

THE *REAL* JANE AUSTEN: AUSTEN'S SHIFTING IMAGE

Deborah Mondadori Simionato

Submetido em 25 de maio de 2018.

Aceito para publicação em 06 de setembro de 2018.

Cadernos do IL, Porto Alegre, n.º 57, novembro de 2018. p. 220-231.

POLÍTICA DE DIREITO AUTORAL

Autores que publicam nesta revista concordam com os seguintes termos:

- (a) Os autores mantêm os direitos autorais e concedem à revista o direito de primeira publicação, com o trabalho simultaneamente licenciado sob a Creative Commons Attribution License, permitindo o compartilhamento do trabalho com reconhecimento da autoria do trabalho e publicação inicial nesta revista.
 - (b) Os autores têm autorização para assumir contratos adicionais separadamente, para distribuição não exclusiva da versão do trabalho publicada nesta revista (ex.: publicar em repositório institucional ou como capítulo de livro), com reconhecimento de autoria e publicação inicial nesta revista.
 - (c) Os autores têm permissão e são estimulados a publicar e distribuir seu trabalho online (ex.: em repositórios institucionais ou na sua página pessoal) a qualquer ponto antes ou durante o processo editorial, já que isso pode gerar alterações produtivas, bem como aumentar o impacto e a citação do trabalho publicado.
 - (d) Os autores estão conscientes de que a revista não se responsabiliza pela solicitação ou pelo pagamento de direitos autorais referentes às imagens incorporadas ao artigo. A obtenção de autorização para a publicação de imagens, de autoria do próprio autor do artigo ou de terceiros, é de responsabilidade do autor. Por esta razão, para todos os artigos que contenham imagens, o autor deve ter uma autorização do uso da imagem, sem qualquer ônus financeiro para os Cadernos do IL.
-

POLÍTICA DE ACESSO LIVRE

Esta revista oferece acesso livre imediato ao seu conteúdo, seguindo o princípio de que disponibilizar gratuitamente o conhecimento científico ao público proporciona sua democratização.

<http://seer.ufrgs.br/cadernosdoil/index>

Quinta-feira, 22 de novembro de 2018.

THE *REAL* JANE AUSTEN: AUSTEN'S SHIFTING IMAGE

A VERDADEIRA JANE AUSTEN: A IMAGEM EM CONSTANTE MUDANÇA DE AUSTEN

Deborah Mondadori Simionato¹

ABSTRACT

Jane Austen is one of the most important and widely known authors in the English language. Despite her unrelenting fame, very little is known about the actual woman who lived from 1775 to 1816 – her family claimed she led a quiet life and they burned her presumably most compromising letters. Readers and scholars were left with an unfinished sketch by Austen's sister, Cassandra, later modified to fit the Victorian expectations of what a proper lady ought to be. In 2011, a new portrait was found, one of a mature and independent authoress. This essay aims to look at Austen's life in order to glimpse at the woman behind the images, understanding how Austen's image changed alongside her readers, and perhaps because of them.

Key-words: Jane Austen, portraits, biography, English Literature.

RESUMO

Jane Austen é uma das mais importantes e bem conhecidas escritoras de língua inglesa. Apesar de sua fama incansável, muito pouco é sabido sobre a mulher que viveu entre 1775 e 1816 – sua família afirmou que ela viveu uma vida pacata, e suas cartas supostamente mais comprometedoras foram queimadas. Leitores e acadêmicos foram deixados com um esboço de um retrato feito pela irmã de Austen, Cassandra, que foi mais tarde modificado para se enquadrar no ideal vitoriano do que uma mulher deveria ser. Em 2011, uma nova imagem foi encontrada, retratando uma escritora madura e independente. O presente artigo, portanto, pretende analisar a vida de Austen, a fim de compreender a mulher por trás das imagens, entendendo como a imagem de Austen mudou junto com o seu público leitor, e talvez por causa dele.

Palavras-chave: Jane Austen, retratos, biografia, Literatura Inglesa.

Jane Austen is still considered one of the most important authors in the English language, even 200 years after her death. Having published six completed novels and a handful of short stories, Austen's name is revered as one of the greatest voices of female fiction of the 1800s. Her current renown and popularity are incomparable to the lack of recognition she received in her lifetime: Austen saw four of her finished novels published before she died. She made a respectable, but by no means substantial, amount of money from them, and she never saw her name become known amongst her peers – Austen published as “A Lady”, having had her real name revealed only after her death.

