Female Homosocial Bonds in English Literature: Romantic Friendship in Jane Austen and Austen-based Femslash.


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To Olivia, my goddaughter

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the result of a strange idea, reading an immense amount of books and articles, and coming across a lot of “weird stuff” on the internet. It would not have been possible without the support, help and advice of a number of people. Most importantly, I want to thank professor Buelens and Ms Van Steenhuyse for their help, tips and guidance, without which none of this could have been realised. With regard to the theories of Foucault and the argumentation of Faderman about the history of sexuality and female romantic friendship, I am deeply indebted to professor Buelens, whose comments helped me a lot in achieving a better insight in this matter. I thank Ms Veerle van Steenhuyse for sharing her insight and knowledge concerning fan fiction writing and fan fiction communities.

After quite a tough year, I more than ever want to thank my family for always being there for me and supporting me unconditionally. I thank my parents and my close family for joining forces in my upbringing and education, bringing me to this point in life. I’m especially grateful to oma Milou who introduced me to Jane Austen (albeit the film adaptation) when I was only five. I thank Ilse, who is like a sister to me, and her daughters, Elena and Olivia, whom I love dearly. I thank my brother Max whom I appallingly neglected during the past months. I will make it up to you. I thank Katrijn and Charlotte for sticking around, even when I was insufferable. I thank Sven for providing the at times much needed diversion and for being a lovely friend. I thank Gert from the bottom of my heart, with all of which I love him dearly, for always being there for me.

When I set out to illustrate the evolution of the representation of lesbian relations and started this undertaking of investigating Austen-based femslash, the world of fan fiction was completely strange to me. At times I felt lost in an alien universe, complete with a separate language and social manners of its own. And now, much to my own surprise, but even more to my own satisfaction, this paper is finally finished. This thesis can be considered the written account of my initiation into the fascinating and thrilling world of fan fiction. This means, and I cannot stress this enough, that my position is that of an outside observer, since I am not a writer of fan fiction myself. This also means that I have no doubt missed out on some of the subtleties that are typical for this community. In my newly adopted identity of an academic lurker and knowing more about Spock and Kirk bromance than I ever cared for, but hooked for life on this exciting type of contemporary literature, I truly hope I can awaken the interest of whoever reads this dissertation in this type of literature, which features some of the most social and yet personal creative expressions I have ever encountered.

A final comment beforehand is concerned with the ethical side of my research, specifically the decision not to “anonymise” the fics that are analysed. Even though the fics are all found on public domain, as they are published on various internet forums, I want to clarify my decision not to number the fics, but simply use the pseudonyms they are published under. As will become clear throughout this thesis and especially in the analyses, I focus solely on the text and refrain from making any statements about the specific authors or even about fan fiction writers in general. This means that I do not jeopardise the writers’ privacy or reveal any personal information that might harm them, and, hence, I do not consider it prejudicial to name the authors. Even though some of the writers whose work I have used for analysis are not aware that I have used their work, I want to – even though it may be merely symbolical – thank them for their creativity, convictions and passion.
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Am I the only one in the world who reads 19th century novels and immediately ship [sic] the girls together? Srsly, guys. Emma/Harriet, ffs. ANNE/DIANA. Don’t tell me I’m the only one who sees it.

- A fan on Tumblr (Geekybitch)

Fan fiction is what literature might look like if it were reinvented from scratch after a nuclear apocalypse by a band of brilliant pop-culture junkies trapped in a sealed bunker. They don’t do it for money. That’s not what it’s about. The writers write it and put it up online just for the satisfaction. They’re fans, but they’re not silent, couchbound consumers of media. The culture talks to them, and they talk back to the culture in its own language.

- Lev Grossman (Grossman)

I adore the way fan fiction writers engage with and critique source texts, by manipulating them and breaking their rules. Some of it is straight-up homage, but a lot of [fan fiction] is really aggressive towards the source text. One tends to think of it as written by total fanboys and fangirls as a kind of worshipful act, but a lot of times you’ll read these stories and it’ll be like ‘What if Star Trek had an openly gay character on the bridge?’ And of course the point is that they don’t, and they wouldn’t, because they don’t have the balls, or they are beholden to their advertisers, or whatever. There’s a powerful critique, almost punk-like anger, being expressed there—which I find fascinating and interesting and cool.

