

# Sexuality and Jane Austen

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## ABSTRACT

Sexuality is not a term usually linked with Jane Austen. One of the reason is that most people do not know the history behind the word. At the time of Jane Austen, it meant what was characteristic of her sex, the latter referring to women. Writing an article about sexuality and Jane Austen means writing about what was characteristic of woman in her novels. Jane Austen is a recognizable author by her style. If one thing that was not studied before can define her style is reticence. There is a paradox by defining her style by a language which is restrained and sometimes withdrawn but this is what my article will endeavor to demonstrate. Jane Austen's stylistic reticence is paradoxical since in her writing one can read the footprint of one thing going further than what is said. Jane Austen's stylistic reticence points out an absence in the speech. Eventually, when her stylistic reticence calls for silence, it turns out that something is said.

**Keywords :** JANE AUSTEN SEXUALITY LANGUAGE SILENCE RETICENCE

## INTRODUCTION

The first question you must put up with a theme such as Jane Austen and sexuality is the following one : what is sexuality in the eighteenth century ? Actually the word sexuality only appears in the the XIXth century. Before this period, one talk about sexe. In the sixteenth century the word sex refers to women. In Mary Wollenstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women published in 1792, she first refers to a sexual character meaning what is charateristic of the sex. It is only in the twentieth century that the word sexuality will have its modern meaning that is to say the capacity for sexual feelings and activities. Dealing with sexuality in Jane Austen's novels is dealing with the representation of sexuality at her time. Moreover, she is a woman : that seems obvious but it makes a major difference. Indeed, In Essais Book III, the French philosopher Michel de Montaigne freely describes his sexuality which might be disturbing today. He takes the time to wonder about one fact : how can we explain that we are not allowed to talk about sexualty when one can betray, rob or kill without an hesitation. It is simply because shame is at the core of the subject. Sexuality is linked with shame. For Montaigne, if people have so much restraint about talking about sexuality it is that if they talk less about it, it is because people think more about it. People silence the word but know it

perfectly and people cherish it as long as it stays a secret. One of the advantage of this secret is that if the subject cannot be freely discussed, one must find another way to do it with painting, writing and the art generally speaking. In Jane Austen's novels, what is revelant of her art is her writing and to be more precise the language she uses to serve her cause and that is what we will study first.

Dealing with sexuality in Jane Austen's novels is dealing with education, male and female education. All her novels do not delve into the marital life. Most of the time, her main characters are young and are about to get married. They are witnesses of their parents' marital life but they do not have to cope with it straight away. So that is the reason why sexuality is linked to education as far as Jane Austen's novels are concerned. Education is a way of leading young ladies and young men to desire, which is the sphere they reach before anything else. How this desire is put forward in Jane Austen's novels is what we see in a second part.

In her essay *Women and Fiction*, Virginia Woolf puts forward that History of England is History of the male and of the female. But even in the eighteenth century, some women had access to education and that was the case for Jane Austen. She was educated even if women used to live exclusively in their household and most of the time mainly in their emotions and generally speaking that was their only experience in life. Moreover Virginia Woolf also puts forward that the sentence was made by men : it is too loose, too unwieldy, too emphatic to suit women. Women had to find the way to be faithful to themselves. That is the reason why when a woman finally writes a book, she must find a way to make it interesting what a man should find superficial. It is all the more difficult especially when a woman wants to delve into a subject she is not supposed to deal with such as sexuality. Yet, we will see that despite the first appearances, Jane Austen succeeded in doing it.

At first sight, when you make reference to Jane Austen's novels, you do not expect to talk about sexuality but there is a general hypocrisis about this situation. How could we talk about love and about marriage without dealing with sexuality ? Of course, at the time of Jane Austen, the subject was totally untouched at least it was not appropriate to openly and freely discuss the subject the way we are used to do it nowadays but this article will endeavor to demonstrate that Jane Austen used her main weapon to write about the subject anyway.

My objective in this article is to show that Jane Austen mainly writes about sexuality in her novels - let us bear in mind that sexulaity meant what was characteristic of her sex - and she uses one of her main assets which was her stylistic reticence, which made her transcended all the obstacles of her time.

### **I- Jane Austen's language marked by reticence**

In Jane Austen's work, langage is a source of wealth. She seems to divide it into two parts : what is said and what is unsaid. What is said is known whatever it is a thing, a cause or a relation. What is unsaid is everything one cannot tell. Wondering about reticence of langage turns out to be the same as wondering about what is said and what is unsaid.

While studying the neuter, Roland Barthes (2002) delves into the silence and consequently to the unsaid. According to him, one must go back first to the origins of the word silence. In the classical language, "be silent" and "stay silent" have the same signification. Yet, "tacere" used to mean the verbal silence whereas "silere" used to mean the absence of move or noise. So, "silere" refers to a kind of virginal timeless state of things before their birth or after their death. "Silere" is consequently a state without a paradigm or a sign.