This essay aims to look at the construction of Austen's image in three different moments of time: her lifetime, the time that followed it, the Victorian Era, and nowadays, in order to understand how the perception of the author in question has shifted in the two centuries since her first novel was published. This analysis will be carried out through a study of Austen's biography and her letters, and principally by means of an analysis of her famous portraits and the cult that has been established around the novelist.

By all accounts, Jane Austen led a quiet country life, and not much is known

¹ Doutoranda em Estudos de Literatura pela Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

about it, especially when compared to other nineteenth century writers and how much information we have about them to this day – which is both due to their fame during their lifetime and the many letters they left behind. However, the lack of information on Austen's life has not stopped scholars and writers from minutely discussing and exploring what we do know, for Jane Austen seems to have attracted a lot of attention, more so in the past thirty years than ever before. The *known unknown* regarding Austen's life provides a lot of room for speculation, as scholar after scholar has used the material available – her six main novels, short stories, unfinished works, letters, family descriptions and portraits – to infer as much as possible as to what Austen and her life were like. The facts, however, are few, and we are left with little information and a lot of conjecturing – the former (or the lack thereof) fuelling the latter.

Jane Austen was born on the 16th of December, 1775, in the midst of the Georgian period (1717 – 1830), in a small village in Hampshire, south of England, to the Reverend George Austen and his wife Cassandra. Jane Austen was the seventh child of the Austen family, and the second girl – she succeeded five brothers (James, George, Edward, Henry, Francis) and one sister (Cassandra), preceding only another brother (Charles).

During her lifetime, Jane Austen would never leave England, but would explore her surroundings like few before her, and travel around the south of England more than most women of her times (ADKINS & ADKINS, 2013, p. xvii). Austen, despite being a woman and therefore not allowed the same level of education as the men she knew, was very much aware of the changing times in which she lived, and the claims that her writing is never placed in time are easily debunked, as Austen was capable of registering with subtlety the changes around her, leaving it to the well-informed reader to gather the meanings behind her characters' actions and her narrators' remarks: "the England that Jane Austen knew was the result of a profound change in man's attitude to himself and his environment which had begun some seventy or eighty years before her birth." (LANE, 1996, p. 15).

The life the Austens would have known in those days in Hampshire was very different from the life we know in the 21st century, being "both more tranquil and less desolate than now, for the human figure was very much a part of the scenery" (LANE, 1996, p. 18). However, it is worth noticing that "the flower-strewn England of Jane Austen, well known to us from countless Hollywood adaptations, doesn't come from the sharp, acid novels of Jane herself" (WORSLEY, 2017, p. 24), but from a Victorian idealisation of what the world used to be like in the past versus the pollution and overcrowding of the Industrial Revolution. Despite not living in the most green and idyllic of lands, Jane Austen is known to have been an avid walker, and escaping the tyranny of enclosed spaces through walks was one of the only ways women could have some freedom – going to war, touring continental Europe, and exploring the world was a man's business, whereas women were made to stay at home and become accomplished in music and embroidery. Most social spaces were men's domains, and balls and dances were a couple of the few instances of congregation, whereas everyday life held distinct spaces for males and females.

"Respectable young women could have no profession except matrimony, hence girls were expected to marry as soon as possible after they made their debut into society in their late teens" (LE FAYE, 2003, p. 113), and if, like Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra, they did not marry and had no money to their names, women would most likely have to depend on a kind wealthier male relation to survive – again, like the Austen women did. Marriage, however, did not necessarily equal security. For one, death in childbirth was extremely common. Furthermore, fathers did not always make

provisions for their daughters, and the death of the husband could entail in the woman's loss of everything, including the dowry she first brought to the marriage. This meant that she would have to depend on the kindness of relations. Moreover, marriage often meant the end of any career prospect for the woman, since for a gentlewoman to work in the early years of the 19th century reflected badly on the man supposed to provide for her, even if her work was not related to income.

