Etiquette as the Mirror of Morals: Decoding the Art of Social Calling in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*

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All Politeness is owing to Liberty. We polish one another and rub off our Corners and rough Sides by a sort of amicable Collision. To restrain this, is inevitably to bring a Rust upon Mens Understandings.

(Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury. *Sensus Communis*, 1709)

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Abstract

Throughout the eighteenth century, Britain experienced a series of socioeconomic changes brought about by the onset of the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath. The consequent rise of the middle classes compelled the *nouveau riche* to adopt a set of rules of etiquette that became central to ensuring the acceptable comportment of the emerging class in the new social order, which was now substantially based on the notions of property and economic power. This growing interest in public decorum was soon illustrated in literature, which—together with the rise of the novel—gave birth to a new literary sub-genre: The Novel of Manners, of which authors such as Jane Austen became representative, and served through their works to offer an overview of the important role that social etiquette acquired in their society. Considering this sociocultural panorama, this TFG aims to inspect such forms of public decorum through the study of how so-called "social calls" are performed in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* by analysing the relationship that they hold with the notions of morality and property. To do so, this paper contextualises the variety of calling events that framed social interaction in the early nineteenth century and examines how these are represented in the novel by focusing on how the characters perform the rules of calling etiquette in accordance with their moral quality and the social conventions of the time. This way, by assessing the relationship between mores, property, and social etiquette displayed in Austen's work, this study aims to gain a fuller understanding of the significance underlying the forms of interaction that are ingrained within the novel, and which often escape the attention of the modern reader.

Keywords: *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen, Novel of Manners, etiquette, social calls, morals, property.

0. Introduction

Manners, protocol, and public behaviour have long remained mechanisms to delimit the social status and moral codes of many civilisations worldwide. The prominence of proper conduct to preserve social stability had already been described in Vizier Ptahhotep's didactic literary composition *The Maxims of Ptahhotep*[1] (2375-2350 BCE), and continued to be a recurrent element in later East-Asian rationalist works such as *The Doctrine of the Mean*[2] (400-600 BCE) by Kong Ji. In Western culture, the refinement of one's behaviour through a set of rules of etiquette also became a distinguished form of action that appealed primarily to the aristocratic and upper classes. This concern with social conventions was soon incorporated into the narrative of medieval texts—notably, for example, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1380-1400)—and continued to be a recurring element in the literature of what we now know as England. Yet it was in the early eighteenth century that the country experienced an upsurge in an interest for the rules of etiquette that were to be performed[3] in the public and private domains.[4] The centrality of mannerisms was also soon illustrated in literature through a variety of instructive works that aimed to compile and preserve the codes of social conduct. However, the literary genre in which mannerisms gained most popularity was the novel. The relevance of decorum in narrative fiction gave rise to a new sub-genre known as the Novel of Manners,

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[1] *The Maxims of Ptahhotep* (2375-2350 BC) are a collection of principles on morality, justice, and social etiquette written in Ancient Egypt by the elderly Vizier Ptahhotep, in his attempt to transfer his knowledge about the importance of rules of conduct to future generations.

[2] *The Doctrine of the Mean* (400-600 BC) is a theological work written by Zisi (Kong Ji), Confucius' grandchild, which contains some of the maxims of the celebrated philosopher in Eastern culture. Following the line of Ptahhotep's work*, The Doctrine of the Mean* establishes a wide range of principles of conduct backed by a series of moral and philosophical theories.

[3] In keeping with the relevant critical literature, I use this term intentionally to express the public, *performative* nature of the activities carried out.

[4] One of the most remarkable works that appealed to the correct usage of etiquette in polite society was *Letter to His Son on the Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman* (1774) by Philip Stanhope, Fourth Earl of Chesterfield. The same year saw the publication of a very similar work, now rather more renowned than Stanhope's, titled *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* by Dr John Gregory, although this latter work belongs more to women's conduct literature than to works primarily focused on social etiquette.

which continued to be a prolific literary type until well into the early twentieth century. Although many works from different periods conform to the Novel of Manners' narrative, there is one author who remains one of the most celebrated in the genre, as well as in British literature as a whole: Jane Austen (1775–1817).

It is through the study of one Austen's most acclaimed works, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), that I aim to explore the factors that gave rise to the important role of social etiquette in the eighteenth-century English society. The reason for this choice is my aim to read Austen's work through the lenses of her contemporaries by analysing and understanding the codes of conduct that the novel's characters perform. This way, through this study, I will attempt to detect the significant undertones that cannot be found in what the characters say, but which is traceable through their demeanour, and that consequently frequently go unnoticed by the twenty-first-century reader.

0.1 Historical and Sociocultural Contexts of the English Regency Era

To account for the centrality of mannerisms in the period in which *Sense and Sensibility* was published, it is essential to examine the socioeconomic transformation that late eighteenth-century English society was experiencing at that time, as well as how it interconnects with some of the era's most remarkable historical events. One of the main factors that triggered the alteration of Britain's deeply rooted social structures was the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the Georgian era (1714-1837). Amongst the many changes that the Industrial Revolution brought to Britain, the most outstanding result was the mass-production of goods, which fostered a gradual expansion of local and international trade. Consequently, all the professions involved in the fabrication and commercialisation of wares became central to Industrial Britain, which consolidated the rise of the middle classes, both economically and socially.

According to Carter (2001: 2), the ascent of the bourgeoisie went hand-in-hand with a growing concern for social decorum, since "an up-to-date understanding of politeness [w]as the guarantor of [...] new moral standards in a commercial society". Thus, manners became much more than a mere practice to draw the line between aristocratic classes and the commons. Instead, the notion of politeness became a quintessential element in Georgian Britain that allowed the preserving of a sense of "social order and stability" (Tanner 1986: 17) both in the mercantile and public spheres. The need to establish a solid and uniform code of social conduct gave rise to the mass publication of a series of didactic books that were "calling for improved standards of behaviour, especially in men" (Carter, 2001: 33). Two of the most popular and influential publications were *The Tatler* (1709-11) and *The Spectator* (1711-14), journals which attempted to lecture on how to re-adapt old traditional values and mores to the needs and dynamics of modern Britain. Additionally, embracing the rules of social behaviour through instructive literature also provided the bourgeois male reader with the tools to improve and refine his character, which ensured a smooth blending in the upgraded social position that he now occupied.

What is more, a proper display of public decorum would become a quality that not only served to display men's socioeconomic status, but it also constituted a central element to the building of their masculinity. As McCormack (2005: 2) stresses, "personal freedom was a prominent aspect of a Georgian man's sense of his gender—as well as his social and political being—and this was commonly articulated in terms of "manly independence" a concept that, according to Aliwood (2008: 60), stems from "financial and moral independence, political participation, and the appropriate exercise of power". In this regard, the socioeconomical changes evoked by the Industrial Revolution introduced a new form of masculinity that regarded social etiquette as an indicator of economic independence and affluence. Although this understanding of manliness was

still in-the-making throughout the eighteenth century, it would finally become consolidated in the Victorian Era (Aliwood 2008: 60).

The increasing importance of literacy as a means to polish one's behaviour came conjointly with what Watt (1957) claims to be the *'rise of the novel',* as he presents the novel, "together with that of journalism, as prime examples of the effect of changes in the audience for literature" (Watt 1957: 35). The new audience that Watt refers to is none other than that of women, implying that the rise of the novel was brought about by female access to literacy[5]. Being more limited than men in the habits of leisure that they could enjoy and perform, women soon found the means of experiencing such forms of entertainment through extensive reading (Watt 1957: 43). Drawing on Richardson (1994), the importance of literacy within the female public was oftentimes depicted in the works of the most outstanding female novelists of the Georgian and Regency eras—e.g., Jane Austen, Jane West, and Maria Edgeworth, amongst many others. In their works, these authors not only pictured the lifestyle and new forms of *divertissement* that were enjoyed by the middle-class woman, but also presented a great concern—as with the didactic books that appealed to the male audience—on the representation of the rules of etiquette and codes of decorum that framed social interaction. The prominent role that social etiquette acquired in relation to the interests and mores of the novels' heroines, and consequently in the plot of the novel itself, gave birth to a new literary sub-genre in British literature: The Novel of Manners.

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[5] It must be noted that having access to literacy and books was a privilege that could only be enjoyed by the upper classes in eighteenth-century Britain, since—while the "lower orders" obtained an income of about £6-20 per annum (Watt 1957: 36)—books were regarded as a luxury that only very few could afford.