"Tacere" meaning speechless silence is opposing itself to "silere" meaning natural or divine silence. Both have become synonymous to the advantage of the meaning of "tacere". For now, the said and the unsaid belongs to the paradigm of "tacere" yet without opposing to each other.

Moreover, one can notice that speech and power are linked ; make a speech is linked to the theme of power. It is the theme of the right to make a speech. In Greek "isegoria" is the right for everyone to speak to everyone, to claim one's right to speak and consequently the right to be silent as well.

With the neuter, one have the possibility to be silent, the right to be silent.

Following Roland Barthes, Jane Austen thwarts the speech to fool people's morality counselling to be silent in order to avoid the tricks of the speech. To be silent is then a moral inner obligation such as the sceptical silence as defined by Hegel and Kojève. Silence is then a more powerful sign than the individual : it is a significant sign of a full signified sign and becomes a sign only if one makes it talk. So we are left to wonder what Jane Austen's silence tells.

The reticence represented by silences becomes consequently one way of telling and the readers' questioning about their link to the language and to the world. The reticence could be considered as a supposed weapon to undo the paradigm's of the speech. Finally, the reticence becomes a sign itself and defines a new paradigm. That is what my study will first show.

### **A- The right to be silent or the impossibility to be silent : a way of telling and a questioning on what the link is between language and the world.**

#### **A-1 The unsaid and the silence.**

For Wittgenstein, the link between the language, the world and its meaning must be questioned. He wrote that the clause is able to stand for reality yet is unable to stand for what it has in common with reality to be able to stand for reality that is to say its logical form. To make it possible, one must step outside the world. According to Wittgenstein, there is what he called the "unsaid" (l'indicible), something that one cannot express and even to a certain point an "unthinkable" (l'impensable). Wittgenstein thinks that when you cannot not talk about something, you must keep the silence. Keeping the silence does not only mean be quiet but rather mean a state of expectation, of openness, of research without word and speech. It is probably essential to let this time be to allow something to come up.

It is exactly what we can witness in Emma when Emma is helping Harriet to make up her mind about the letter she has received from Mr Martin, in which he asked Harriet to marry him.

The dialogue between Emma and Harriet is surrounded by silences as we can read : "she paused over it, while Harriet stood anxiously watching for her opinion,' [...] Harriet was silent. [...] For a little while Emma persevered in her silence [...] Instead of answering, Harriet turned away confused, and stood thoughtfully by the fire ; and though the letter was still in her hand, it was now mechanically twisted about without regard. Emma waited the result with impatience."

It is only at the end of these state of expectation that the answer from Harriet comes up and eventually she decides to refuse Mr Martin. Throughout this passage, we can understand that Emma does want to say openly that she thinks it is not a proper thing for Harriet to marry Mr Martin but she does not tell anything to Harriet. Actually she lets her come up with the negative answer.

## **A-2 The Art : a combination of speech and silence**

In music, one can find a paradigm of language in which silence sets up inside a music sheet expresses beating, rhythm and expressivity. The listener receives silently and the self communes with itself. The silence in music cannot be defined as the antithesis of speech but rather the opposite of the uproar and the noise.

In Jane Austen's work, we find rhythm, beating and expressivity. Silences are set up just like in a music sheet. They are the opposite of the uproar which is the consequence of a too much wealthy speech. A combination of the speech and the silence are required so one can talk about the language of reticence.

Let us take the example of Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility*. Since the first part of the novel Elinor must keep the silence about Lucy's secret : she is engaged to Edward. She cannot even tell Marianne about it since she promised Lucy to keep her engagement secret. Throughout the novel, she remains silent and it is as if it is a second nature about her : her silence is actually a characteristic of her character. Whenever Lucy is here or whenever something is brought about Lucy and Edward, Elinor is stuck in her silence and this silence comes back again and again just like silence in a music sheet. Elinor's silences forms the tempo in the narrative. They are not the antitheses of her speech but rather they tell something about her character and the less she says the more attractive she becomes for the readers. These silences builds a sort of empathy with this character : not only the readers understand what she is going through but her silences are making them feel **WITH** her and this is how her speech and her silence simply become a piece of art. Is considered artistic whenever when one feels with the artist or the writer and this is exactly what happens with the character of Elinor.

## **A-3 Dialectics of speech and silence.**

Silence must be mixed to the speech to be meaningful. Only that way it is the more expressive. Silence only appears well thought out when being compared to the speech. Silence gives a density to the speech. This is how we can define the dialectics of speech and silence. Thus, the more the speech says something the more it reveals out how deep and great what cannot be said can be deep and great. Here we can take one example in *Emma* to give an example of what has just been explained. At the beginning of chapter VIII in the first part,

Harriet has just learnt about Robert Martin's proposal and has made up her mind to refuse. Just after that event, Emma received a visit from Mr Knightley when he planned to tell her about it and during this conversation, the readers can read this : " Emma knew this was too true for contradiction, and therefore said nothing." Mr Knightley has just teased her by making a comparison between Harriet and herself. She perfectly knows that he knows her character so much more than the other. Consequently, what he said about her ("Harriet may not consider every body tiresome as you would") is for sure true. She does not contradict because she recognize it to be perfectly true but she cannot say or admit it right now. That is the reason why Jane Austen uses the third-person narrative to say it anyway. The narrative has just begun and her character of Emma is not ready to admit her faults especially as far as her dear friend Harriet is concerned. Thus, Jane Austen uses one silence from her character in the midst of a dialogue with Mr Knightley to say something true from the inner thoughts of Emma.