The 18th century was prolific in many aspects, and the developing of the arts saw, amongst many other things, the birth of what we know today as the *novel*. Jane Austen was lucky insofar as she had access to her father's library – an uncommon practice in her times – and made full use of it. Austen was acquainted with her contemporary writers, reading everything her hands touched. Reverend Austen's bookshelves “were of primary importance in fostering her talent, given that the first impulse to write stories comes from being entertained and excited by other people's” (TOMALIN, 2000, p. 69). This freedom to read whatever she wanted helped her to learn more about the world she lived in and gave her insights into the minds of people, helping her to understand, and even analyse the characters around her. Claire Tomalin (2000, p. 68-69) speculates that “Mr Austen cannot have kept much from her. In this as in his unruffled response to her bold stories, he was an exceptional father to his exceptional daughter”.

Austen was adept of the philosophy that one should write about what one knows, and her knowledge of the human condition was expanded by the reading material available to her. Austen wrote about the English society that she knew well, making her novels and letters a fair portrayal of the time and place in which she lived. Austen went as far as making sure to avoid writing scenes in which men were the only participants, for she claimed that she did not know what men talked about when women were not present, therefore focusing on her female protagonists, as she would know about a woman's life and thoughts.

Jane Austen spent the first few years of her life brought up by a village woman, as was common practice in the 19th century – babies would only return to their parents' home once they were more sentient. Jane Austen's “second banishment from home” (TOMALIN, 2000, p. 35) happened when she was seven years old and was sent away to school. Even though most girls in the late 18th century were taught at home, the Austen girls were sent to school as their house was inhabited by a plethora of boys who Reverend Austen taught in the school ran by him. Lucy Worsley (2017) stresses that Austen spent nearly five years of her first eleven years of life living away from her family home and parents, contradicting the idea that the Austen family was “tightly knit, self-contained and constantly harmonious” (WORSLEY, 2017, p. 25), as well as potentially explaining Austen's seemingly difficult relationship with her mother later in life.

Very early on she started developing a taste for writing – which was not unexpected in a family of amateur writers. Young Jane Austen received intellectual encouragement from her father, who presented her with notebooks and paper with which to write her stories, both of which were expensive items at the time; Reverend Austen gave Cassandra drawing paper, and it was she who illustrated Jane Austen's *History of England*, dated just before Jane's sixteenth birthday. The *History* was written for the pleasure and enjoyment of her family and it is composed by inside jokes, teases and charades that she would have known her parents and siblings to appreciate.

During her teenage years, Jane Austen started working on short stories about young people struggling with matters of love and friendship – short prototypes to what would later become full length novels. The works from that period are known as her

Juvenilia, and make for an interesting read, as it is possible to detect some of the style that marks her later novels – her *Juvenilia* carries a more dramatic tone than her later works, a characteristic typical of adolescence and translated into writing through damsels in distress and dashing heroes.

In 1785, when Jane Austen was a young lady, the Austens found themselves in the company of a young Irish gentleman called Tom Lefroy. Lefroy's name features in a few of Austen's letters to her sister Cassandra (they wrote consistently to each other when they were apart), with special notice to the description of a ball she had attended the night before. Tom was a newcomer in the neighbourhood, an Irish law student related to one of the Hampshire families with whom the Austens were friendly.

Tom Lefroy was a visitor to Hampshire, not one of the dancing partners she and Cassandra had known most of their lives, but someone quite new. He was fair-haired and good-looking, clever and charming; he had completed a degree in Dublin and was about to study for the bar in London, and was just taking a few weeks' holiday over Christmas with his Uncle and Aunt Lefroy at Ashe parsonage. After this first mention, Tom Lefroy keeps putting in more appearances in Jane's letter. In fact she can't keep him out, this 'gentlemanlike, good-looking, pleasant young man', as she covers the sheet of paper so cheerfully, dipping her well-sharpened pen into the little ink bottle at her side. (TOMALIN, 2000, p. 115)

Austen's brief relationship with Tom Lefroy is to this day reason for speculation. After Austen's death, Cassandra Austen burnt most of the letters they exchanged, as well as other potentially compromising correspondence her sister might have carried, meaning that there is very little left, but what can be inferred from the remaining letters is that some sort of flirtation did happen between the two. However, we will never know the depth of her feelings for "her Irish friend", as she used to call him. Lefroy is one of the only potential love interests in Austen's life as far as we are aware nowadays, and perhaps for that very reason, their relationship – whatever it entailed – still attracts so much attention. Biographers differ in their view of Austen and Lefroy's relationship, with some of them believing (and "believe" is the term here, as there is scant evidence) she was really in love with Mr Lefroy. Films like *Becoming Jane* (2007) link the relationship with him to her writing of *Pride and Prejudice*. The film was based on a biography/novel by scholar Jon Hunter Spence titled *Becoming Jane Austen* (2007). The book does not go as far as its film adaptation, but it does imply that there was a romantic relationship between Lefroy and Austen, as that relationship would have inspired her to write what has become her most popular novel, *Pride & Prejudice*.