- Lev Grossman, quoted on Tumblr (Wolfspelz)1

1. General introduction

Geekybitch, a fan on Tumblr looking for like-minded people, posted the inquiring exclamation above on Tumblr, a “micro-blogging platform with social networking features that allows users to post and share text, images, audio, and video” (“Tumblr”). The verb she employs when talking about matching two characters together, “to ship”, is a neologism that is central to fan fiction terminology. It refers to “the act of supporting or wishing for a particular potential romantic relationship” (“Shipping”). Originally, “advocates of a romantic relationship were dubbed ‘relationshippers’, or ‘shippers’” (“Shipping”). This form of address was later “shortened to ‘ship’ and subsequently also used as a verb: ‘(to) ship a certain pairing’” (“Shipping”). A pairing, then, refers to “the characters who make up the central focus of a certain fanwork”, particularly one that focuses on “an explored sexual or romantic relationship” (“Pairing”). The first pairing this fan refers to is derived from Jane Austen’s Emma, pairing Emma and her new protégée friend Harriet. The second pairing, Anne and Diana,

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1 These and other quotes by Lev Grossman about fan fiction have gone viral on the internet and are very popular on Tumblr and other fan forums. The circulation and popularity are likely to be due to the fact that Grossman shows himself to be one of the few mainstream authors who is enthusiastic about the phenomenon of fan fiction, even expressing awe and respect for these amateur authors, instead of resisting this trend because of concerns regarding issues of authorship and copyright.
Eeckhout

refers to the protagonist of *Anne of Green Gables* and her bosom friend. This literary classic, written by Lucy Maud Montgomery, is in fact not a nineteenth-century novel, as this girl mistakenly states in her outcry for like-minded fans. Nonetheless, this work, an early twentieth-century novel, also fits the categorization I employ, that of older literature that serves as an inspiration for shippers and other fan fiction writers. It should not be very hard for this fangirl to find kindred spirits, since she is by far not the only one with this perhaps somewhat unusual inclination. When we look at other, more personal forums, such as Livejournal, or more fan fiction-specialized forums, such as FanFiction.net, AdultFanFiction.net, Archive of Our Own, the amount of fan fiction that is based on older literature is astonishing. Fan writers have founded stories on the works of Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, J. M. Barrie, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and many others. The second and third quote are from Lev Grossman, an American fantasy author and book critic for *Time* magazine. Grossman argues that the practice of fan fiction “challenges just about everything we thought we knew about art and creativity” (Grossman). I agree with Grossman that fan fiction’s innovative and creative way of dealing with literature and the at times subversive character of fan-created stories makes fan culture and fan fiction writing culturally valuable and interesting. However, with regard to older literature as an original source in general, and Austen’s novels in particular, the motivation of fans is not likely to spring from a will to critique the practises and society described. It is unlikely that fan fiction writers write adaptations of Austen’s work as an act of opposition against the fact that she did not stage any queer characters or was not more critical of society and the politics of her time. I argue that taking up older literature as an inspiration is a way of rethinking and reworking the stories from a contemporary perspective.

When I set out to write this master’s dissertation, I intended to investigate the evolution of the representation of female same-sex sexuality in English literature. As a primary source of older literature, I wanted to look for this theme in an unusual corner, namely in the widely read, romantic, and generally considered rather prudish novels of Jane Austen. Very quickly it became clear that there is no distinct explicit or even veiled depiction of sexuality of any kind to be found within the novels of Austen. Arguing the opposite would be risking over-interpretation or reading innuendo where there is none. Ultimately, I decided to include the emotional aspect of relationships in addition to the sexual component. In this paper, I will analyse the loving relationships and the homosocial bonds between the female characters in three of Austen’s major novels and investigate how this older literature dealt with both the emotional and sexual aspects of same-sex relationships. For the contemporary reference of the comparison, I opted to focus on a less conventional and, in any case, less canonical form of contemporary literary creative production, that is fan fiction. Fan fiction is an umbrella term for works of fiction that are written by fans for other fans, and that take a
source text, film, television show or a famous person as a point of departure. It is most commonly produced within the context of a fannish community and can be shared online such as in archives or in print such as in zines ("Fanfiction"). In this paper, I will deal solely with internet-published fiction. I will use fan fiction writing as an indicator to demonstrate how contemporary society and culture can, maybe even is compelled to, deal much more freely with the representation of same-sex relations and sexuality. Whereas Austen could limit herself to be suggestive about sexuality, contemporary fan fiction is obliged to be much more explicit, sometimes bordering pornography, to achieve a similar gripping effect on the reader today.