### **B- The reticence is supposedly a weapon to undo the conflicts within the speech.**

#### **B-1 The speech is conflictual when it does not stand for reality.**

In Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein is even opposed to the possibility of a "private language" ; he means a language will always remain personal and private since nobody is and will ever be able to understand it. That language is based upon a subjectivism. Yet a language based upon such a subjectivism is possible only to three conditions :

- The meaning of words describing sensitive internal experience depends upon these same experiences
- One cannot communicate about these experiences
- The only person who can communicate about these experiences is the one who lives them.

Any speaker faces these oppositions if he or she wants to develop a "private language". But what about the author ? His or her voice through his or her writing may be conflictual since it does not stand for reality.

According to Wittgenstein, the use of one word or one expression is determined by rules specifying what is right or not. But whenever it is the right way to use it, there is the other way to misuse it. Jane Austen's reticence stands at the frontier between what is right and what is wrong. It is through this process that the reticence becomes a weapon to undo the conflicts within the speech.

The character of Fanny Price can be relevant of what I am trying to develop in this part especially because one can read about her : "Her own thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions." (Mansfield Park, 469). Indeed, contrary to the character of Emma, she is rather a character in restraint first because of her origins and even when she receives an education from her foster family, she does not become confident. When her uncle Sir Thomas leaves the house for his business, her two cousins Edmund and his brother Tom are in charge of the house. This is the moment when Tom decides to produce a play at home. First, Edmund is very reluctant to do it and he is finally convinced to do it with the help of Maria Crawford. But it is not the case for Fanny. All along the rehearsals, she does not give her opinion about it : she is totally against it

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because she perfectly knows that her uncle would have rejected the simple idea of a play ("[...] except Fanny, who had been a quiet auditor of the whole[...]")(Mansfield Park 500). She is the only one to reject the play : the whole thing seems improper to her. Most of the time, she takes a safe haven in one room in the house and makes her best to avoid the whole thing. At the end, Sir Thomas comes back home just before the beginning of the play and stops the plan. What makes the reader understand that Jane Austen develops a private language for the character of Fanny is when she writes : "Such language was so new to Fanny that it quite embarrassed her." Thus, if there is a new language this means that there was a former language and that language can be defined just the way Wittgenstein did it that is to say a "private language" developed with the subjectivism of Fanny and which only Fanny can understand since she she was the only one living what we have just described before, she could communicate about it to anyone and it becomes an unique sensitive internal experience. That completely fits Wittgenstein's definition of a "private language".

### **B-2 The creation of illocutory acts : what the act of speech does.**

As for John Langshaw Austin (1991), saying something is an act since it matches to a linguistic activity giving birth to something new to the world. In the same way, Searle thinks that meaning something and referring to it are acts done thanks to the speech. That is the path which will lead us to demonstrate how Jane Austen uses the act of speech and its illocutory effects to define the paradigm of the language of the reticence.

### **B-3 Reconsidering the effectiveness of the speech**

Up to now, we have studied the active part of the speech. Yet its effectiveness must be reconsidered because the act of speech does not do something by saying something. This is paradoxical since the act of speech is detained, goes through the filter of the reticence of Jane Austen and thus undo the conventional process. With J.L. Austin, the context is one of the most important thing for the "felicity" of the clause. Yet, Jane Austen thwarts the rituals within the speech and uses the reticence of the speech like a tool, a weapon and consequently process does not have any value.

## **C- Reticence can be defined as a new paradigm**

In this part, we will follow the quotation from Catherine Rannoux and Lilianne Rouvelin her work entitled *The Reticence (La réticence)* : "reticence is one way of telling. It does not tell a will, an ability or a prohibition yet it always tells something." (*La Réticence* 7)

### **C-1 Reticence does not tell a will : the crossing-out**

Let us begin with a definition of the crossing-out. According to Jacques Anis (*La Réticence* 39) who wrote about Francis Ponge, it can be defined as the suppression of a part of the text by erasing or overwriting. One must consider the crossing-out in the dialectics of erasing or keeping. It may or may not be impossible to read the erased part but whatever may happen, one can clearly see the attempt of crossing-out.