Conclusions regarding this supposed relationship often differ. Tomalin's view of the brief encounter between Austen and Lefroy is that it was "a small experience, perhaps, but a painful one for Jane Austen, this brush with young Tom Lefroy. What she distilled from it was something else again" (TOMALIN, 200, p. 122), and she adds that,

From now on she carried in her own flesh and blood, and not just gleamed from books and plays, the knowledge of sexual vulnerability; of what it is to be entranced by the dangerous stranger; to hope, and to feel the blood warm; to wince, to withdraw; to hope for what you are not going to have and had better not mention. Her writing becomes informed by this knowledge, running like a dark undercurrent beneath the comedy. (TOMALIN, 2000, p. 122)

When Austen was about to turn 25 years old, years after her encounter with Lefroy, in December 1800, Reverend Austen decided he would retire and move his family to Bath, in Somerset, and by all accounts, his younger daughter was not happy

with the news. The move to Bath “was not only the greatest change that her life had ever known, but a change which was unwelcome in its nature” (LANE, 1996, p. 85), as Austen loved the freedom of the countryside, and was not fond of the ‘smoke and mirrors’ style of life in Bath. Despite having visited Bath in the past (much like Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*), it was the first time Austen went to Bath as a resident (as happens with Anne Elliot to be in *Persuasion*). Bath was the perfect place for “husband hunting” (TOMALIN, 2000, p. 174), and it is plausible to imagine that Austen would have felt the pressure of finding a husband since her parents’ decision to retrench to the roman city. The move was followed by what is known as Austen’s quiet years, as very little was produced in the five years she spent in the city – she did start working on the manuscript of *The Watsons*, which remains unfinished, perhaps because its subject hit too close to home, when Austen’s father passed away and her mother, sister and she were left to their own devices, depending on the kindness of relations.

Biographers are prone to looking at Austen’s time in Bath as bleak and lacking all sorts of creative endeavours, but of course that is not known. That she did not produce while she was there it is easy to prove; however, it is as easy to claim that her time there was one for collecting impressions and anecdotes which would later fuel her writing. *Persuasion*, her last completed novel, is full of Bath and its inhabitants, and that is possibly due to the knowledge Austen had gathered about the place, and the new eye with which she saw the city she had known for years.

Jane and her sister Cassandra used to spend a considerable amount of time going from one friend’s house to another. In December 1802, during a visit to two of their good friends, Alethea and Catherine Bigg, their brother, Harris Bigg-Wither asked Jane Austen for her hand in matrimony.

Jane, no doubt very fond of her friends’ brother, whom she would have danced with when he was a child, accepted his proposal. The discrepancy in their ages was only five years, nothing of any moment; Eliza was ten years older than Henry. The entire Manydown household was delighted. The evening was passed in congratulations, and everyone went to bed rejoicing. (TOMALIN, 2000, p. 182-3)

What followed the proposal and its acceptance was a sleepless night for Austen, leading her to the conclusion that she did not wish to marry Harris. She esteemed and respected him, but realised those two things were not enough to make her want to marry him. There were many pros in accepting his proposal: had they married, Austen would have become the mistress of a large and respectable Hampshire house, not far from her beloved birthplace of Steventon. Not only that, but she would also have been in a position to help her parents and siblings financially. On the other hand, had she married, it is likely she would have stopped writing, and that what she had already written would never see the light of day. Austen might not have found the same happy ending as she gave her characters, but she found a happy ending of her own, being a published author.