By using a number of theories about (same-sex) sexuality developed by prominent scholars, I will compare the relationships between Austen’s female characters on the one hand with the women in Austen-based femslash fan fiction on the other hand. By outlining the evolution of the representation of female-female friendships and relationships, I want to investigate how contemporary fan-produced literary creations deal with sexuality and same-sex sexuality. The female characters in Austen’s novels maintain very profound friendships, characterised by a strong affection, but in no way are there any references to or innuendos that hint at a possible sexual aspect to these relationships. Still, the Austen novels prove to be susceptible to queer rewriting within present-day fan communities. It cannot be denied that fan fiction writing generally necessitates more freedom and explicitness in describing sexuality, even when incorporating the characters, settings, situations and events that are depicted in Austen’s work. This relative freedom of fan writers is made possible by today’s specific sociocultural context in which they function. Slash writers can write what they write, in part, because they belong to a community of like-minded fans, and because they can self-publish with the help of user-friendly and easily accessible modes of publication, in particular, with regard to the fics I analyse here, the Internet. However, this finding should be nuanced, since there are ample examples of fics that are categorized as slash fics, but at the same time rated G, meaning that they do not feature any descriptions of sexuality, as will be explained in depth in section 3.2.2. This clearly shows that femslashers depict female same-sex relationships in various ways, and don’t reduce them to sexual relationships per se. The very existence of these texts shows that fan writers are not always compelled to depict near-pornographic images.

With regard to the binary split between heterosexuality and homosexuality, O’Driscoll points out that investigating the nature of sexual identity, such as Lisa Moore does for Emma, is one of the most important debates in queer theory (Moore, Dangerous Intimacies). Scholars working within the framework of queer studies have raised alternative interpretations of the friendships and relationships described in Austen. However, with regard to the awareness of two separate concepts,
homosexuality on the one hand and heterosexuality on the other, it should be pointed out that these notions were not developed and defined until the twentieth century and, thus, we cannot speak of a conscious knowledge of a dichotomy in sexual preference. In addition, unfortunately, many scholars investigating the theme of (queer) sexuality in Austen’s novels tend to focus on the sparse biographical information and often discuss Austen’s presumed personal taste. Terry Castle, for example, in her discussion of homosocial and homoerotic relationships between Austen’s female protagonists, refers mainly to Jane Austen’s relationship with her sister Cassandra (Castle). Moreover, Irish novelist and critic George Moore has suggested that Austen’s literary power derives directly from her marital status. He claimed that “Miss Austen’s spinsterhood allowed her to discover” that “we do not go into society for the pleasure of conversation, but for the pleasure of sex” (Quinn 65). And as such he calls her “a forerunner of Freud”, since she uncovered “the unconscious force of desire” (Quinn 65). According to Castle “women are a source of unending sisterly preoccupation” (Castle). This becomes clear in Austen’s letters to Cassandra, but also, I argue, in the interaction between the characters of her novels.

Austen’s physical descriptions of women – their faces, voices, hair, clothing, comportment at balls and in sitting-rooms – are funny, complex, often poignant, and as exquisitely drawn as any in her fiction. Yet they inevitably reveal, too, what can only be called a kind of homophilic fascination. Unlike men, women have bodies – to be scrutinised and discussed, admired or found wanting.

(Castle)

In addition, Castle has proposed that “many of the final happy marriages seem designed not so much to bring about a union between hero and heroine as between the heroine and the hero’s sister” . Northanger Abbey’s Catherine Morland is delighted to marry Henry Tilney, but “the most intense part of her joy seems to derive from the fact that in doing so she also becomes ‘sister’ to his sister Eleanor” (Castle). This contention received a lot of critique, not in the least because there are very few other examples in Austen’s corpus of a novel’s heroine wanting to get closer to the hero’s sister. In section 2.3.2, however, I will argue that there are several instances of this theme to be found in Pride and Prejudice.