When Sabine Petillon studies the crossing-out as the embodiment of reticence, she first approaches it sensorily : the crossing-out could be linked with an urge of erasing ; like an exclusive gesture of cancelling. By studying the manuscript of Jane Austen and more exactly Sanditon and The Watsons, we are left to wonder what her crossing-out reveals about her reticence. Is it to be considered as a withdrawal or a desire to be easily reached by her readers ? When Jane Austen erased a whole part of her original sentences in The Watsons, it appears out she did not withdraw but expresses with her crossing-out a desire to be easily reached by her readers as we can see in the following examples. Instead of keeping : "I wish she were well married with all my heart ; when once she is, she will be a very wealthy character-" she crossed this line out and wrote : "I wish with all my heart she was well married. I declare I had rather have her well-married than myself." (Later Manuscript 263) First, the chosen sentence is longer and there are more details and precisions in it with expressions such as "with all my heart" or "I declare". These are details showing that Jane Austen wanted to clarify the situation concerning her character and it is then obvious that she wanted to be easily reached by her readers.

Secondly, Sabine Petillon also puts forward that the crossing-out stands as a meeting the opaque saying, it suspends the obvious use of words. Moreover the crossing-out belongs to the author's writing. It is essential to the author's research of an appropriate language. Words sometimes seem obvious. When one speaks, they come naturally without a transparency. This transparency is not clear when an author is writing and then the crossing-out reticence comes out when the spontaneous discourse disappears to the advantage of the writing.

### **C-2 Reticence does not tell an ability : when telling means silence.**

According to G.Frege's works, language is a subjective expression of the speaker's thinking. So the language is defined according to the world to which it refers. The language is also defined by the objective meaning it brings. Truth is one condition of this definition. The world states are set up and words have a reference. The discussion about reference is naturally followed by the question of perception and interpretation. When perception and interpretation are different while reference is still the same, we are at the core of one situation when the reticence is not able of anything. When Jane Austen writes, she does not only refer to something, she actually creates something. Within this creation, she may retain the words and even silence them. Here lies all the paradoxical reticence of her writing.

### **C-3 Reticence does not tell a prohibition yet it always tells something.**

The first part of the quotation ("reticence does not tell a prohibition") leads us to question morality whenever it is such a burden that the speech is silenced. Is it a mark of the reticence ? This what we are going to demonstrate.

So does exist marks of reticence at the linguistic level. We could focus on impersonal forms, infinitive clauses, the gerund but also all the passive forms : there are numerous in the work of Jane Austen. Here is a relevant example of it in Emma (728) : "She could not speak. But she was not wanted to speak. It was enough for her to feel." In this example, Harriet has just read a riddle she thought Mr Elton wrote for her. She concluded that he was in love with her hence her reaction. In this quotation, the readers understands that Harriet is so flabbergasted that she is unable to speak but with the passive form ("she was not wanted to speak") the readers also understands that it is not proper to openly express one's feelings. So the only left option for

Harriet since her feelings must be silenced by morality is to feel just like Jane Austen describes it by using the third-person narrative since she could not use the direct speech with a dialogue to do it.

## II- **Language of lovers : before everything there is desire**

Jean-Jacques Lecercle (2004) wonders about one form of paradox : what kind of meaning can we give to the language when it is marked by one form of silence ? Reticence in language must be understood in a larger perspective that is another philosophy of the language which will take the language not only as an instrument of communication. We will try to demonstrate what the reticence shows us about the language in Jane Austen's novels.

Language is useful to communicate. Wondering about reticence in Jane Austen's novels is the same thing as wondering about the language at the service of the reticence in a situation of communication. J-L Austin (1991) described many functions to what he defined as speech acts. Language is useful to communicate but can also be able to change the world's representations around oneself in order to shoot for one precise aim. Thus, he made a difference between the different performative utterances. Studying the principle of reticence in Jane Austen's novels means studying the language using the tools set up by J-L Austin.

Silence creates a tension. This tension puts forward a kind of withdrawal from the author but also at the same time it is also a kind of commitment : there is a speech behind this reticence – one subjectivity. Whenever one catches and translates the signs of reticence in Jane Austen's novels, one can understand her commitment to set up a social bridge through the language. Consequently one could say that Jane Austen invented an approach to the language which is characteristic to her writing.

### **A- The principle of reticence at the heart of the language.**

#### **A-1- The metalanguage of reticence.**

Reticence is a way of telling. As we see with Catherine Rannoux and Liliane Rouvel, the reticence does not tell a will, an ability or a prohibition but it tells something anyway. This definition of reticence can be found in *Sense and Sensibility* in the following quotation : "After her entrance, Colonel Brandon became more thoughtful and silent than he had been before". Here, the reader understands that Colonel Brandon is reticent in his behavior since he becomes silent when Marianne enters the room. It is as if he was forbidding himself to say something, as if it was impossible for him to say something in the presence of Marianne and indeed since what he knows about Willoughby is directly linked to Marianne and he does not want her to be unhappy.