After the death of Reverend Austen and the impossibility to stay living in Bath due to their diminished income, the Austen women started to move around, and for the first three years, they lived in Southampton, in Austen’s beloved Hampshire. Austen was only able to fully settle, however, when her brother Edward, who had been adopted as a young boy by the wealthy and heirless Knights, comes into his inheritance and provides the Austen women with Chawton Cottage, for which Jane was grateful – “like her own Anne Elliot, since leaving Steventon, her private wishes had always centred on ‘a small house in their own neighbourhood’. Chawton Cottage, seventeen miles south-east of Steventon, was almost exactly that.” (LANE, 1996, p. 155). It was in Chawton that Austen revised her early works – such as *Pride & Prejudice* and *Sense &*

Sensibility, as well as writing *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park* to completion, all at the small parlour table that survives to this day, adding to the aura behind the author's life. According to family records, Austen wrote in a room with a creaking door, and whenever she heard the tell-tale sound of the door meaning that someone was approaching, she hid her writing, even though her family were aware of her activities.

The Chawton years were the settled, fulfilling, productive years – but the years and the travels that had preceded them were not wasted. All that she had seen and read, all that she had learnt to feel for the English landscape, was there for her to draw on now that she had found the right conditions in which to exercise her genius. (LANE, 1996, p. 162)

During the last few years of her life, Austen saw herself, with the help of her favourite brother Henry, become a published author, successful enough to attract the interest of the Prince Regent, to whom she was invited to dedicate one of her novels². Trips to London for meetings with her publisher became part of Austen's life – not as quiet as many biographies lead us to assume.

In 1816, while she was working on *Persuasion*, Austen began to feel unwell, and many say that this unknown disease, which would a year later take her life at only 41 years of age, had an effect in her writing style, meaning that *Persuasion* had a different tone to all her other novels. *Persuasion* is unlike her previous boisterous novels: it is a mature novel, written by a mature woman, who has seen more of life than the one who wrote Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, but it also carries traces of weariness, as if its writer were eager to have it finished – Austen's meticulous plotting is not as clear in her last novel, and its ending feels rushed, some of the characters' stories unfinished. Austen's cause of death is still subject to debate, and as Tomalin (2000, p. 289) remarks, "two hundred years after her death, any diagnosis must be tentative", for there is little left in the form of medical records for a comprehensive diagnosis.

Austen was buried in Winchester Cathedral due to her brother knowing the right people and getting her a place there, as most people would be buried in the graveyard, not in the cathedral itself. Her immediate family had no desire to publicise Austen as an author, and her gravestone, composed by her brother Henry Austen, makes no mention of her being a writer. It reads:

In Memory of
JANE AUSTEN,
youngest daughter of the late
Rev'd. GEORGE AUSTEN
formerly Rector of Steventon in the County
she departed this life on the 18th July 1817,
aged 41, after a long illness supported with
the patience and the hopes of a Christian

The benevolence of her heart,
the sweetness of her temper, and
the extraordinary endowments of her mind
obtained the regard of all who knew her and
the warmest love of her intimate connections.

Their grief is in proportion to their affection
they know their loss to be irreparable
but in their deepest affliction they are consoled
by a firm though humble hope that her charity,

² *Emma* is the novel Austen, apparently begrudgingly, dedicated to the prince.

devotion, faith and purity have rendered
her soul acceptable in the sight of her
REDEEMER

Even though Austen's family seemed happy to have her write her stories as a pastime, announcing to the world that she was striving to make money as a published author was a different matter. In her gravestone, Austen is described with endearing words that speak of her ladylikeness and portray her as someone who could do no wrong, feminine traits that are more platitudes than descriptions of her personality – “the benevolence of her heart, the sweetness of her temper” – while her mind is only mentioned once, never in relation to literature, but as having “extraordinary endowments”. Her gravestone, then, starts the process of making Austen palatable to the late Georgian public, and most importantly, to the Victorian readers.

For many decades, the only known image of Jane Austen seen from the front that we had to rely on was one unfinished drawing by her sister Cassandra (today exhibited in the Nation Portrait Gallery in London), which depicts Austen as a serious young woman, with stern features. Many who knew her during her lifetime commented on the portrait not being a fair likeness. It could be argued, however, that this was how Cassandra saw her sister, who she knew intimately. The picture was never finished, but the facial features are the ones with most definition, and they bear similarities to the portraits of her brothers, meaning that there is probably some truth to Cassandra's drawing.