Finally, Mary Waldron warns of two serious dangers that may be related to “the ease with which critics currently [...] pick any aspect of human life and employ it in some disquisition about Austen” (Quinn 57). She specifically points to the “‘why-not’ approach”. She refers to “the identification of supposed oblique references within Austen’s texts which provide links with issues of present-day concern” and hence risking “strained and unlikely interpretations of language and allusion” (Quinn 57). As such an instance of this fallacy Waldron cites Susan Korba’s article ‘Improper and Dangerous Distinctions: Female Relationships and Erotic Domination in Emma’, in which Korba wonders “Why
shouldn’t Emma be a lesbian?”. In Waldron’s view this question depends “on what is not in the text and therefore risks identifying a novel which Austen might perhaps have written, but didn’t” (Quinn 57). Another possible risk is “complacent blandness […], the danger of rewriting Jane Austen to suit narrative desires” (Quinn 57). Vincent Quinn argues that this is in fact exactly what any reading experience is about. From this statement we can infer that he considers reading to be an individual and personal activity, and this interpretation brings forth a conception of meaning as something that arises in and during the act of reading. When meaning is considered as something that is not written in the text or is not a-priori fixed, it is only natural to presume that readers read into a certain narrative what most appeals to them. However, there is a significant difference between meaning that comes about through academic criticism and research on the one hand, and the popular interpretations of –to put it derogatory– common readers and fans on the other hand. However, Henry Jenkins has pointed out that “the intimate knowledge and cultural competency of the popular reader also promotes critical evaluation and interpretation” (86). In that sense, he argues, “the exercise of a popular ‘expertise’” in some ways mirrors the knowledge-production of academia (Jenkins 86). It cannot be denied that any research that departs from the hypothesis that meaning depends on interpretation alone and lies entirely in the eye of the beholder risks of falling into the pitfalls proposed by Waldron. However, in the analyses of the Austen novels below, I will focus solely on what is in the text, interpreting the narrative and putting forward claims on the basis of textual cues only, and found my claims with academic views and statements as much as possible.

In the first chapter, I will discuss a number of theoretical approaches that have been developed by scholars who have investigated sexuality or extraordinary friendship ties. This will allow me to focus the comparative analysis of my corpus on specific types of same-sex relationships and the features they invoke. First of all, I will look into Foucault’s work on the history of sexuality, and especially focus on the origins of homosexuality in the modern world. Homosexuality, or rather homosexual relationships and conduct, have always existed, but it was not until the twentieth century that society started to employ a specific lexicon to describe this phenomenon. In addition, a certain norm of acceptable sexual conduct came into existence and this came with a set of rules and regulations to mark out what was admissible and what was reprehensible. Secondly, I will elaborate on the work of Faderman, who has investigated the friendship ties between women. She states that the close and profound female-female relationships that originated already in the Renaissance were given the label “Romantic Friendship” from the eighteenth century onwards. In addition, Faderman claims that these love relationships between female friends were generally considered to be “socially permissible” and even encouraged by society, because they did not pose a threat to the dominance
of men (80). Instead, she argues, this type of social interactions helped girls and young women practise between each other the social skills that were needed to find a suitable husband. Thirdly and finally, I look at Girard’s notions of triangular relationships and mediated desire. Girard has developed the notion of mimetic desire. He argues that no desire is ever completely original or personal, but that all human emotions are borrowed from others. Any person will be likely to copy a preference for a certain object from another person. This is also true for erotic desire, resulting in an erotic triangle that connects a subject, an object, and a mediator. This situation of adopted desire often results in rivalry between the subject and the mediator, who both share the same desire. Through a close reading of five major novels, Girard distinguishes a certain type of novel that is characterized by this mediated desire. Desire can be mediated in a situation with a subject and object, in which case “the beloved is divided into both subject and an object in the lover’s eyes” and “imitating one’s lover’s desire is to desire oneself” (Girard 105). Another instance of mediated desire occurs within a triangular situation that includes a mediator.

In the second chapter, I will first briefly introduce Jane Austen and her writing and take a look at the historical context of female sexuality in Austen’s time, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Learning more about the strong anxiety that existed about women and sexuality in this era will contribute to mapping the evolution that has taken place between literature then and now. To overcome this fear, it was argued that female pleasure simply did not exist. This line of reasoning resulted in the figure of “the passionless woman” (O’Driscoll 103). The presumed absence of female sexual desire was one of the principles that underlay the argument of the emotional counterpart of a love relationship, the discursive category of the romantic friend, which will be discussed in section 1.1.2. At the opposite side of the continuum, female desire was condemned by placing it within the context of prostitution. Any woman who did involve in sexual interaction was regarded as immoral and licentious, became associated with vice and promiscuous behaviour, and was therefore condemned to the realm of whoredom. Secondly, I will analyse the relationships between the central female characters of Austen’s novels, looking into the nature of their friendship and interaction. With regard to Sense and Sensibility, I will investigate the affection between the eldest of the Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne. In addition, I argue that the many female characters in Pride and Prejudice are drawn to the sister of the man they seemingly desire or that they feel compelled to give ample attention to the sister of the man they want to win the heart of. Concerning Emma, it has been argued by several scholars that Emma maintains a number of very significant

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2 In the section on the historical context of female sexuality (section 2.2.1), large extracts are taken from my Bachelor paper “Investigating the ambiguities and contradictions in the representation of female same-sex desire in eighteenth-century erotica, particularly Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure.”
relationships with other women. I argue and demonstrate that Emma values her profound friendships more than the love relationship and marriage that finalize the novel. I will also apply an adaptation of Girard’s theory about triangular relationships to this novel, to explain the bonds that are established and the mirroring of desire these bonds include.