0.2 The Origins of the Novel of Manners: Revising Frances Burney's *Cecilia* and Jane West's *A Gossip's Story*

What is now known as The Novel of Manners is a concept that was first introduced by Henry James (1843–1916) when accounting for the wide extent of lexical elements found in Maria Edgeworth and Frances Burney's works in relation to public behaviour (Brandy-Scubbi, 2013). These two mutually contemporary authors who are often presented as the "pioneers" (Brandy-Scubbi, 2013: 235) of the sub-genre, set the basis for a literary style that would continue to be adopted by early nineteenth-century novelists such as Austen. Drawing on Michie (2011), apart from depicting the codes of conduct that framed social interaction in the Georgian era, Burney and her contemporaries also focused on the portrayal of the so-called marriage plot: the courtship and consequent marriage of the heroine and the hero. Nonetheless, marriage plots were far from being mere representations of love affairs. Instead, they tended to ironically depict "an interest in and anxiety about economic developments in the place where we least expect or want to find those materialist concerns, at the heart of romantic stories about the triumph of love over money" (Michie, 2011: 13). Hence, as Michie (2011) suggests, the relationship between wealth and marriage in these novels presented an attempt to depict the growing capitalist tendencies of Industrial Britain. To expose the social interest in what Trollope (1997) calls the "vulgar question of money" in their narrative, these novelists emphasize the importance of the role of social etiquette, which far from being a mere senseless self-display, was perceived as a "a culture's hum and buzz of implication," (Trilling 1976, cited in Michie, 2011: 206) as it became "a political necessity as essential as property to the maintenance of order and peace in society" (Tanner 1986: 18). The merging of the subtle implications of etiquette and the notion of property became central in the Novel of Manners' narrative, as depicted in Burney's *Cecilia*, in which the representation of the characters' socioeconomic power is disclosed through their display public decorum

(widespread throughout her work). As Sabor (2007: 36) points out "Jane Austen took a great deal from *Cecilia*", given that the impact of social constraints on the characters' relationships in Austen's works very much resembles that presented by Burney.

Nonetheless, Burney was not Austen's only source of inspiration. In fact, Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (1796) which is "suggested to be a source text for Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811)" (Goss, 2015: 165) also played a major role in the making of Austen's narrative. By offering a detailed account of the codes of behaviour in their time, both novels reflect upon the marked dichotomy between the individual and the social. This duality is presented both by Austen and West as the source of "tension between subordinating oneself to the will of the community, as expressed in its social conventions" (Spacks, 2000: 531), which is persistently contrasted with the characters' urge to attain personal freedom. In both novels, the relationship between the individual's privacy and the public domain is represented to a great extent by the means of *social calls*, which apparently innocent in their purpose, could nevertheless "hazard the reputation of a lady" (Ross, 2009: 32) if they were carelessly performed.

0.3 Social Interaction: Protocols and Etiquette of Social Calling and Calling Cards.

Despite the prominent role and widespread presence that social calling protocols presented in Austen's works, it is essential to examine the rules of etiquette that conformed this public event through a socio-historical perspective to apprehend its means of operating as twenty-first-century readers. The range of calling events that were encompassed in the Georgian Era is equivalent to the variety of contexts and motives that propelled the caller to perform the visit. Amongst the most common types of appointments there are morning, afternoon, and evening calls, which as their respective

names indicate, used to take place at different times of the day. Another noteworthy category of social calls is the so-called visits-of-duty, namely those that were occasioned by a particular purpose on behalf of the caller. Such events comprehended what are known as visits of condolence, which were paid after a death; calls after betrothal, which served to congratulate a recently engaged couple, and visits made in a variety of festivities, especially at New Year's Eve. Lastly, amongst the most exceptional, but none the less common in Austen's narrative, we find those which are known as First Visits, which are followed by the subsequent procedure of forming an acquaintance.

Although the specific rules that conformed most of these calling events will be further analysed throughout this TFG, it is imperative to account for the most basic protocols that framed the ritual of social calling to ensure a proper understanding of future references. First and foremost, calls ought to be formally introduced by the means of calling cards—or, as Burney calls them in *Cecilia* (making use of then-common parlance)*,* 'tickets'—which were to be "printed with the [gentleman or lady's] name and title, to which may be added, by hand, their current address" (Ross, 2009: 34). Once the card had been handed or delivered, it was the host's duty to accept or decline it by returning a card to the caller within one week. If correspondence was delayed beyond this point, the host's behaviour would then be considered totally impolite (Byrne, 2005). If the visit was accepted, a set of protocols were to be followed during the calling event as well. Calls could only be made on *At Home Days*[6] and, as remarked by Byrne (2005), they could not last more than thirty minutes. As for the conduct of host and guest, rules varied depending on gender. Women, for instance, could not call upon a man unless it

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[6] An At Home Day was a social custom initiated in Georgian Britain lasting well into the early twentieth century. This consisted of a specific day of the week when the "high-bred" citizen would receive visits at home. There was not an officially established *At Home Day*, and it therefore had to be clarified on the calling card.

was "upon some business, officially or professionally" (Young, 2006: 68). Then, additionally, unless the gentleman "request[ed] to pay a first call to a lady or her family, no deeper connection between the families—from dinner invitations to marriage proposals—may result" (Ross: 33). This is a particularly recurrent source of distress in many of Austen's novels, as can be observed in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) when Mrs Bennet implores Mr Bennet to "go and see Mr Bingley in the neighbourhood... for it will be impossible for us to visit him, if you don't" (*P&P*, 2012: 4).

Having now accounted for the variety of social calls that were encompassed in Austen's times, as well as for the most essential rules of conduct that were to be followed by the *polite* citizen, this section of my TFG has established the basic ground rules for initiating a far more in-depth analysis on how successfully social calls are displayed in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility.* Also, by revising the numerous academic interpretations on the prominence of this social act that—in the following section of this study—I review the critical panorama for formulating a new area of study.

0.4 Critical Framework

Most academic studies that focus on the role of social etiquette in Austen's works have been published throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, with the start of the twenty-first century, the interest in the representation of the codes of social behaviour found in the Austen's narrative began to decline. In 1979, the scholar David Hirst (2018) considered the role that mannerisms and social behaviour played in Jane Austen's works to be an instance of what is known as 'comedy of manners'. According to Hirst, the way that etiquette and decorum are displayed in most of the author's works fits into his definition of this sub-genre: "comedy of manners is the way people behave, the manners they employ in a social context; the chief concerns of the characters are sex

and money (and thus the interrelated topics of marriage, adultery and divorce); the style is distinguished by the refinement of raw emotional expression and action in the subtly of wit and intrigue" (Hirst, 2018: 10). What is more, in his study *Comedy of Manners* (2018) Hirst claims that *Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* are novels that comprise all the elements of a comic representation of decorum, both in their plot, as well as by the forms of interaction between the characters. The interpretation of Austen's work as a parody of social etiquette is a theory upheld by many other scholars, such as Mather (1997), whose *The Heirs of Jane Austen: Twentieth Century Writers of the Comedy of Manners* presents Austen as one of the most influential writers in the comedy of manners style for works of that time. Nonetheless, the interpretation of the role of social etiquette in Austen's novels as a comic factor was later questioned by Tanner (1986), who relates public behaviour and good manners to the notion of morality and social duty. Tanner (1986: 206) believes that good manners were indispensable to "maintain[ing] the moral fabric and coherence of society" and, therefore, that they were the element facilitating the preservation of property and of the social structures in the Regency Era. The relationship between politeness and mores is also discussed by Harris (1989), who focuses on the way that the rules of etiquette have an influence on the plot and characters of Austen's works. Harris presents social politeness as a practice that "like acting, misleads" (Harris 1989: 158), and claims that the display of good manners in Austen's works often makes the reader question which characters are to be trusted, and which ones disguise their evil intentions through a *decorous* attitude. Similarly, Byrne (2005) states that the representation of pompous mannerisms in Austen's novels serves as a critique against the "hypocrisy and snobbery" (Byrne, 2005: 300) of the upper classes. At the same time, Byrne (2005) considers that Austen aims to emphasise how good manners are "bound up with goodness of heart rather than social status" (Byrne,

2005: 300). The critical tone regarding the rules of behaviour in Austen's narratives is also contested by Price (1973), who asserts that "manners may become a code of socially acceptable immorality" (Price 1973: 268). Finally, some of the most recent theories on the relevance of social-interaction protocols in the author's narrative are formulated by Yoder (2008: 610) through what she calls "*rhetorical manners*",[7] which imply the variability of the role of decorum in the narrative, depending on the tone that the author wants to provide to her work and characters. In addition, following Tanner's (1986) standpoint, Yoder (2008: 611) also argues that—in the late eighteenth century—manners "[were] the essential lubricant of civilization" and further emphasises the prominence of social etiquette in Austen's era by asserting that it was common understanding in this period that "if only people would conduct themselves as ladies and gentlemen, peace would break out everywhere".

Having now reviewed this critical panorama, it can be observed that—although many academic works in the field of sociocultural studies highlight the social context depicted in Austen's novels—there are few instances of academic studies that provide a thorough analysis of the role played by social behaviour within the narrative of any of Austen's specific novels. In addition, while most scholars focus on the relationship between property and propriety in Austen's narrative, none of their studies provides a comprehensive analysis of a distinct form of public decorum that is regularly performed by the novels' characters. Consequently, I believe that there is a further aspect of consideration worth pursuing, namely the role of social calling as a form of social interaction as a means to understand the moral codes and the relationships of the characters in one of Austen's most acclaimed novels: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). In light of this, I therefore propose the following questions: Is it possible to discern the mores

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[7] Yoder 2008: 610. Italics in the original.

and values of the novel's characters through an analysis of their performance of social-calling etiquette? And to what extent does public decorum relate to the notions of property and economic power in the novel?