Second, the reader must pay attention to the form used by Jane Austen at this moment of her novel. She could have used a dialogue and the direct speech to inform her readers about the situation. Yet, she uses the third person narrative to describe Colonel Brandon's attitude. This is all the more revealing of her presence in the narrative. The character of Colonel Brandon is not

free anymore to express what he wants but where the paradox relies is that it is with this sort of language that Jane Austen expresses her reticence. Thus the language serves the reticence : it has become a tool to communicate just like J-L Austin described it. The language is useful to transform the representation of the surrounding world. In the quoted example, the language of reticence does not tell or hide something but it means something and this is how one can define the metalanguage of reticence. This way, Jane Austen builds a new definition of the truth since the metalanguage of reticence is useful only for this purpose : she puts forward what is acceptable according to this new truth.

However, this definition stays limited whenever one refers to the writing of reticence.

## **A-2 How to write the principle of reticence**

Words does not always mean the things, they point out them. Husserl makes a difference between expressing and pointing out. One expression always has one signification otherwise it is not an expression. Here, one can understand the importance of the language. It is exactly what Chomsky did. Saussure puts forward that it is impossible to determine the definition of one word if only the exchangeable thing is considered. One must also think about the similar set of similar words. Moreover, the cultural side sets up the relation between the signifying and the signified and eventually the language of reticence is the footprint of a signifying experience of the world. In *Persuasion*, when one can read " Captain Wentworth had no fortune." (*Persuasion* 1106), the words are pointing out one situation for Captain Wentworth : he has no money. This is a blunt example when words point out things but Jane Austen also uses words and expressions to write about her reticence especially in the following example when words are referring to a situation when something is happening for the character in a complete silence : " Marianne said not a word." (*Sense and Sensibility* 189) Here we are just after Marianne's recovery. Elinor is trying to tell Marianne all the truth about Willoughby. Marianne has understood his character and how he lied to her about his real intentions but not a word is spoken. This shows we can outline the principle of reticence in Jane Austen's writing.

## **A-3 The reticence : language and meaning or the impact of words : the birth of desire.**

In *Le poids des mots*, Bourdieu studies the part coming to the words in the social construction : the world is "my" representation. If one allows the language of reticence, the social conditions of the effectiveness of the speech are created. Indeed in *Lady Susan*, one can read :

"He can have no true regard for me, or he would not have listened to her ; and she, with her little rebellion heart and indelicate feelings to throw herself into the protection of a young man with whom she had scarcely ever exchanged two words before."(*Lady Susan* 1258)

Lady Susan is referring to one of her potential lover Reginald De Courcy who is, against all her expectations, shows some interest for her daughter Frederica. First, the use of the present shows that the described situation is something in running at the present time and thus it is building itself before Lady Susan's eyes : she is witnessing the beginning of a relationship between her daughter Frederica and Reginald. The world she is describing is her representation of her surrounding world. Second, through her words, the readers can witness with her how the language is building a desire between Frederica and Reginald but this desire is marked by a restraint. The adverb "scarcely" is a proof of this restraint. The two points we have just studied

show how the language of reticence has an impact in the world Jane Austen built for her characters especially in Lady Susan.

## **B- The reticence or how to build a social bridge through the language**

### **B-1 Jane Austen and Austin's speech acts.**

According to J-L Austin, an utterance is performative only if some conditions are reunited. All the present protagonists must agree about the necessary conditions. Thus a social bridge can be built through the reticence. It is also a kind of paradox since this social bridge is set up in spite of a sort of a restraint in the language.

Through Jane Austen's work, one can testify that some utterances might not be performative and yet, through them Jane Austen names, establishes, gives its essence to the reticence by defining some rules.

### **B-2 Reticence or the rules of language.**

Searle wrote that to speak is a form of behavior determined by rules. Society imposes them. The speaking subject is forced to follow rules which have not been determined by oneself. Yet, through the reticence, the speaking subject and in our case the writing subject that is to say Jane Austen determines limits and boundaries and thus is free from any imposed pressure by society and this also the way how she is able to free her characters from any imposed pressure.

Moreover as Wittgenstein underlined it, the subject and consequently the writer stands as a boundary of language and thus determines the limits of the reticence since as stressed out by this author the subject does not belong to the world but is one boundary of this world. As a way to conclude, we can say that Jane Austen stands herself as a boundary to the rules of the language of reticence that she sets forth in her novels.

## **III- Sexuality in Jane Austen's novels or what was characteristic of women in Jane Austen's novels : creation of one style, her stylistic reticence.**

Aesthetics is a philosophic and disciplinary art exploring the nature of perception, senses and beauty or exclusively what is relating to the concept of art. Up to the 18th century, Aesthetics was equivalent to the sphere of "science of beauty" and became the art philosophy in the 19th century. It can be related to the emotions one can feel before a master piece or what can be specific or unique to one expression (artistic, literary or poetic), and what can be defined as beautiful contrary to what is only useful or functional. Yet, after reading Jane Austen's novels, we can go far further. She created a stylistic reticence which was characteristic of her sex. Jane Austen deployed her stylistic reticence in almost every described situation. Whenever she restraints or erases one word, she actually creates one new movement characteristic of her writing. Her stylistic reticence is ambiguous because it cannot be understood without the veil of appearances. Besides, it cannot exist by itself : it needs a reader in order to exist. What is then

Jane Austen's role in this creation for and towards the reader ? Just like an artist before his brand new canvas or like the musician before his brand new score, Jane Austen invented herself as a creating artist, "magus and prophet" as Victor Hugo used to say it when describing artists. Jane Austen was a member of the audience but she was more talented since she created one aesthetics characteristic to her work.

