goes on to reassure her that "to have conducted yourselves so as to avoid any share

of the like censure, is praise no less generally bestowed on you and your elder sister, than it is honourable to the sense and disposition of both" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 128-129).

Furthermore, Darcy explains that he had not seen in Jane the attachment that he had witnessed in his friend: "her look and manners were open, cheerful, and engaging as ever, but without any symptom of peculiar regard, and I remained convinced from the evening's scrutiny, that though she received his attentions with pleasure, she did not invite them by any participation of sentiment" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 128); he admits that he could have been mistaken, willing to believe Elizabeth's views on the matter, since she is the one who best knows her elder sister. This statement, however, echoes Charlotte's practical warnings early in the novel, when she and Elizabeth discuss Jane and Mr Bingley, and Charlotte advises that "it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him; and it will then be but poor consolation to believe the world equally in the dark" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 15). Charlotte goes as far as suggesting that even though it is clear that Bingley likes Jane, "he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on", to which Elizabeth replies indignantly that Jane is only following her nature. Charlotte then warns that "he does not know Jane's disposition", foreshadowing the later misunderstanding. Elizabeth's first reading of his letter angers her, "his belief of her sister's insensibility she instantly resolved to be false; and his account of the real, the worst objections to the match, made her too angry to have any wish of doing him justice. He expressed no regret for what he had done which satisfied her; his style was not penitent, but haughty. It was all pride and insolence" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 132); however, "widely different was the effect of a second perusal. How could she deny that credit to his assertions in one instance, which she had been obliged to give in the other? He declared himself to be totally unsuspicious of her sister's attachment", which brought to mind Charlotte's own opinion on the matter. Thus, though Elizabeth could not "deny the justice of his description of Jane. She felt that Jane's feelings, though fervent, were little displayed, and that there was a constant complacency in her air and manner not often united with great sensibility" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 135). Not only that, but his words made her see her family's behaviour through his eyes, and even if the compliment to herself and Jane helped sooth the truth, "the justice of the charge struck her too forcibly for denial, and the circumstances to which he particularly alluded as having passed at the Netherfield ball, and as confirming all his first disapprobation, could not have made a stronger impression on his mind than on hers" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 135). Elizabeth had always been aware of her family's antics, but their place being secured in their small town, amongst their friends and neighbours, she never felt the need to dwell on their

impropriety, despite being always aware of her own. Now, through new eyes, it becomes impossible to ignore Darcy's reprobation, and more importantly, not to agree with them.

His letter does not stop at admitting responsibility for the separation between Jane and Bingley. Darcy also explains his side of his dealings with Mr Wickham. The man whose charm and easy-going manners were so attractive to Elizabeth turns out to be someone quite different behind his openness and smiles. According to Darcy's account, Wickham has changed events in order to suit his narrative, and Elizabeth, prejudiced against Darcy from the start, was more than willing to believe the version that showed the man who had hurt her pride in a bad light. Elizabeth allows herself to think of Wickham with honesty, and not as an ally against a common enemy, finally realising how fooled she was by a pleasing appearance. As she searches her memory for a glimpse of his true character, she struggles; she tries to recollect "some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity or benevolence" that would rescue him from Darcy's attacks, or that would, at least, explain his behaviour, but fails: "she could see him instantly before her, in every charm of air and address; but she could remember no more substantial good than the general approbation of the neighbourhood, and the regard which his social powers had gained him in the mess" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 133-134). Of all his bad deeds, it was his behaviour towards young Georgiana Darcy that most troubled Elizabeth – and presaged Lydia's future. She cannot believe Mr Darcy would lie to her involving his sister and the girl's near ruin, leading her to believe him. As she accepts that he is telling the truth, Wickham's lies become clearer: "she perfectly remembered everything that had passed in conversation between Wickham and herself […]. She was now struck with the impropriety of such communications to a stranger, and wondered it had escaped her before", going as far as realising that despite all his bravado and claims that he had nothing to fear from Darcy, Wickham is the one who avoided the Netherfield ball; she also remembers that before the Netherfield party left the country, "he had told his story to no one but herself; but that after their removal it had been everywhere discussed; that he had then no reserves, no scruples in sinking Mr Darcy's character, though he had assured her that respect for the father would always prevent his exposing the son" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 134). Elizabeth had been so biased against Darcy, that Wickham's behaviour seemed normal to her, charming even. Remembering it after reading Darcy's letter, however, changes her view and opinion of what has passed between them. John Wiltshire (2014) suggests that memory and its use are very important themes in *Pride & Prejudice*, and the novel plays both with the characters' memories and that of the readers'. Having always portrayed a semblance of confidence and self-assuredness, being

forced to look at her actions and prejudgements weakens Elizabeth's certainties, and she finally begins to look at things and people in a different light, and so does the reader.

> How differently did everything now appear in which he was concerned! His attentions to Miss King were now the consequence of views solely and hatefully mercenary; and the mediocrity of her fortune proved no longer the moderation of his wishes, but his eagerness to grasp at anything. His behaviour to herself could now have had no tolerable motive; he had either been deceived with regard to her fortune, or had been gratifying his vanity by encouraging the preference which she believed she had most incautiously shown. Every lingering struggle in his favour grew fainter and fainter; and in farther justification of Mr Darcy, she could not but allow Mr Bingley, when questioned by Jane, had long ago asserted his blamelessness in the affair; that proud and repulsive as were his manners, she had never, in the whole course of their acquaintance […] seen anything that betrayed him to be unprincipled or unjust […]. (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 134-135)

Having always portrayed a semblance of confidence and self-assuredness, being forced to look at her actions weakens Elizabeth's resolve, "thus increasing her vulnerability" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 120), and a thorough examination of her feelings brings about unprecedented pain: "she grew absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think without feeling she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 135). This is one of the most important moments of self-realisation in the novel, in which Elizabeth, now fully informed of the true nature of two men whom she misjudged, finds it possible to look at herself and how her own misguided ideas played their part in constructing the characters of Darcy and Wickham to be such opposites of the truth.

> "How despicably I have acted!" she cried; "I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable mistrust! How humiliating is this discovery! […] But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. *Till this moment I never knew myself*[36]." (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 137)

Perhaps aided by the fact that she is not in her own house, where her memories are surrounded by the safety it provides (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 8), protected by the physical comfort of familiar surroundings, it is easier for Elizabeth to rethink and reconsider previously stablished beliefs, thus questioning her experience and memories of events and conversations. Showing herself to be receptive to accepting her mistakes, Elizabeth is finally able to look at herself, at how her wounded pride affected the way she treated both Darcy and Wickham, how

[36] My italics.

she was susceptible to the latter's lies because she was so prejudiced against Darcy. Her private humiliation is not only at being so wrong, but it also derives from the fact that she always considered herself to be a good judge of character, clever enough to see people's true nature, but now must admit, if only to herself, the error of her ways. Her former anger at Darcy is now turned against herself, and she feels compassion for his disappointed feelings at her refusal to marry him – a decision that she still considers to be the correct one, for even though "his attachment excited gratitude, his general character respect; […] she could not approve him; nor could she for a moment repent her refusal, or feel the slightest inclination ever to see him again" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 138). This moment, after all, is far too personal for Elizabeth to entertain the possibility of marriage, since it is the connection to her own self that needs rekindling. The earlier snippets of awareness Elizabeth had shown regarding her family are elevated to a full break down of their actions and words, and not even her beloved father escapes her informed judgement, for he was always so contented with laughing at them, never exerting to set boundaries for his younger daughters, while her mother, "with manners so far from right herself, was entirely insensible of the evil. Elizabeth had frequently united with Jane in an endeavour to check the imprudence of Catherine and Lydia; but while they were supported by their mother's indulgence" there was no chance of improvement; the girls "were ignorant, idle, and vain" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 138), and Elizabeth's awareness of their lack of propriety is heightened by what it has caused to Jane: it was her own family's behaviour that deprived Jane of the happiness she deserved – Elizabeth no longer blames Darcy for the separation he orchestrated, for she knows anyone would try to protect their friend from making a similar mistake.

Reflexion and time help settle things in Elizabeth's mind. She advises her father not to allow Lydia to go to Brighton but does not disclose her real motives in doing so. When she tells Jane about Darcy's letter and Wickham's true character, Jane, as always, tries to relativize his blame, and Elizabeth jumps to Darcy's defence, claiming that his is all the merit of the story, and that "one has all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 145), words that are, in themselves, a warning against the dangers of first impressions. Jane, then, contradicts her sister, for she "never thought Mr Darcy so deficient in the appearance of it as [Elizabeth] used to do", highlighting once again Lizzy's prejudice. Elizabeth, now more willing to accept her mistakes and make peace with herself, jokes that she "meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to him, without any reason" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 145).

Elizabeth's journey is still ongoing, and it is psychological as well as literal, since her travels to Derbyshire with the Gardiners are responsible for another awakening of feelings and reflexions. Their journey takes them through Lambton, Mrs Gardiner's home town and, more importantly, a place very near Pemberley, Mr's Darcy's home. When the Gardiners show an interest in seeing the place, Elizabeth becomes distressed at the possibility, for she "felt that she had no business at Pemberley, and was obliged to assume a disinclination for seeing it", but after enquiring about the owner's presence and finding that he was absent, she acquiesces, admitting that she felt "a great deal of curiosity to see the house herself". Their arrival at Pemberley opens the third and final volume of the novel, the beginning of the end of Elizabeth's journey, the third act in her play.

Houses are important in Jane Austen's works, and Pemberley is, perhaps, the most memorable of her creations, due to, amongst other reasons, the fact that despite Jane Austen's descriptions are often very sparse, Elizabeth's first view of Pemberley is described in detail and full of admiration, as if the place was a mirror of its owner's personality and taste, for it was a "large, handsome stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance", and like Mr Darcy, "its banks were neither formal nor falsely adorned" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 156). It was love at first sight for Elizabeth, as "she had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste", and she finally realises that "to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 156). The descriptions of the inside of the house are also extremely favourable, again speaking of Darcy's character: the dining parlour "was a large, well-proportioned room, handsomely fitted up"; the prospects from the windows were pleasant, "every disposition of the ground was good; and [Elizabeth] looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with delight" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 156). In every room, the view from the windows was beautiful, and the furniture "was neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less of splendour, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Rosings" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 156). Darcy's home, then, is a testament to his character, and Lizzy realises that both house and man could have been hers. Pemberley is a character in itself, "a natural being whose fate is bound to that of the mountains and of the waters that plough the land" (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 23-24), and it functions as an extra testimony to Darcy's character.

The visit to Pemberley is illuminating for it is Elizabeth's first chance to observe Darcy in his home, where he feels comfortable and knows everyone. Furthermore, she has the chance

to hear other people's opinion of him, especially the housekeeper's, Mrs Reynolds. The old woman adores Darcy, and speaks highly of his person, claiming she does not know "who is good enough for him" and that she "never had a cross word from him" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 158). Mrs Reynolds is all compliments to her master, who is, in her eyes, the best that ever lived, "not like the wild young men nowadays, who think of nothing but themselves. There is not one of his tenants or servants but will give him a good name. Some people call him proud; but I am sure I never saw anything of it. To my fancy, it is only because he does not rattle away like other young men" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 158-159). These words corroborate the information Darcy offered Elizabeth in his letter, and perhaps more so for they were uttered by a servant, often so mistreated by their masters. To her commendation, Mrs Reynolds adds that Mr Darcy is the best of brothers to his younger sister, doing whatever he can to bring her pleasure. The unadulterated praise from a servant, combined with the beautiful house and park, as well as Elizabeth's changing opinion mean that when she admires the portrait of the man himself, there is "a more gentle sensation towards the original than she had ever felt at the height of their acquaintance", for "what praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship!—how much of pleasure or pain was it in his power to bestow!—how much of good or evil must be done by him!" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 159). This man she was getting to know was very different from the one she had conjured up in her head in the beginning of their acquaintance, and his noble character induced her to think of "his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 160).

When Mr Darcy arrives at his property quite unexpectedly, the transformation is completed. Elizabeth feels ashamed and vexed to be there in the first place, but Darcy, despite his awkwardness at this sudden encounter, is gentle and kind not only to her, but also to the Gardiners, who are exactly some of the connections he seemed to despise when proposing marriage to her. Her aunt and uncle might have a background in trade and business, but they are genteel in manners, for which Elizabeth was delighted, as it "was consoling that he should know she had some relations for whom there was no need to blush. She listened most attentively to all that passed between them, and gloried in every expression, every sentence of her uncle, which marked his intelligence, his taste, or his good manners" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 162). Darcy is changed both in her appraisal of him, but also because her words to him after he proposed were heeded: she had never seen him "so desirous to please, so free from self-consequence or unbending reserve" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 168). His change is palpable, but since we are told the

story through Elizabeth's point of view, it should not be ignored that this perceived change is also a consequence of the new lenses through which she is looking at him. Both of them have changed, and been essential in each other's transformation.

Elizabeth meets Darcy's sister, and again she is reminded of Wickham's lies, for Georgiana Darcy is a shy girl, not proud and conceited as he had suggested. The party is invited back to Pemberley, and Elizabeth has another chance to witness the changes in Darcy – which are also changes in herself – and confirm that "the improvement of manners which she had yesterday witnessed however temporary its existence might prove, had at least out lived one day" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 167). These changes excited in Elizabeth astonishment and gratitude, "for to love, ardent love, it must be attributed". Elizabeth grows to realise that she cares for him and his wellbeing, and "she only wanted to know how far she wished that welfare to depend upon herself, and how far it would be for the happiness of both that she should employ the power, which her fancy told her she still possessed, of bringing on her the renewal of his addresses" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 169).

The trip north and the possibility of exploring her new feelings are cut short, however, due to the news of Lydia's elopement. Elizabeth's words to her father have become true, and now all the Bennet sisters might have to suffer the consequences of their youngest's folly, for which they will all be condemned through connection: Lydia's bad behaviour did not speak only of her lack of strong morals, but also of her selfishness, for her deeds will impact on her sisters' futures. Therefore, this is also the moment of full realisation of her true feelings for Darcy, since she believes that Lydia's shame will prevent forever the renewal of his proposal, for how could he ever associate himself with someone whose sister had eloped with his greatest enemy? What Elizabeth does not realise is that Darcy feels guilty for what happened, guilty for having kept secrets about Wickham's true nature in order to protect his family, and takes it upon himself to find the couple and arrange their marriage. Even before she learns of his deeds, which he desired to maintain secret, she begins "to comprehend that he was exactly the man who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes" and they would complement each other, "by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved; and from his judgement, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 199). Once she comprehends the reach of his influence and the pivotal role he played in saving Lydia from ruin, she is humbled for herself, and "proud of him" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 209) for overcoming his prejudice to help her family.

This understanding both of her feelings and of the promise of equality in a match that she believes to be now impossible propel her through Lady Catherine's surprise visit, Elizabeth's final step towards securing her place, knowing her failures and yet having the confidence to stand up for herself. The grand lady comes to Longbourn to confirm that Elizabeth will *not* be marrying her nephew, as if intimidating Elizabeth would guarantee her wishes to be satisfied. Lady Catherine believes herself to be curbing the "upstart pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or fortune". The subject of gentility and class resurfaces when the lady suggests that if Elizabeth married Darcy, she would be quitting the sphere in which she was brought up, to which Elizabeth replies that this is not true, since "he is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 299), and refuses to deny any future connection with Darcy, thus being the means of informing him that, now that prejudices are set aside and wounded prides are healed, there would be hope for a union, if he were to renew his proposal.

Darcy and Elizabeth are thus finally able to unite and speak truthfully to one another, without the veil of the preconceptions that has clouded much of their acquaintance. The renewal of his suit is done in a much different fashion than his first proposal, and it is met by the warmth of her new-found feelings for him. Mr Bennet, finally out of his stupor after Lydia's indiscretion, warns Lizzy that she could not be happy unless she "truly respected [her] husband" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 242), and she reassures him that Mr Darcy is worthy of her respect and her love, enumerating his good qualities and all he has done for the Bennet family.

Elizabeth's marriage to Mr Darcy is more than just a romantic happy ending. As mentioned before, Jane Austen rewards her heroines, and this is the ultimate reward: Elizabeth becomes the mistress of Pemberley, rich enough that she would have the means to help her family were her father to pass away, as well as gaining a husband who is her equal in respectability and sense. The novel "legitimizes the reader's romantic wishes by humbling the heroine's vanity. At the level of the plot, power is taken from egotism and given to love" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 201). Furthermore, the marriage that crowns the final felicity of the characters rests "not on the young woman's subordination or professions of innocence but on her developed awareness, her growing knowledge of reality" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 121), as well as on her husband's improvement and renewed consciousness of what it truly means to be a gentleman. Elizabeth rejects the innocence and coyness that society demands from her, and it is her "irreverence that makes it possible a private language" between Darcy and herself, transcending society's expectations (BYRNE, 2017, p. 165). Not only that, but having achieved maturity, Elizabeth's new way of perceiving herself and the world around her "affects her way

of being as well as of acting. She finds a personal answer to the large questions implicit in the superficialities of her social world: particularly, the tempting superficialities of marriage" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 115). By losing some of the self-assuredness that defined her character at the start of the novel, Elizabeth improves and grows.