Taking these questions as the basis of my TFG, I aim to examine how the novel's protagonists perform social calling within a wide range of public events. To do so, in Chapter One, I will start by studying the various types of existing social-calling acts in *Sense and Sensibility*. First, I will consider what are known as *mourning calls—*or visits of condolence—by examining the initial instance of social calling etiquette in the novel: the arrival of Mr John Dashwood and his family to Mrs Dashwood's household after Mr Henry Dashwood Father's death. In this section of the study, I will also analyse one of the novel's plot climaxes; that is, the Dashwood sisters' visit to London as Mrs Jennings' guests. Here, I will establish a comparison between the codes of social decorum in the Big City and those displayed in the country. At the same time, I intend to evaluate the extent to which both the hostess (Mrs Jennings) and the guests (Marianne and Elinor Dashwood) perform their role within the social-calling constraints. Finally, the heroines' stay in London will also serve to evaluate the relationship between Marianne and Willoughby by observing how they interact through calls, as well as in one of the most noteworthy public events of the period: the ball.

Chapter Two focuses on how the heroines of the novel perform the codes of public behaviour. I will present the contrast between Elinor and Marianne by assessing the heroines' performance and understanding of the rules of social etiquette. Additionally, this will be linked to the notion of privacy and how it is displayed by the Dashwood sisters. Lastly, I will consider to what extent their lack of a sense of privacy has an influence on both their romantic lives as well as on their social duties as women.

Finally, in Chapter Three, I will contemplate the notions of romance and marriage by analysing how the novel's male lovers perform the act of social calling. To do so, I will consider the marked contrast that the novel presents between those who strictly follow the protocols of such event—Colonel Brandon, Edward Ferrars—against those who appear to be utterly deviant—particularly, Willoughby. The analysis of the characters' demeanour will be carried out through observing the male characters' interaction with the novel's heroines. In addition, in this section of my study I will assess the male characters' masculinity, and how it is socially perceived, by considering their economic status and their sense of propriety. To support my claims, in this chapter I have accounted for an event that has already been discussed in previous stages of my TFG—specifically, the instance in which Willoughby gives a horse to Marianne as a present. Here, however, this episode is examined from a different perspective, in accordance with the purpose of this section of my study. Finally, I will consider the narrative resolution to discuss to what extent the characters' failure or success in performing social calling allows the reader to distinguish between those who would become suitable or—in contrast—incongruous husbands.

1. Chapter One: The Art of Paying Social Calls in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*

As stated above, the act of social calling was an essential element that delimited social interaction in early nineteenth-century society. The rules that framed the making and receiving of calls, as well as the sending of cards, were founded on a "code that could be learned through 'Method' in childhood and experienced in adolescence" (Byrne, 2005: 303). Hence, through adopting this well-established convention, the British asserted their social rank, and, at the same time, it allowed them to discern those who were deemed to be *well-bred* citizens. Nevertheless, although the close relationship between social decorum, morality, and social status was widely acknowledged, Austen's novels often suggest that manners are, in many cases, unrepresentative of one's moral quality, that the former may be surface-only, whereas the latter is deeply dependent on one's intrinsic character. Following this idea, this opening chapter will explain how the ways in which characters perform social events may vary depending on their personal interests, as well as the circumstances in which such social occasions take place.

1.1 Mourning Calls

The first instance of social interaction presented in *Sense and Sensibility* corresponds to the very opening lines of the novel. On the recent death of Mr Henry Dashwood, his son Mr John Dashwood and his family determine to visit what would now become their property: Mrs Dashwood's residence. This therefore presents an archetype of what are known as mourning calls or visits of condolence, which, by definition, were an occasion to render consolation and to show sympathy towards the relatives of the deceased. As stated in Young's didactic book *Manners, Conduct and Decorum of the Most Refined*

Society (1881),[8] in such circumstances, visits should be paid "within a week after the event which occasioned them" (Young, 2006: 61), since it was considered polite to allow the family to grief before paying a call. However, Mr and Mrs John Dashwood fail to follow this essential rule of conduct, for "no sooner was his father's funeral over, than Mrs John Dashwood, without sending any notice of her intention to her mother-in-law, arrived with her child and their attendants" (*S&S*: 5). Hence, Mrs John Dashwood's way to proceed in this social act presents a twofold problem. On the one hand, the immediacy of the visit shows that the caller clearly ignores the family's necessary grieving-period established by the rules of etiquette of visits for condolence. More problematic still, however, is the visitor's ignominious failure to send a calling card to announce the intended visit at Mrs Dashwood's house—an outrage that is, moreover, implicitly emphasised by the narrative voice. As Byrne (2005: 299) points out, independently of the nature of the caller's visit, "the calling card [was] an essential part of introductions, invitations and visits", and it especially represented an indispensable tool in mourning events, as it enabled the grievers to indicate whether they "were able to receive you" (Young, 2006: 61), or were contrarily indisposed. Hence, by depicting how inattentively the call is performed, Austen's narrative voice already suggests not only the insensitive attitude of Mr John Dashwood and his wife, but also the dismissive and overbearing quality of the relationship that those characters hold with the novel's heroines.

It is essential, then, to examine the nature of the characters' rapport in accounting for their deliberate deviance from expected component in the act of social calling. As both families are linked by their shared social status and by family lineage, it is clearly not the

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[8] It should be noted that Young's *Manners, Conduct and Decorum of the Most Refined Society* was first published in 1879, and hence does not belong to the same historical period when *Sense and Sensibility* was first published (1811). Notwithstanding this, due to the lack of studies on social calling etiquette, in this TFG, Young's didactic manual on social decorum is used as one of the main sources to analyse the rules of calling in Austen's novel.

case that Mr and Mrs John Dashwood's deliberate divergence from the social protocol stemmed from their ignorance of the rules of social etiquette or a lack of kinship with their hosts. Therefore, the only possible cause that propelled the Dashwoods' indecorous demeanour is their urge to get hold of the property that they have inherited on Mr Henry Dashwood's death, and which happens to be the residence of their hosts. Austen's narrator seems to condemn the characters' greed by emphasizing their failure to behave accordingly with the rules of social-calling etiquette "the indelicacy of her [Mrs John Dashwood's] conduct was so much the greater" (*S&S*: 5), which is contrasted with the hostess's "sense of honour" and "generosity" (*S&S*: 5). According to McMaster (1997), by depicting the aftermath of Mr Henry Dashwood's death, Austen attempts to "highlight the injustices of this system of inheritance" (McMaster 1997: 119) represented by the Law on Property in Regency Britain, commonly known as the 'the system of primogeniture',[9] which "unfairly privileges one family member by accumulating all property in his hands" (McMaster 1997: 119). The couple's concern in safeguarding the wealth inherited from Mr John Dashwood's father is much more explicitly depicted in the novel when the characters ponder over the sum they ought to donate to Mrs Dashwood and her daughters. At last, their meanness is unsurprisingly revealed when both resolve not to provide an annual income to their relatives.[10]

The discourteous behaviour of the callers, as well as the evident avarice that prompts them to behave in such a manner is not only condemned by the narrator, but also

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[9] Primogeniture was the obligatory preference in inheritance to the eldest son of the family that was established by law. This system completely excluded female members from inheriting the family's estate, even the deceased's daughters and wife.

[10] In his article "Law and Property, *Sense and Sensibility*: Austen at the Cusp of Modernity" Kaufmann (1992: 389) further inspects the relationship between law and manners in the early nineteenth century by claiming that "manners precede law and correct its severities by restoring equity to precedence. In doing so, manners attempt to mediate the apparently mutual exclusion that separates justice and benevolence in civic jurisprudential tradition". Hence, by failing to mediate the juridical nature of their visit with their display of social etiquette, Mr and Mrs John Dashwood both neglect their sense of morality and disclose their lack of social duty.

transgresses the well-stablished codes of morality that were upheld in eighteenth-century England. As Hutcheson (2008: 77) observes in his compilation of moral maxims titled *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1729), the attempt to "pursue property where it is not necessary to the true enjoyment of them" implies "no generous intentions of virtuous actions". Hence, by contemplating the religious perspective that framed the mores of their society, the Dashwoods can be read as sinful characters corrupted by greed and avarice. What is more, the evil nature of their manners is subsequently aggravated by the family's demeanour once they settle into their guests' residence. After her arrival, Mrs John Dashwood not only "installed herself mistress of Norland", but her "mother and sister-in-law were degraded to the condition of visitors" (*S&S*: 6). Through her ironic narrative voice, Austen appears to suggest the wickedness of the occasion, and reinforces the immoral nature of the new landlords by depicting the "quiet civility" (*S&S*: 6) by which those who had now become guests in their own home supported such abominable treatment, to the point that Mrs Dashwood feels "impatient to be gone" from her own "beloved spot" (*S&S*: 11).

And so, by portraying the indecorous manner in which this visit of condolence is displayed in the first instances of the novel, Austen already presents the reader with the corrupted moral nature of Mr and Mrs John Dashwood before they have even formally interacted with the novel's protagonists. This allows readers to discern between those characters who are to become the antagonists and those who are to be read as the narrative's heroines. At the same time, through this instance of social calling, the narrator appears to condemn the unjust laws and social orders regarding property that dominated in Regency Britain. Finally, the way the call is performed reflects the hypocritical character of British society, since as Tanner points out, "Austen reveals the fault-lines between theory and practice: in theory, 'politeness' embodied both elegance of manners

and the virtues of 'good humour and kindness', but in practice 'manners and morals' did not always go together" (Tanner 1986: 304).

