"What! Is Fanny Ill?" - Disease as a Means of Telling the Self in Jane Austen's Narrative

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Abstract

The present paper, placing its focus on three of Jane Austen's canonical texts: *Sense and Sensibility, Pride* and *Prejudice, and Emma* is aimed at evaluating the function of disease states inside the narration. Consequently, the disease state highlights characters, relational and linguistic elements that seem to act as a communicative model that leads up to modifying the social relationships themselves and the fate of the characters. This is the area that is explored in the present paper, utilizing a methodology oriented to shed light, by means of text analysis, on the implications located between those places of the text in which the disease state actively enters and becomes part of the narration. The disease state is able to communicate those most authentic and universal feelings that are at the basis of domestic life narrated in the extraordinary Jane Austen's microcosm, and as the internal uneasiness is dissolved so is the disease.

Keywords: Feminine gender, disease, text analysis, Jane Austen.

Introduction

Disease states are unexpected and silent elements extremely present in Jane Austen's narrative (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1990). They have a distinctly feminine gender, since they concern men and women to different degrees, and they are transversal factors related to social class and age. So, the disease state represents an important triggering element through which archetypal narratives can be traced with an extremely important symbolic value in the expressive economy of the texts. By virtue of its pervasiveness, the disease state lends itself to assume the communicative burden of a Victorian body that has no voice; it is "absent, suspended, at best relegated to the inferior partner in the dyad of mind and body" (Whiltshire, 1992), and particularly the female body which is the privileged target of the sublimation of desire (Grandi, 2018).

Pervasive and adaptive, the disease state ‘speaks’ thanks to a wide range of registers, from Mrs. Bennet’s comics (Copeland, 2013) up to the tragic words and events linked to the figure of Marianne Dashwood. Through the subtle Jane Austen’s combinatorial art, who paints on ivory, the disease state carries out the important function of fulcrum of the imbalance between body and reason, pain and mockery, representing not only a motivation related to the unwinding of the plot, but a real factor marking the emotional journey of the characters, their personal evolutions and their choices.

The tension between decomposition and re-composition, between the loss and regaining of the balances, between health and illness, revolves around certain elements recurring in Austen’s canon. Thanks to such controversies in combination with the onset, persistence and healing of the disease state, real margins of dialogicality are brought to life, in which the characters can express themselves, change the course of the events, solicit reactions towards that personal relational microcosm that becomes the paradigm of a wider Victorian condition, in which the concept of concealment and transfiguration of the body seems to be essential (Grandi, 2018).

The marital status, the class, the loss and the search for relational support figures and more generally a state of physical and social minority are factors that if *in absentia* remain functional to diegesis, through combining *in presentia* with the disease state of the body become prismatic and diffractive sites of emotions, pains and social aspirations, true expressive traces that are not manifestable otherwise. Therefore, the disease state is not only: “an aid to the effect of domestic realism” (Whiltshire, 1992), but also a suitable tool to develop and illustrate “moral characters as well as to further its plots” (Whiltshire, 1992).

The etymology of the word pathology derives from the Greek *pathos* (pi άθος), meaning ‘experiencing’, ‘suffering’ and *-logy* (- λογί alpha), meaning ‘the study of’, and clears the implications running between body and disease. Concurrently, the word disease which derives from old English, is composed by the prefix ‘dis-’ meaning ‘altered’ ‘not normal’ and ‘–ease meaning ‘comfort’ ‘well-being’. Thus, a disease is actually the loss of the state of wellness. The famous metaphor of the ivory (Le Faye et al., 2014) offers a starting point to relate the complex texture of Austen’s narrative, of which the disease state is a structuring element, to the almost evanescent smoothness apparently devoid of own corporality, which is typical of the ivory material. This aesthetic-formal composure could legitimately be understood as coldness. Mark Twain (Auerbach, 2004) defines the characters of Edward Ferrars and Elinor Dashwood as not being very passionate (Auerbach, 1999) and completely disembodied, and accuses them of being mere shadows of themselves. However, in pre-Victorian age in which the

body especially the female one is hidden under heavy drapes of social velvet is unreal and distorted, and it becomes an instrument all the more unexpected as subversive: a “correlative objective of desire” (Grandi, 2018) and of experiential form. Therefore, a representative method is necessarily developed that focuses on both the transfiguration and appearing in a different way, with a surprising trick that does not imply the disappearance of the physical identity, but its dialogic-narrative refraction of which Austen’s texts are entirely studded.