### **A- Jane Austen's role for and towards the reader.**

#### **A-1 Does Jane Austen show some restraint, withdraw or is she reticent ?**

Bergson (2014) wishes we could see the same things in the same way. Most of the time we only read tags stuck on them. The language is the cause of this classifying and selective tendency of one's look. One is so used to those generalities that one lose sight of what is unique in these actions or objects. It is as if describing was not as intense and effective anymore. Thus instead of understanding the unique aspect of our experiences, one only understands the personal aspect of them : the language has already named it once and for all in the same conditions for everyone. One must be aware of it if the chains of language must be broken. It was the case for Jane Austen. She was aware that language could be one impoverishment of the unique experience. Through her stylistic reticence in the language, she has taught her readers to see the world again. Her stylistic reticence stands as one creation that can be qualified as « austenian » for and towards the readers.

#### **A-2 Jane Austen stands as a paradox : she has a silent voice.**

France Farago (1999) defines literature as a shining presence which is more intuitive than any particular language. Consequently, the author or the writer masters the language in a way that he or she can be recognized among the other authors or writers. They have a voice. The French novelist André Malraux clearly opposes style and writing. The style is a world's feeling when writing is a representation. Jane Austen's style and voice can be found in the silences she gives her characters but also in the silences she imposes to herself as an author. Indeed, if in some of her novels, we can clearly read the presence of a narrator and as a consequence of Jane Austen with the presence of sentence like : "I purposely abstain some dates from this occasion" in *Mansfield Park* (684) where the personal pronoun stands for the narrator and the author at the same time, she tends to erase more and more her presence throughout all her novels. The difference can be all the more flagrant in *Juvenilia*s and more exactly in *Jack and Alice* (13) a novel in which the narrator interferes not at the end of the novel but right at the beginning :

"Before I proceed to give an account of the Evening, it will be proper to describe to my readers, the persons and Characters of the party introduced to his acquaintance".

In her first attempts as a writer, it is all the more clear that Jane Austen as a narrator did not have a silent voice just as she did in her last novels and as we saw in *Mansfield Park*.

### **A-3 Jane Austen teaches her readers to see the world again.**

Merleau-Ponty isopposed to Noam Chomsky when he excluded any intellectualism putting forward the existence of a pure thought before the speech. Something from the world goes into the language and it is the role of a writer to put it into the light. The art masterpiece teaches us to see and eventually makes us think like any analitical book cannot do it. When Jane Austen wrote her novels, something of her world is described throughout the language she uses. It allows the readers to discover the world throughout her vision whoever the characters she uses to do so especially when she uses the stream of conciousness to do it : she thus introduces her readers to the full spectrum and the continuous flow of her character's inner thoughts. Their senses are mingled with conscious inner thoughts, memories or experiences. The unspoken is spoken throughout this technique of narrative and this is how Jane Austen teaches her readers to see the world again, through her characters'inner thoughts. *Pride and Prejudice* is to provide an example of these statements :

"Thursday was to be the wedding day, and on Wednesday Miss Lucas paid her farewell visit ; and when she rose to take leave, Elizabeth, ashamed of her mother ungracious and reluctant good wishes, and sincerely affected herself, accompanied her out of the room. " (*Pride and Prejudice* 290)

If the first part of the latter quotation can be related to the narrator only, there is no doubt about the second part : Jane Austen is using the stream of consciounes technique to share with her readers Elizabeth's inner thoughts. This is all the more obvious with the use of the past participle "ashamed"and the two adjectives"ungracious" and "reluctant". Obviously, it is Elizabeth's judgementon her mother that is introduced here not the narrator's or Jane Austen.

Thus Jane Austen introduces her readers to different prospects and one of them can be related to a feminist prospect and this is what we are going to see in the following part.