To the observer and reader of Austen, this sketch depicts a woman who does not look too pleased about having to sit down and pose for hours on end. She probably considered herself to have better things to do – like working on her writing. The arms are crossed and the face is not touched by a smile or by the gentleness seen in its future reimagining. The hair is not so much covered (a very practical if uncommon fashion for unmarried young ladies) as it is unfinished; in fact, apart from the facial features, the picture is not completed. It was only decades later that, during Victorian times, this image would receive a new treatment, and a polished finish.

In 1869, over fifty years after Austen's death, her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh, son of Jane Austen's eldest brother, published the first full length biography of his aunt. Using the profit made through the sales of his book, Austen-Leigh commissioned a brass memorial tablet to be installed near to Jane Austen's grave in Winchester Cathedral. The tablet contains a small mention to her writings, and it reads:

Jane Austen. Known to many by her writings, endeared to her family by the varied charms of her character and ennobled by her Christian faith and piety was born at Steventon in the County of Hants, December 16 1775 and buried in the Cathedral July 18 1817.

The brass tablet, alongside the biography by James Edward Austen-Leigh, portray Jane Austen as conforming to Victorian ideals of how a woman should think and behave. Austen-Leigh's version of Austen depicts a woman dedicated to her family, uninterested in anything beyond her immediate circle, and whose writings were nothing more than a quirky hobby – according to Austen's nephew, she was unconcerned about making money or having literary success and wrote only for her own pleasure and to entertain her family.

This Victorian version of Jane Austen created by her nephew was accompanied by a new image of her, based on Cassandra's drawing, but more palatable to Victorian sensibilities, in which the novelist looks rosy-cheeked and demure. It is no wonder that Austen is known to many as “Dear Aunt Jane”, for it was the image fed to the Victorians

by her nephew – hence the ‘aunt’ – that remained and to this day is sold to readers as the ‘real Austen’. Moreover, Austen-Leigh’s biography depicted Jane Austen’s writing as nothing more than domestic and apolitical, almost as if saying that she may have written good novels, but that they did not go beyond the walls of the parlour and were not as serious as something a man might write.

Austen’s writing is composed by sarcasm and accurate descriptions of the English gentility of the early years of the 19th century; there might be elements of escapism in her novels, yes, but satire is never far away, and her depictions of the society she knew and live in are those of an observant participant, who is aware of one’s own folly, willing to make fun of it – elements that can be perceived not only in her fiction, but also in her letters to loved ones: her jokes and flippant remarks are always dotted with an acute awareness of herself and of those who surround her.

Austen’s ability to write satirically but to not offend, portraying with accuracy the society she knew could be said to be one of the reasons for her success. During World War I, men in the trenches would read Austen’s novels, as they reminded them of home, of a life felt a million miles away. Rudyard Kipling coined the term *Janeites*, to refer to Austen readers during the war in the homonymous short story, first published in 1926. To this day, *Janeites* is used to designate Jane Austen readers and fans, and many are unaware that Austen’s public in the early decades of the 20th century was composed in its majority by males who went to war and found comfort in her words.

The image conjured by James Edward Austen-Leigh of “dear Aunt Jane” has been proven extremely hard to debunk, even in the 21st century. Her most famous image is still the Victorian version of the drawing made by Cassandra, and even now, when Austen will be the first female author feature in a pound note³, the image selected to represent the author is the Victorian, demure and sweet picture of Austen. Many biographers have written about Austen, but their success is limited, seeing as information about her life does not abound. Scholars and biographers writing about Austen’s life tend to write about the lives of those who surrounded her as a means to better understanding her own existence, for what is actually known about Austen herself is not enough material to feed the many biographies published about her.

The constant publications are testament to the fascination surrounding Austen’s writing and her “character”. Propelled by a series of television and film adaptations – adaptations of her novels and of her life – the late 20th century and the early 21st century have seen a rise in Austen’s popularity, and she has become the centre of discussions and debates like never before. Readers and enthusiasts are not satisfied by just consuming her novels and the screen adaptations: they want to know who Austen was, they want to understand her times and how they thought and behaved. More than that, they write their own versions of her novels and her life, similarly to the way myths and fairy tales are created.