The novel closes with an overview of the principal characters, how Lydia and Wickham were still living above their means, depending on the kindness of Mrs Darcy and Mrs Bingley for their extra expenses; how the two sisters lived near each other and far enough away from their mother so as to be happy with their situation; how Elizabeth pushed Darcy towards a reconciliation with Lady Catherine, despite the latter's hatred of her, and the great lady was eventually persuaded to visit them at Pemberley, despite considering it to be "polluted" by Elizabeth's presence as its mistress. The most important bond formed by the newlyweds, however, was that with the Gardiners, for "Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them; and they were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing her into Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 250). Darcy and, especially, for the purposes of this dissertation, Elizabeth overcome their differences without erasing them, learning to be less proud and to put less value on first impressions; she is rewarded with the security of Pemberley and the influential position that comes with being the lady of such an estate, signalling the development of a society in which gentility is rewarded with money, and not the other way around: Pemberley becomes the home of a tradesman's niece.

3.2 "As She Realized What Might Have Been, She Grew to Be Thankful for What Was"

> ***"How am I to dress up in my finery, and go off and away to smart parties, after the sorrow I have seen today?"***
> Elizabeth Gaskell, ***North & South***

For a good portion of the twentieth century, Elizabeth Gaskell was somewhat forgotten by readers as well as academic circles, though she knew a modicum of fame during her lifetime, being included in the literary circles and making a living out of her writing. In the past decades, however, there has been a renewal in the interest surrounding her works in both spheres, which is not surprising since Mrs Gaskell was a prolific author, and her main works all tell stories of women who were very much products of the society in which they were created. What is

possibly her most renowned novel, *North & South*[37] is the focus of my analysis in this section. I will look at its protagonist, Margaret , and her journey from a genteel lady from the idyllic south of England to an almost impoverished woman in the industrial north. I will explore her relationship with the Higgins family, working class people who teach her much about the conditions of factory workers and how to navigate her new town. These changes will culminate in Margaret's new outlook on life, and I will follow her through the loss of her parents, her trip back to her previous home only to find that it is no long where she belongs, as she grows to appreciate Milton and its people. Like Elizabeth Bennet before her, Margaret must relinquish her prejudice, as well as her pride in her own position, in order to grow and be able to see beyond her own surroundings and troubles.

3.2.1 Northbound

The Margaret who starts *North & South* shares many similarities with *Pride & Prejudice*'s Elizabeth Bennet, insofar as they are both beautiful, both outspoken and clever, and most importantly, they are both very certain of where they belonged and what is expected of them – even if they do not always comply. At the start of the novel, we find Margaret helping her cousin Edith with the preparations for the latter's wedding. The two young women are good friends but very different, and whilst Edith can think of nothing but balls and dresses, Margaret's more down-to-earth attitude sees her pondering about where life is taking her now that she will leave her aunt's house in London's Harley Street, to go back to her parents' home, her beloved Helstone: it was "where her bright holidays had always been passed, though for the last ten years her aunt Shaw's house had been considered as her home. […] It was a happy brooding, although tinged with regret at being separated for an indefinite time from her gentle aunt and dear cousin" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 8). The separation from the people and place she knew so well was bittersweet as, despite being sad to leave them behind, it gave her pleasure to think that she would reassume the post of the only daughter of the parsonage.

Whilst all in the Shaw household are focused on Edith's wedding and the joy it brings, since it is a good match financially as well as being a love match, Margaret cannot help but constantly reminisce about the past, about her time there and how this period of her life is due to end in a few days. In that house she had had her first experience of leaving her parents' home, leaving the countryside in order to start learning about the ways of the sophisticated members of the big city; she had arrived "all untamed from the forest, to share the home, the play, and

[37] *North & South* was first published in 1855; however, the text I will use throughout this analysis is from the Norton Critical Edition, 2005.

the lessons of her cousin Edith" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 10). The nursery, where she spent much of the past decade, had once seemed dark and dim, and Margaret remembered well what her first night there had felt like, recollecting "the first tea up there – separate from her father and aunt, who were dining somewhere down below […]. At home – before she came to live in Harley Street – her mother's dressing-room had been her nursery; and as they kept early hours in the country parsonage" and her meals had always been taken in the company of her parents, as a member of the household rather than separated from it. These first memories in the place she would grow to call home were still fresh, and she allowed herself to feel sorry for the little girl who "hid her face under the bed-clothes in that first night; and […] was bidden not to cry by the nurse, because it would disturb Miss Edith"; she remembered then

> how she had cried as bitterly, but more quietly, till her newly-seen, grand, pretty aunt had come softly upstairs with Mr Hale to show him his little sleeping daughter. Then the little Margaret had hushed her sobs, and tried to lie quiet as if asleep, for fear of making her father unhappy by her grief, which she dared not express before her aunt, and which she rather thought it was wrong to feel at all after the long hoping, and planning, and contriving they had gone through at home, before her wardrobe could be arranged to suit her grander circumstances, and before papa could leave his parish to come up to London, even for a few days. (GASKELL, 2005, p. 10)

At an early age, she was already aware of what was expected of her, as her coming to London had been so thoroughly planned. Unsurprisingly, eighteen-year-old Margaret had grown attached to the nursery and house, to its inhabitants and the life she got used to living while there. Being made to leave her childhood home for a house in the city must have been a difficult experience for a young girl, and it also meant that the childhood home would become idealised in the dreams and expectations of the woman Margaret is becoming, as it was associated with the past, with happy summer holidays, and with her beloved parents – not unlike Fanny Price's impressions and expectations of her family home. From the start, Margaret talks about Helstone as if she were describing the perfect retreat from the chaos and novelty of the capital: "'Oh, only a hamlet; I don't think I could call it a village at all. There is the church and a few houses near it on the green – cottages, rather – with roses growing all over them"'; when challenged by Henry Lennox about the provinciality and veracity of her description, she affirms that she is "not making a picture. I am trying to describe Helstone as it really is", and she follows with a passionate description of the almost ethereal-like place, saying that "all the other places in England that I have seen seem so hard and prosaic-looking, after the New Forest. Helstone is like a village in a poem – in one of Tennyson's poems" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 13). Nothing can compare to her first home, the place to which she is bound to return, and Margaret's

sentiments echo the general disposition towards the countryside during the nineteenth century, elevating it to an impossible standard. Her love for Helstone is important throughout the novel, playing a part in how she relates to her new abode after being made to leave it behind, for its idealisation "as a home which provides an assured sense of place is undermined by the disruptions and demands of modern society which make constant change inevitable" (LAMBERT, 2013, p. 43). Margaret struggles to explain Helstone to her friends and acquaintances in London, for it is so perfect in her eyes, and so different from the reality to which they are used, that she knows she will fail in her object; furthermore, being her childhood home, her private haven even in her private thoughts, it constitutes a "real house of memory", which Bachelard defines as "the houses to which we return in dreams, the houses that are rich in unalterable oneirism, do not readily lend themselves to description. To describe them would be like showing them to visitors" (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 13), and, considering Margaret's later discomfort at having someone from her London life arriving at Helstone, it is easy to understand that her difficulty in talking more about it comes from a sense of protection over this place that inhabits such as special position in her very constitution.

Margaret's situation at the start is not that different from Fanny Price's in *Mansfield Park*, or even Jane's in *Jane Eyre*, for she too spends most of her early life with relatives, not her own parents, almost a ward to her aunt Shaw; she is saved from the other two's fate because her parents are still alive, she is not an orphan, therefore having a place where to retreat when her presence with her relatives was no longer needed or wanted. Not only that, but Margaret, unlike Fanny or Jane, is always treated as an equal at the Shaw's household, her inferior means not an obstacle to the friendship she develops with her cousin and aunt, who later comes to her comfort when she most needs it.

Commentary on the characters' choice of partner seems to be a constant in the novels analysed here, and it is not different with Gaskell's work. Mrs Shaw and Mrs Hale wedded men of very different means, the first "deliberately marrying General Shaw with no warmer feeling than respect for his character and establishment, was constantly, though quietly, bemoaning her hard lot in being united to one whom she could not love" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 9), whilst the second married for love; "dearest Maria had married the man of her heart, only eight years older than herself, with the sweetest temper, and that blue black hair one so seldom sees. Mr Hale was one of the most delightful preachers she had ever heard, and a perfect model of a parish priest" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 16). Like in many of the novels produced during this period, a financially imprudent match has consequences such as not being as comfortable and leisured as one had hoped, allowing bitterness and shame to develop. Mrs Hale does not attend Edith's

wedding; even though nobody else seems to understand her motives fully, her husband was "aware that all his arguments in favour of a grey satin gown, which was midway between oldness and newness, had proved unavailing; and that, as he had not the money to equip his wife afresh, from top to toe, she would not show herself at her only sister's only child's wedding" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 16): Mrs Hale is ashamed to appear wearing an old dress that has the power to reflect the family's financial situation. The two sisters do not understand each other's plight, for while Mrs Hale is self-conscious of her dress, Mrs Shaw, who had married a much older man she could not love, had "forgotten all grievances except that of the unhappiness arising from disparity of age in married life", thus believing her sister's life to be perfection, since Mrs Hale married for love, what else could she "have to wish for in this world?" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 16). These marriages and their outcomes are, as often in the literature of the time, examples from which the heroine must derive her own conclusions in order to decide on how she should proceed with her own life choices.

Mrs Hale not having gone to London, then, means that Mr Hale was the one to bring Margaret home, just as he was the one who delivered her to the Shaw's residence all those years ago. Margaret is sad to leave, but happy to be going home, "to be at hand to comfort [her father] and mamma" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 17). Even though she was not in fact an only child, when her brother Frederick[38] joined the navy and involved himself in a mutiny, never returning to his proper place as the son of the house, all the filial responsibility had fallen on Margaret. Since his departure and Margaret's years in London, her place in the heart of her family, especially her mother's, was always second best, never living up to "poor Frederick", thus staining her relationship with Mrs Hale: "Margaret yearned to re-unite the bond of intimate confidence which had been broken […], and strove by gentle caresses and softened words to creep into the warmest place in her mother's heart" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 82), but was not as successful as she had hoped, for Dixon, Mrs Hale's maid, stayed her principal confidant.

According to Lambert, "Gaskell uses descriptions of domestic interiors to 'place' Margaret Hale socially and to chart her journey from a sheltered childhood to an adult appreciation of a wider social and cultural environment" (LAMBERT, 2013, p. 92). Back in Helstone, the outside of the house is pleasant and full of delights to Margaret, fulfilling the expectations she had developed throughout the years: the weather was warm, the forest was

[38] Margaret's older brother was a sailor who, since after being involved in a mutiny had had to avoid the country, for his arrest was likely to be waiting for him on British soil. Amongst the Hales Frederick had become "poor Frederick", and due to her mother's ill health, talk of him was limited, therefore Margaret had never learned the full extent of his involvement in said mutiny. Despite his apparent misdeeds, his absence was in detriment to the happiness of the Helstone inhabitants.

beautiful, and she mingled with it and its people, becoming part of that ecosystem of this fairy-tale place.

> She made hearty friends with them; learned and delighted in using their peculiar words; took up her freedom amongst them; nursed their babies; talked or read with slow distinctness to their old people; carried dainty messes to their sick; resolved before long to teach at the school where her father went regularly every day as to an appointed task, but she was continually tempted off to go and see some individual friend—man, woman, or child—in some cottage in the green shade of the forest. Her out-of-doors life was perfect. (GASKELL, 2005, p. 18)

Not the same could be said for her life indoors, however. Her mother, bitter after years of living what she saw as a life of hardship as the wife of the parish priest, seemed "discontented with their situation; thought that the bishop strangely neglected his episcopal duties, in not giving Mr Hale a better living; and almost reproached her husband because he could not bring himself to say that he wished to leave the parish, and undertake the charge of a larger" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 18). Margaret observed her father shrinking more and more at every complaint from her mother, as he probably felt it was beyond him to ask for more, while his wife's dissatisfaction was perceived as a reflection of a failure in his duties. Margaret felt caught in between inside and outside, between her mother and her father. This constant discontentment and "marring of the peace of home" were not what Margaret had prepared for when she left Harley Street. She had been aware that she would have to give up many of the comforts she found in her aunt's home, and there was a part of her that delighted in it, for "her keen enjoyment of every sensuous pleasure was balanced finely, if not overbalanced, by her conscious pride in being able to do without them all, if need were"; however, despite having been her mother's interlocutor regarding the Helstone situation while she had been spending her summers there in the past, due to "the general happiness of the recollection of those times, she had forgotten the small details which were not so pleasant" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 19). Mrs Hale was unhappy, everything was a reason for complaint, including the very location of their house, as she saw it as "one of the most out-of-the-way places in England" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 19). Little did she know that her dissatisfaction with Helstone was about to end, but that what was to come would be even harder on herself and her constitution.

Despite its difficulties, Helstone and its surroundings still carry an ethereal element. Distant from London and from corruption, in the outskirts of a forest, Margaret's home is still very dear to her heart, still idyllic, for she was at an age "when any apprehension, not absolutely based on a knowledge of facts, is easily banished for a time by a bright sunny day, or some happy outward circumstance" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 22). The place is "carefully set up to

represent a pastoral condition as apparently immune to change as any that could be imagined" (BODENHEIMER, 1979, p. 283). The first disturbance to the idyll is the arrival of Henry Lennox, Edith's brother-in-law, who comes from London to visit Margaret and see the beauties of Helstone for himself. The city comes to the countryside and disturbs its balance, and in this case, his presence is responsible for disturbing Margaret's peace of mind.

Henry Lennox's arrival means having to admit that there is trouble in paradise, that things are not as perfect as Margaret had described to him when they were both in Harley Street. Like Margaret's preference for the outside and its beauties, he too notices the striking contrast between the happy prospect of the gardens and surroundings and the darkness of the house as the "very brightness outside made the colours within seem poor and faded. The carpet was far from new; the chintz had been often washed; the whole apartment was smaller and shabbier than he had expected, as back-ground and frame-work for Margaret, herself so queenly" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 23). More than being a new set of eyes through which to scrutinise the reality of the Hales, Mr Lennox brings with him conflict in his very presence, for a visitor of his calibre must be treated as such, which sends Mrs Hale into a stream of abuse towards their very situation as they cannot offer the hospitality he deserves in such short notice, adding to her shame and regret. It falls to Margaret to entertain their guest as best as she can. While Lennox's intentions become a little clearer to the reader – he is interested in Margaret – she seems oblivious to it, or rather, she seems to be making an effort to ignore his interest until it is not there anymore. He figures that "a regular London girl" would understand the meaning behind his words and actions, thus making Margaret different, but it could be argued that she simply does not want to trouble herself with the idea that she had awakened such feelings. In fact, as soon as she realises he is about to propose, "she wished herself back with her mother – her father – anywhere away from him", and a moment later, "the strong pride that was in her came to conquer her sudden agitation, which she hoped he had not perceived". As the narrator suggests, "of course she could answer, and answer the right thing; and it was poor and despicable of her to shrink from hearing any speech, as if she had not power to put an end to it with her high maidenly dignity" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 28). Margaret, who has just returned to her childhood home, cannot bear the thought of leaving it, thus she tries to ignore Lennox as best as she can, for his very intentions would culminate in her leaving her home and her parents.

Faced with his undesired words, however, "she made a strong effort to be calm; she would not speak till she had succeeded in mastering her voice", delicately but firmly replying that she cannot give him the answer she knows he expects, to which he then inquires if she loves another, as if she needed a reason beyond not sharing his feelings. Though she cannot

accept him, she worries about his reaction and hopes they will still be friends despite it. He makes her feel even worse by suggesting that his very proposal was a feat, since he is “a man not given to romance in general – prudent, worldly, as some people call me – who has been carried out of his usual habits by the force of a passion – well, we will say no more of that”, not only that, he also seems to feel sorry for himself and blame her, claiming that, despite his rationality, “in the one outlet which he has formed for the deeper and better feelings of his nature, he meets with rejection and repulse. I shall have to console myself with scorning my own folly” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 28). His words show how little he understands of Margaret’s character, for she is speechless and not a little annoyed when faced with his self-pity for it highlights “all the points of difference which had often repelled her in him; while yet he was the pleasantest man, the most sympathising friend, the person of all others who understood her best in Harley Street. She felt a tinge of contempt mingle itself with her pain at having refused him” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 28). Not only that, but his presumption of her acceptance echoes his predecessors in the other novels analysed here, men who believe they can have the object of their desire, that a proposal should be both flattering and accepted.