Through emotions, the body is invariably called upon as a primary means of experiencing pain, joy, feelings, even if it is unable to explicitly manifest itself (McCabe, 2008). Referring to the social context and the female condition in the second half of '700, the social female segregation typical of the Regency Age immediately brings to mind the ideal of “the angel of the hearth” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979), virgin and ethereal, juxtaposed to the diabolical Bronte’s “mad woman in the attic” as previously defined (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979). Such condition never fails to generate a state of dysphoric weakness and is constantly suspended between passion and negation, finding its natural variation in the disease state. The state of being in love, the institution of marriage, the low social status and in particular the sudden lack a supporting reference figure with a surrogate maternal function are all elements that denounce a minority condition competing with the development of a disease. In this way the disease state never fails to fulfill its important communicative function of a deeper state of mind, of an inner unease of the soul that would otherwise remain unexpressed.

The present paper, placing its focus on three of Jane Austen’s canonical texts: *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma* is aimed at evaluating the function of disease states inside the narration. Placed in direct correlation with the specific conditions of weakness as previously defined, the symptoms and ailments can assume sign-expressive functions as well as being merely functional to the development of narration. Consequently, the disease state highlights characters, relational and linguistic elements that seem to act as a communicative model that leads up to modifying the social relationships themselves and the fate of the characters. This is the area that is explored in the present paper, utilizing a methodology oriented to shed light, by means of text analysis, on the implications located between those places of the text in which the disease state actively enters and becomes part of the narration.

Disease and Destiny

Marriage represents the crucial moment in the life of Austen’s women (Bertinetti, 1987), it is the ultimate goal to which mothers and

daughters tend and place all aspirations. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bennet represents the incarnation of election of these projects. She even goes so far as to despise any rule of legitimate parental prudence towards her eldest daughter, in order to create a real possibility for her to catch a husband:

“She did at last extort from her father an acknowledgment that the horses were engaged, Jane was therefore obliged to go on horseback, and her mother attended her to the door with many cheerful prognostics of a bad day. Her hopes were answered; Jane had not been gone long before it rained hard. Her sisters were uneasy for her, but her mother was delighted. The rain continued the whole evening without intermission; Jane certainly could not come back. ‘This was a lucky idea of mine, indeed!’ said Mrs. Bennet, more than once, as if the credit of making it rain were all her own. Till the next morning, however, she was not aware of all the felicity of her contrivance. Breakfast was scarcely over when a servant from Netherfield brought the following note for Elizabeth”.

“ ‘My dearest Lizzy, I find myself very unwell this morning, which, I suppose, is to be imputed to my getting wet through yesterday. My kind friends will not hear of my returning home till I am better. They insist also on my seeing Mr. Jones—therefore do not be alarmed if you should hear of his having been to me—and excepting a sore-throat and head-ache there is not much the matter with me.’ ”

It is clear that the disease state performs a function directly affecting the fate of Jane Bennet, and the many chances and hopes that the young woman falls victim of an illness and that she is forced to stay at Netherfield Park for the entire duration of the disease constitute the foundation of the devised and executed plan by Mrs. Bennet. The disadvantage of Jane being away from home, and the ‘fortuitous’ opportunity set by Mrs. Bennet ensure a privileged position to the young woman who can enjoy a forced proximity with the excellent party Mr. Bingley who in fact proves to be very considerate towards Jane, despite of her illness. In this way, the developed illness ensures the state of imbalance, which is a prerequisite to the accomplishment of mother’s projects, and even though a quite high price is paid in terms of health, the project is judged appropriate by Mrs. Bennet:

“ ‘Oh! I am not at all afraid of her dying. People do not die of little trifling colds. She will be taken good care of. As long as she stays there, it is all very well. I would go and see her, if I could have the carriage.’ ”

The balance is later restored by both the cares of Mr. Bingley and the loving Elisabeth Bennet who faces, on foot and in adverse weather conditions, a journey more than three miles long to reach her sick sister at Netherfield.