In the third chapter, I will offer a brief characterization of fan fiction writing and enunciate the specific terminology that is used within this niche of contemporary creative production as an introduction to the analyses. Next, I will analyse a selection of femslash fics that are based on the stories and characters of Jane Austen. Femslash is the smallest subgenre within fan fiction, and especially within the Austen fandom, which is the object of my study. It is also least analysed by academics after “gen”, general stories that do not feature sex, “het”, stories that centre around heterosexual relationships, or especially “m/m” (male) slash, which scholars apparently prefer to study above all other genres, even though slash fics are actually less numerous than stories within the other genres (Busse 17).

I will bring together and compare my findings about female homosocial bonds in Austen and the way femslash writers deal with same-sex sexuality in a final chapter, investigating whether there is an evolution in the degree of subversiveness between the two types of literature. This way, I want to shed a new light within the domain of queer studies, which has not convincingly looked into the genre of fan fiction, and contribute to the growing academic branch of fan fiction studies, in this case specifically focusing on femslash fiction.

1.1 Theoretical framework

1.1.1 Michel Foucault: The History of (Homo)sexuality
The female relationships in Austen’s books have sporadically been studied in queer studies as actively opposing a strict binary split between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Both Austen and her novels have been the subject of queer attention and studies, most famously so by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Terry Castle (Quinn 57). This interpretation of the relationships described in Austen draws on the Foucauldian notion that the concept of homosexuality as we know it today did not come into existence until well into the twentieth century. To make out whether there was already an awareness of a division of some kind between what is now considered homosexual and heterosexual behaviour in Austen’s day or in Austen’s writing, we have to turn to the theories of Michel Foucault as expounded in the first volume of his History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge. Foucault claims
that homosexuality only “appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the
practise of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul” (43). This means
that this category of sexual preference was “characterized less by a type of sexual relations than by a
certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in
oneself”. Even though Foucault predominantly talks about male homosexuality, we can assume that
a similar train of thought can be applied to forms of female sexuality that do not follow the
heterosexual norm. Laura Doan, for example, points out that the key argument of Deborah Cohler’s
book Citizen, Invert, Queer: Lesbianism and War in Early Twentieth-Century Britain is that “female
masculinity (or gender inversion/deviance) or sexual deviance were not read as homosexuality until
the mid-twentieth century” (Doan 183). Foucault argues that nevertheless a growing discourse of
sexuality arose since the seventeenth century. In addition, as pointed out by Preus, sexuality came to
be “more than a force that society attempts to control; it is a productive mechanism that in itself
defines norms and deviations” (198). Even though much of this discourse was of a repressive nature,
the very “discursive fact”, the way in which sex is “put into discourse”, and the existence of a
discussion in itself was a noteworthy transition (Foucault 11-12). What is more, towards the end of
the eighteenth century a “new technology of sex” emerged (Foucault 116). The discourse of sexuality
slowly eluded the influence of the spiritual and religious institutions and became a secular concern.
Through upcoming and rapidly dispersing discourses like pedagogy, medicine and economics,
sexuality became “not only a secular concern but a concern of the state as well” (Foucault 116).
Moreover, “sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its
individuals, to place themselves under surveillance” (Foucault, 116). This transition towards a more
open discussion of sexuality more or less coincides with the period Jane Austen started writing her
novels. Even though her major novels date from between 1811 and 1818, her writing was no doubt
influenced by the changing spirit at the end of the eighteenth century with regard to the dealing with
sexuality. Foucault has pointed out that “a lush plurality of (proscribed and regulated) sexual
identities had developed by the end of the nineteenth century” (Sedgwick, "Masturbating" 826).
Following this premise, Preus has examined “the way in which the discourse of sexuality is the
fundamental concern of the novel of manners”, among which Austen’s Emma (196). Furthermore,
Sedgwick adds that this “Victorian multiplication of sexual species has today all but boiled down to a
single, bare –and moreover fiercely invidious– dichotomy” ("Masturbating" 826). Hence, I would not
go as far as to say that Austen actively resists a binary split between a heterosexual matrix and a
homosexual opposite, since this divide only arose much later. She did not challenge a similar
dichotomy in her writing, because the distinct categories were not yet firmly established in society at
that point. However, contemporary readers of Austen, also those who take up her writing as a
prompt to write fan fiction, actually read her work within the binary framework that now has long
been established and cannot be avoided today, as will become clear from the analysis under section 3.2.2. I do not attempt to demonstrate that Austen was aware of the array of different forms of sexual preferences that came about around the end of the eighteenth century. I also do not want to locate an awareness-before-the-fact of sexual preferences organized along the lines of hetero- and homosexuality in Austen’s work. However, I argue that Austen’s world precedes the late nineteenth-century division into heterosexual and homosexual identities and that she is suggestive of the existence of same-sex sexual practices and feelings in her writing. However, once hetero- and homosexual identities became defined and distinguished, same-sex friendship had to be carefully set apart from it, as to avoid assignation as homosexual (see section 1.1.2).