More than not wishing to marry Henry Lennox, Margaret did not feel ready for such a step with anyone: “Margaret felt guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 32). Despite being of a marriageable age for the period, eighteen-year-old Margaret does not even like to think of herself as the object of male admiration, she is still too much of a child in her own view, too connected to her childhood home and to her mother and father – after all, she has just returned to them, house and parents, after a long absence; she has barely had time to settle. Furthermore, Spacks suggests that adolescence is, for the nineteenth-century woman, one of the only opportunities of any semblance of freedom, for though “marriage is the ‘normal’ conclusion, the orthodox way for a girl to declare herself adult”, during adolescence, she is “released from the restrictions of childhood, not yet experiencing those of wifehood and maternity” (SPACKS, 1975, p. 114), and Margaret is not willing to let go of this so-called freedom and apparent absence of responsibility.

Much like other heroes and heroines before her, however, she is called to action when her father delivers the news that the family would be relocating to the north of England. Her father’s doubts regarding his position in the Church of England – a representation of the crisis of faith mentioned in chapter one – leads him to wish to abandon his post and move as far away from the life he had been used to as possible, going to a place where he “can earn bread for my

family. Because I know no one there, and no one knows Helstone, or can ever talk to me about it" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 36).

North & South touches on religious issues in a couple of instances, and Mr Hale's decision to leave his post is the first and more prominent of them. This decision does not seem to have been made lightly, even if it was made secretly, as his wife and daughter only learn of his final choice when it is already made, rather than being able to contribute to this resolution. His reasons are never made overtly clear, as he claims he still believes in God, but it is his role that he is unable to fulfil. Rosemarie Bodenheimer affirms that "later readers with the whole novel in hand have criticized the treatment of Mr Hale's defection from the Church of England as unmotivated, or without serious consequences, or as a mere pretext for the family's removal to Milton-Northern" (BODENHEIMER, 1979, p. 283), but Gaskell could have chosen from a myriad of other reasons for the relocation if religious issues were not relevant for her portrayal of his character and of the world. He decides to leave the idyll of Helstone, his life-long duties and his certainties, to move to the industrial north, a place of change, where the worship of money and progress comes before that of any god. The fact that Gaskell does not delve deeper into his reasons is "not a weakness but a placement of emphasis: his irrevocable change, its statement of doubt in face of traditional order, his cowardice and ineptitude at facing its social consequences are the issues she attends to" (BODENHEIMER, 1979, p. 284). There was a general discontent with many forms of religion in the nineteenth century, and Mr Hale's departure from his Church echoes that animosity. While still firm in his belief in God, he starts doubting some of the dogmas and questions the practices. In a way, this is also Gaskell's way to criticise the Anglican Church while pressing forward Unitarian doctrine.

Moving to Milton[39] means that Margaret gains a new place within her family. Her father's ineptitude to deal with the changing world translates into his being weakened and unsure of himself while her mother is chronically indisposed, so it falls to their only present child to deal with most of the bureaucracy and responsibility of the relocation. Her first and most harrowing task is to break the news of her father's decision to her mother, indirectly admitting that he is a coward for not doing so himself, but claiming that he "cannot bear to give pain", as well as acknowledging that he knows "so well your mother's married life has not been all she hoped – all she had a right to expect – and this will be such a blow to her, that I have never had the heart, the power to tell her. She must be told though, now" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 35). Mr Hale is aware that informing her mother of the move will cause distress to Margaret,

[39] Most likely a fictionalised version of Gaskell's own Manchester.

but he does not go back on his wishes, and he even arranges to leave the house on the day his wife will be informed of what is to happen to the family. Here, and in many other instances throughout the novel, Mr Hale resembles Mr Bennet insofar as he too delegates responsibility as if it were not his problem, a trait that many of Gaskell's male characters, and indeed many of the characters created by the three novelists studied in this work, seem to share: the inability to fulfil what society expects of them as men and providers leads them to skew away from responsibility in order to avoid further failure: "anxiety is [Mr Hale's] dominant emotion, antithetical to cultural expectations of his role as a man and as a member of the clergy which would require him to act with authority and decision" (LAMBERT, 2013, p. 89).

Since she is not happy about the move, Margaret finds it difficult to break the news to her mother. After gathering the courage Mr Hale did not possess, she tells Mrs Hale about the move and how soon it is set to happen, and her mother's first reaction is disbelief, for she assumes she would have been told something of this magnitude before it was decided. At this moment, "it came strongly upon Margaret's mind that her mother ought to have been told: that whatever her faults of discontent and repining might have been, it was an error in her father to have left her to learn his change of opinion, and his approaching change of life, from her better-informed child" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 42). Despite those feelings, however, Margaret struggles to accept her mother's criticism of her father's decision for she "knew that his very reserve had originated in a tenderness for her, which might be cowardly, but was not unfeeling". For Mrs Hale, the change of scene was not exactly such as she had hoped, for despite her constant complaints about Helstone, Milton would, in her view, certainly be even worse for her health with its "smoky air […] all chimneys and dirt" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 43). Mrs Hale, much like her daughter, also thinks herself superior to tradespeople, and Margaret reassures her that they "shall have little enough to do with them" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 44).

From the start of the novel, even before the news of the relocation, Margaret shows herself to be prejudiced against tradesmen, claiming, during a conversation with her mother that she liked "all people whose occupations have to do with land; I like soldiers and sailors, and the three learned professions, as they call them. I'm sure you don't want me to admire butchers and bakers, and candlestick-makers, do you, mamma?" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 19). Therefore, learning that she is about to be a permanent resident of an industrial town in the north of England, awakens even more worries about having to associate with people she does not deem to be genteel; moreover, taking the reins of the move also means that she will be in close contact with such tradesmen and lower class people in her dealings. Her father tells her that he intends to become a private tutor of classics to young men in Milton, and Margaret shows her prejudiced

views once again, enquiring “what in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or literature, or the accomplishments of a gentleman?” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 37). A product of her social class – especially due to the interference of the London upbringing –, Margaret sees the new middle classes as intruders to the order of things; furthermore, she detests “all she had ever heard of the North of England, the manufacturers, the people, the wild and bleak country” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 38).

Despite Margaret’s misgivings, they were to go very soon, and our protagonist mourns, once again, the loss of her home and of a certain lifestyle. Since she feels responsible for many of the tasks and chores related to the move, as well as being, perhaps, the only one capable of carrying them out, her daily life takes a dramatic turn; only a few months before, “all the decisions she needed to make were what dress she would wear for dinner, and to help Edith to draw out the lists of who should take down whom in the dinner parties at home. Nor was the household in which she lived one that called for much decision”. Margaret fixes the start of these changes on the date of Mr Lennox’s visit, for that was when she first had to make a serious choice, placing her in a position of adult in charge of her future, and since then “every day brought some question, momentous to her, and to those whom she loved, to be settled” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 48). In these first chapters of the novel, Margaret is often described as placid or languid, leading a life of leisure in the pastoral background of Helstone and its environs. The news of the move to Milton sets her in motion.

Margaret places herself in charge of the plans for the move, trying to make the best of the situation, at least insofar as her parents were concerned. She finds a bathing-place for her mother and her loyal servant Dixon to stay while she and her father look for a new place for them to live in Milton, even though there does not seem to be any house in town that meets their needs and taste. Finally, all is arranged and the last day in Helstone is upon them. Margaret’s childhood abode, without the furniture and the prospect of being a home for those leaving it, seems alien and distant, the “rooms had a strange echoing sound in them,—and the light came harshly and strongly in through the uncurtained windows,—seeming already unfamiliar and strange” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 49). The servants wondered how Margaret could be so restrained in her feelings about leaving, and assumed “that she was not likely to care much for Helstone, having been so long in London” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 50):

> They could not understand how her heart was aching all the time, with a heavy pressure that no sighs could lift off or relieve, and how constant exertion for her perceptive faculties was the only way to keep herself from crying out with pain. Moreover, if she gave way, who was to act? Her father was examining papers, books, registers, what not, in the vestry with the clerk; and when he came in, there were his

> own books to pack up, which no one but himself could do to his satisfaction. Besides, was Margaret one to give way before strange men, or even household friends like the cook and Charlotte? Not she! (GASKELL, 2005, p. 50)

Resolute not to betray her true emotions, Margaret faces the move with determination and restraint, but her sadness at leaving Helstone is ever present: she is leaving the place that has been the home for her hopes and dreams, the refuge, even if in thought, from the hustle and bustle of the life in London, and this time her parents are not staying behind to welcome her back. Nonetheless, this is what her father wants, and there is no time for dwelling too much on what might have been. On quitting Helstone, the place no longer seemed so strange, it "looked more homelike than ever", and a "sting at Margaret's heart made her strive to look out to catch the last glimpse of the old church tower at the turn where she knew it might be seen above a wave of the forest trees; but her father remembered this too, and she silently acknowledged his greater right to the one window from which it could be seen" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 53). Their path took them through London, a no man's land in between their idyllic life in Hampshire and their future in a manufacturing town in the north of England; there, they do not feel as if they belong, lost amongst the hustle and bustle of the busy capital: "every one they saw, either in the house or out in the streets, appeared to be hurrying to some appointment, expected by, or expecting somebody" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 54). There was no room there for their mourning of their past life, and they do not even seek the Shaws' residence in order to see familiar faces, for they know that "London life is too whirling and full to admit of even an hour of that deep silence of feeling" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 54). Their mourning is not to be shared, and they must put it aside in order to continue on their journey.

Finally, they reach the north of the country, and the differences spotted in the scenery do not go unnoticed. Their first stop in the north is Heston, and straightaway it becomes clear the place had "a character of its own, as different from the little bathing-places in the south of England as they again from those of the continent", everything seemed to be more purposeful: "the country carts had more iron, and less wood and leather about the horse-gear; the people in the streets, although on pleasure bent, had yet a busy mind. The colours looked grayer – more enduring, not so gay and pretty". Margaret noticed, too, a difference in attitude, for whereas in the south of England, shopmen would "lounge a little at the door" when not employed by patrons or business of some sort, "here, if they had any leisure from customers, they made themselves business in the shop […]" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 54). In *North & South*, the words *lounge* and *languid* appear several times associated with the life in the south, and are even employed to describe Margaret's disposition and attitude before the move; relocating to the

north of the country, where everything moves fast and is perpetually changing, sets her in motion. It is not surprising, then, that one of the first things she notices upon arrival is that constant movement is the new order of the day.

Margaret is the one to accompany her father in looking for a house in Milton while her mother stays in Heston and waits for their decision to be made. It is a new role for our protagonist, administrating the household funds, making plans based on their financial situation and standing next to her father as if she were the lady of the house, while her mother convalesces in a nearby town. She and Mr Hale go to Milton in search for a new home, and the weather seems to match Margaret's feelings, since "for several miles before they reached Milton, they saw a deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon in the direction in which it lay. It was all the darker from contrast with the pale gray-blue of the wintry sky" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 55). The first descriptions of Milton-Northern are reminiscent of London, but with "hopeless streets of regularly-built houses, all small and of brick" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 55), and the weather unfavourable; the mils and factories dominated the landscape, their smoke covering the town; "people thronged the footpaths, most of them well-dressed as regarded the material, but with a slovenly looseness which struck Margaret as different from the shabby, threadbare smartness of a similar class in London" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 56).

She is in charge of their search for a house, propelling her father when he falters, full of action when he stops; Margaret jokes that she is "overpowered by my genius of management" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 57), suggesting solutions to make the best of their new living situation. They decide upon taking the house in the suburb of Crampton, and if the novel's descriptions of the small size of the house, or the overly decorated walls were not enough to infer the situation of the place, its name makes it obvious: the Hales' new house is nothing like Helstone, it is cramped and small, as the name of the region suggests. They try to make the best out of the situation, but the change in their station is harshly felt. Milton feels like a new country, where the habits of the inhabitants were as different as possible from all that Margaret had known before. The industriousness of the town was translated into the action of its people, and it all feels alien to our protagonist, who will now have to learn new ways, both literal, as she explores her new surroundings, and social, as she will have to interact and socialise with people whose station in life she had always considered far below her own.

3.2.2 "And I too change perpetually"

Life in Milton starts and the women struggle to adjust. Margaret once again has to put on a brave face to help her mother settle; alongside Dixon, they "worked unpacking and

arranging, but everything inside the house still looked in disorder; and outside a thick fog crept up to the very windows, and was driven in to every open door in choking white wreaths of unwholesome mist" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 61). Mrs Hale's dreary questions of "Oh, Margaret! Are we to live here?" did not offer any reward to her efforts. Even the fog in London, often a motive of complaint, is now favourably compared to the fog and industrial fumes of Milton, for in London, at least, they had friends behind the fog, while here they were "desolate" and alone. Mrs Hale, whose health complaints were prominent before now finds more reasons to despair of her situation, since "there was no comfort to be given. They were settled in Milton, and must endure smoke and fogs for a season; indeed, all other life seemed shut out from them by as thick a fog of circumstance" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 61). They all must adjust to their new surroundings, despite its many difficulties, some more successfully than others. Life in Milton was different from what Mrs Hale had been accustomed in Helstone, where, despite her constant dissatisfaction, she was "in and out perpetually into the fresh and open air", whereas in Milton "the air itself was so different, deprived of all revivifying principle"; furthermore, "the domestic worries pressed so very closely, and in so new and sordid a form, upon all the women in the family", that there was good reason to fear that her mother's health might be becoming seriously affected" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 81). Not only that, but it is plausible to consider that Mrs Hale's increasing dissatisfaction is somatised, and her ailments grow proportionally to her displeasure, especially since she had no choice in the move and their new situation, probably feeling ignored and left out by a husband whose saving grace was his love for her.

Mr Hale, unsurprisingly, seems to be the one for whom the change is easiest – perhaps because it was, after all, his choice to move up north. He had led a calm and quiet life for many years, and for him, "there was something dazzling […] in the energy which conquered immense difficulties with ease; the power of the machinery of Milton, the power of the men of Milton, impressed him with a sense of grandeur, which he yielded to without caring to inquire into the details of its exercise". However, while Mr Hale is impressed by the activity and general purposefulness of the inhabitants of Milton – especially of the male inhabitants –, Margaret struggles with her new town, she "went less abroad, among machinery and men; saw less of power in its public effect, and, as it happened, she was thrown with one or two of those who, in all measures affecting masses of people, must be acute sufferers for the good of many" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 64). Despite going through something of a culture shock, it falls to Margaret, and after the move it continues to be her responsibility, to deal with practical aspects of their new life, such as finding someone to help Dixon with her duties, which takes her out of the house to go "up and down to butchers and grocers" in an attempt to find help, but to little

success, since most people would rather have “the better wages and greater independence of working in a mill”, to Margaret’s despair.

Walking around Milton felt like the polar opposite of the walks to which she had been accustomed all her life, and she found it was challenging to go out unaccompanied at first, especially since while living with Mrs Shaw she had become used to the lady’s ideas of propriety, which involved a footman accompanying her and her cousin Edith “if they went beyond Harley Street or the immediate neighbourhood. The limits by which this rule of her aunt’s had circumscribed Margaret’s independence had been silently rebelled against at the time: and she had doubly enjoyed the free walks and rambles of her forest life” in Helstone. But those stolen moments were in the safety of her well-known and beloved former home, in the quiet of the countryside. Thus, “it was a trial to come down from such motion or such stillness, only guided by her own sweet will, to the even and decorous pace necessary in streets” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 66). She is no longer fully protected by the norms of propriety that dominate society in the south of England, thus having more freedom, as well as practical need, to explore the world outside. This freedom, in an unknown place, is accompanied by apprehension, and not as desired as it had been in London.