Hampshire, Austen’s home county, boasts with Austen pride, but the same could be said about all the places and towns that have a connection with the writer, especially Bath. Not only do they have a festival in her name (the Jane Austen Festival, held annually and bringing together academics, enthusiastic fans, and admirers alike), they have also made her the theme of walking tours around the city, and gave her a place of her own, the Jane Austen Centre, celebrating Jane Austen’s time in Bath and her two novels set there, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. Chawton Cottage, Austen’s final home, has been transformed into a museum in Jane Austen’s memory, and it attracts thousands of visitors every year from all over the world – despite not being the easiest

³ As of 2017, Austen is in the £10 note, issued by the Bank of England, celebrating the 200th anniversary of her death.

place to get to. Bath's Jane Austen Centre, dedicated to the author's years in the city of Bath and her two novels set there, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, is one of the principal conversion points for *Janeites* coming from all corners of the world, wishing to learn more about Jane Austen, her life, and her works. In England, every single place that can claim its connection to the novelist, so much so that a 'Jane Austen Trail' has been established, allowing enthusiasts and academics to follow in the writer's footsteps.

In 2011, biographer Paula Byrne uncovered what she believes to be an unknown portrait of Jane Austen in her later life, posing while in London. Much discussion has ensued since the finding of this new portrait, and many scholars believe it is nothing more than an imagining of Austen, rather than an actual portrait of the author. It is interesting to notice, however, that the new century seems to have brought with it a new image for the novelist – be it an authentic one or not. A new image that is, once again, filled with meaning and potentially more telling of our expectations as readers than of the real woman who lived over two centuries ago – the authenticity of the picture is almost surplus when the image depicted answers to contemporary ideals of what a female writer should be like – especially one of the pioneers.

Austen's alleged new portrait depicts a woman still in her prime enacting her profession: writing. Not only that, the portrait is believed to be set in London, with Westminster Abbey in the background. The woman in this picture is closer to the one drawn by Cassandra Austen than to the famous Victorian version of the author. Byrne argued her case well, and renowned Austen scholars such as Professor Kathryn Sutherland and Professor Claudia Johnson agree that this is, indeed, a picture of Jane Austen.

The previous portrait is a very sentimentalised Victorian view of 'Aunt Jane', someone who played spillikins, who just lurked in the shadows with her scribbling. But it seems to me that it's very clear from her letters that Jane Austen took great pride in her writing, that she was desperate to be taken seriously," said Byrne. "This new picture first roots her in a London setting – by Westminster Abbey. And second, it presents her as a professional woman writer; there are pens on the table, a sheaf of paper. She seems to be a woman very confident in her own skin, very happy to be presented as a professional woman writer and a novelist, which does fly in the face of the cutesy, heritage spinster view. (FLOOD, 2011, n/p)

By all accounts, the portrait seems to be a real depiction of Jane Austen, and that being the case, the image we have of the author is due to start changing. Interestingly, it is a new image of Jane Austen for a new century, nay, millennium, of readers, who have now gone beyond looking for a demure and sweet authoress, and who are aware that there is more to Austen's novels than romance and happy endings. The portrait of a professional woman writer makes for a happy marriage to the contemporary reader and the emergence of fourth wave feminism, much like the image of "dear Aunt Jane" worked for the Victorian imagination and expectations of women.

Undoubtedly there was a real Austen, but we will never get to meet her. Her truth can be found in her writings, in her personal letters, short stories and novels. Those show us a quick-witted mind and keen character observer, someone who took pride in her work, unlike what Austen-Leigh suggests, but was also sweet and family-oriented. Author J. M. Coetzee questions autobiographies as being a construct, founded on fact, but embellished by the teller, and it is no different in the case of Jane Austen, who might not have written her own story, but who has had her story told by so many throughout the past two centuries.

Are all autobiographies, all life-narratives, not fictions, at least in the sense that they are constructions (fictions from Latin *figere*, to shape or mould or form)? The claim here is not that autobiography is free, in the sense that we can make up our life-story as we wish. Rather, the claim is that in the making up our autobiography we exercise the same freedom that we have in dreams, where we impose a narrative form that is our own, even if influenced by forces that are obscure to us, on elements of a remembered reality. (COETZEE, 2016, p. 3)