In any case, it is clear that talking about (female) homosexuality as early as the late eighteenth century risks of landing us in the trap of anachronism. Sedgwick points out that “homosexual identities, and certainly female ones, are not supposed to have had a broad discursive circulation until later in the nineteenth century” (“Masturbating” 823). Moreover, she questions “in what sense could heterosexual identities” then have existed as an opposing discourse (Sedgwick, "Masturbating" 823). Sedgwick argues that since there was no clear notion of homosexuality, there was no heterosexual norm or matrix that could be deviated from either. Sedgwick states that this line of reasoning provides the grounds for Lillian Faderman’s concept of Romantic Friendship. I will argue that the relationships between women that are described in Austen are of a similar profound and intense nature.

1.1.2 Lillian Faderman: Female Romantic Friendship
In the previous section, it has been demonstrated that there was no binary split between heterosexual or homosexual conduct nor a clear-cut ideological concept of homosexuality until the twentieth century. Since the sexual sphere was organized and regulated in a completely different way, we cannot speak of lesbianism as early as the eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Instead, female romantic friendship was the dominant profound love relationship that existed between women before the twentieth century. In her book Surpassing the Love of Men, Lillian Faderman proposes an identification of the love that can exist between two women as romantic friendship. Faderman initially set out to investigate the love poems of Emily Dickinson to her sister-in-law Sue Gilbert. She found that the “passionate and sensual pronouncements [...] were not simply an example of Victorian rhetoric”, but neither do these expressions point to a lesbian relationship as we would recognize it today (Faderman 15). During her study of Dickinson’s love letters, Faderman came across “innumerable fictional examples of such female love relationships” (16). She furthermore
ascertains that the genesis of this institution, which was in the eighteenth century named romantic friendship, has to be situated in the Renaissance (Faderman 16). Faderman investigated several documents (correspondence and memoirs) that “corroborate how ubiquitous the idea of romantic friendship was among literate eighteenth-century women” (125). In addition, it has become clear that female romantic friends shared a variety of romantic sentiments, which have come to be associated exclusively with heterosexual love from the twentieth century until the present. Female romantic friends, even though they could each simultaneously be in a relationship with a man, were strongly devoted to each other and they did not refrain from expressing their affection and behaving like a standard heterosexual couple: they
courted each other, flirted, were anxious about the beloved’s responses and about reciprocity. They believed their relationships to be eternal, and in fact the faithfulness of one often extended beyond the death of the other. The fondest dream of many romantic friends, which was not often realized, was to establish a home with the beloved. (Faderman 125)

Furthermore, Faderman states that “these romantic friendships were love relationships in every sense except perhaps the genital” (16). This can be traced back to the conviction that many women, and by extension the entire society, had adopted, that women experienced very little sexual passion. The character of the passionless woman will be further investigated in section 2.2.1.1. However, Donoghue claims that “in fact many of the romantic friends of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries might have shared sex, ‘genital’ and otherwise” (109). In any case, these female friends openly proclaimed their love for each other and made statements that were not very different from the language used by heterosexual lovers (Faderman 16). The sincerity and candour with which these same-sex relationships were described and addressed should not be surprising, since the romantic friendship has been noted to, perhaps surprisingly, belong to “the realm of socially permissible” (Faderman 80). Faderman explains that,

[b]ecause it was unlikely that even their sensuality, which included kissing, caressing and fondling, would become genital, romantic friends were permitted to articulate, even during the most sexually conservative times, their physical appreciation of each other. (80)

This quote proves that Donoghue is mistaken when she claims that Faderman’s discourse presents female friendship and lesbianism as being incompatible (109). However, “the lack of overt sexual expression”, which according to Faderman characterizes these particular relationships,
could not discount the seriousness or the intensity of the women’s passions toward each other — or the fact that if by ‘lesbian’ we mean an all-consuming emotional relationship in which two women are devoted to each other above anyone else, these ubiquitous sixteenth-,
seventeenth-, eighteenth, and nineteenth-century romantic friendships were ‘lesbian’.
(Faderman 19)

It is obvious from this quotation that Faderman does not follow Foucault’s theory or a similar train of thought as Sedgwick will later develop. Clearly, the arguments developed by Faderman and Donoghue are more similar than Donoghue is prepared to admit, and they both belong to a scholarly tradition which maintains that lesbianism has always been around. After all, Donoghue also argues that many romantic friendships may have involved the sexual intercourse that is central to current notions of lesbianism.