Not only did Margaret have to learn how to get familiar with this new type of freedom, she also had to learn the consequences of being new, and different, and, most of all, alone in a new place. Near where the Hales lived, there was a thoroughfare for the factory people, for they lived near mills and factories, and “until Margaret had learnt the times of their ingress and egress, she was very unfortunate in constantly falling in with them”. These working-class people were loud and animated, and their comments and jokes were often made in detriment of those who “appeared to be above them in rank or station. The tones of their unrestrained voices, and their carelessness of all common rules of street politeness, frightened Margaret a little at first” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 66), but soon she learned that being spoken to or commented on by the women did not bother her half as much as when work*men* did it:

> The girls, with their rough, but not unfriendly freedom, would comment on her dress, even touch her shawl or gown to ascertain the exact material; nay, once or twice she was asked questions relative to some article which they particularly admired. There was such a simple reliance on her womanly sympathy with their love of dress, and on her kindliness, that she gladly replied to these inquiries, as soon as she understood them; and half smiled back at their remarks. She did not mind meeting any number of girls, loud spoken and boisterous though they might be. But she alternately dreaded and fired up against the workmen, who commented not on her dress, but on her looks, in the same open, fearless manner. She, who had hitherto felt that even the most refined remark on her personal appearance was an impertinence, had to endure undisguised admiration from these outspoken men. But the very outspokenness marked their innocence of any intention to hurt her delicacy, as she would have

> perceived if she had been less frightened by the disorderly tumult. Out of her fright came a flash of indignation which made her face scarlet, and her dark eyes gather flame, as she heard some of their speeches. Yet there were other sayings of theirs, which, when she reached the quiet safety of home, amused her even while they irritated her. (GASKELL, 2005, p. 66)

Their behaviour was unlike anything she had encountered before, but it was to become the norm in her new life, and she struggled to make sense of it all until their blurred faces, all mixed up in one other, gained definition when she finally struck up a real conversation with a man and his daughter, setting them apart from the others at the same time as humanising the whole. Margaret had been out with Mr Hale in the fields that surrounded the town, and when he left her to return to Milton on business, she started to make her way back on her own, trying to get comfortable with her new surroundings. On the road, she met her new friends, and gave the girl, Bessy, the flowers she had gathered. This act of kindness prompted the girl's father, Nicolas Higgins, to start a conversation with her, inquiring where she was from, to which she replied that she came from Hampshire "a little afraid of wounding his consciousness of ignorance, if she used a name which he did not understand". To her surprise, he comes back with "'that's beyond London, I reckon? And I come fro' Burnleyways, and forty miles to th' North. And yet, yo see, *North and South has both met and made kind o' friends in this big smoky place*[40]*"*" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 69). Their conversation is pleasant to Margaret, who has no friends in Milton, and she implies she would like to pay them a call. Higgins had none of the smoke and mirrors that abound in the capital, and his answer is straightforward, telling her he does not like having strangers in his house, but then he takes pity on her and adds, "'Yo're a *foreigner*[41], as one may say, and maybe don't know many folk here, and yo've given my wench here flowers out of yo'r own hand;—yo may come if yo like'" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 68). Higgins is welcoming in his own way, and even though Margaret finds it strange at first, she begins to gain an understanding of him and the people in Milton. As soon as she makes these new acquaintances, her outlook changes, and "from that day Milton became a brighter place to her. It was not the long, bleak sunny days of spring, nor yet was it that time was reconciling her to the town of her habitation. It was that in it she had found a human interest" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 69). People make a place, and being attuned with the people is a certain way to gain admiration for the place. Upon meeting the Higgins family, Margaret's views on Milton improve a little, and when walking along the crowded narrow streets, "she felt how much

[40] My italics.
[41] My italics.

interest they had gained by the simple fact of her having learnt to care for a dweller in them" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 92).

When she encounters Bessy again, walking along the streets of Milton, Margaret accompanies the girl to her house, fulfilling her earlier promise to visit it. Bessy is ill and not a little despondent about her future, talking of dying and the end of her pain. Margaret finds the words hard to hear, kindly admonishing the girl to remember God, who gave her life and made it what it is. Nicolas Higgins, wary of religion and not finding comfort in it, reprimands Margaret for pouring religious ideas into his daughter's head. A practical man, whose life is much harder than anything Margaret could imagine, Higgins has no time for religion and, as he understands it, its empty promises, explaining that when he sees the world "bothering itself wi' things it knows nought about, and leaving undone all the things that lie in disorder close at its hand – why, I say, leave a' this talk about religion alone, and set to work on what yo' see and know. That's my creed. It's simple, and not far to fetch, nor hard to work" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 84). Despite their differences, Margaret becomes a common visitor at the Higgins house, and her friendship with Bessy grows. She tells the girl about Helstone and its natural delights, so different from industrial Milton, and in turn, she becomes the interlocutor to Bessy's ponderings about her own life, about how trapped she feels, saying that when she goes "for an out, I've always wanted to get high up and see far away, and take a deep breath o' fulness in that air. I get smothered enough in Milton, and I think the sound yo' speak of among the trees, going on for ever and ever, would send me dazed; it's that made my head ache so in the mill" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 93). Bessy dreams of the life Margaret used to lead, of a day of leisure not working her hours away at the inclement mill, without the illness[42] that overtakes her body. There was nothing that could be done to remedy the girl's situation; Bessy started working very young, her mother had passed away, her father spent money trying to learn and better himself, and her sister was meant to study; at nineteen, the noises of the factory are imprinted in her ears, the fluff of the cotton taking over her lungs. Margaret is faced with the reality of being the same age as this girl who is in the cusp of death, all due to their difference in birth and situation, and even though she disliked having had to move to Milton, the contrast between her life and Bessy's is enough to make her revaluate her situation, the lucky position in which she finds herself socially and even financially, and the injustice that someone so full of potential and

[42] Bessy makes references to "fluff", whose presence is her lungs is responsible for her condition, a very common occurrence amongst factory workers, as she clarifies that the little bits of cotton that fly off and "fill the air till it looks all fine white dust. They say it winds rounds the lungs and tightens them up. Anyhow, there's many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into a waste, coughing and spitting blood, because they're just poisoned by the fluff" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 94).

dreams like Bessy should see her life dwindle for lack of options. As Lambert suggests, Bessy works as a sort of narrative double for Margaret, her opposite and yet so similar; “her journey towards death mirrors Margaret’s journey towards maturity, and it is the link with Bessy and her family that acts as the catalyst for changing Margaret’s perceptions, values, and assessment of the world around her” (LAMBERT, 2013, p. 56). The lessons Margaret learns from Bessy, as well as from Nicolas Higgins, are essential for her coming of age.

Bessy and her working-class family are not the only ones with whom Margaret has to interact, for the most important families in her new town have all made their fortunes from trade and have emerged as the new ruling class in that area, being considered the appropriate company for the Hales – even if looking down on them. One of her father’s best and most committed students was Mr Thornton, the same person who also helped them find lodgings and made Mr Hale’s transition to Milton much smoother. However, his relationship with Margaret could not boast of such a happy start, for when they met, she was fully in charge of the family’s search for a house, and acted the part: upon his arrival, he was struck by her, having previously believed Mr Hale’s daughter to be a young girl, but being faced with the “straight, fearless, dignified presence habitual to her. She felt no awkwardness; she had too much the habits of society for that. Here was a person come on business to her father; and, as he was one who had shown himself obliging, she was disposed to treat him with a full measure of civility” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 57). Even though he “was in the habits of authority himself”, it is Margaret who takes charge of that first encounter, and all that is left for him to do is admire her presence and beauty, which, from the very first, seemed to him as different to the ladies he knew: “Margaret could not help her looks; but the short curled upper lip, the round, massive up-turned chin, the manner of carrying her head, her movements, full of a soft feminine defiance, always gave strangers the impression of haughtiness” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 59). This first meeting sets the tone for many of their interactions in the time to come, and while Thornton admires Margaret, he correctly believes her to think herself above him; while she, on the other hand, saw him as “nothing remarkable – not quite a gentleman” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 60), for he was nothing more than a tradesman in her eyes, regardless of his powerful position or achievements. Her father reprimands her in her use of the word, claiming Thornton is a manufacturer, but Margaret sees no difference between the two for she applies the word to “all those who have something tangible to sell”, but acquiesces to not refer to Thornton as a tradesman. Little did she know that this man would become a presence in their lives, and her idea of separation of class and social position was something reserved for her indulgent past.

To Margaret's chagrin, of all of Mr Hale's students, Mr Thornton was the one who showed most interest and dedication, he was one of the oldest pupils and Mr Hale's favourite. Margaret's father got "into the habit of quoting his opinions so frequently, and with such regard, that it became a little domestic joke to wonder what time, during the hour appointed for instruction, could be given to absolute learning, so much of it appeared to have been spent in conversation" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 64). "The Victorian middle class recognized that knowledge was power. If they forgot this fact for a moment, they were reminded of it through their Protestant religion, their politics, and their business dealings" (MORGAN, 2007, p. 36), and Mr Thornton, aware of the shortcomings in his formal education, looks to improve himself through education and learning the classics with Mr Hale. However, it is not done with his mother's approval, since Mrs Thornton does not think the study of the classics is the way forward for men such as her son, believing that classics "may do very well for men who loiter away their lives in the country or in colleges; but Milton men ought to have their thoughts and powers absorbed in the work of to-day" and she furthers her single-minded argument by claiming that "having many interests does not suit the life of a Milton manufacturer. It is or ought to be enough for him to have one great desire, and to bring all the purposes of his life to bear on the fulfilment of that" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 104). In spite of his deepest respect for his mother, Mr Thornton still sees value in studying, as well as enjoying Mr Hale's company.

While Margaret looks down on John Thornton for his background and source of income, his mother looks down on her for her lack of inheritance and possible interest in her son's money, for "this Miss Hale comes out of the aristocratic counties, where, if all tales be true, rich husbands are reckoned prizes" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 72). When Mr Thornton is invited into their Crampton house for dinner, as a friend not a student, he and Margaret are forced to spend the evening in each other's presence. Margaret, once again assuming the position of the lady of the house, takes care that their guest is looked after properly; she serves the tea and Thornton admires her features, despite seeing haughtiness on them once again. Mr Hale and his friend are mostly left to themselves and their conversation and debates, though Margaret is in the room, until Mr Thornton talks about his pride in being part of such a developing town and trade, defending his work and his ethics, claiming that he would rather "be a man toiling, suffering – nay, failing and successless – here, than lead a dull prosperous life in the old worn grooves of what you call more aristocratic society down in the South, with their slow days of careless ease. One may be clogged with honey and unable to rise and fly" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 77), clearly criticising the way of living of the upper gentry and aristocracy. Margaret feels, then, compelled to speak her mind and defend her beloved South, whose calm and lack of

adventure is balanced, in her opinion, by having less suffering, and she adds that “in the South we have our poor, but there is not that terrible expression in their countenances of a sullen sense of injustice which I see here. You do not know the South, Mr Thornton” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 78). In return, he immediately accuses *her* of not knowing the North. He goes on to defend the North, its people, and their way of doing business and living. A true capitalist and self-made man, Mr Thornton believes that the possibility of social mobility is one of the beauties of the new emerging society, that a lowly workingman has the chance to raise himself to becoming a powerful master, “that, in fact, everyone who rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our ranks; it may not be always as a master, but as an overlooker, a cashier, a book-keeper, a clerk, one on the side of authority and order” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 78).

Having made something of himself, Mr Thornton believes that anyone can do the same through hard work and resilience. He is the first character, in the four novels analysed here, that not only expresses such views, but believes them true because of his own story. As fallacious as his reasonings are, his success is undeniable and a representation of the new middle-classes that gained strength in the nineteenth century. His own story of capitalist success begins with the death of his father when he was a teenager, his subsequent abandoning of his studies in order to help support the family, thus having to “become a man”. He credits Mrs Thornton with much of his success, since he had “such a mother as few are blest with; a woman of strong power and firm resolve”, and as Morgan suggests, during this period, there was a strong emphasis on the “importance of a mother’s influence on her offspring, particularly on boys who were to be the citizens of the future. A strong moral influence in the home was held to be vital to producing men with moral courage and strength” (MORGAN, 2007, p. 39); women, being responsible for the moral upbringing, were seen as essential for the outcome of their children’s success. Young John Thornton then found employment in a draper’s shop, and every week, the family’s income was fifteen shillings, out of which both him, his mother, and his sister had to be kept. Mrs Thornton was a very good household manager, and due to her capital administration, she made her son set aside “three out of these fifteen shillings regularly. This made the beginning; this taught me self-denial. Now that I am able to afford my mother such comforts as her age, rather than her own wish, requires, I thank her silently on each occasion for the early training she gave me” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 78). Like many of his peers, Thornton does not see his success as good fortune, but as “the habits of life which taught me to despise indulgences not thoroughly earned”, and that the suffering Margaret claimed to see in the inhabitants of Milton “is but the natural punishment of dishonestly-enjoyed pleasure, at some

former period of their lives. I do not look on self-indulgent, sensual people as worthy of my hatred; I simply look upon them with contempt for their poorness of character" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 79). Despite Mr Hale's protests that he did, in fact, have some basic education in life, which most likely facilitated his way through the early stimulation of his intellect, Mr Thornton is adamant that all have the same chances as long as they can read and write.

After this expose, when he is about to leave, Mr Thornton shakes hands with her parents, and starts for Margaret to say goodbye in a similar way, as "it was the frank familiar custom of the place; but Margaret was not prepared for it. She simply bowed her farewell; although the instant she saw the hand, half put out, quickly drawn back, she was sorry she had not been aware of the intention" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 79). Unaware of her feelings, he saw only the haughtiness and proud continence, and even her father, after Thornton's departure, accused her of prejudice against a former "shop boy". Margaret defends herself: it was not his admittance of having been a shop boy that she disliked, it was everything else in his speech. She resented his words about Milton as if it were the grandest and most important place in the world – not unlike her feelings for Helstone, but this she cannot see – as well as his "quietly professing to despise people for careless, wasteful improvidence, without ever seeming to think it his duty to try to make them different,—to give them anything of the training which his mother gave him, and to which he evidently owes his position, whatever that may be" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 80). Thus, Margaret makes it clear to her father that she does not like Mr Thornton, despite acknowledging that he is a "remarkable man" for all that he has achieved. Mr Hale feels compelled to defend his favourite pupil, and furnishes details to the man's story: not only did he have to work to keep his mother and sister after his father committed suicide, but he also had to work towards paying the many debts left by him; "long after the creditors had given up hope of any payment of old Mr Thornton's debts […], this young man returned to Milton, and went quietly round to each creditor, paying him the first instalment of the money owing to him" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 81). His decency, however, was not enough to persuade Margaret of his kindness, and still tainted by prejudice, she does not relinquish her dislike of him.

When Margaret visits the Thorntons, returning Mrs and Miss Thornton's visit to Crampton Street[43], we get a glimpse at their truly middle-class house, close to the mill on Marlborough Street: the drawing room lacked life, as "it seemed as though no one had been in

[43] The social practice of visiting amongst ladies was very common during our period, and as soon as someone pays a call, the persons visited must endeavour to return it. Since Mrs and Miss Thornton had visited the Hale ladies upon their arrival in the city, it was now Margaret's turn to return the "favour", in a well-practiced dance of social convention.

it since the day when the furniture was bagged up with as much care as if the house was to be overwhelmed with lava, and discovered a thousand years hence. […] Everything reflected light, nothing absorbed it". Margaret was struck by the "evidence of care and labour, but not care and labour to procure ease, to help on habits of tranquil home employment; solely to ornament and then to preserve ornament from dirt or destruction" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 103), exemplifying the standards of cleanliness admired by the middle classes, and upholding the domestic ideal that "was a crucial component in a series of representations that supported both the middle class's economic power and its legitimation of this position" (POOVEY, 1998, p. 10). Margaret, always the country girl, "wondered why people who could afford to live in so good a house, and keep it in such perfect order, did not prefer a much smaller dwelling in the country, or even some suburb; not in the continual whirl and din of the factory", unable to understand settling for this particular way of life when they had sufficient means to lead a different one, and unable to see how the house was a fair representation of its inhabitants, especially Mrs Thornton, for her choice of the "spending of her days in this cold, uncomfortable room reflects the iron control she has had to take over her life. It is a public statement of her moral rectitude" (LAMBERT, 2013, p. 101).

Despite knowing more about Thornton, Margaret cannot help but enter yet another argument with him, almost as if continuing their previous one: this time, their subject is workers' strikes, and they naturally have diverging views on it. The very idea of a strike is unfamiliar to Margaret, who never had the occasion to witness such an action; she worries it will make the place rough, and Mr Thornton suggests that Milton is not made for cowards, that to live there, one must be brave and face all sorts of adversity, while she claims she will do her best, but that she does not know "whether I am brave or not until I am tried; but I am afraid I should be a coward". Thornton then suggests that is due to her place of birth and upbringing, for "south country people are often frightened by what our Darkshire[44] men and women only call living and struggling" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 107). He explains that trade has not been what they had expected, and the workers are feeling the effects of it, while the masters "see the storm on the horizon and draw in our sails. But because we don't explain our reasons, they won't believe we're acting reasonably. We must give them line and letter for the way we choose to spend or save our money" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 107). Margaret does not comprehend why the workers cannot be told of the situation, cannot be made to understand it, for as she sees it, there

[44] A reference to the county where Milton is situated. An evocative name referring to the industrial strength of the place, dealing not only with mills and factories, but also with the coal industry. It is certainly a dark place for Margaret, accustomed to the brightness of the south.

are two classes "dependent on each other in every possible way, yet each evidently regarding the interests of the other as opposed to their own: I never lived in a place before where there were two sets of people always running each other down" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 109). Margaret is accused by Thornton of being in cahoots with the workers, who, he claims, have been putting ideas in her mind about the situation. He believes that his interests "are identical with those of my workpeople, and vice-versa" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 110). Thornton goes on to express further his views on the relationship between masters and their "hands"[45], using the analogy of the parent-child relationship proposed by Margaret and furthered by Mr Hale – that a parent should become a friend to their child, explaining things to them, and not an autocrat – and claims that the masters "would be trenching on the independence of the their hands […] if we interfered too much with the life they lead out of the mills" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 111). Despite being a master by excellence, prioritising the mill over his workers' wellbeing and often over his own, Thornton, having been a lowly worker himself in the past, claims to value their freedom as much as he does his own: "I value my own independence so highly that I can fancy no degradation greater than that of having another man perpetually directing and advising and lecturing me, or even planning too closely in any way about my actions", and he furthers his argument by suggesting that "this is a stronger feeling in the North of England than in the South". Thornton does not see the impact of his business choices on his workers' lives outside of the mill, he does not think of them as human beyond the working hours, he does not imagine their family and their squalor, characteristics which Margaret, since her friendship with the Higginses, cannot ignore. Once again, they come to no agreement regarding their views.