## **B- Mary Wollstonecraft's perspectives and Jane Austen**

### **B-1 Women and girls' Education**

In her introduction toA *Vindication of Women's rights*, Mary Wollstonecrafts came back on the matter of education. She wished to see more educated women as reasonable as any other human being without any consideration about her sex and not as dizzy creatures with one fate : pleasing the other sex of the human kind. She wrote : "I earnestly wish to point out what true dignity and human happiness consist in ; I want to persuade women to aim at strength of mind and body, and convince them that the soft phrases

‘susceptibility of heart’

‘delicacy of sentiment’, and

‘refinement of taste’

Are almost synonymous with expressions indicating weakness, and that creatures who are the objects only of pity and the kind of love that has been called ‘pity’s sister’ will soon become objects of content. "She wanted to show that elegance was inferior to virtue, that the most praiseworthy ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, whether male or female, and that lesser ambitions should be tested against that one. In Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price clearly embodies this path first drawn by Mary Wollstonecraft. At the beginning of the novel she is described in the following terms, "[...] though there might not be much in her first appearance to captivate, there was, at least, nothing to disgust her relations. She was small of her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty [...]" (*Mansfield Park* 430) Thus Fanny is described as an insignificant character, someone unnoticeable because of her physical appearance. Moreover she has a "quiet passive manner" (*Mansfield Park* 430). She is not looking for a husband contrary to the majority of characters in *Pride and Prejudice* (211) as we can read in the opening scene :

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

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 as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters."

In this quotation one can easily infer the importance of marriage for women. One man with a fortune did not have the same objective in his life. By the way, Fanny is all the more surprised when Henry Crawford asks for her hand.

Fanny also received an education contrary to her brothers and sisters. She had the same education as her cousins Julia and Maria Bertrams. But her education does not stop there contrary to her cousins. She can also rely upon her other cousin Edmund to help her improve her character and that makes all the difference since : "his attentions were otherwise of the highest importance in assisting the improvement of her mind, and extending its pleasure." (*Mansfield Park* 435) This difference is even considered by Jane Austen herself when she interferes as a narrator in the novel by writing :

" [...]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 judgement 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". (*Mansfield Park* 551)

With the use of the personal pronoun *I*, the narrator of the story which is also Jane Austen the author, gives her personal viewpoint about the situation. She does not think her character will fall in love with Henry Crawford because of her taste, her strong mind which is more valuable than anything else as we can read in the latter quotation.

### **B-2 Women's freedom is one condition for a better society.**

In chapter 2 entitled The prevailing opinion about sexual differences, Mary Wollstonecraft argues against the idea that there are characteristics proper to her sex and stands against the principle of a specific education for girls only. That education only aims at making women dependent to men and household activities while encouraging concealment, flirting and a certain taste for pretending. Mary Wollstonecraft puts forward that the only condition to set up a better society is to grant freedom to both sexes. As she wrote it :

"So the most perfect education, in my opinion, is the use of the understanding in the way that is most likely to strengthen the body and form the heart. e to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render him or her independent." (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 20)

Independent mind is what seems to better describe Jane Austen's Emma. Indeed, Emma does not need to marry. She is twenty-one years old at the beginning of the novel and is not in need of anything thanks to the large fortune of her father. She is the mistress of her father's house since her mother died a long time ago. She is in charge of her surrounding society and she decides to further a relationship or not, just like she does with Harriet Smith or Jane Fairfax. Her father thinks that there is nobody : "half so attentive and civil" (Emma 780) as she is. She is loved by everyone in her surrounding companionship. That enables her to be free from any constraints or obligation but not from concealment especially as far as Mr Knightley is concerned. But Jane Austen seems to overcome this obstacle. She does not want her character to be stuck in that state proper to her sex. That must be the reason why she wrote at the end of the novel : "High in the rank of her most serious and heartfelt felicities, was the reflection that all necessity of concealment from Mr Knightley would soon be over. The disguise, equivocation, mystery, so hateful to her to practise, might soon be over." (Emma 952) What is noticeable in this quotation, is the presence of Jane Austen. First, we can witness it because it is not a direct speech from Emma. It is a third person writing hence the presence of personal pronoun like *her*. We could have qualified this passage of stream of consciousness. Yet what is relevant of this stream is that the character's mind or thoughts are given without any construction. Yet with the presence of 'her most serious and heartfelt felicities' and 'so hateful to her', it is as if Emma is addressing herself to the readers. Jane Austen is keeping the control over her character's mind. If not, she would have chosen the direct speech and it is not the case here so we are left to think that actually she is using Emma's internal monologue to give her personal viewpoint about disguise, equivocation and mystery that women were forced to pretend at her time.

### **B-3 Jane Austen is not any women : she uses her reason to write about her sexuality, to write about what was proper to her sex.**