Cleary, there are several takes on the history of sexuality. Faderman thinks of sexual practices as universal and eternal, she argues that homosexual conduct has always been around the way we know it today. Foucault, on the other hand, emphasizes the difference of the past. He is concerned to uncover the ways in which changes in society affect the intimate sphere, which is subject to changes in society and ideology. I share Foulcault’s views and will treat Faderman’s romantic friendship as a distinctive conceptual category which existed in the eighteenth century, rather than as a manifestation of the conception of lesbianism as an eternal and universal phenomenon as Faderman upholds. I follow Foucault’s argument that we can only speak of lesbianism from the late eighteenth century onwards, since the discursive category and regulations that accompany this conduct are a necessary condition for speaking of a distinctive identity in society that is opposed to the conforming heterosexuality.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, English society encouraged women to excel in a number of indicators of proper conduct, sentiments such as “sensibility, faithfulness, and devotion” (Faderman, 75). Obviously, young women and girls were not allowed to frequent the company of the opposite sex. Instead, it was believed, especially by men, to be common practice for these women to practice those desirable behavioural traits on each other (Faderman 75). Since these fundamental bonds between women were regarded harmless and even socially advantageous, “discouragement of romantic friendships seems to have been rare” (Faderman 77). I will demonstrate that a similar model of practices is elaborately represented in literature in three of Austen’s novels. Faderman observes that “by the second half of the eighteenth century in England, romantic friendships became a popular theme in fiction” (103). I will not go so far as to claim that Austen addresses this type of relationship explicitly or comments upon the practices that were associated with it in her novels. However, in her realistic representation and social critique of eighteenth-century society and social
practices, we recognize female same-sex relationships that can be identified as romantic friendships in the close and profound connections between many female protagonists of her novels.

In addition, Faderman’s concept should not be overgeneralized. For example, a number of scholars have investigated the phenomenon of female friendship in relation to the issue of class, arguing that female friendship was restricted to a small number of upper class women, whereas working class women were known to have sex together (Friedli 1985) (Everard 1986) (Donoghue 111-12). Lastly, Moore does not entirely agree with Faderman’s interpretation of the concept of romantic friendships. Whereas Faderman claims that “romantic friendships were widely approved of and idealized and therefore were never conceived of as sexual [...]”, Moore emphasizes the duality and “conflict between approving accounts of the chastity of these relationships” on the on hand and “virulent denunciations of the dangers of female homosexuality” on the other (“Romantic Friendship” 501). Martha Vicinus also emphasizes the “carnal sex and sexual attraction” in her definition of intimate friendship as “an emotional, erotically charged relationship between two women” (Vanita 133). Vanita rightly speaks of “unanswerable questions” that almost inevitably come up when thinking about

persons of the same sex in the nineteenth century [sharing] a bed, either intermittently or in the long term, [embracing], [kissing], and [writing] letters or poetry to each other sprinkled with romantic endearments, declarations of loving commitment, and expressions of yearning to be together, may these be read as evidence of sexual or even erotic engagement with one another?

(133)

The question “was this just the way romantic friends or even good friends were expected to conduct themselves in that era?” will possibly also surface as a result of what follows in this paper, however, I do not attempt to formulate any final and complete response to the uncertainty that surrounds this topic, as this does not fall within the scope of this thesis, which focuses on the literary aspect (Vanita 133).