While Margaret and Mr Hale have been acclimatising to Milton, each in their way, Mrs Hale's health is deteriorating. When Margaret learns of her mother's condition, she leaves the house in order to clear her head, and "the length of a street – yes, the air of a Milton Street – cheered her young blood before she reached her first turning. Her step grew lighter, her lip redder"; crucially, "she began to take notice, instead of having her thoughts turned so exclusively inward" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 120-121). This is a sign of our heroine's transformation, no longer only able to look inside to what is known and safe, no longer only willing to think about her own problems, no longer sheltered. Margaret is living the life of a foreigner in the north, as Higgins insists on calling her, and that condition allows her to look at

[45] Thornton often refers to himself and his peers as "masters", and to his workers as "hands", a commonly used term at the time. He even strives to use it less in front of Margaret, for he knows she "does not like to hear men called 'hands', […] though it comes most readily to my lips as the technical term, whose origin, whatever it was, dates before my time" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 110).

the world around her with new eyes. The conversations with Thornton, whom she disliked so much at first, give her glimpses of how the masters think, and her friendship with Nicholas and Bessy Higgins allows her a peep into the lives of those less fortunate, so similar to her and hers in their human condition, so different in the luck of their birth and social situation. Her time with the Higgins family, especially, has broadened her horizons, and her friendship with Bessy, reminiscent of Jane Eyre's relationship with Helen Burns, does her good, for as she says, "I came here very sad, and rather too apt to think my own cause for grief was the only one in the world. And now I hear how you have had to bear for years, and that makes me stronger" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 127). She witnesses their family going through troubled times, with Bessy's condition and the strike, and yet ploughing through. Their strength teaches Margaret to be strong and to focus beyond herself and her problems.

Margaret can no longer think of parties and dresses with the pleasure those things had given her before. She is too conscious of the injustice and of the sufferings of others to enjoy herself fully at a ball or social event. These new feelings are put in check when they are invited to dinner at the Thorntons, mid-strike. Not only that, but Mrs Hale's health condition means that Margaret feels she should not be idle at a party, but help her mother at home: "the experience with her dying mother forces Margaret to become 'a hand' herself as she must stand in the kitchen and do the ironing, and provides the opportunity for her to wake up to the working world of Milton and move outside of herself, taking note of the consequences of economic depression" (HOTZ, 2000, p. 171) – despite her strong prejudice, Margaret now finds herself in a position in which her work is valuable and necessary too, and in this way the novel compares the work of men, going out and winning the bread, to that of women, keeping house and caring for the ill.

Bessy is the one who encourages her to go to the dinner party, but only upon promising that Margaret will tell her everything about it afterwards. Whilst with Bessy, she witnesses the different type of community formed in the North, in which neighbours and friends look out for each other as if they were a real family. Higgins, being one of the enticers of the strike, takes responsibility for his workmates, represented by Boucher and his struggle to keep up with the strike while his family starves (GASKELL, 2005, p. 143).

Navigating between two worlds, that of the workers and that of the masters, and aware of the difficulties of the strikers, Margaret does not take much pleasure from dressing for dinner at the Thorntons: she could not help comparing this "dressing of hers to go where she did not care to be […] with the old, merry, girlish toilettes that she and Edith had performed scarcely more than a year ago. Her only pleasure now in decking herself out was in thinking that her

mother would take delight in seeing her dressed" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 145). At the Thorntons, Margaret finds it all too ostentatious, she "felt the number of delicacies to be oppressive; one half of the quantity would have been enough, and the effect tighter and more elegant", especially in the light of the strike and the business difficulties, "but it was one of Mrs Thornton's rigorous laws of hospitality, that of each separate dainty enough should be provided for all the guests to partake, if they felt inclined. Careless to abstemiousness in her daily habits, it was part of her pride to set a feast before such of her guests as cared for it" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 146). After all, this semblance of abundance was how the middle classes wanted to be perceived in order to solidify their place in that society, and Mrs Thornton is cautious to present herself and her son in the best possible light.

The dinner party throws Margaret amongst manufacturing men, their wives and relatives of the town. She sees Thornton amongst his people, and the hesitation in his manner she had seen when he visited their Crampton house was gone: here, in his house and amongst his peers, "there was no uncertainty about his position. He was regarded by them as a man of great force of character; of power in many ways. There was no need to struggle for their respect" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 149). Like Mr Darcy in *Pride & Prejudice*, Thornton is more himself in the comfort of his home, surrounded by men who look up to him, than he had been previously. A surprise to herself, Margaret realises that now that she is involved with the matters of the town, she finds enjoyment in the dinner party and in the conversations around the table. Being amongst the most important men of Milton forces her to consider the very notion of what it means to be a gentleman, for those Milton men see themselves as genteel, but are not what she would have called so. As Thornton explains, he takes it "that 'gentleman' is a term that only describes a person in his relation to others; but when we speak of him as 'a man,' we consider him not merely with regard to his fellow-men, but in relation to himself" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 150), thus confronting Margaret with the idea that being a gentleman means more than simply to be of a genteel – landed – background. Living in Milton challenges Margaret's views and beliefs, even if her default reaction is to resist the change. Later in the novel, when Frederick Hale meets Mr Thornton and thinks he is a "shopman", Margaret jumps to his defence, calling him a gentleman, and "a very kind friend" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 236).

Transiting between sumptuous dinner parties amongst the manufacturers and the squalor of the strikers allows Margaret to get acquainted with both realities, caught in-between but not trapped: able to navigate, to move, to listen to both sides and to draw her own conclusions. Not only that, but her very situation in life is no longer that of the idle gentlewoman, for moving to Milton and losing a great portion of their income means that the

Hales must make do for themselves, and Margaret is now managing the household and its many chores. Perhaps the culmination of this in-betweenness happens when Margaret sees her chance to influence Mr Thornton by coaxing him to go down and explain himself to the strikers, encouraging to treat them as equals, telling him to speak to the "workmen as if they were human beings. Speak to them kindly. Don't let the soldiers come in and cut down poor creatures who are driven mad. […] you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, *man to man*[46]!" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 161), which culminates in her feeling responsible for placing him in a difficult situation and putting herself between him and the strikers, a physical manifestation of her situation, defending him in detriment of herself, her position and even her reputation.

3.2.3 "Bear up brave heart!"

In the course of the novel, Margaret goes through many life changes, from leaving her aunt's house and returning to her childhood home, to then being forced away from it because of her father's decision; moving to a different county, amongst people whose habits she does not know or even understand. Perhaps the greatest of these changes, however, is the loss of her parents, first her mother, and then her beloved father; in fact, the second half of the novel is littered with deaths, and they all play a part in the protagonist's development. It is during these trying events that we witness some of Margaret's fragility, otherwise hidden by happier circumstances. From the moment she returns to her parents' house, in the beginning of the novel, Margaret assumes a lot of the lady of the house's responsibilities, mainly due to her mother's constant health complaints. Margaret takes the reins of the move to Milton, too, from breaking the news to Mrs Hale, to helping her father find a place for them to live. She becomes the lady of the house in all but title, responsible for the household management, including looking for and hiring new servants, as well as for entertaining guests and maintaining their overall position in this new place, which means that many of her more intense feelings and attitudes are often put aside in order to exercise her duties.

Amongst all the new situations and responsibilities, Margaret has to deal with new emotions and points of view. The man for whom, at first acquaintance, she had nothing but prejudice starts showing signs of being more interesting and thoughtful than she had assumed. Thornton is a good friend to Mr Hale and helpful towards Mrs Hale, offering small comforts to

[46] My italics.

the older lady due to her illness – and perhaps due to his feelings for Margaret. Most of their encounters include animated discussions on the differences between North and South, masters and men, man and gentleman; all through which Margaret starts learning about him, and even admiring the great man that he is, despite herself and their diverging opinions. When she rescues Mr Thornton from the mob of workers, she believes herself to be doing something quite innocent, hoping that her womanly presence will convince them to refrain from using violence, but to no avail, and those who witness her act, including Mr Thornton himself and his mother and sister, see it differently: they assume this is the action of a woman in love, for why else would she put herself in danger for him? While she does not think much of her defence of him – "it was only a natural instinct; any woman would have done just the same. We all feel the sanctity of our sex as a high privilege when we see danger" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 176) –, for Mr Thornton it works as enough encouragement to believe her to be in love, and lead him to offer her his hand in marriage. Much more intense than her first proposal by Mr Lennox, Thornton claims to owe his life to her, and his declaration of love strikes as true and powerful, for as he says, he is "a man. I claim the right of expressing my feelings"; but Margaret takes offence: she claims that he seems to believe her behaviour was a special act between the two of them, and "that you may come and thank me for it, instead of perceiving, as a gentleman would – yes! a gentleman […] that any woman, worthy of the name of woman, would come forward to shield, with her reverenced helplessness, a man in danger from the violence of numbers" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 177). Despite refusing his proposal, Margaret tries to part from Thornton in friendly terms; his reaction, dominated by the pain of unrequited love is to explain that he will keep on loving her, but will refrain from showing it. Mr Thornton is a man of great feeling, and unlike the anger of Mr Lennox in being refused, Margaret believes to have seen tears in Thornton's eyes as he leaves Crampton Street.

Lennox's proposal brought about in her the indignant feeling of being so grown up as to attract such attentions, whereas Mr Thornton's declarations, though unexpected, were of a different nature: "in Lennox's case, he seemed for a moment to have slid over the boundary between friendship and love; and the instant afterwards, to regret it nearly as much as she did, although for different reasons. In Mr Thornton's case, as far as Margaret knew, there was no intervening stage of friendship"; nonetheless, this difference in their approach and in how they dealt with her refusal struck Margaret, leading her to realise the intensity of each's feelings. Her relationship with Thornton so far had been nothing but oppositions,

> Their opinions clashed; and indeed, she had never perceived that he had cared for her opinions, as belonging to her, the individual. As far as they defied his rock-like power

> of character, his passion-strength, he seemed to throw them off from him with contempt, until she felt the weariness of the exertion of making useless protests; and now, he had come, in this strange wild passionate way, to make known his love! For, although at first it had struck her, that his offer was forced and goaded out of him by sharp compassion for the exposure she had made of herself,—which he, like others, might misunderstand—yet, even before he left the room,—and certainly not five minutes after, the clear conviction dawned upon her, shined bright upon her, that he did love her; that he had loved her; that he would love her. And she shrank and shuddered as under the fascination of some great power, repugnant to her whole previous life. (GASKELL, 2005, p. 179)

The men to whom she had been accustomed in the past did not show such strength of feeling, and she struggles to come to terms with Mr Thornton's earnest declarations. Even in his passion, his truthfulness acts as a contrast to the smoke and mirrors of London society. Throughout the novel, John Thornton is never afraid of speaking his mind, even when his opinions are sure to find many who dislike them. His honesty is a mark of his character, so when he protects Margaret from the enquiry that questions her presence at the train station when a man died, he covers for her, despite having seen her there with an unknown man, and even before learning that it was her brother, Frederick, whose presence in the country was secretive – a secret that Thornton kept unknowingly – because it could have put the Hales in danger.

Thornton's proposal is the start of a series of events that change Margaret's life further. The death of Bessy is the first loss Margaret experiences, and it is a shock despite the girl's long illness, since her youth should have been on her side. Bessy was the first to welcome Margaret to Milton, to seek her friendship, and to show her how people lived in the north of England, especially factory workers. Lambert argues that in Gaskell's fiction, young women rarely die, but are often plagued by some sort of illness; and in the case of Margaret and Bessy, "the boundary between illness and death is further blurred by [their] exchange of 'gifts' […] after Bessy's death. Margaret gives Bessy's sister one of her own nightcaps for Bessy to wear in her coffin, and Margaret chooses a small drinking cup of Bessy's as a memento" (LAMBERT, 2013, p. 55). As mentioned before, Bessy works as Margaret's double in the narrative, someone who is very similar to her, but whose life and circumstances could not be more distinct, and the "exchange of these personal items makes psychological and emotional sense in the context of the novel, but can also be seen as symbolic, in that Margaret has to 'die' and 'reborn' in the physical world as Bessy believes she herself will die and be reborn in the spiritual world" (LAMBERT, 2013, p. 56). Margaret's importance amongst the Higgins family is clear when she is the one to break the news of Bessy's death to Nicholas. Not only that, but while he is mourning, Margaret invites him to her house, to speak with her father to help him find solace in his grief. The very act of inviting this working-class man into her home is telling

of how much Margaret has changed: he might work in a factory, but to her, he is her friend's father, a man she respects regardless of his background. Mr Hale, who always "treated his fellow-creatures alike: it never entered into his head to make any difference because of their rank" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 207), tries to help Higgins to find faith in order to feel comforted after his daughter's death, but Higgins is adamant that religion is not for him, since God has never been present when he asked for His help, and he compares the hard life he has led to the lives of leisure people lead elsewhere, claiming it is much easier for those people to believe. Their discussion moves from matters of faith to matters of business, as the strike is an added pressure on Higgins's consciousness, since he was one of its enticers. Before he leaves, "Margaret the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 215), a demonstration of the bringing together of differences, one of the main themes of the novel.

Margaret's first encounter with death is not easily forgotten, and her life seems so different from what she had known only a few months previously. A letter from Edith brings this feeling home further, for her cousin's worries and everyday life seem trivial now that Margaret has seen true suffering and pain. She longs for a day of Edith's life: "her freedom from care, her cheerful home, her sunny skies. If a wish could have transported her, she would have gone off; just for one day. She yearned for the strength which such a change would give – even for a few hours to be in the midst of that bright life, and to feel young again" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 216-217); Edith's letter has the effect of making Margaret feel quite old, especially compared to her cousin – who was the same age as her, but lived an extremely different life after years of sharing the same experiences under the same roof – and little did she know that her trials were far from over. However, at the same time that moving to Milton and its repercussions have caused much pain to those involved, it has also seen a change in them, and Margaret, before so prejudiced against anyone who was not what she considered genteel, now starts to adopt what her mother calls "factory language". Margaret explains that if she lives "in a factory town, I must speak factory language when I want it. […] I could astonish you with many a great many words you never heard in your life" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 2018). Learning the local slang and feeling that she is entitled to use it since she lives there is a sign that Margaret has started adapting, accepting that she is part of Milton, and thus, Milton is also a part of her, reflected on the very way she speaks.

Mrs Hale, whose permanent dissatisfaction with her lot is reflected throughout the novel, becomes especially sensitive as she feels her own end approaching. Her health has not improved, and being aware of her future, she asks Mrs Thornton, despite the cold relationship

between them, to look out for Margaret after she dies. It is an appeal that hopes to tap into Mrs Thornton's womanly decency and maternal heart, since mothers were thought to be fundamental in guiding their children morally, especially their daughters, throughout life, in order for them to lead a decent and good existence. Despite resisting this request, Mrs Thornton agrees to be a friend to Margaret, as best as she can since she dislikes her for being the one who broke her son's heart, and promises to call her out if ever Margaret is acting in such a way as begs disapproval: "If ever I see her doing what I believe to be wrong – such wrong not touching me or mine, in which case I might be supposed to have an interested motive – I will tell her of it, faithfully and plainly, as I should wish my own daughter to be told" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 222). Later in the novel, when Margaret is spotted with Frederick at the train station late at night, Mrs Thornton, not knowing his true identity, tries to advise her against walking around with a man at that time, claiming that she has "a duty to perform", since she promised Mrs Hale that "as far as my poor judgement went, I would not allow you to act in any way wrongly, or […] inadvertently, without remonstrating; at least, without offering advice, whether you took it or not" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 287). Unfortunately for Mrs Hale's plan and Mrs Thornton's good intentions, Margaret's pride, as well as her innocence in this case, mean that she is the unwilling recipient of Mrs Thornton's words, and the two of them end up arguing. Nevertheless, the altercation does make Margaret reflect on her feelings and actions.