1.2 London

Although Mrs Dashwood, Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret finally succeed in finding modest yet comfortable accommodation in Devonshire, the most central part of the novel takes part in the bustling city in London. The momentousness of the heroines' stay in the city not only depends on the respective guest-host performance displayed by the Dashwood sisters and Mrs Jennings, but also sets the occasion to compare the understandings of the codes of social conduct in the countryside in contrast with those observed in the capital. Just as importantly, London presents the opportunity to inspect the relationship that Elinor and Marianne hold with their respective suitors, from whom—to their great sadness—they have both been long separated.

The representation of the *modus operandi* of Londoners in opposition to the lifestyle of the countryside represents a marked dichotomy in *Sense and Sensibility*, as it does in many other of Austen's works. Following the well-established Romantic trope of the city as recklessly tempting and degrading, in *Sense and Sensibility* the capital is presented as both a "a world of glamour, excitement, activity [and] amusement" as well as "a world in which manners substitute for morals, a world given over to cold deception, manipulation and exploitation" (Tanner 1986: 150). The shallowness that defines the gentry of the city is also reflected in their performance of social etiquette, as they had "no relish for country delights, foreign in their manners, distant and haughty in their behaviour" (Tanner 1986: 145). The difference between the countryside and The City, in terms of the protocols to be adopted in public events that required social calling is made

evident in the novel when accounting for distinct approaches to the arrangement of balls: "in the country, an unpremeditated dance was very allowable; but in London, where the reputation of elegance was more important and less easily attained, it was risking too much for the gratification of a few girls" (*S&S*: 124). It is thus in this unsympathetic—and even alien—environment encompassed by the city where the young heroines are not only expected to "engage with the manners and amusements of London" (*S&S*: 113), but must also suppress their eagerness to reencounter their lovers.

The stay in London is initiated with a social call from Mrs Jennings to Elinor and Marianne. Mrs Jennings is first introduced in the novel as a "good-humoured" yet "rather vulgar" (*S&S*: 25) elderly woman who is very partial to gossiping on the private affairs of her acquaintances. In agreement with this description, the extent to which Mrs Jennings approaches the rules of social calling etiquette is equally careless. The first blunder that Mrs Jennings commits as a future hostess is her total unwillingness to accept Marianne and Elinor's refusal of her invitation to London—where she has a town house—which is justified by their firm "resolution of not leaving their mother at that time of the year" (*S&S*: 111). Yet, Mrs Jennings disregards their negative by "repeat[ing] her invitation immediately" (*S&S*: 111), which is followed by a visit paid by the elderly woman to the Dashwoods in her attempt to persuade them to accompany her to town. Despite being "thoroughly acquainted with Mrs Jennings' manners, and invariably disgusted by them" (*S&S*: 112) Marianne and Elinor determine to accept the invitation with the blessing of their mother, Marianne for being especially motivated through her eagerness to re-encounter Willoughby, and Elinor reluctant to believe that "Marianne should be left to the sole guidance of her own judgment" due to her disinclination "to behave with tolerable politeness" (*S&S*: 114). Thus, by accounting for the ways and reasons why the guests and the host propose and accept the invitation, the characters' perception of the codes of

decorum can be already sensed: while Marianne, and especially Mrs Jennings, refuses to adapt to the protocols of calling etiquette, Elinor is depicted as a role model for her discretion and civility. Resultantly, it can already be perceived that the performance of the rules of social calling during the visit to London by both the guests and the hostess will be utterly conditioned by their understanding or transgression of the codes of social behaviour.

Despite her flaws in the performance of social calling, Mrs Jennings succeeds in following the first principle of calling etiquette when arriving in London: to "leave cards at the houses of [her] acquaintance to inform them of her being in town" (*S&S*: 122). Although this is seen as respectful when carried out by a married—or, in this case, a widowed hostess—, sending cards to a man to announce one's arrival in town was not at all a suitable way to proceed for a single (and especially an *eligibly* single) woman. Notwithstanding this, as soon as she settles in London, Marianne determines to send a letter to Willoughby to inform him of her arrival. This behaviour is so wholly unconventional that it causes Elinor to believe that there must necessarily be a formal engagement between her sister and Willoughby, since "women were discouraged from writing to men until there was a formal engagement between them" (Byrne 1997: 301). What is more, as Colonel Brandon points out while conversing to Elinor, the "marriage is universally talked of", deducing since "they openly correspond" (*S&S*: 126) that there must be some sort of engagement between the two people. It is only when Marianne finally discloses that such an agreement never existed between Willoughby and herself, and that she never received any marriage proposal from him, that her conduct can be read not only as immensely incautious, but also as the gravest of mistakes.

The state of affairs between Marianne and Willoughby while being in London can be very constructively analysed through the observation of their performance of calling.

The fact that Marianne sends him correspondence not once, but three times during her stay in town already presents her desperate—even irrational—need to arrange a meeting with the man she loves. In contrast, Willoughby shows complete indifference in this matter, for he "neither came nor wrote" (*S&S*: 127). Indeed, not replying to Marianne's calls appears to be a calculatedly unkind act, considering Willoughby's formerly close acquittance with Miss Dashwood. Additionally, the way he performs his only attempt to return a call to Marianne shows him to be not only undignified, but also immoral. As pointed out by Ross (2009: 34), when paying a call "cards are placed on a salver in the entrance hall, to show the family (and the world) who has called". However, despite being aware of this rule of etiquette, Willoughby intentionally makes sure to deliver his card when the ladies are not at home, to avoid an encounter with Marianne. Hence, Willoughby's callous way to proceed presents him to the eyes of the reader a doubtlessly "deceitful character" (Ross: 32), an understating of this man that, without a knowledge of the social codes and etiquette of visiting, would be far less immediately acute. These hints of Willoughby's indifference towards Marianne are finally made fully apparent when all the characters attend a ball in town. It is on this occasion that, when noticing the presence of Willoughby, Marianne impatiently questions him regarding his absence and asserts in disbelief that his silence must have been the result of "some dreadful misapprehension or other" (*S&S*: 129). However, Willoughby's distant countenance and reserved reply, as well as the subsequent letter that he sends to Marianne the morning after, confirms that his behaviour reflects the withdrawal of his earlier interest in her. In light of this, and drawing on Tanner (1986), Marianne can be understood as a victim, not only of Willoughby's coldness but also of the shallowness of the society that he represents, as it is "Marianne who perhaps suffers most from the false face which the social world can put on when she receives that devastating snub from Willoughby at the party in London"

(Tanner: 89). Yet, although Willoughby's sudden and immense change in affections may surprise a modern reader, Austen' own readership would have already detected, through the character's performance in the act of social calling, his suddenly apparent emotional distance towards Marianne. In turn, the fact that Marianne was firstly unaware of that may partly indicate her certainty that his love was true, but also signals her unfamiliarity with the social codes framing these situations; in Austen's terms, this places the heroine's character as emotionally decent, in opposition to the shallowness of the city's hypocritical society.

2. Chapter Two: Privacy and the Dashwood Sisters.

The contrast between individual interests and social constraints is made clear in the novel through the way the characters perceive and perform the codes of social decorum. As Spacks (2000: 515) points out, Austen's narrative portrays good manners as "a tax paid by individuals to society, a widely condoned form of hypocrisy". It is through the Dashwood sisters that *Sense and Sensibility* presents two opposing responses to these dogmatic precepts. While Elinor is aware of the detrimental consequences of disregarding her duties towards the community, Marianne appears to be both insensible and indifferent to the uninterrupted social surveillance carried out on her character. Yet, far from shown as absurd, Austen's novel presents the ineluctable link between mannerisms and female duties as a quintessential element in preserving women's social and financial welfare. What is more, by depicting a family that is deprived of a *pater familias* that secures a regular income, the novel deliberately positions the heroines in a vulnerable financial situation. Consequently, marriage becomes the only means by which the heroines may aim to attain a stable socioeconomic status, which is a constant narrative concern in Austen's novels. As Kauffman (1992: 392) puts it, "Austen depicts a society in which women's identity is determined by familial and marital connection", and it is precisely how the sisters display themselves in the public domain through social etiquette that will determine their value as future wives, since modesty and a concealed character were seen as epitomizing the main qualities that a virtuous woman ought to possess (Richardson 1994: 172).

Taking this into account, in this second chapter, I will discuss how in *Sense and Sensibility* the sisters' differing understanding of privacy is depicted through their performance of social etiquette. This allows us to read both the nature of their character

as well as the role of women within the complex dynamics of that society in which they are embedded. In line with this, in this chapter, I will explore how, while Marianne's idealistic understanding of love is completely out of touch with the practicality of money and marriage, Elinor's extreme sense of privacy and moral responsibility almost leads her to be deprived of her desired and advantageous martial union with her beloved suitor, Edward Ferrars.