The disease therefore acts as a first and fundamental trigger towards Mrs. Bennet’s canonical goal of marrying both of her daughters, albeit

directly for Jane Bennet, and indirectly for Lizzy. Although Mrs. Bennet's project is undertaken for reasons far from noble but truly maternal, it is however directly related to the sudden onset of the illness that affects Jane Bennet, which in turn unexpected results are generated that cause cascading changes to the social relationships of the young women, guaranteeing Lizzy a new and providential personal position in the eyes of Mr. Darcy, which will bring both sisters to happy marriages:

" 'Your picture may be very exact, Louisa,' said Bingley; 'but this was all lost upon me. I thought Miss Elizabeth Bennet looked remarkably well, when she came into the room this morning. Her dirty petticoat quite escaped my notice.' 'You observed it, Mr. Darcy, I am sure,' said Miss Bingley 'and I am inclined to think that you would not wish to see your sister make such an exhibition.' 'Certainly not.' 'To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles in dirt, and alone, quite alone! What could she mean by it? It seems to me to shew an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country town indifference to decorum.' 'It shews an affection for her sister that is very pleasing,' said Bingley. 'I am afraid, Mr. Darcy,' observed Miss Bingley, in a half whisper, 'that this adventure has rather affected your admiration of her fine eyes.' 'Not at all,' he replied; 'they were brightened by the exercise.' "

Also in *Sense and Sensibility*, the same discriminant function of the disease can be modelled thanks to the passionate Marianne who meets Mr. Willoughby because of her falling down along the slopes of the hill during a thunderstorm. In this case the event is not directly driven by maternal supervision, nor is it the result of a devised premeditation. However, Sir Middleton explicitly, clearly and out of metaphor indicates the instrumental use of ailments, which are widely used by the female gender to seek husbands and more generally to encourage contacts between the two sexes:

"Aye, you will make conquests enough, I dare say, one way or other. Poor Brandon! He is quite smitten already and he is very well worth setting your cap at. I can tell you, in spite of all this tumbling about and spraining of ankles."

With Marianne Dashwood the connotative power of the disease is probably conveyed most clearly, and from an expressive dialogue element it turns into a real medical condition that can affect the fate of the characters, through the vision that they themselves have of the world surrounding them, as well as through an intimate and personal journey of maturity. Marianne's path moves from an exaggerated, romantic and painful passion capable of personifying natural places that could arouse violent emotions, to a loving utopia embodied in Willoughby, which can only manifest tragically and totally:

"The slightest mention of anything relative to Willoughby overpowered her in an instant; and though her family were most anxiously attentive to her comfort, it was impossible for them, if they spoke at all, to keep clear of every subject which her feelings connected with him. […]She would have been ashamed to look her family in the face the next morning, had she not risen from her bed in more need of repose than when she lay down in it. But the feelings which made such composure a disgrace, left her in no danger of incurring it. She was awake the whole night, and she wept the greatest part of it. She got up with a headache, was unable to talk, and unwilling to take any nourishment; giving pain every moment to her mother and sisters, and forbidding all attempt at consolation from either. Her sensibility was potent enough!"

The emotional *crescendo* evolves in such a way as to bring Marianne one step away from death, from which she is torn away also thanks to the reunification and proximity of those essential reference figures represented by her mother and her sister Elinor. Mrs. Dashwood, in particular, and no longer Willoughby becomes the object of Marianne's torment, and she is invoked in a loud voice by her daughter, who is now out of her mind, at the height of the delusion, and under the dismayed eyes of Elinor who assists her helplessly:

"The repose of the latter became more and more disturbed; and her sister, who watched with unremitting attention her continual change of posture, […] when Marianne, suddenly awakened by some accidental noise in the house, started hastily up, and with feverish wildness, cried out— 'Is mama coming?' 'Not yet,' replied the other, concealing her terror, and assisting Marianne to lie down again, 'but she will be here, I hope, before it is long. It is a great way, you know, from hence to Barton.' 'But she must not go round by London,' cried Marianne, in the same hurried manner, 'I shall never see her, if she goes by London.' Elinor perceived with alarm that she was not quite herself, and while attempting to soothe her, eagerly felt her pulse. It was lower and quicker than ever! and Marianne, still talking wildly of mama, her alarm increased so rapidly, as to determine her on sending instantly for Mr. Harris, and dispatching a messenger to Barton for her mother."