When Frederick, the Hale's son, now a Roman Catholic[47], comes back for the briefest of visits to see his mother before she passes away, his very presence is a balm to Margaret, who, for the first time in many weeks dared to relax a little; not only that, but her brother's presence also allows her to realise just how much "responsibility she had had to bear, from the exquisite sensation of relief which she felt in Frederick's presence". Frederick seemed to understand Mr and Mrs Hale so well, and "went along with a careless freedom, which was yet most delicately careful not to hurt or wound any of their feelings. He seemed to know instinctively when a little of the natural brilliancy of his manner and conversation would not jar on the deep depression of his father, or might relieve his mother's pain" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 227), allowing Margaret to understand the amount of pressure to which she had been subjected without the support of her brother. His visit is timely, and he is present when Mrs Hale passes away. Despite not having been there throughout her illness, Frederick grieves intensely, while Margaret, assuming the role of the lady of the house once again – and this time in actuality since her mother is gone –,

[47] Frederick is engaged to a Spanish woman, and thus has converted to her faith. Margaret considers this to be the reason why he did not seem to care much for his father's abandonment of the Anglican Church post, since Frederick himself has left behind the religion in which he had been raised (GASKELL, 2005, p. 236)

comforts him and their father: regardless of her own sadness and overwhelming grief, “she had no time to give way to regular crying. The father and brother depended upon her; while they were giving way to grief, she must be working, planning, considering. Even the necessary arrangements for the funeral seemed to devolve upon her” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 230). It is up to her to think of distractions for the men, “little nothings” to say at breakfast to spare their feelings. She is more in control of the situation and of the expression of her feelings than it was assumed from ladies of her class during this period. Margaret insists in attending the funeral, even though the practice, amongst the middle and upper classes, was that women did not go, allegedly because they were likely to make a scene and embarrass themselves and their relatives. She claims that “women of our class don’t go, because they have no power over their emotions, and yet are ashamed of showing them. Poor women go, and don’t care if they are seen overwhelmed with grief” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 244). As Hotz suggests, this claim indicates that “emotionality is coded both as lower class and female”, meaning that self-control is the value of middle-class men[48] and is a power “attributed both by and to them in a greater degree than to working-class men or women of any class” (HOTZ, 2000, p. 172). Margaret’s wish to attend the funeral, then, is marking her independence from both the expectations of class and those of gender.

Mrs Hale is dead and Frederick has gone back to Spain. Margaret took him to the train station, and he had to make an escape since Frederick’s being in the country was motive to fear his arrest. They are, indeed, seen by Mr Thornton, who pretends to ignore their presence, and by Leonards, who, in his drunken state, recognises Margaret and seems to know who Frederick is, or at least know that he is a Hale. The two men have an altercation and Leonards falls to his death. Frederick manages to get away, leaving Margaret with the consequences of his visit. While Mr Hale is in deep grief, Margaret copes as best as she can, though “sometimes she thought she must give way, and cry out with pain, as the sudden sharp thought came across her, even during her apparently cheerful conversations with her father, that she had no longer a mother. About Frederick, too, there was great uneasiness” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 247). Mr Thornton shows himself to be more than a friend to the family, but also an ally to Margaret, when he protects her from the enquiry that surrounds Leonards’ death – and here, Mr Thornton shows himself to be like Mr Darcy before him, protecting the woman he loves from being disgraced in the eyes of society; unlike Darcy, however, Mr Thornton does believe Margaret is guilty of something, while Mr Darcy blames himself for what happened to Lydia Bennet. The

[48] Though Gaskell defies that idea, too, when she portrays Mr Thornton as full of passion, as was the case when he proposed to Margaret.

possibility of being “degraded” in Mr Thornton’s eyes is painful to Margaret, who starts to, upon much reflection, develop feelings for him, for she finds herself desirous of his good opinion, as well as realising that he is deserving of hers, especially when she understands the part he played in protecting her in the enquiry, since he is a local magistrate. Thornton, despite his actions, avoids her presence, and she attributes this to his feeling scorn towards her, and even though it pains her, “his cause for contempt was so just that she should have respected him less if she had thought he did not feel contempt. It was a pleasure to feel how thoroughly she respected him. He could not prevent her doing that; it was the one comfort in all this misery” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 263). She desperately wants to meet him face to face again, to face his condemnation and explain herself: Margaret wishes she “were a man, that I could go and force him to express his disapprobation, and tell him honestly that I knew I deserved it. It seems hard to lose him as a friend just when I had begun to feel his value” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 281). However, when she finally has the opportunity to explain herself, she deflects, for a full explanation to Thornton would mean putting Frederick in danger. The animosity between them continues.

Before Margaret has time to explore her feelings further, a visit to Nicholas Higgins’ house brings about more bad news: our protagonist encounters death yet again, this time in the brutality of suicide: Boucher, one of Higgins’ friends and co-workers, could not bear the effects of the strike and ended his life, leaving behind a wife and children. Margaret, always the bearer of news, tells Boucher’s wife of his death and is shocked by her reaction: the woman seems more worried about their financial situation as well as about who will take care of all their children, than sad about her husband’s death, exclaiming that he has left her “alone wi’ a’ these children! […] I’ve got six children, sir, and the eldest not eight years of age” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 272). There is, here, a strong hint at the privilege of mourning when one knows where the next meal is coming from, unlike Mrs Boucher, who relied on her husband for income, and who will have to find work and childcare now that he is gone; furthermore, Mrs Boucher’s reaction might be a manifestation of the aforementioned bouts of emotion demonstrated by lower-class women, whose allegedly uncontrolled desperation in fact comes from fear of hunger and cold more than from grief. Higgins, feeling responsible for Boucher’s death, decides to help support his wife and children, while he dreams of the working conditions in the South, Margaret tries to dissuade him, showing him all the disadvantages of working life there, claiming that he could not stand the outdoors work, having to be out in all weathers, as well as the dullness of it all, saying that

> Those that have lived there all their lives, are used to soaking in the stagnant waters. They labour on from day to day, in the great solitude of steaming fields—never speaking or lifting up their poor, bent, downcast heads. The hard spadework robs their brain of life; the sameness of their toil deadens their imagination; they don't care to meet to talk over thoughts and speculations, even of the weakest, wildest kind, after their work is done; they go home brutishly tired, poor creatures! caring for nothing but food and rest. You could not stir them up into any companionship, which you get in a town as plentiful as the air you breathe, whether it be good or bad—and that I don't know; but I do know, that you of all men are not one to bear a life among such labourers. What would be peace to them, would be eternal fretting to you. Think no more of it, Nicholas, I beg. (GASKELL, 2005, p. 279)

The Margaret who utters these words against life in the South is certainly not the same one who used to defend her birthplace with such strength. She understands the differences between North and South, between the people in each place, and what those people need in their lives. She acknowledges that the South is not inherently better just because it was formerly better *for her*. She has grown in understanding, and this is a reflection of that growth. Higgins reacts to her words with his own wise realisation: "God help 'em! North an' South have each getten their own troubles" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 279).

Despite finally being able to stop some stains on her perfect image of the South and all it entails, Margaret feels miserable, reflecting on how unhappy the past year has been and how much she has had to grow: "I have passed out of childhood into old age. I have had no youth – no womanhood; the hopes of womanhood have closed for me – for I shall never marry […]. I am weary of this continual call upon me for strength" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 295). Her life seems very bleak now that her mother is gone, her father is mourning and purposeless, Frederick is far away and unable to help her bear the burden of everyday life, and Mr Thornton ignores her. Her self-defensive mechanism is to ignore all the changes and the pain they caused, taking a pragmatic approach to life: "I *will* not think of myself and my own position. I won't examine into my own feelings. It would be of no use now. Some time, if I live to be an old woman, I may sit over the fire, and looking into the embers, see the life that might have been" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 296).

A breath of southern air comes in the presence of Mr Bell, her father's friend, and later a great friend to Margaret, who was born in Milton but spent most of his life in Oxford. His arrival has the unexpected effect of cheering up Margaret, and also of creating situations in which she is propelled to defend Milton, expressing her newfound feelings for the place. He has left the town many years ago, and despite still having business there, he has become slightly prejudiced against the place and its people, and it falls to Margaret to defend them. Mr Bell claims affectionally that she is now "quite Miltonian and manufacturing in her preferences"

(GASKELL, 2005, p. 303). His presence highlights, through his conversation with Mr Thornton, one of the main differences between the North and the South, namely the fact that in Milton, the people value the present and the future, while in the South, they are still holding on to the past: "if we do not reverence the past as you do in Oxford, it is because we want something which can apply to the present more directly. It is fine when the study of the past leads to a prophecy of the future. […] People can speak of Utopia much more easily than of the next day's duty" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 304). Milton represented the new, the innovative, and the fast-changing world of the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism, while in the South they still lived, or strived to live, as if time had stopped, and Mr Thornton is not shy to speak his mind about it.

Mr Bell's visit concludes with her father journeying to the South with his friend, to spend some time at Oxford and hopefully recover from his grief. Mr Bell's invitation included Margaret, but "she felt as if it would be a greater relief to her to remain quietly at home, entirely free from any responsibility whatever, and so to rest her mind and heart in a manner which she had not been able to do for more than two years past" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 313). Being the lady of the house meant that she was, to some extent, responsible for her father's well-being, physical and emotional. Thus, she had not had time to herself in many months, from the move to Milton, to losing her mother, then consoling her father, and mulling over her feelings for Mr Thornton. Margaret is Mrs Gaskell's "model young woman", for she "occupies herself by taking care of others and wishes only for something of her own to take care of; but we are enabled to ask whether this must be all there is, whether it is in any sense enough" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 95), especially as it does not seem to have its importance recognised by those of whom she takes cares. When Mr Hale leaves, then, Margaret allows herself to feel, and as the weight of the pressure of the last few months lifted she realised how heavy they had been; "it was astonishing, almost stunning, to feel herself so much at liberty; no one depending on her for cheering care, if not for positive happiness; no invalid to plan and think for; she might be idle, and silent and forgetful, [and] she might be unhappy if she liked" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 313), which seemed like a great privilege after months of containing her own feelings. Women were seen as comforters, especially comforters of men, and this is the role Margaret had played incessantly since moving to Milton, whilst having feelings of her own with which to be contended. Being alone meant not having a companion on whom she could rely, but it also meant not giving herself to the comfort of others. Her respite is cut short, however, as the news of her father's sudden demise reaches her. Margaret is now all alone in the world, "helpless, homeless, friendless" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 322), and needs comforting more than ever. Mr

Bell believes she needs a female companion to help her through, and Mrs Shaw is called to help Margaret close the house in Milton and prepare her move back South.

While Mr Bell asks Margaret to be his heiress, Mrs Shaw's arrival comes loaded with judgements of Milton, its people and their ways; she sounds like Margaret did when she first moved there, and it is Margaret's turn to defend the place, once again, claiming it is "sometimes very pretty – in summer; you can't judge by what it is now. I have been very happy here" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 332), after all, there is nothing like the prospect of leaving something behind to make its joys, as small as they might have been, more palpable, and despite all the sadness that surrounded Margaret's eighteen months in Milton, her opinions and views of the world have been altered forever, and the people she met will never be forgotten. Having to downsize her possessions and say goodbye to much of her parents' belongings now that she would return to where she had started, back living with the Shaws, Margaret finds herself in a similar position for the third time, packing and preparing to leave a place that she had just started to learn how to love: "she set out again upon her travels through the house, turning over articles, known to her from her childhood, with a sort of caressing reluctance to leave them – old-fashioned, worn and shabby, as they might be" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 333). Before she leaves Milton behind, Margaret and her aunt pay a visit to Mrs Thornton to say goodbye and, more importantly, for her to apologise for the altercation they had regarding Margaret's presence at the train station. She also takes her leave from Higgins, and they part as friends. Milton has changed much in Margaret, and she, too, has had an impact on the town and its people, allowing all to find the common ground that seemed unfathomable at the start.

Having had the experience of living in Milton-Northern, of mingling amongst some of the richest exponents of the new middle class as well as the working class, returning to Harley Street has Margaret's thoughts going "back to Milton, with a strange sense of contrast between the life there, and here". She had never before considered the inequalities or even the fact that the very existence of those below her was hidden away: "the servants lived in an underground world of their own, of which she knew neither the hopes nor the fears; they only seemed to start into existence when some want or whim of their master and mistress needed them. There was a strange unsatisfied vacuum in Margaret's heart and mode of life" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 339). She misses those in Milton, "it had appeared a sudden famine to her heart, this entire cessation of any news respecting the people amongst whom she had lived for so long" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 340). Everyday life at Harley Street was quiet and even languid, the antithesis of her days in the North, where she had chores to complete and where all around her were always occupied with some task; the inactivity made her weary, and the concerns with dresses and dinner parties

seemed foreign. In Harley Street, even when the conversations were interesting, they were never improving: people talked about art “in a merely sensuous way, dwelling on outside effects, instead of allowing themselves to learn what is has to teach” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 370).

When Mr Bell invites her to visit Helstone with him, it takes her out of her stupor. It is a homecoming of sorts, even though it is no longer, nor will it ever be again, her house. Every step of the journey is loaded with memories,

> Every mile was redolent of associations, which she would not have missed for the world, but each of which made her cry upon “the days that are no more,” with ineffable longing. The last time she had passed along this road was when she had left it with her father and mother—the day, the season, had been gloomy, and she herself hopeless, but they were there with her. Now she was alone, an orphan, and they, strangely, had gone away from her, and vanished from the face of the earth. It hurt her to see the Helstone road so flooded in the sunlight, and every turn and every familiar tree so precisely the same in its summer glory as it had been in former years. Nature felt no change and was ever young. (GASKELL, 2005, p. 350)

So much has changed since Margaret left Helstone, and seeing the home of her childhood, Margaret realises how much those changes affected her. Helstone has a new vicar, a man with a big family, who has made changes to the house, now no longer as Margaret remembered. The alterations, both to the house and its surroundings, make her feel old, and Mr Bell wisely suggests that it is “the first changes among familiar things that make such a mystery of time to the young, afterwards we lose the sense of the mysterious. I take changes in all I see as a matter of course. The instability of all human things is familiar to me, to you it is new and oppressive” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 353). Margaret does not like to think of the changes, and almost refuses to see the interior alterations done to the parsonage. When she finally accepts to enter it, she encounters a place that “was so altered, both inside and out, that the real pain was less than she anticipated. It was not like the same place” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 357), and she was not the same Margaret who left it all those months ago: “there was change everywhere; slight, yet pervading all. Households were changed by absence, or death, or marriage, or the natural mutations brought by days and months and years, which carry us on imperceptibly from childhood to youth, and thence through manhood to age” (GASKELL, 2005, p. 358). Helstone, then, works as a physical representation of the many changes Margaret has gone through inside, growing and maturing, not the same as before due to the need to accommodate more people and new feelings. Its concrete existence is no longer home to Margaret, for now she has only the memory of what it was, since the place was home to another family, whose children would learn to dream and grow into themselves where she had previously lived.

Despite all that has happened to her, all the growing she has done in the past eighteen months, Margaret is still dependent, and perhaps more than ever now that her parents are gone, on the kindness of others. Mr Bell was a good friend to her, and the only one who, like herself, transitions between North and South with some ease, since the other two people with whom she had shared the experience of the North, her parents, are no longer alive to comfort her. She is mistress of her time, and at the same time, she is at the mercy of others; "a sense of change, of individual nothingness, of perplexity and disappointment, overpowered Margaret. Nothing had been the same; and this slight, all-pervading instability, had given her greater pain than if all had been too entirely changed for her to recognise it". Margaret feels tired, "so tired of being whirled on through all these phases of my life, in which nothing abides by me, no creature, no place; it is like the circle in which the victims of earthly passion eddy continually" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 363). The lack of constancy in her surroundings places a strain on her now that she is ready to settle for a while, to remain in one place with one lot of people. Despite the pains that accompany change, Margaret is aware that change is necessary, for if "the world stood still, it would retrograde and become corrupt", thus acknowledging the importance of looking beyond her own feelings and desires and seeing that "the progress of all around me is right and necessary. I must not think so much of how circumstances affect me myself, but how they affect others, if I wish to have a right judgment, or a hopeful trustful heart" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 364). Accepting the changes, Margaret says one last goodbye to Helstone, a place like no other in her heart, where she learned to dream and cultivated her future self. "She was very glad to have been there, and that she had seen it again, and that to her it would always be the prettiest spot in the world" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 365), but she is finally ready to leave it behind.