2.1 Marianne Dashwood.

While in *Sense and Sensibility* Elinor possesses an admirable "coldness of judgement" (*S&S*: 5), Marianne is characterised by her passionate and sensitive character. Far from embracing the discrete and retiring demeanour that was expected from women, the middle sister is depicted as being "everything but prudent" (*S&S*: 6). As Spacks (2000) points out, Marianne's careless deportment reveals her will to preserve her own identity by refusing to be constrained by the strict codes of behaviour imposed on her by society as "she neither conforms to established social standards nor cares about conformist social judgments. Her risk-taking denies the power of the community" (Spacks, 2000: 529). Nonetheless, and despite her firm standpoint, Marianne is soon faced with the dangers of replacing reason with passion when she meets and falls in love with the alluring Mr Willoughby. By refusing to conform to the rules of courtship etiquette, her reckless attitude, and her sense of privacy—or lack of it—not only endanger her reputation and social position within the community but also threaten her future socioeconomic status. And as I have previously observed, this status is intrinsically related to the notion of marriage.

One of the most significant instances in which Marianne publicly infringes the codes of social behaviour is when she attends a local ball in Devonshire. The way she and

Willoughby display their mutual affection by blatantly breaking the rules of dancing etiquette is presented in the novel as follows: "If dancing formed the amusement of the night, they were partners for half the time; and when obliged to separate for a couple of dances, were careful to stand together and scarcely spoke a word to anybody else. Such conduct made them of course most exceedingly laughed at; but ridicule could not shame, and seemed hardly to provoke them" (*S&S*: 40). Marianne's overt display of emotions and marked lack of privacy illustrates her unflinching indifference towards public opinion and mockery. Even though Mrs Dashwood perceives it as "the natural consequence of a strong affection in a young and ardent mind" (*S&S*: 40), Colonel Brandon is quick to express his uneasiness to Elinor after having himself witnessed the appalling consequences to which a young lady can be exposed by having so little sense of decorum. In Brandon's own words, "when romantic refinements of a young mind are obliged to give away, how frequently are they succeeded by such opinions as are but too common, and too dangerous!" (*S&S*: 42). By comparing Marianne to his protégée, Eliza, Brandon hints at the possibility that by failing to conceal her sentiments through the rules of public behaviour, Marianne could very well endanger her virtue and integrity, and hence be excluded from the respectable social circle she presently belongs to. The importance of having a solid sense of privacy when it comes to preserving the virtue of a young woman is likewise pinpointed by Spacks (2000: 518), who stresses that in Austen's world "hardly a trivial component of a woman's conduct or appearance escapes commentary. The eyes upon her belong to men who are constantly judging [...] they assess her value in the marriage market". In spite of this, Marianne once again endangers her reputation by transgressing the limits of intimacy when Willoughby pays her at call at the cottage. On that occasion, Marianne's younger sister, Margaret, informs Elinor that the instant after her sister and Willoughby were left alone, she witnessed them "whispering and talking

together as fast as could be [...] and presently he took up her scissors and cut off a long lock of her hair, and he kissed it" (*S&S*: 44). Elinor, "c[an] not withhold [her sister's] credit"[11] (*S&S*: 45) and determines to believe that there is a formal engagement between Marianne and Willoughby. Yet, even if such an engagement existed, according to the prevailing codes of social calling, Marianne's attitude must be regarded as utterly scandalous, since during the visit "a young lady c[ould] not be left alone in the presence of a man" (Jefferis, Nichols 1919: 31), and physical contact was unconditionally prohibited.

Marianne's inconsiderate attitude towards the importance of observing the norms of public decorum also reflects her lack of understanding of the pragmatic nature of her society in terms of wealth and economy. In the novel, this is exemplified when Marianne is willing to accept a horse as a present from Willoughby. While Elinor "ventured to doubt the propriety of her receiving such a present from a man so little, or at least, so lately known to her", Marianne asserts that "[she] should hold herself guilty of greater impropriety in accepting a horse from [her] brother, than of Willoughby" (*S&S*: 43). Through Marianne's answer, it can be sensed how she not only seems to disregard the inappropriateness of the gift, but she also completely ignores the modest economic means of her family—who have a very slender annual income of £500—which rules out the capricious expenses of maintaining a horse, except where that would be strictly necessary. Consequently, we can conclude that Marianne's neglect of the social demands of concealing her sense of privacy and decorum reflects how utterly unaware she is of her family's fragile socioeconomic position—and by extension, to the prominence of wealth

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[11] Although Margaret is essentially a secondary character, she is a relevant example of the role of children in the act of social calling throughout the nineteenth century. As Young (2006: 63) claims, the guest should "never allow young children, dogs or pets of any sort to accompany [them] in a call" by concluding that "they often prove disagreeable and troublesome". This perception of children offered by the study of the rules of etiquette hints at how infancy was apprehended and handled in the social context of Austen's times.

in her society as a whole. It is only when the dreadful psychological and physical dangers of her reckless sensibility are wholly clear to her that Marianne acknowledges and comprehends her social role as an unmarried young woman. Following her prolonged illness, the heroine resolves to refine her conduct by asserting that "[her] feelings shall be governed and [her] temper improved" (*S&S*: 255). Accordingly, and faithful to her promise, Marianne determines to embrace her social duties by marrying the honourable—and conveniently affluent—Colonel Brandon.

To conclude, in the novel, Marianne's sentimentalism (often presented as preposterous) and her lack of privacy serve to warn the reader of the harrowing consequences of exposing one's feelings to public judgement. It is only after experiencing the almost mortal dangers of her deviant attitude that Marianne is finally forced to acknowledge the relevance of what Michie (2011: 1) calls "the vulgar question of money" in a society where—to Marianne's sorrow—there is no room for Romantic idealism.

2.2 Elinor Dashwood.

On the other hand, Elinor contrasts Marianne's careless character by "possess[ing] not only a highly developed sense of privacy but marked sensitivity to social norms" (Spacks, 2000: 527). Unlike Marianne, Elinor understands the existing link between social norms and securing a stable social and economic position. The fact that she is the most rational and prudent sister is also significant to her role within the family structure, since "aunts and older sisters played a prominent part in raising children. They, like mothers, provided the orderly, disciplined framework which was the basis of the serious Christian household" (Davidoff, Hall, 2019: 281). Hence, Elinor's marked—and even inflexible—understanding of social etiquette may be read as her attempt to carry out her duty of preserving her family's reputation in the public eye.

Nonetheless, Elinor's sense of personal and social responsibility is at the same time the very cause of her suffering. Soon after becoming acquainted with the small social circle of her community in Devonshire, Elinor falls victim to Lucy Steele's wicked character, as Lucy challenges Elinor's morality and sense of privacy by turning her into her confidant while trying to dissuade the heroine from marrying Edward Ferrars. Lucy is, by these means, presented as antagonistic to Marianne: an ambitious character who exploits the conventions of the propertied classes to secure herself an accommodated social position by "mean[ing] to marry as well as possible" (Brownstein 1997: 45). Yet, although Elinor is condemned to suffer in silence by being repeatedly reminded of Lucy's clandestine engagement to Edward Ferrars, she nevertheless strictly follows the codes of civility by "keeping her suffering to herself, and she demonstrates the kind of social responsibility implicit in scrupulous preservation of one's own as well as others' privacy" (Spacks: 530). Even though Elinor's character differs completely from Lucy's mischievous and immoral nature, both women display themselves to society through impeccable mannerisms—Lucy's sense of social etiquette is highlighted in the novel when she is said to behave with contrived "graciousness" (*S&S*: 275) while paying a call to Mrs Ferrars. By establishing a parallel between Lucy and Elinor in terms of how they are socially perceived despite having such an opposing sense of morality, Austen seems to be complicating the notion of 'good manners' by depicting them as an unreliable indicator of moral quality. Pierce (1975) assesses the role of manners in Austen's narrative by claiming that

> Manners have [...] considerable suppleness and ambiguity. We may see in them a comic incongruity, a failure of behaviour to realize intention, or a deliberate use of the conventions of courtesy to express cold distaste or angry resentment. We may find a conflict between the code of a society and the code of moral principle; and manners may become a code of socially acceptable immorality. The possibilities are, in fact, endless. (Price 1975: 268)

Although the ambiguity on the purpose of manners that Pierce refers to here is mostly evidenced through the character of Lucy Steele, Elinor's response to Lucy's coercion adds yet a further layer to the complexity of social decorum. Even though Elinor remains faithful to her promise of not revealing Lucy's confidences, she "solicits them with an air as ingenuous and false as Lucy's own" (Mudrick 1952, cited in Richardson, 2014: 230), which to Richardson (2014: 230), is representative of the fact that "this dissimulation is no longer distinguishable from courtesy". Kauffman (1992: 391) further depicts the important role that manners play as a self-defence mechanism by drawing a connection between propriety and judicature, as he claims that "Elinor is practicing a form of emotional aikido: she deflects Lucy's attacks by protecting the privacy of her affections. Just as law maintains the private realm of choice—allowing one to dispose of one's property as one wishes-so propriety allows one the privacy of sentiment". This way, both women engage in a quiet battle without either damaging their public image or betraying their valued sense of privacy. At last, it is Elinor who triumphs in this confrontation and is rewarded for having kept to her principles by finally marrying Edward Ferrars. In contrast to this, Lucy is punished by her insidious behaviour which "leads her to what is obviously a morally mistaken choice" (Kelly 1997: 164) by opting to marry the decadent Robert Ferrars and thus falling into the misery of an impoverished and loveless marriage.