In chapter 4 called The state of degradation explaining the reasons why a woman is reduced, Mary Wollstonscraft gives a very negative overview of the state of women generally speaking. As they do not have a proper education, they are frivolous, weak, changing, shy and entirely submitted to their sensitivity and to their feelings while they would be in better position if they only try to convince themselves to improve their intelligence. Mary Wollstoncrafts fiercely criticizes the prejudice according to a man must reason and a woman must feel. She wanted to warn women against the consequences of such a prejudice. In a way, Jane Austen does the same in her novel *Sense and Sensibility* with the character of Marianne. Here is the way Jane Austen describes her : "she was sensible and clever, but eager in everthing ; her sorrows, her joys could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting : she was everything but prudent." (*Sense and Sensibility* 5) Marianne is governed by her feelings and that will lead her to her own loss especially when she meets Willoughby. As she is not used to reason her feelings she leaves them overpower her and she hardly accepts any critics even from her dear sister Elinor. Even when she learns that Willoughby is engaged to another woman she hardly believes what she is witnessing at the ball. Willoughby is not a trust-worthy man. She lets herself nearly die out of love for him. That behavior is clearly counterbalanced by Elinor's behavior. Jane Austen describes her this way, "her feelings were strong but she knew how to govern them." (*Sense and Sensibility* 5). Elinor is also her mother's counsellor. When Lucy, her rival, reveals her her secret about her engagement with Edward she keeps it up to its breaking-out. All along the novel, she never loses her temper even when Marianne is so sick that there is nearly no hope for her. By opposing these two sisters, Jane Austen also warns her readers to what may happen to a woman when she is governed by her feelings just like Marianne. What was proper to her sex is embodied by the character of Marianne but by opposing her to a character like Elinor, Jane Austen proves that she understood the importance of reason in the education of women. The character of Marianne also understands it since when she finally recovers she says, "I wish for no change" (*Sense ans Sensibility* 190). She finally admits that an unreasonable experience like she used to live with Willoughby made her no good and led her to nothing except death. Even the character of Willoughby admits it since the reader discovers that he made her "his secret standart of perfection in woman"(*Sense ansd Sensibility*207). With this third person narrative, the character of Willoughby is not free to express himself. Once again, Jane Austen keeps the control over her character so the readers can induce that she also thinks that when a woman leads a life governed by reason, she actually lives a perfect life.

### **C-Jane Austen is a more skilfull member of the audience.**

#### **C-1 Language is an unique experience.**

In tractatus logico-philosophicus, Wittgenstein demonstrates how language is limited. It articulates the details of the world but is unable to tell the meaning of it. The meaning of the said can be lived but cannot be told. Jane Austen lived these limits in her literary work. What is inexpressible is one condition to the world and to the language. Yet, Jane Austen transforms the language into one unique experience by making it an internal experience. Lady Susan, her epistolary novel is one obvious example. The letters Lady Susan exchanges with her friend Alicia, her lovers or to her family is a plugeon into an internal experience, the one Lady Susan is experiencing. When Jane Austen chose to write an epistolary novel and only the letters exchanged around one character, she chose to show her readers that she can be a more skilfull member of the audience. Indeed, contrary to the other studied example before, she did not use the third-person narrative to tell her story. Allthe letters are adressed to someone and Jane Austen always uses the first person for her characters, just like in any letters. So, up to the conclusion, she made no interference in the narrative. This does not prevent the inexpressible from being said. Lady Susan's daughter Frederica is unable to expresse how uneasy she feels with her mother's attitude but that situation is described anyway. This is how Jane Austen succeeds in transcending her situation as an author. She made it possible for her readers to have access to an internal experience throughout the language she used.

### **C-2 Jane Austen develops a "private" language.**

Wittgenstein was the first to give a definition of what he called a "private language". It can be related to the inner language. It evolves and is submitted what he called the use. The use of language is the same for everyone. The use of language allows us to develop the meaning of words or the expressions we used according to a contex. Jane Austen develops a private language through this way. She uses references which is characteristic to herself but at the same time they are the same for her readers. She varies the expressions she uses according to the contex she sets forth in each of her novels. Her language is accepted without any effort and this is a proof that she develops a "private" language not only for her characters as we studied before with the character of Fanny Price, but also for her readers. With the use of the third person in her narrative, the readers are slowly iniated to her private language throughout her characters. The more she uses the third person, the more she interfers in the inner thought but also in the inner language which is developed. That is the way she chose to develop a private language which is characteristic to all her female characters and consequently this private language was the way she chose to talk about the sexuality that is to say what was characteristic of her sex.

### **C-3 The austenian stylistic reticence.**

The mindis not only a mirror of the world : it defines classes in reality. The mindis symbolic since it transforms real things into concepts. Hence the mind has the power to rationalize. Yet Jane Austen transcends this stage through her writing and her novels. Through

her stylistic reticence, she has created a writing, a language characteristic of her work and this is how she was able to define sexuality or what was characteristic of her sex by revealing her mind defining the classes in her reality. The readers could eventually define the austenian stylistic reticence.

## CONCLUSION

In a way of concluding this article, I hope that my readers are now convinced that Jane Austen can be considered as a major author. First, she was different from the other writers in away that she defines the outlines of a new language through her stylistic reticence which was characteristic only to her novels. Second, she uses her stylistic reticence as one way of telling something about her sex. Where anyone else could have seen a paradox by using reticence to tell about her sex, she transcends her conditions as a female writer but also as a woman by using the concept to make her style unique and noticeable from any other authors whether it is a man or a woman. Her stylistic reticence stands more as a form of coherence and lucidity than a sort of claim. Her stylistic reticence is not to be considered as a form of restraint or withdrawal. Jane Austen is not claiming herself as a female novelist, she **IS** a female novelist.

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