The last death in the novel, the last one to strike Margaret that is, is that of her friend and benefactor, Mr Bell, who in the time before his demise has become a good friend and counsellor to her: it had been to him that she had confessed her presence at Leonards' death, explaining Frederick's visit, and her reasons to keep it all a secret; furthermore, it was on him that she had trusted to explain all that happened to Mr Thornton, hoping that the man she now knew she loved would not think ill of her, wherever he was – she trusts that Mr Bell will explain everything to Thornton, acquitting her. Thus, when Margaret learns of his illness, she makes up her mind to go to Oxford and tend to him, but is at first stopped by Edith's protestations. Again defying expectations and enacting her independence of mind, if not of means, Margaret insists on going, after all Mr Bell, "her father's friend, her own friend, was lying at the point of death; and the thought of this came upon her with such vividness, that she was surprised herself at the firmness with which she asserted something of her right to independence of action"

(GASKELL, 2005, p. 375). She is too late, however, and by the time she reaches Oxford, he is already gone. The wounds of her mourning, which never really closed from all the deaths she witnessed, are fresh once again. This time, however, his death comes with her freedom, for Margaret is the beneficiary in his will.

She was never taught any business management, and alongside coming to terms with the death of a friend, she must learn the minutia of being in possession of property. Mr Lennox helps Margaret learn about business matters. Furthermore, she must learn to deal with her new-found freedom, and even simple things such as choosing her own dresses strike her as a novelty. In an attempt to take her life into her own hands, Margaret decides that "she herself must one day answer for her own life, and what she had done with it; and she tried to settle that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for freedom in working" (GASKELL, 2005, p. 377); she resolves that she will find herself duties to fulfil, since she does not have a husband or child. Nothing interests Margaret more than the affairs of Milton, and the fact that she is forever linked to them now through Mr Bell's businesses – now hers – is a source of joy.

While Margaret grows into her independence, Milton also goes through many changes. Even before she left, the relationship between masters and employees had been improving; perhaps due to Margaret's influence, defending the workers. Not only that, but through an effort of his own to learn of how difficult their lives are outside of work, Thornton creates a new eating space for his workers in an attempt to improve their conditions and keep them fed, as well as equalising them all, going as far as joining them for meals and striking new relationships with those working for him. Despite his successful experiment, in the past year, business was slow, and Marlborough Mills was going through hard times. Mr Thornton then goes to London hoping to sublet his property, since Margaret now is his landlady. She is not used to this position of power, leading her to see him with new eyes: she has control, and he is in her territory, both as a tenant and as a foreigner in the South. Hearing of his troubles while unaided by Mr Lennox, Margaret decides, of her own accord, to call Mr Thornton to a business meeting, offering for him to stay at Marlborough Mills, thus saving his enterprise. Margaret's olive branch leads them to being able to speak their minds to one another, and Mr Thornton tells her he has been to Helstone in order to see the place in which she had become who she was, since he already knew so well the place where she had grown into herself. They reach an understanding and, by extension, happiness. According to Spacks, in *North & South*, Gaskell portrays how the "virtues of the relatively unexalted social classes may combine with the emotional richness of the upper class, their union symbolised by the marriage of Margaret and Thornton" (SPACKS, 1975, p.

265); but more than that, this union of differences is also seen in Thornton's new concern for his workers' welfare and Margaret's interest in business.

Margaret's journey starts in a bedroom at Shaw's house, and it ends in the same house, but this time in the study, conducting a business meeting on her own: passivity has become action. She goes from being self-centred, to a young woman who looks beyond herself into society, and who is an active participant in it, able to converse with anyone, from important business men and members of the gentry, to lowly factory workers: they become equals in her eyes, when previously they had been worlds apart. Margaret moves in society with flexibility and confidence, an ever-changing creature in ever-changing times, adapting to her surroundings, learning to love and respect those who are different and to accept their choices; she "incorporates the vitality of the North without abandoning the *politesse* of the South" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 267). Like Jane Eyre before her, Margaret finds independence in her unexpected inheritance, which comes through in an almost *deus-ex-machina* situation, portraying once again how difficult and unlikely it was for women like her to become independent. It is only then that she can start making her own choices, which include leading the life she wishes to lead, and helping Thornton in the process. It is an independence that matches how she had been feeling, of which the culmination is her business *proposal* to Thornton, allowing him then to renew his addresses to her. Thus, Margaret does not only move between social classes, but she also defies gender expectations, unwilling to be a damsel in distress and taking control of her life.

CONCLUSION:
"OH, I CAN´T DESCRIBE MY HOME. IT IS HOME, AND I CAN´T PUT ITS CHARMS INTO WORDS"

> ***It is only a novel... or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language.***
>
> Jane Austen***, Northanger Abbey***

The fascination that drew me to novels published during the nineteenth century is the same as the one that pushed me towards further investigation both into those novels and the period itself – a period with which I have become very familiar in these past four years (or six, if one ads my Master's Degree research into the mix). The nineteenth century, or as I have called it many times throughout this work, *our* period, often seems so distant, as if it had not taken place less than two centuries ago; indeed, for two of the novels analysed here, the bicentenary of their publication has not yet been reached. Having always been interested in the lives of women during that time and having loved the novels analysed here for as long as I can remember, combining the two seemed natural. These stories, even though they were written two centuries ago, are still relevant and still attract new readers, perhaps because in a society where male narratives have always taken centre-stage, literature produced by women, especially these early works, written during a time when women barely existed in the eyes of the law, stand out due to their unique understanding of the lives of the women who lived in our period, as well as their historical importance. Furthermore, although women's lives have changed much since Austen, Brontë, and Gaskell employed their pens, the importance of their works persists, too, because the female trials and tribulations they portray still find an echo two hundred years later, and the ghost of the Angel in the House still haunts women and dictates the expectations placed upon them to this day.

The thorough examination of works written in the 1800s is only possible if one has a good understanding of the time in which they were written, and the long nineteenth century was a period of such change and contradiction that the help of scholars such as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, as well as Mary Poovey and Elizabet Langland, was fundamental. Their works shed light not only on how people lived, but also on how society functioned and how people in it thought and conducted themselves, being essential to the comprehension of the novels studied here, in order to understand what was being said between the lines, through

social convention and even in the silences. Furthermore, looking at the very idea of coming of age and evolving, and relating it to *place*, philosophers such as Bachelard played an important role in focusing my vision in order to find the details to bring physical houses to life, and their importance in the subjectivity of the characters; even when Bachelard is not directly quoted, his *Poetics of Space* looms in the background, for I would not have been able to look at these novels through such lenses without his aid.

In the four novels analysed in these pages, I have focused on the coming of age of their protagonists, not only as a literal growing up process, but also with the association between this process and their finding of a place in the world where they belong, where they can be themselves and are fully respected for it, rather than having constantly to struggle to find their feet. We see Fanny, Elizabeth, Jane, and Margaret grow in understanding of themselves and of the world around them. Furthermore, for all of our protagonists, this comes with finding partners who appreciate who they are and next to whom they are equal; these "heroines grow instead of diminish into marriage" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 134), and since marriage was seen as the best possibility for a woman during the period, a happy and equal union was nothing short of utopia. Unlike the unhappy and unsuited unions by which they are surrounded, their marriages are a testament to their worth, a happy reward for having developed and evolved.

In the first pair of novels, *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre*, we encounter protagonists who are not beautiful or charming, a rare occurrence in nineteenth century novels, since beauty was associated with ideals of femininity and purity, and to be well-liked, authors usually created – and to this day still create – female characters who unrealistically possessed many allures, even if, perhaps especially if, they were unaware of them. Fanny Price is readers' least favourite heroine amongst the pantheon of Austen's creations, and *Mansfield Park* often marked as her least popular novel. Fanny does not have Jane Eyre's passion, and her quietness is often seen as tedious. Her mousiness and lack of charm can be off-putting, but Fanny's journey in *Mansfield Park* distinguishes Austen as one of the greatest writers of female coming of age, as seen in chapter two. Both *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre* follow the young ward to a rich family, and both families find different solutions to deal with the new member of the household. Bringing Fanny to Mansfield was a joint decision amongst the Bertrams – even if heavily influence by Mrs Norris –, while taking care of Jane was not part of Mrs Reed's plans: it had been her late husband who had chosen to shelter the girl, and after his passing, Mrs Reed saw no reason to continue to put up with a young girl she could not understand. Whilst Fanny receives the same education as her cousins Julia and Maria, she also finds a mentor in Edmund, who guides her intellectually and morally. Jane, on the other hand, is sent to school more to

repress her passion than for educational purposes, and her coming out of it with decent skills is surprising. The influences of Miss Temple and Helen Burns at Lowood, and of the Rivers sisters in the latter volume of the novel are as important to Jane's growth as the formal schooling she received.

Not only are Fanny and Jane the poor relations, they are also orphans for all intents and purposes – for Fanny, the promise of a loving family always lingered in the background, until she finally went back to her parents' house and realised she did not, in fact, belong there; whereas for Jane, the loss of her parents and the mistreatment by the Reeds mean that she becomes an orphan twice in her childhood. Jane's journey leads her to the Rivers, thus giving her the relatives she had always desired; not only that, but the inheritance she receives and her decision to share it with this new-found family is further evidence of her wish to live amongst her equals, blood relations who are also in the same position as her, with whom any inequality of power is diminished through the sameness of their situations: Jane never wants to be superior to her cousins, she wants people to be equal, to have the same opportunities. Despite her goodwill, St John abuses his influence as the man of the family and tries to control Jane like many men who came before him in her life. Finding their next of kin is important for both our heroines, as there is a prevailing sense of loneliness in both novels, and they both find disappointment in their idealised relatives: Fanny does not find the loving parents for whom she longs, and Jane does not find in St John the brother she wishes she had. It is only when they can be true to themselves, amongst those who love them as much as they love them, and more importantly, those who are able to see them for who they truly are – for Fanny, these are William and Edmund, and for Jane, it is first Helen Burns, then the Rivers sisters, and finally Rochester – that finally they are not lonely any longer, and feel like they belong.

Perhaps the most striking difference in their situation, and a mark of the subtle differences between the periods when the novels were published – even though they are both nineteenth-century works – is that it never occurs to Fanny that she could find work, while Jane leaves her secure post as a teacher in Lowood and goes on to be a governess. Working opportunities for women were limited throughout the nineteenth century, but especially during its early decades; not only that, but while Fanny spends most of her life as a dependant, Jane is cast out of the Reed's household as a young girl, and is forced by circumstance to learn how to fend for herself, and this includes surviving on whatever income she could find. Furthermore, the very thought of leaving one's family home to work, rather than leaving it to go to her husband's house, was not an option for most women of the middle and upper classes in the beginning of the century, even when they contributed to the household economy from within.

Fanny's future, had she not married, would likely have been as a companion to her aunts, depending on her male and wealthier relatives for whatever income they were willing to bestow – first on Sir Thomas, and then his sons. For her, looking for employment would be a way of shaming her uncle, implying that he was failing to do his duty in providing for his ward, which is yet another reason why Fanny never contemplates the possibility, even though for much of her teenage years she dislikes living at Mansfield. Jane, on the other hand, had no one on whom to depend, and a life of servitude would have been her only option had she not inherited her long-lost uncle's money, as not even the marriage to Rochester would free her on its own. Thus, being the poor relation means one has a lot to lose, and both young ladies deal with their situation differently, but with the same aim. Fanny and Jane try to find a place in the world where they belong, and this search is inherent to their process of coming of age, when they can fully be themselves without fear of being trapped by what is socially acceptable or that they will lose their stance in the world if they defy its norms.

Pride & Prejudice and *North & South*, on the other hand, published forty-two years apart, give us two protagonists who, again, share many similarities, even if their situations also present countless differences. As Spacks suggests, "Jane Austen and Elizabeth Gaskell define in fictional terms the delicate emotional balancing point on which women must poise between commitment to others and preservation of their selves" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 106). At the beginning of the novels, Elizabeth and Margaret had never had their social position challenged, even if they were often uncomfortable with its requirements. They are outspoken and pretty, unconcerned about life beyond their immediate surroundings. Because both young women are members of nuclear families, their parents' presence and their relationship with them are, in fact, important factors in their process of coming of age, the same way that the lack of it is important for both Fanny and Jane.

Elizabeth and Margaret must learn to overcome their prejudice as well as their pride, and to look beyond themselves in order to understand their feelings and to improve their minds. Despite their many similarities, Elizabeth lives in a society that is still coming to grips with capitalism, and Austen does not focus her attention on the new middle classes or the numerous members of the working classes. Meanwhile, Margaret's Milton-Northern is at its heart a manufacturing town, living off the proceeds of the surrounding mills, depending on progress and capital to continue. There are many references to the source of one's income in *Pride & Prejudice*, and Lizzy is a heroine who already exercises transitioning between different levels of the gentry and the middling classes: her father is a gentleman, but her uncle is a businessman; here, it is Mr Darcy who must learn to see them all as equals. In *North & South*, class relations

are one of the focal points, and Margaret's life changes dramatically when she moves from the idyllic South to the industrial North of England; unlike Lizzy, she must acclimatise to a life in-between. It is through her friendship with the Higginses that Margaret learns to look at all men and women as equal, regardless of their background, all worthy of respect and of a decent life. She grows beyond her idealisation of the South, becoming open to see a world that is miles away, both geographically and metaphorically, from where she started. Remarkably, both Elizabeth and Margaret, ladies of the South, find partners in men of the North[49], and both of them end their journeys there; while Elizabeth's new home is still in an idyllic part of the North, a place she loved when she first saw, and which allowed her to understand Mr Darcy, Margaret goes on to live where she at first despised, but which has also been the means for her to gain understanding about Mr Thornton and about herself.

Elizabeth and Margaret go through different journeys in order to find a place where they belong. They both come into contact with aspects of life of which they had before been ignorant, or at least about which they had never cared: Elizabeth learns the truth about Mr Wickham and what he has done to Miss Darcy, placing her in contact with some of the evils of the world; Margaret sees the suffering and plight of factory workers, pulling her away from her privileged position in order to understand and sympathise with their predicament. The biggest difference between them is, perhaps, that while Austen's story touches but does not fully commit to dealing with social changes – after all, Elizabeth, a gentleman's daughter, marries another gentleman, even if a rich one –, Gaskell delves deeply in the new social dynamics created with the industrial revolution, and places her protagonist in the centre of change, ultimately marrying genteel Margaret to middle-class John Thornton.

Again, both young women's coming of age is connected with their finding themselves, finding a place where they belong and that they love – and it is a place that goes beyond the materiality of a house. Elizabeth and Margaret allow themselves to see beyond their prejudices and learn from others, and despite the difficulties of the beginning of their relationships with Darcy and Thornton, respectively, they learn how to meet in the middle, without relinquishing who they are, welcoming rather than ignoring differences, allowing themselves to be enriched by them.

The classic division of outward space for men and internal domestic space for women is seen when each of the four cases is more closely examined, but it is also revealed to be affected by social class and financial situation, not only gender. Women who were in higher

[49] Mr Darcy's estate, Pemberley, is in Derbyshire.

social positions often had more freedom to go wherever they want and speak as they wished, whereas working and middle-class women had more at stake, and worked harder to comply with the ideal imposed upon them. The four characters followed in this dissertation, like many women in the nineteenth century, learn how to use their social limitations in their favour, sometimes rebelling against them if their will trumped the difficulties such rebellion would bring, and other times using their situations in order to benefit from it. Men and women lived under the burden of different expectations and ideals; women were, throughout our period, expected to be angelic helpmates to the men in their lives, and while "men, too, must work to be good, and the criteria of goodness in men and women are not necessarily dissimilar […], men do not face the same kind of pressure from others that women confront in the ordinary course of their existence" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 85-86). As Morgan suggests, despite the pervasive ideology of separate spheres, explored in detail in the first chapter of this work, there was "subversive possibilities inherent in discourses of domesticity, and the way that women were able to exploit these in order to expand their role" (MORGAN, 2007, p. 1-2). Furthermore, these novels are vehicles for demonstrating that women did not always need to rebel, revealing "ways in which [they] may achieve power through passivity" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 103).

Through analysing the four novels, I have also looked at the idea of home both as a physical space, but also as a safe haven where one can grow and build. All our protagonists must leave the comfort of their childhood home and learn to navigate new spaces, interact with new people, and find, in these new environments, a space to call their own. Fanny journeys from her parents' house to her aunt and uncle's, leaving behind her siblings and the life she knew in the hope of better opportunities, as well as relieving her parents from the burden of another mouth to feed. In Mansfield, she struggles to find her own space, and is not shown the same respect and affection as her cousins. Her return to her parents' house is riddled with disappointments, and she does not have the homecoming for which she had hoped for so long. Having always done other people's bidding, aware of her place as a mere dependant, it is only when she finally stands up for herself against the great patriarchal figure of Sir Thomas, her uncle, that she starts to believe in herself and in all the growth she has done – especially concerning her morality and her judgement of others. Fanny gains the admiration of all when her stance is proven to be the correct one, and she is also awarded with Edmund's love. After having been her moral guide throughout her life at Mansfield, Fanny surpasses his wisdom, internalising the knowledge he imparted and combining it with her own observations of the world, thus making the most sensible choices in the novel. Even though Edmund is not the heir to Mansfield, as he is the younger son, they marry and eventually move to the parsonage

overlooking the Park, as if Fanny's moral strength is responsible for and guardian of the great house's own morality.