Through the study of Elinor and Marianne's public behaviour, I have assessed two pivotal points in this chapter. On the one hand, I have explored the importance of possessing a strong sense of privacy to avoid falling victim to public criticism and subsequent moral censure. This is mainly presented in the novel through Marianne's reckless attitude regarding the rules of social etiquette, which is moreover accentuated during her courtship with the alluring Willoughby. Although Marianne initially strives to preserve her unconstrained character and sense of freedom, she is soon compelled to

succumb to the social constraints to prevent the dangers of becoming a social outcast and hence result physically and morally doomed. Accordingly, the heroine finally cedes to the social pressure inflicted upon her character by acceding to correct her demeanour and acknowledge of her duties as a woman, which she ultimately consolidates by marrying Colonel Brandon. On the other hand, by contemplating the relationship between Elinor and Lucy Steele, this chapter has assessed how manners in *Sense and Sensibility* are also presented as an unreliable means for determining morality, since a proper sense of social decorum does not always equate to noble intentions. While Elinor's high moral sense aligns with her impeccable display of social etiquette, Lucy serves of good manners to project a decent public image to conceal her mischievous attempt to climb the social ladder by securing an advantageous marriage. Henceforth, through this ironic and contradictory portrayal of the role of manners, the novel appears to suggest that while happy resolutions can be achieved only through a proper display of decorum motivated by a noble heart, being deprived of one of these two qualities would certainly result in social disaster.

3. Chapter Three: Romance and the Novel's Male Lovers: Studying the Social-Calling Performance of Mr Ferrars, Willoughby and Colonel Brandon

As *Sense and Sensibility* is a novel that revolves around the concepts of romance, courtship, and marriage, the public and private encounters between the heroines and their male lovers become central to the understanding of the plot. It is precisely through social interaction that the Dashwood sisters and their suitors progressively develop the emotional bonds that will supposedly result in their greatly awaited marriages. Nonetheless, although the analysis of the male protagonists' performance with regards to social calling certainly allows the reader to apprehend the nature and evolution of their relationship with Elinor and Marianne, it also enables us to examine the morality, intentions, and ambitions that drive the heroes into courtship with the heroines. It is through their display of social decorum that Edward Ferrars, Colonel Brandon, and John Willoughby assert their role in society, which parallels to a great extent their worth as suitable husbands. As Aliwood (2008: 94) points out, "Austen uses politeness [...] to argue that men's relationship with women should form a key element in determining 'what men ought to be'". Hence, the male characters' display of the rules of etiquette not only discloses their love interests, but mirrors at the same time the extent to which they fulfil their duties, which are directly related to "the growing dominance of middle-class values and the link they establish between productive work, domesticity and socially-approved masculinity" (Aliwood: 45). It is in this light that in this chapter I examine the role of the male suitors in *Sense and Sensibility* both within the marriage-plot discourse of the novel as well as in the representation of the changing prototypes of manliness in the Regency era by revising the concepts of domesticity and financial independence. Finally, through the study of how these factors are portrayed in the novel, I consider the

question of what makes Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon the most convenient suitors to marry the Dashwood sisters in opposition to Willoughby.

3.1 Edward Ferrars

The first admirer presented in the narrative is Edward Ferrars, Mrs John Dashwood's brother, who despite his shyness and lack of social-interaction skills soon wins Elinor's affection. Although Edward and Elinor first meet at the Dashwoods' former residence in Norland, he is eagerly invited by Mrs Dashwood to visit them at their new residence at Devonshire after their departure. Nonetheless, his awaited arrival is so much delayed that it induces Marianne to believe that "Edward Ferrars is not well. We have now been here almost a fortnight, and yet he does not come. Nothing but real indisposition could occasion this extraordinary delay" (*S&S*: 29). When Edward finally pays them a visit at their modest cottage, the sisters are greatly surprised to learn that he had already spent a fortnight in Devonshire, which makes Marianne ponder the reasons that propelled him to remain "so long in the same country with Elinor without seeing her before" (*S&S*: 29). Far from being a sign of his detachment from Elinor, however, Edward's delay in paying a call to the woman whom he loves can be used to analyse his character and personality as well as the relationship that he maintains with his family, and by extension his role within society as a whole. Drawing on Watson (2011), Edward is initially introduced as a man "both of sense and of sensibility, whose diffidence prevents him from the proper exertion of these qualities". Therefore, not in the least presented as the prototypical hero, Edward is characterised by his "natural awkwardness" and his intrinsic disposition to be "little at [his] ease among strangers of gentility" (*S&S*: 70). Nonetheless, the reason for his delay and his overall lack of interaction with Elinor throughout most of the novel

could be rationalised through two pivotal factors: his marked dependence on his family's approval of his actions, and his unrevealed engagement to Lucy Steele.

As for the first aspect, Edward's lack of independence can be implicitly sensed in the novel, since "Austen reveals a stunning disparity between Edward's own wishes and his family's wishes *for*[12] him" (Watson, 2011). In this case, by delaying his visit to Barton Park, Edward seems to be advocating in favour of his family's "disapprobation of the match" (*S&S*: 7). To make sense of Edward's reliance on his family's interests we need to consider not only the natural passivity that shapes his persona, but also the vulnerability of his financial status. As stated in the novel, Edward does not own a great fortune himself, but his wealth depends on the inheritance that will eventually fall to him after his mother's death. Hence, Edward's lack of economic autonomy allows us to read him as a "victim of patrilineal disposition of property" (Aliwood: 111), since it prevents him from courting Elinor and pursuing a marriage that is against his family's will. According to Aliwood (2008: 60), this initially presents him as an unsuitable lover and an undesirable suitor, as in Austen's novels independence usually implies "an essential quality of desirable masculinity and dramatize[s] the uncertain masculinities of men who are either financially dependent on others or lack [...] moral and intellectual independence".

However, the main factor that accounts for Edward's delay in returning the call to the Dashwoods despite being in Devonshire is his engagement to Lucy Steele, which happens to be the reason that prompts him to visit the region in the first place. His final resolution to call upon Elinor despite knowing that their union is unattainable can be read as the beginning of the character's attempt to develop his own free will, despite the monetary constraints that impede him to profess his love for Elinor. As Watson (2011)

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[12] Watson 2011: online. Italics in the original.

claims, "Edward's very presence at Barton, especially directly following his stay with Lucy at Longstaple, indicates that his emotions, not his right judgment, guide him in making this decision". However, "when he becomes aware of his miserly conduct, sense displaces sensibility and begins to direct his conduct" (Watson 2011), which implies that Edward can be read as an honourable man for staying loyal to his engagement to Lucy. Taking all these factors into account, the study of Edward's visit to Barton Park offers a hint at his financial flaws and moral qualities and establishes the beginning of his steady evolution towards a worthwhile husband.

Edward's personal growth can be sensed through his second attempt to interact with Elinor by calling her at Berkeley Street. In this instance, despite the apparent momentousness of this "moment of action",[13] Edward does not betray this facet of Edward's character" (Watson 2011). The way the call is carried out reflects in great measure his uneasiness and gracelessness. Without having previously sent a card reporting his arrival, Edward has hardly been announced by the servant before he "immediately walk[s] in" (*S&S*: 176). Reflecting the impression that such an entrance caused on the hostess, the narrator describes it as "a very awkward moment" by emphasizing how "they all looked exceedingly foolish" (*S&S*: 176). On this occasion, Edward's failure to follow the decorum of social calling as well as embracing his role as a guest—the narrator deliberately condemns him for not querying about Mrs Dashwood's health, which "he ought to have enquired about, but never did" (*S&S*: 177)—is further obstructed by the presence of Lucy Steele. When realizing her presence, Edward falls victim once again to his bashfulness, to the point that "his embarrassment exceeded that of the ladies in a proportion, which the case rendered reasonable, through his sex might make it rare" (*S&S*: 177). Here, the narrative voice appeals directly to the notion of

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[13] Watson 2011: online. Inverted comas in the original.

masculinity by questioning Edward's manliness through exposing his incapability to maintain proper conduct as a visitor despite the exceptionality of the circumstances, to the point that he is condemned by being unable to conceal his emotions better than the opposite sex. By describing Elinor's lover as (in effect) an emasculatory character, Austen appears to be challenging the notion of 'manly man' as the only possible form of masculinity for a desirable husband, and, instead, she places value on the notions of morality and affluence as the distinctive qualities that conform the prevailing form of masculinity in the early nineteenth century.