At first glance, the experience of disillusioned falling in love lived in such a visceral way is for Marianne the beginning of a journey that leads her to conclude her personal story in the canonical happy ending in the arms of the mature Colonel Brandon. Actually the disease could have represented an authentic trigger of Marianne's personal maturation processes, making explicit a clear vision of a more moderate and less dionysiac and self-destructive conception of life itself. The illness carries out the task of inducing her to reconsider the persons that are close to her, the same ones

that she previously had the temerity to criticize bitterly, such as Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Palmer and especially Colonel Brandon, so opening the doors to the expected happy ending:

"Marianne's illness, though weakening in its kind, had not been long enough to make her recovery slow; and with youth, natural strength, and her mother's presence in aid, it proceeded so smoothly as to enable her to remove within four days after the arrival of the latter, into Mrs. Palmer's dressing-room. When there, at her own particular request, for she was impatient to pour forth her thanks to him for fetching her mother, Colonel Brandon was invited to visit her.[…] The day of separation and departure arrived; and Marianne, after taking so particular and lengthened a leave of Mrs. Jennings, one so earnestly grateful, so full of respect and kind wishes as seemed due to her own heart from a secret acknowledgement of past inattention, and bidding Colonel Brandon farewell with the cordiality of a friend…"

Just like in *Pride and Prejudice,* also in *Emma*, the marriage institution represents a real Gordian knot. Jane Fairfax represents the liminal character whose dissimulation ability used for a large part of the text and functional to the development of the text itself acts as a perfect counterpart to the figure of Emma Woodhouse within a deeply unequal cordiality relationship. The dissimulation method of which Jane Fairfax is anything but proud is made necessary by the circumstances and indispensable for the pursuit of her marriage goal, and is also achieved thanks to the marked condition of illness. In the culminating moment in which for Jane Fairfax both the emotional and economic supports from the reference figures identified in the Campbell family are lacking, her marriage project is still stranded among the dry emotions of a young Frank Churchill. He tries to clumsily conceal his own feelings, and in this way Jane Fairfax touches the lowest point of her personal diegetic parable assuming a state of absolute minority and becomes ill. Therefore, the disease takes on the dialogic and communicative functions that are denied to the young woman, finally allowing her to overwhelmingly, suddenly manifest her pain and unbalancing the balance.

"Jane caught a bad cold, poor thing! So long ago as the 7th of November, (as I am going to read to you,) and has never been well since. A long time, is not it, for a cold to hang upon her? She never mentioned it before, because she would not alarm us. Just like her! so considerate!—But however, she is so far from well, that her kind friends the Campbells think she had better come home, and try an air that always agrees with her; and they have no doubt that three or four months at Highbury will entirely cure her—and it is certainly a great deal better that she should come here, than go to Ireland, if she is unwell. Nobody could nurse her, as we should do."

Also in this case the imbalance finds its center of gravity thanks to the providential pass away of Mrs. Churchill, who represents the only real impediment to the accomplishment of the marriage project. The consequent dissolution of the situation in a whirlwind of explanations, amazements, clarifications materializes in an immediate physical and nervous recovery of Jane Fairfax, who after having laboriously conquered the right to express the real nature of her painful condition, rising to the role of girlfriend officially recognized in view of the marriage goal, she can make her version of the facts public. However, emblematically, Jane Fairfax does not speak directly, instead Mrs. Weston reports her words:

" 'On the misery of what she had suffered, during the concealment of so many months,' continued Mrs. Weston, 'she was energetic'. This was one of her expressions. 'I will not say, that since I entered into the engagement I have not had some happy moments; but I can say, that I have never known the blessing of one tranquil hour:—and the quivering lip, Emma, which uttered it, was an attestation that I felt at my heart.' 'Poor girl!' said Emma. 'She thinks herself wrong, then, for having consented to a private engagement?' 'Wrong!—No one, I believe, can blame her more than she is disposed to blame herself. The consequence,' said she, 'has been a state of perpetual suffering to me; and so it ought. But after all the punishment that misconduct can bring, it is still not less misconduct. Pain is no expiation. I never can be blameless. I have been acting contrary to all my sense of right; and the fortunate turn that everything has taken, and the kindness I am now receiving, is what my conscience tells me ought not to be. Do not imagine, madam,' she continued, 'that I was taught wrong. Do not let any reflection fall on the principles or the care of the friends who brought me up. The error has been all my own; and I do assure you that, with all the excuse that present circumstances may appear to give, I shall yet dread making the story known to Colonel Campbell.' "