Jane Eyre's story of finding her own place begins in a similar way to Fanny's: as a young girl she is sent to live with richer relatives. In her case, however, these relatives – or at least her aunt – do not want her, and she is mistreated from the start. Going to school is an escape from the Reeds, but though school is not kind to her, there she finds everlasting friendship in Helen Burns, whose teachings Jane remembers for the rest of her life, and in Miss Temple, who is a motherly figure to the young girl, and as such, does justice to her surname. In the school Jane rises up to become a teacher herself, gaining the education necessary to leave the place behind. Thornfield becomes her new dwelling, there as a governess, that most in-between of female professions, not quite as lowly as the servants, definitely not as important as the masters. Thornfield always held too many secrets and closed doors to be a true home where she is free to wander, both physically and metaphorically. When she leaves it behind, she has nowhere to go until the Rivers siblings find her. Despite all the happiness that derives from their friendship, and also despite the unexpected inheritance that frees Jane from the shackles of poverty, St John is still an obstacle to her happiness, and Jane must "symbolically, if not literally, behead the abstract principles of this man before she can finally achieve her true independence" (GILBERT & GUBAR, 2000, p. 365). Like Fanny, Jane must stand up for what she truly desires, defying the patriarchal figures challenging her. Free, she hears Rochester's call, and they can finally find happiness together, in a quiet place, wild and hidden away from the society that from the start wanted to tame Jane's nature.

Unlike Fanny and Jane, Elizabeth Bennet is not moved about in order to live with this or that relative; her parents are alive and well, her house secured as long as her father is alive, and her position seemingly constant. Her family is well-respected in the neighbourhood, and Lizzy is confident of her intellect and wit. Life is unchallenged and always the same until "foreigners" arrive, putting in check crystalized behaviours and ideas, making Elizabeth see her familiar surroundings through new lenses; not only that, their presence makes her question herself, her beliefs and her social position. To add to the new sense of disquiet, the very security of Longbourn, her house, is questioned with the remembrance of its entailed condition, meaning that as soon as Mr Bennet is no long amongst them, the property will go to someone else, since all his children are female. Elizabeth's main act of rebellion is refusing to marry Mr Collins, the heir of Longbourn, which would save her family upon the demise of her father. Disappointing her matchmaking mother, Lizzy cannot abide the idea of marrying someone she does not love or respect, and she has her parents' own marriage from which to learn this lesson.

Elizabeth allows herself to be lured towards someone whose intentions are to poison her against a common enemy, and part of her journey is to understand why she allowed that to happen, and learn to be a better judge of character, even if her rational conclusions do not suit her feelings. Like Fanny, Elizabeth's reward for such hard work is a physical dwelling, Mr Darcy's Pemberley, a house worthy of more descriptions than Austen usually applies, for its goodness and sturdiness speak of its owner more than of its concrete structure. Moreover, she also finds a partner who she can respect, with whom she is equal. Pemberley becomes home, and she its deserving mistress.

Margaret Hale, on the other hand, shares many of her traits with Elizabeth: beautiful, outspoken and proud. Like Fanny, she was sent to her aunt's house as a child in order to have a more genteel upbringing than her parents were able to afford – her mother, like Mrs Price, married for love, and the consequences of such union was lack of funds. We follow Margaret in her journey back to her early childhood home, only to have to leave it behind completely to move to the industrial North of England, amongst people with whom she does not think she can possibly associate or even respect. Moving up North whilst her mother is indisposed means having to confront and take upon herself the responsibilities of the lady of the house, which Margaret dutifully does. This is what propels her out of their new lodgings, for she needs to find someone to work as a maid, meaning that she ends up exploring Milton even without meaning to do so. Margaret's friendship with the Higgins family is life changing, allowing her a glimpse into the lives of people whose reality is so different from her own, a feeling that is intensified when her friendship with Bessy deepens, for she is a girl who is the same age as Margaret, but whose future is bleak and hopeless. Throughout the novel, Margaret loses all that she knows, from her house to her parents, and is left alone in the world. Like Jane Eyre, she also inherits money from a benefactor, and this inheritance is also responsible for giving her the independence she craves – the very idea of female independence seems to have been so farfetched that both Brontë and Gaskell feel that only an unexpected and unrealistic inheritance could provide such freedom. *North & South* ends where it started geographically, for Margaret goes back to her aunt Shaw's house after her parents pass away, but she is no longer the same: a defender of Milton and its people, Margaret struggles to find fulfilment in conversations about balls and dresses, and becomes interested in business and news of the North. Like Elizabeth Bennet, Margaret must relinquish both her prejudice, in her case, against those in a social position inferior to hers, as well as overcome her pride in that same position. Once she can do that, she finds that Milton had its smiles as well as its tears, allowing herself to reciprocate Mr Thornton's love. Interestingly, the novel does not disclose where Margaret ends up living, but

one can assume she returns to Milton, this time very much taking part in the enterprise with Thornton, making a home for herself there, while their partnership, both in business and in their personal lives, is a testament to the possibility of a union between North & South, between the new capitalist society and the old gentry.

The four protagonists have their sense of belonging change throughout their novels, and they create homes inside themselves, growing stronger through each challenge, willing to change and be proven wrong, becoming more aware of the world around them at the same time that they learn about who they are inside. In these four novels, we see female characters quietly battle against the *status quo* while they are also part of it. Fanny stands up to her uncle, Jane to St John; Elizabeth does not allow Lady Catherine's status to bully her into not living the life she wants to live, and places herself as equal to the grand lady, and Margaret takes charge of her life, going from languid to active, managing the household and later becoming a businesswoman.

All four of them know, as their creators probably also knew, that "the values of society provide a screen behind which women can conduct their inner lives; they may, at best, actually supply a means for expressing the dimensions of inner reality. And inner reality is a woman's most valuable possession" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 275). All these characters were financially and socially dependent on the men around them, though Jane and Margaret find freedom in a timely inheritance; despite all the difficulties they overcome, they learn how to make havens in their minds, cultivating their thoughts and ideas, learning to trust themselves, fighting for what they want. Thus, as Spacks suggests, "in novels written by women in the nineteenth century, when social liberation was hardly a real possibility for women, the connection between imaginative vitality and psychic freedom was clear and striking" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 307). Furthermore, dependency does not equate total powerlessness, and the myth of the Angel in the House combined with the doctrine of domesticity gave women something towards which to aim, using them in their favour, as "dependency need not imply relinquishment of power" (SPACKS, 1975, p. 59).

Women employed "the rhetoric of separate spheres to their own ends as well as being limited by it" (STEINBACK, 2004, p. 42), that means that they were victims of the system at the same time that they found ways through which to benefit themselves. The standards of womanhood imposed on women were an impossible ideal; society tried to make the Victorian angel to be a creature "immune from the human condition and, unlike her feebly well-intentioned male counterparts, endowed by definition with superhuman powers. No doubt this exclusion from her human birth right is a social insult, but imaginatively it promises the freedom

of the spheres" (AUERBACH, 1982, p. 64). Transforming mere human women into angels of the house, "making Patmore's title a convenient shorthand for the selfless paragon all women were exhorted to be, enveloped in family life and seeking no identity beyond the roles of daughter, wife and mother" (AUERBACH, 1982, p. 67-69) was a certain way to try to control women, their actions, behaviours, and their voice, inhibiting their identity and maintaining things as they were. Women were not supernatural forces, however, and faced with the ideal, they had to make choices in order to fit in with it, even if just for appearance's sake. However, as Auerbach expertly suggests, "Victorian culture never quite domesticated its angels" (AUERBACH, 1982, p. 81), and women learned how to develop strategies to cope with their exclusion and imprisonment in the impossible ideal – even Queen Victoria had to deal with the impossibility and contradiction of her situation during the times in which she lived, bypassing difficulties by conforming on the one hand, and yet ruling the Empire on the other.

> In the nineteenth century the dialect between womanhood and power was so central and general a concern, one so fundamental to the literature, art, and social thought of the period, that it is misleading to pigeonhole it as "feminist" as though it were the concern of one interest group alone. Legally and socially women composed an oppressed class, but […] women's very aura of exclusion gave her imaginative centrality in a culture increasingly alienated from itself. Powerful images of oppression became images of barely suppressed power, all the more grandly haunting because, unlike the hungry workers, women ruled both the Palace and the home while hovering simultaneously in the darkness without. Assuming the power of the ruler as well as the menace of the oppressed, woman was at the centre of her age's myth at the same time as she was excluded from its institutions. (AUERBACH, 1982, p. 188-189)

Unsurprisingly, then, in the four novels, we see women, who were frequently in the outskirts of narratives, taking centre-stage. Not only that, but Austen, Brontë and Gaskell created characters who have strong personalities, often overshadowing the men around them, as well as always getting the last word, even if their powers to achieve what their hearts desire is not always actualised. In *Mansfield Park* and especially in *Jane Eyre*, there are tyrannical men who try to control our heroines; in the first, we find Sir Thomas, whose very presence is fear inducing, and against whom, as said before, Fanny has to stand. Not only that, but Henry Crawford, disguised as a progressive man, uses his influence and charm to shake the very structures that keep Mansfield together. At the same time, we have Mrs Norris' persuasiveness and Mary Crawford's use of her charms in order to get what she wants. In *Jane Eyre*, on the other hand, Jane meets a series of men who try to control her, and she has to fight them one at a time with the little power she has: she escapes from John Reed's beatings by literally fighting back; from Mr Brocklehurst by finding female guidance and protection in Helen and Miss Temple; from Rochester she escapes by discovering herself to be the same as all the other

women who are also victims of their time and place; and finally Jane manages to stand up to St John by being true to her passionate self: different strategies for every different threat, sometimes going against what was expected of her, and at other times placing herself above societal expectation. In *Pride & Prejudice* and *North & South*, on the other hand, instead of strong patriarchal figures who want to dominate the protagonists, we see men who have not fulfilled the expectations placed on them by society: Mr Bennet has mismanaged his property and failed to produce a male heir, meaning that both his wife and daughters are at the mercy of Mr Collins; Mr Bingley is at the mercy of his sisters, and Mr Darcy's silence about Wickham does more damage than expected. In Austen's novel, it is the women who take the lead in life and in strength, from Mrs Bennet shrill matchmaking ploys, to Charlotte's marriage of convenience, in which she manages the household and her life more so than her husband. This is also the case in Gaskell's *North & South*. Women are at the centre of the novel not only through Margaret, but also Mrs Shaw, Bessy Higgins and Mrs Thornton. Like Mr Bennet, Mr Hale has also failed, but in his case, it was his abandonment of his occupation that marked the misfortune of his endeavour. Furthermore, whilst Mr Thornton is a successful businessman, he admits that it is all due to his mother's colossal persistence, and when he fails, Margaret is the one to come to his rescue. Women, then, might have relied on men for a civic life – as much of it as they were allowed to have before the Married Women's Property Act and the universal suffrage – but they did find ways to take the reins of their lives, as seen in the four novels analysed in this dissertation.

And so did their creators, for whom writing was a defiance of the *status quo*, a protest against their permanent subordination, as well as a way to free their thoughts and ideas. Austen, Brontë, and Gaskell all knew some level of fame during their lifetime. A woman writing in the nineteenth century was seen as either being looking for a form of entertainment, or to be making a statement regarding her financial situation, meaning that writing as a career reflected badly on the male relatives *responsible* for the lady in question. Austen published under the words "By a Lady", admitting her gender, but not disclosing her name, probably in order to protect her family. For many years after her death, the remaining Austens and Knights (family name adopted by Jane's brother at the time of his coming into his inheritance) strove to make her seem like a woman with too much time on her hands, who would write to please herself and her nieces and nephews, with no pretension to an actual profession and, perhaps crucially, to her own income. However, what remains and has been pieced together of her biography tells a different tale: undoubtedly Austen did write for pleasure and entertainment, since it was common practice in the 1800s, but she also wrote to have her works published, to earn her own

money. Despite writing about the safety of what she knew, meaning that her array of characters does not belong to a wide range of social classes – even though social classes and the changes through which they undergo are present in her works –, and despite often hiding more direct and crude remarks about society behind irony and sarcasm, Austen wrote about women of her times, women like the ones she knew, like herself. She gave them voices and strong personalities, portraying through humour and piercing social commentary the struggles of women during the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Charlotte Brontë, too, alongside her two sisters, wrote under a pseudonym, the androgynous Currer Bell. Worrying about their future as unmarried women, the Brontë sisters were looking for a way in which to contribute to the household economy and support themselves, and writing was the best weapon they had. *Jane Eyre* was a hugely successful novel during its time, and Charlotte witnessed its success mostly from far away, in Haworth, while the name of Currer Bell was discussed amongst the literary circles of London. The novel opened doors for the young author, and even led her to experience a little of life in the capital, only to go back to her secluded and safe parsonage. Like Austen and Gaskell's heroines, Brontë's Jane Eyre is also rewarded with a happy ending, represented by marriage, since "for a woman, not to marry is to fail in her 'profession'" (POOVEY, 1998, p. 154), but more than that, these happily-ever-afters found by our heroines are also *in spite of* their marriages – the final union is almost an embellishment, to furnish their successful growth and accomplishments gained throughout the novel. However, Jane Eyre is the one, amongst the four fictional ladies I have followed here, whose path is filled with the most struggle and pain, bleak and yet full of life, imbibed in the contradictions of the Victorian period, from the very fact that she is a homeless orphan who does not belong anywhere and yet strives to be correct and moral in her actions, to her in-between and complicated social position, not quite belonging to the working class, nor even the middle classes: she does come from a genteel family, but was abandoned by them. Her placement as a governess, then, the most in-between of employments, works to illustrate her very position. Thus, despite rewarding her character with a loving marriage after all her struggles, it is clear that Charlotte Brontë does not dismiss the difficult life many women led, especially those in situations similar to Jane's – and, dare I say, to Brontë herself – for, as Poovey suggests, "that only the coincidence of a rich uncle's death can confer on a single woman autonomy and power, after all, suggests just how intractable her dependence really was in the 1840s" (POOVEY, 1998, p. 142).

Elizabeth Gaskell, of the three writers, is possibly the one most in contact with the harsh political and social realities of her surroundings, at least in so far as placing them in her works;

at the same time that she is also the one who seemed to have the most freedom and ability to come and go geographically and socially. Of the three, Gaskell is the only one who married young[50], and furthermore, defying the very idea that marriage would mean a cessation to female writing, Gaskell published her novels under the name Mrs Gaskell, not only identifying her as a woman, but also as a married woman. Being from the South of England and having moved North after the death of her mother placed Gaskell in touch with an array of different people and situations; as a married woman, she lived in the outskirts of Manchester, meaning that she was also in the outskirts of social change, witnessing first-hand the changes brought about by the process of industrialisation and the impact it had on the local population, giving life to her observations and thoughts in her novels, particularly *North & South* and *Mary Barton*. Gaskell was a modern woman; she travelled far, did much without her husband – including buying a house in secret – and used writing both as a therapy and as a means to evoke social change, or at least to denounce the need for such change. Her female characters have hints of the New Woman whilst still very much centred in mid-century ideals and morality. Much like her friend Charlotte Brontë, Gaskell was in a different sort of in-betweenness, circulating between North and South and between motherhood and her writing.

These women and their creations were some of the pioneers in telling women's stories in a world created and ruled by men; their works, all to some extent popular during their lifetimes, are even more so nowadays, when arguably much of what they wrote could be seen as dated. Their novels and characters offer us a glimpse into a world that we will never experience first-hand, but whose influence in the shaping of the society in which we now live is paramount. Moreover, the characters analysed in this dissertation all come of age on the page, growing not only in age, but also in understanding. Fanny, Jane, Elizabeth, and Margaret undergo many changes throughout their stories, they are faced with homelessness – not only through the loss of the roof over their heads, but also through the loss of the certainties that had previously guided them, learning to understand other people's perspectives, becoming more worldly even if they do not go far, letting go of former beliefs and even behaviours in order to make way to new forms of thinking and acting that are more in accordance with whom they want to become. Furthermore, for these four characters, their coming of age journey is intrinsically linked to finding a place where they belong, and this place contains not only the physicality of a house, but it also refers to inserting themselves socially and finding a partner with whom to share a loving relationship of equals, a relationship of respect. Thus, coming of

[50] Charlotte Brontë did marry later in life, but passed away less than a year later, thus most of her writing career was achieved as a single woman.

age for these characters means finding a home in which they belong and where there is space for love and growth without constraints, and this is as true in the twenty-first century as it was in the nineteenth. Their two-century-old plight still rings true, for it is still true.

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