It is in his third and final call upon the Dashwoods that Edward completes his evolution towards what makes a worthy suitor, since as soon as he is "freed from his engagement to Lucy Steele, he immediately rushes to Barton and proposes to Elinor, in one stroke uniting both sense and sensibility while remaining an *honourable*[14] hero" (Watson 2011). The end of his engagement with Lucy also provides him with what he initially lacked to become a desirable suitor: his family's financial support and its approval of his union to Elinor. Yet, despite this, the way he performs the call, as well as the proposal, indicates that he still maintains his intrinsic shyness and his bungling nature, as after being received by Mrs Dashwood "his complexion was white with agitation, and he looked as if fearful of his reception" (*S&S*: 263). In spite of this, the narrator appears to disregard Edward's shyness as an impediment to read him as a desirable suitor. Contrarily, it is the fact that he honourably performs the call to propose marriage to Elinor only *after* he has been freed from his engagement to Lucy, as well as when he is finally financially independent, that makes him a noble and desirable man. Thus, by contemplating the novel's ending, Edward could be read as a hero-in-the-making who

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[14] Watson 2011: online. Italics in the original.

manifests his personal growth by meeting the economic and moral qualities of a suitable husband through the marked evolution of social calling throughout the novel.

3.2 John Willoughby

As an opposite to Edward's character, Willoughby—the object of Marianne's emotional interest—is initially presented as the prototypical hero that steadily develops into a loathsome suitor due to his distinctive lack of property and propriety. As stated by Adams, Buchanan, et al (2008: 26), John Willoughby could be read as a "Byronic hero *par excellence*", [15] who matches Marianne's standards of "what a young man ought to be" by being "so frank and so graceful" that "his person and air were equal to what her fancy had ever drawn for the hero of a favourite story" (*S&S*: 32). Furthermore, exactly as Marianne, Willoughby completely disregards the most basic rules of decorum that frame social interaction, especially concerning social calling. One of the most significant points of evidence of his recklessness towards social codes of behaviour is depicted when he invites Marianne to visit his benefactress's property at Allenham. While performing the call, the guests not only intrude in the house without forewarning the hostess, but also perform the visit on their own with no third party to accompany them. Even if, in sight of the couple's lack of manners, Mrs Jennings facetiously qualifies Willoughby as "Mr Imprudence", the gravity of their actions is soon condemned by Elinor, who assures that she "would not [have] go[ne] while Mrs Smith was there, and with no other companion than Mr Willoughby", since "the pleasantness of an employment does not always evince its propriety" (*S&S*: 51). Elinor's distress regarding her sister's conduct is directly linked to the fact that "it was not acceptable for a young unmarried woman to be alone in the company of a gentleman" (Byrne, 2009: 300) as it could endanger the lady's "chastity",

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[15] Adams, Buchanan, et al 2008: 26. Italics in the original.

which a was believed to be what framed "a ductile female character" (Richardson 1994: 183). Hence, Willoughby's disregard for the rules of calling etiquette on this occasion allows us to read him as a character that lacks any sense of morality, since not only does he overlook his benefactress' ownership by intruding into her property, but he also exposes Marianne to becoming a social outcast by endangering her reputation and her virtue.

Willoughby's steady *de-heroification* is further depicted when he suddenly deserts Marianne to fulfil the desire of Mrs Smith—to whom he is protégé—to see him leave for London. It is through the study of the last call that he pays before his departure that we can examine both Willoughby's selfish nature as well as his undesirable financial vulnerability. In this visit, the character's performance of the call is presented as utterly distressing. After informing the Dashwoods of his imminent departure, Willoughby claims that "[he] will not torment [him]self any longer by remaining among friends whose society it is impossible for [him] now to enjoy. He then hastily took leave of them all and left the room. They saw him step into his carriage, and in a minute, it was out of sight" (*S&S*: 57). In this disquieting scene, Willoughby once more disregards the rules of calling etiquette by not "express[ing] the pleasure experienced in [the] visit" (Young, 2006: 75) nor waiting for the host to approve of his leave. His abrupt exit is nonetheless justified by Mrs Dashwood, who believes it to be the result of the fact that "Mrs Smith suspects his regard for Marianne, disapproves of it, (perhaps because she has other views for him) and on that account is eager to get him away; —and that the business which she sends him off to transact is invented as an excuse to dismiss him" (*S&S*: 58). By acknowledging his dependence upon Mrs Smith's will, Willoughby, like Edward, is presented as a financially constrained character who is obliged to comply with his benefactress' marriage prospects. However, Willoughby's intentions are far more treacherous than

merely obeying his protector' wishes. Having been deprived of Mrs Smith's bequest after knowing of his affair with Eliza, Willoughby then proceeds to spouse Miss Grey, an affluent woman with a fortune of fifty thousand pounds, despite being "by insensible degrees, sincerely fond of [Marianne]" (*S&S*: 235). It is after becoming aware of his intentions that Elinor enquires the reason why he had performed a last call to Marianne to bid adieu, and disdainfully states that "a note would have answered every purpose. Why was it necessary to call?" to which he resignedly replies, "it was necessary to my own pride" (*S&S*: 237). According to Chamberlain (2012), Willoughby's marriage to Miss Grey illustrates the fact that he "might best be described as a kind of luxury good" who satisfies his "expensive, dissipated" (*S&S*: 153) character by benefiting from other ladies' fortunes—those of Mrs Smith and Miss Grey, respectively. Therefore, it is by presenting Willoughby's unwillingness of becoming economically independent as the cause that propels him to act wickedly that the character's masculinity is questioned, since "characters such as John Willoughby [...] demonstrate that, in Austen's world, idleness is fundamentally undesirable in men" (Aliwood, 2011: 48). Furthermore, Willoughby's incapacity to administer his own economic affairs is also revealed when he fails to regard those of the others, as is exemplified in the novel when he determines to grant a horse to Marianne as a present. As I have previously discussed in this study, Willoughby's gift must be regarded as awfully improper due to the excessive maintenance expenses that it entails for such a short-incomed family as the Dashwoods. Taking this into account, this scene can be interpreted as an instance that enables the reader to distinguish both the suitor and Marianne's lack of sensibility towards the economic status of the family, and, by extension, towards the relevance of money and property in their society. Such an imprudent awareness of the value of property and wealth, altogether with his

opportunistic disposition make of Willoughby a truly negligent—and particularly ill-mannered—character.

Yet, in his final call to Elinor, the courter experiences a moral development in his attempt to repent from his sins and apologize for his self-centeredness. Willoughby's uneasiness can be sensed from the unconventionality of the visit, which breaks all the possible rules of calling etiquette. At his arrival, Willoughby enters the room without previous notice, which makes Elinor "start back with a look of horror at the sight of him" while he claims, "in a voice rather of command than supplication, "Miss Dashwood, for half an hour—for ten minutes—I entreat you to stay" (*S&S*: 232). The fact that he '*commands*' Elinor could be read as a manifestation of his exasperation and fanatical need for redemption, which most likely derives from his frustration regarding his diminished masculinity, since he has placed more value on his own salvation than on acting in a gentlemanly manner towards Marianne: "my affection for Marianne, my thorough conviction of her attachment to me—it was all insufficient to outweigh that dread of poverty, or get the better of those false ideas of the necessity of the riches, which I was naturally inclined to feel, and expensive society had increased" (*S&S*: 237). Here Willoughby not only blames himself for his actions, but also society and its materialistic nature that urged him to choose wealth over feeling. Even if, on that account, Willoughby can be read as a character that merely attempts to fulfil his role as a man by sacrificing his happiness, his position as a married man is likewise wrecked by engaging in a loveless and lucrative wedlock, as he admits when claiming "I must rub through the world as well as I can. Domestic happiness is out of the question" (*S&S*: 244). Here Willoughby refers once more to his failed masculinity by referring to his negligent performance of domestic duty; a quality that became a quintessential element for the new model of hegemonic masculinity in the Regency era. As Tosh (1999) points out "Austen unequivocally

presents men's attitudes to their domestic roles and responsibilities as reliable of their worth and value as men. Male characters' domestic orientation—or lack thereof—is demonstrated through their attitudes to women, their siblings, their parents, their dependents and other members of their household, and also by their attitudes to settled domestic life itself" (Tosh 1999, cited in Aliwood, 2011: 53). Hence, Willoughby's lack of propriety is presented as the core element that misshapes his initially idealised manliness, as being characterised by his indiscreet manners, Willoughby not only ruins his relationship with Marianne, but also fails to perform his domestic service as a husband, and, consequently, his marriage is likewise condemned. Even though Willoughby is harshly censured by his lack of sensitivity, he can be read as a sensible character that, unlike Marianne, is unable to accept and adapt to the social demands concerning the role of the man in a changing capitalist society, in which there is no room for an impassionate display of sentiments and is strictly framed by decorum. Thus, through the study of the detrimental consequences resulting from Willoughby's failed attempt to follow the codes of social protocol, it may be questioned to what extent the shaping of a new masculinity based on "the principles which should characterize Christian manhood in the early nineteenth century—piety, domesticity, a proper sense of responsibility about business" (Aliwood, 2011: 46) can be aligned with the notion of sensibility and free-will. Although Austen does not provide a decisive answer, through Willoughby's misfortune she certainly depicts the perils of refusing to adapt to the rules of a changing society.