If Jane Fairfax's condition of social inferiority is directly connected with her possibility - or better to say impossibility - to express her own being, then the development of a disease acts as a communicative surrogate within the dichotomous relationship that links Jane Fairfax to Emma, and the social picture changes completely. Indeed, Jane Fairfax's silence and illness are accompanied by a vital and assertive Emma who can clearly state how the class and therefore the social and economic conditions are decisive for defining the position of women in the world, also and above all outside the institution of marriage:

"Never mind, Harriet, I shall not be a poor old maid; and it is poverty trees cut back so as to produce a thick, hedge like growth only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid! The proper

sport of boys and girls; but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else."

The Language of Dis-ease

Dis-ease, meaning altered wellness, is encountered in both parental figures Jane Austen's narrative, and for the first time illness is not relegated to women. Indeed, if for Mrs. Bennet her daughters' marriages are desired, searched for and planned, on the other hand, for Mr. Woodhouse they become central in three different occurrences in the text: Isabella's marriage, Miss Taylor's marriage, and finally Emma's marriage. For Mr. Woodhouse his daughters' marriages represent the cause of the removal, one after the other, of the central supportive reference figures in the life of the elderly widower, and contribute to heightening his intrinsic selfishness and hypochondria, which end up becoming peculiar traits of this character. In the case of Mr. Woodhouse, the age at the registry plays a fundamental role, together with the class and the economic condition. Thanks to the disease, which acts as an expressive trigger, he himself will explicitly claim the condition of invalid, and therefore he becomes in some way legitimized to compromize the life and choices of those around him, openly affirming himself a privileged:

"Well, I believe. If you will excuse me. Mr. Knightley, if you will not consider me as doing a very rude thing [...] We invalids think we are privileged people."

Mr. Woodhouse's hypochondria even manages to take on an ironic trait when the interesting exchange of terms that refer to the semantic field of corporality symbolically suggests the close link among disease, body and unexpressed feelings and among disease heart and lungs:

"Poor Mr. Woodhouse little suspected what was plotting against him in the breast of that man whom he was so cordially welcoming, and so anxiously hoping might not have taken cold from his ride.—Could he have seen the heart, he would have cared very little for the lungs; but without the most distant imagination of the impending evil, without the slightest perception of anything extraordinary in the looks or ways of either, he repeated to them very comfortably all the articles of news he had received from Mr. Perry, and talked on with much self-contentment, totally unsuspicious of what they could have told him in return."

After all, in a completely different context as can be that of the family *menagè* in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bennet also uses her nerves as an effective tool to stand in a position of strength and take control of the interactions with her husband, in a sort of a linguistic system that Mr. Bennet shows, however, that he understands perfectly:

"Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves." "You mistake me my dear, I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends"

Disease is accorded with a privilege that comes to constitute a dialogic-communicative model within a precise personal relationship based on games of strength and stereotyping. Also for Jane Fairfax in *Emma*, the disease state is a form of dialogue that uses more or less obvious ways of shielding, avoiding and concealing. If for Mr. and Mrs. Bennet the chosen form is that of irony, for Mr. Woodhouse and Isabella is one of apparent civilization of social relationships and roles and the unsuspected composure of the communicative tones that act as screens within that particular linguistic model founded on the disease and its derivatives, such as more valuable treatment methods or trusted doctors to contact. Behind the urbanity of the speeches, the paternal intransigence and the selfish resentment for the transfer of his eldest daughter from Hartfield to South End, after her marriage to Mr. Knightley fear, and Emma strenuously strives to prevent the conflict from escalating, during the articulated confrontation between Isabella and her elderly father:

"While they were thus comfortably occupied, Mr. Woodhouse was enjoying a full flow of happy regrets and fearful affection with his daughter.[…] 'It was an awkward business, my dear, your spending the autumn at South End instead of coming here. I never had much opinion of the sea air.' 'Mr. Wingfield most strenuously recommended it, sir—or we should not have gone. He recommended it for all the children, but particularly for the weakness in little Bella's throat,—both sea air and bathing.' 'Ah! My dear, but Perry had many doubts about the sea doing her any good; and as to myself, I have been long perfectly convinced, though perhaps I never told you so before, that the sea is very rarely of use to anybody. I am sure it almost killed me once.' 'Come, come,' cried Emma, feeling this to be an unsafe subject, 'I must beg you not to talk of the sea.[…]' 'Ah! My poor dear child, the truth is, that in London it is always a sickly season. Nobody is healthy in London, nobody can be. It is a dreadful thing to have you forced to live there!—so far off!—and the air so bad!' 'No, indeed—we are not at all in a bad air. Our part of London is so very superior to most others! You must not confound us with London in general, my dear sir.' 'Ah! My dear, it is not like Hartfield. You make the best of it—but after you have been a week at Hartfield, you are all of you different creatures; you do not look like the same. Now I cannot say, that I think you are any of you looking well at present.' "

However, Emma also falls victim of an imbalance that cracks her view of the world. As for Jane Bennet, Marianne and Jane Fairfax, frailty

also manifests itself through the birth and torment of love, so much so that it becomes clear even if not so violent and disruptive as for the others. However, the paths between the lines can be traced, and it is precisely that reference figure so dear to her, Mrs. Weston that once again supports Emma:

" 'Are you well, my Emma?' was Mrs. Weston's parting question. 'Oh! Perfectly. I am always well, you know. Be sure to give me intelligence of the letter as soon as possible.'

The marriage epilogue between Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley represents yet another factor of misalignment, which exacerbates Mr. Woodhouse's disease condition. The communicative model linked to the disease, which in this case is distinctly nervous, is the channel of choice used by the elderly gentleman to modify the social relationships and the decisions taken by the characters;

"When first sounded on the subject, he was so miserable, that they were almost hopeless.—A second allusion, indeed, gave less pain.—He began to think it was to be, and that he could not prevent it—a very promising step of the mind on its way to resignation. Still, however, he was not happy. Nay, he appeared so much otherwise, that his daughter's courage failed. She could not bear to see him suffering, to know him fancying himself neglected; and though her understanding almost acquiesced in the assurance of both Mr. Knightleys, that when once the event were over, his distress would be soon over too, she hesitated—she could not proceed. In this state of suspense they were befriended, not by any sudden illumination."

Mr. Knightley himself restores the correct balances providentially agreeing not to take away Emma from her father's house after the wedding:

"This proposal of his, this plan of marrying and continuing at Hartfield—the more she contemplated it, the more pleasing it became. His evils seemed to lessen, her own advantages to increase, their mutual good to outweigh every drawback. Such a companion for herself in the periods of anxiety and cheerlessness before her!—Such a partner in all those duties and cares to which time must be giving increase of melancholy!"

Conclusions

For Jane Austen's heroines Jane Bennet, Marianne, Jane Fairfax and Emma, the disease state, which is preceded and followed by reflections in search of a refuge in solitude and nature so to put order among thoughts and find the strength to manifest feelings that go beyond the communicative channel of the body, represents a concrete turning point towards the conquest of the right to self-expression. As the narration continues, the disease states disappear when the soul and mind have found their complete resolution through love. This landing is an integral part of the particular personal maturation process of the characters of which Jane Austen's literature

speaks, outlining scenes and feelings on ivory with delicate strokes of a very fine paintbrush.

Balance is something precious and ethereal that pervades Jane Austen's writings entirely. Each ingredient is carefully weighed and placed under the right light, in an almost perfect gear. Even the disease state is fully part of the turns of the mechanism, participating in the tension between decomposition and re-composition of the balances. In combination with different elements, which taken individually contribute merely to the development of diegetic realism, the disease state manages to route the text towards new expressive paths, sometimes in a subtle but always decisive way.

Through the social class, age and gender, the disease state is able to modify social relationships, compromising the fate of the characters and encouraging character and personal maturation, taking on itself the honors of rising to a communicative model by means of the body as an instrument of choice and through ironic, tragic, sometimes even comical linguistic registers. The disease state is able to communicate those most authentic and universal feelings that are at the basis of domestic life narrated in the extraordinary Jane Austen's microcosm, which has contributed so much to characterize the development of the figure of the woman through the last centuries, and which continues to enrich itself with new visions, through infinite re-readings, over the course of time.

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