Austen's many biographies and the three portraits discussed here form a kaleidoscopic image of the writer, as well as bringing to light a slightly different version of the author depending on the century she is being read (and written about). Cassandra's portrait of her sister is untouched and unfinished, just like the young Austen who sat for it was at the time; it also reflects the lack of real information about Jane Austen during her lifetime, meaning that all that is left from then are a few of her letters, testimonies of those who knew her, and her fiction. Austen's nephew's version is a romanticised Victorian ideal of how a woman should be, which suited both her readers in the second half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century and her family members who wished to portray a domesticized version of their relative. The newly found version portrays a professional woman writer, not so young this time, but still active, in the country's capital, where all the action was – despite having been painted in 1815, the third picture is in accordance with the 21st century readers' sensibilities, and it is a happy coincidence that it has been uncovered now. There are as many Jane Austens as there are readers, and if each of these Austens is loosely based on any of the known portraits, there is at least some truth to all of them.

REFERENCES

- ADKINS, Roy; ADKINS, Lesley. *Eavesdropping on Jane Austen's England: How Our Ancestors Lived Two Centuries Ago*. London: Little, Brown, 2013.
- AUSTEN, Jane. *Emma*. London: Penguin, 2003.
- _____. *Mansfield Park*. London: Penguin, 2003.
- _____. *Northanger Abbey*. London: Penguin, 2003.
- _____. *Persuasion*. London: Penguin, 2003.
- _____. *Pride and Prejudice*. London: Penguin, 2003.
- _____. *Sense and Sensibility*. London: Penguin, 2003.
- _____. *Jane Austen's Letters*. (Edited by Deirdre Le Faye). 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- _____. *Minor Works* (edited by Robert W. Chapman). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- AUSTEN, Henry. "Biographical Notice of the Author". In: AUSTEN-LEIGH, James-Edward; SUTHERLAND, Kathryn (Ed). *A Memoir of Jane Austen and Other Family Recollections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- AUSTEN-LEIGH, James-Edward. *A Memoir of Jane Austen and Other Family Recollections* (edited by Kathryn Sutherland). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- AUSTEN-LEIGH, William; AUSTEN-LEIGH, Richard. *Jane Austen: A Family Record*. Rev. Deirdre Le Faye. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1989.
- AUSTEN-LEIGH, Richard A. *Jane Austen and Lyme Regis*. London: Spottiswoode and Co., 1946.
- BECOMING Jane. Directed by: Julian Jarrold. Produced by: Graham Broadbent, Robert Bernstein, Douglas Rae. Screenplay by: Sarah Williams, Kevin Hood. Cast: Anne

- Hathaway, James McAvoy, Julie Walters, James Cromwell, Maggie Smith. UK: Miramax, 2007. 1 DVD (120 min).
- BYRNE, Paula. *The Real Jane Austen: A Life In Small Things*. London: Harper Press; 2013.
- COETZEE, J. M., KURTZ, Arabella. *The Good Story – Exchanged on Truth, Fiction and Psychotherapy*. London: Vintage, 2016.
- FLOOD, Alison. “Jane Austen biographer discovers ‘lost portrait’”. In: *The Guardian*, December 2011. Accessed on: 18 February 2017. Available at: < <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/dec/05/jane-austen-lost-portrait>>.
- HARMAN, Claire. *Jane’s Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered the World*. New York: Henry Holt, 2010.
- KIPLING, Rudyard. “The Janeites”. *Debits and Credits, The Collected Works of Rudyard Kipling*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1941.
- LANE, Maggie. *A Charming Place, Bath in the Life and Times of Jane Austen*. Bath: Millstream Books, 1988.
- _____. *Jane Austen and Lyme Regis*. Winchester: Sarsen Press, 2003.
- _____. *Jane Austen’s England*. London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1996.
- LE FAYE, Deirdre. *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family: 1700-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- _____. *Jane Austen’s Country Life: Uncovering the rural background to her life, her letters and her novels*. London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2014.
- _____. *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*. London: Frances Lincoln, 2002.
- LE FAYE, Deirdre. “Memoirs and biographies”. In: TODD, Janet (Ed.). *Jane Austen in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 51-58
- SPENCE, Jon. *Becoming Jane Austen*. New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2007.
- TODD, Janet (Ed.). *Jane Austen in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- TOMALIN, Claire. *Jane Austen: A Life*. New York: Knopf, 2000.
- WALDRON, Mary. *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- WORSLEY, Lucy. *Jane Austen at Home A Biography*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017.