3.3 Colonel Brandon

Given the fact that Willoughby's marriage to Marianne is undesirable both because of his lack of decorum, as well as "the internal economic logic of the novel"[16] (Chamberlain, 2012), the heroine's marriage plot can be proved successful only if she marries a man who represents a marked sense of propriety and property; qualities that are embodied by no other than Colonel Brandon. Throughout the novel, Brandon is repeatedly defined as a "particularly gentlemanlike" (*S&S*: 26) who, alongside Elinor and Edward displays a "highly developed sense of privacy" (Spacks, 2000: 527). This is particularly reflected in the novel through Brandon's non-interference in the courtship between Willoughby and Marianne despite knowing of the suitor's deceitful past as the assailant of his very own protégée. Additionally, Brandon's high sense of propriety also serves to symbolically elevate the "ranks of the army, maintaining the honour of their class and country" (Jones, 2009: 269) and thus provides a sense of social stability. Yet Brandon is not merely venerated by his moral righteousness; he is also constantly praised by his economic circumstances, since according to Mrs Jennings, Brandon's estate is worth £2,000 a year, and he is moreover free of any debts. However, notwithstanding Brandon's qualities as a suitable husband, he is ardently despised by Marianne, who believes him to be a man that "has neither genius, taste, nor spirit [...] his understanding has no brilliancy, his feelings no ardour, and his voice no expression"[17] (*S&S*: 39) and hence is distanced from Marianne's understanding of the ideal masculinity, which—particularly for her—is

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[16] Here, the author does not refer to the modern association of the word 'economy' with wealth and finance, but to "any organization or structure governed according to certain rules or habits, or any human society", such as "[a] household; a society or other structure ordered after the manner of a family" (Chamberlain 2012: online).

[17] Elinor's opposition to marrying Brandon is also influenced by their marked age gap, which is explicitly referred to in the novel when Marianne claims that "he is old enough to be my father; and if he were ever animated enough to be in love, must have long outlived every sensation of the kind. It is too ridiculous!" (*S&S*: 28). However, a considerable difference in age between a wife and her husband would later become relatively common in the Victorian era.

shaped by the canonical Romantic hero. It is only after her almost-fatal illness when Marianne sets aside her sensibility, which is replaced by sense, when she finally values Brandon's refined character and agrees to marry him.

The fact that Marianne is compelled to sacrifice her understanding of marriage and recalibrate what makes a suitable husband could be interpreted as her surrender to the new values that shape manliness. These values, far from being linked to an idealised Romantic conception of love, are ingrained to the tangibility of wealth and domestic prosperity. Tanner (2008) commenting on the novel's bittersweet ending for Marianne, observes that

> The ideal marriage at the end of a Jane Austen novel is not simply a conventional happy ending, an easily available tactic of narrative closure. It offers itself as an emblem of the ideal union of property and propriety—a model to be emulated, a paradigm for a more general combination of the two on which the future of her society depends. Marriages in her work which lack either or both are, by the same token, admonitory failures. (Tanner 2008: 19)

Hence, although Marianne and Brandon's union at the ending of *Sense and Sensibility* may appear as unpredictable and even "all wrong" (Chapman, 2000) to the twenty-first-century reader, Tanner's (2008) statement suggests that the marriage perfectly aligns with the values and interests that conformed a satisfactory engagement in the early-nineteenth century. Far from being a union based solely on mutual affection, the novel depicts a marriage that satisfies the merging of property and propriety, and that consequently mirrors the workings of the society in which the characters are embedded.

At last, through the study of how the rules of social etiquette are performed by the male suitors in the novel, this chapter has evaluated the close relationship between property and propriety, which are both presented as key elements shaping a new understanding of masculinity in the early nineteenth century. Unlike the idealised Romantic conception of the reckless and passionate hero initially pursued by Marianne,

Austen's understanding of this depicts politeness and self-countenance as fundamental qualities to ensure the successful union of a wife and a husband. At the same time, a marked sense of decorum (in her novels, at least) tends to correlate with a solid economic status, as is exemplified by Colonel Brandon. In contrast, Willoughby's idleness and immorality can be perceived through his careless performance of social protocols, which result in the heroines' reprobation of his persona, as well as in his failure as a husband. To that end, through the portrayal of the link between the concepts of propriety, morality, and property, the author asserts the rising moral and monetary values that would soon come to define hegemonic masculinity throughout the Victorian era by presenting the reader with a scenario in which *unmanly* men like Edward Ferrars ought to be chosen over the audacious Willoughbys of the world.

4. Conclusions

In this TFG, I have assessed the role of social etiquette in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* through the analysis of social calls. Two main questions set the basis of my study; the first one being whether the mores and values of the novel's characters can be discerned through the observation of their performance of social calling etiquette, and the second referring to the extent to which public decorum relates to the notions of property and economic power in the novel. Through the analysis of several calling events that are presented throughout the narrative, altogether with the inspection of primary and secondary critical studies on the field of etiquette, mores, and property, I have been able to provide a satisfactory conclusive statement on both questions.

As for the relationship between social etiquette and mores, throughout this TFG it has been observed that in *Sense and Sensibility* the quality of the characters' public behaviour presents a two-fold issue. On the one hand, the performance of calling etiquette on behalf of the novel's protagonists is persistently used to feature their mores, which allows the reader to discern between those who are morally decent, in opposition to the deceitful ones. This is already presented in the first instances of the novel when Mr and Mrs John Dashwood's neglectful performance of calling etiquette serves as an indicator of their greedy—and hence sinful—moral nature, which already allows the reader to identify them as antagonistic characters in the narrative. Likewise, Willoughby is constantly reproved by his complete lack of social etiquette on a variety of occasions, which emphasises his selfish character, and consequently leads to the steady *de-heroification* of his persona throughout the novel. Conversely, a good sense of social decorum is used to enhance the moral virtue of Elinor and Colonel Brandon, which aligns with their marked understanding of social duty towards the commanding community. Yet, notwithstanding this, this study has explored how in *Sense and Sensibility* manners are

also presented as a complex enterprise, as is exemplified in the novel through Lucy's character, who serves of her social skills to manipulate and silence Elinor to her own benefit. In such instances, the narrative does not serve of the characters' display of social decorum to hint at their moral quality, but rather attempts to present a critical view of social etiquette by challenging the eighteenth-century prevailing understanding that a righteous and noble mind will necessarily be mirrored through a proper display of social decorum. Instead, the novel seems to point to the dangers of a society that serves of a refined demeanour to disguise its conceited interests, and that hence may be read as shallow and utterly hypocritical.

Addressing now the second question that this paper aimed to approach, the results of the study show that in Austen's novel, social decorum is intrinsically related to economic welfare. Through the analysis of the characters' performance of social calls, there have been assessed the reasons that propelled—or restrained—them to realize the visits. In most instances, such motives serve to mirror the characters' monetary interests or financial status, which moreover disclose their role in the social order in accordance with their gender and social rank. Through the study of the Dashwood sisters, this paper has assessed how, in Austen's society, women's economic welfare depends on the quality of their performance of the rules of social etiquette, which, in turn, allows the heroines to engage in advantageous marriages and hence secure their economic needs. While Elinor's concealed character and high sense of privacy permit her to marry Edward Ferrars, Marianne serves as an example of the dangers of carelessly performing social decorum as a woman, as her lack of social etiquette not only endangers her family's economic status, but almost leads her to moral and social ruin. Similarly, the worth of the novel's male characters as desirable suitors is conditioned by the balance between the quality of their performance on the rules of etiquette and their economic status. Hence, while

Bandon is praised for being both propertied and affluent, Edward Ferrars and Willoughby are initially regarded as unsuited to perform their role as husbands due to their lack of economic independence and poor display of the rules of calling etiquette. Based on this reading, this study has concluded that Austen's novel depicts a new emerging form of hegemonic masculinity which relies on the harmony between a decorous character and a solid financial condition.

To conclude, through the analysis of the various calling events that are encompassed in *Sense and Sensibility*, this study has assessed the relevance of social etiquette within the sociocultural framework of the novel. By doing so, it has offered a thorough analysis of how the characters' display of public behaviour aligns with the socioeconomic constraints of the time. This is, in short, a reading that, without contemplating the various rules that framed social interaction, would have gone fundamentally unnoticed by the modern reader.

5. Further Research

Throughout writing this TFG, I have encountered a variety of issues that I believe to be worth analysing in future studies in this field, and which I have not discussed in my work due to the necessarily limited scope of this current discussion.

Although in this TFG I have studied social calls by considering the characters' performance of social etiquette in a variety of events, there is another instance of social interaction worth examining, which is that of balls and dancing. Since dancing is a recurrent element in Austen's narrative, I believe that it would be of interest to assess this cultural phenomenon through the lenses of social etiquette to study the characters' relationships and interests, and how these relate to their socioeconomic status.

A further topic of interest to me would be to consider the role of children in Austen's narrative through the study of the rules of social calling. By extension, this would also present an opportunity to apprehend how infancy was understood in the Regency Era and how it is reflected in the literature of the time.

Finally, drawing on the main basis of my thesis, I would like to propose an additional field of study in eighteenth-century literature, and, more specifically, Austen's works. Given the fact that scholars such as Tanner (1986) focus on the relationship between property and propriety, I believe that, similarly, it would be valuable to analyse the relationships between etiquette and propriety, and to examine how they are presented as two differing concepts in Austen's narratives.

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