1.1.3 René Girard: The Erotic Triangular Relationship and the Homosocial

I borrow the term ‘homosocial’ from Faderman to characterize the relationships between many women in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. This coinage was popularized by Sedgwick in her investigation of male homosocial desire (Sedgwick 1985). The characterisation ‘homosocial’ refers to a relationship or a social bond of a non-sexual, often non-romantic nature between people of the same sex (Sedgwick, Between Men 1). In her book, incorporating the theories of Girard, Freud and Lévi-Strauss, Sedgwick deals with the phenomenon of “male traffic in women”, an issue that is based
on Gayle Rubin’s claim that “patriarchal heterosexuality can best be discussed in terms of one or other form of the traffic in women” (Between Men 16, 25). Rubin argues that women in a patriarchal society can be regarded as “exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property” serving the “primary purpose of cementing bonds” between men (Sedgwick, Between Men 25-26). In addition, Lévi-Strauss has said that marriage, which can be regarded as a relationship that is characterized by a total exchange, is not an agreement between a man and a woman who love each other, but rather a conveyance that is established “between two groups of men and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners” (Sedgwick, Between Men 26). In addition, he claims that women are rather used “as a ‘conduit of a relationship’ in which the true partner is a man” (Sedgwick, Between Men 26). In her book, Sedgwick attempts to prove and demonstrate with literary examples the existence of a “continuum, a potential structural congruence, and a (shifting) relation of meaning between male homosocial relationships and the male patriarchal relations by which women are oppressed” (Between Men 20). She investigates a number of literary accounts that deal with how women were caught up “in male homosocial exchange” (Sedgwick, Between Men 16). She describes how male homosocial desire comes about “within the structural context of triangular, heterosexual desire” (Sedgwick, Between Men 16). The male homosocial desire comes about within the structures “for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power” (Haggerty 74). Haggerty argues that Sedgwick’s “argument leaves little room for female-female relations”, since the male homosocial bond is situated within “a culture in which [women] have no access to the exchange economy that gives men both the reason for same-sex desire and an excuse for its intensity” (74). I disagree with Haggerty that relationships of a similar nature simply did not exist between two women. However, I follow his contention that female-female homosocial bonds, even though of the same intensity and significance, were merely located elsewhere. Whereas male homosocial relations were public, visible, female-female bonds were rather private and almost invisible (Haggerty 75). Consequently, Haggerty argues, “the most profoundly emotional and physical relations between women emerge from the family itself” (75).

Girard, then, in his study of “the self and the other in literary structure”, investigates the power structures that originate in the relation of rivalry between two members of said erotic triangle. The metaphor of the erotic triangle that makes up the core of Girard’s argument describes a situation and an intersubjective structure in which three people constitute a close-knit network of desire and rivalry. Generally, the situation consists of two men who share a passionate desire for the same woman. Girard makes a contrast between a straight line that directly connects the subject and the object of desire, and a triangle, in which case a mediator of the desire is added (2). One of the main ideas Girard has developed within his theory of triangular desire is the notion of “mimetic desire”. He
argues that all human desires can be traced back to having been borrowed from other people. A person’s desire, Girard proposes, is not as individual or autonomous as one might think and people borrow their desires and interests from others. He states that people are inspired by others and borrow others’ interests to develop their own personal tastes and desires. Hence, any person’s desire for a certain object is likely to have been caused by witnessing another person’s desire for this same object. In a situation such as the one described above, when the mediator also desires the object himself, two competing desires are at play, since “the mediator can no longer act his role of model without also acting or appearing to act the role of obstacle” (Girard 7). In addition, the mediator or rival is “brought into existence as a rival by vanity, and that same vanity demands his defeat” (Girard 7). In addition, Girard argues that “sexual desire, like other triangular desires, is always contagious” and “to speak of contagion is inevitably to speak of a second desire which is fixed on the same object as the original desire” (Girard 105). Girard furthermore states that “with regard to sexual desire, the presence of a rival is not needed in order to term the desire triangular” and in that case “to imitate one’s lover’s desire” could also result in “desiring oneself, thanks to that lover’s desire” (Girard 105). In what follows, I will argue for an adaptation and a reinterpretation of Girard’s central theory. I propose a reading of at least one of Austen’s novels, more specifically, *Emma*, in which the desire for a certain third party is not provoked because this desire is shared with another person, but rather by desire for the other person. Emma falls in love with Mr. Kinghtley, not only because Harriet is partial to him, but because Emma actually experiences strong feelings for Harriet.

Girard has also stated that the theory of triangular desire especially applies within patriarchy, as it is defined for example by Hartmann as “relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women” (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 3). Sedgwick points out that this type of relationship and typical feature of English culture often featured in “the mid-eighteenth- to mid-nineteenth-century novel” (*Between Men* 1). Even though Austen’s novels predominantly focus on the female psyche and women’s social environment, the reader can easily imagine the society in which her narratives are embedded to be dominated by a patriarchal culture. However, I want to point out that I refrain from talking about women as trading goods and turn away from the paradigm of economy in the context of this dissertation. The relationships in Austen’s novels that I will analyse are only superficially situated in the larger context of society and the relations between the characters constitute a limited microcosm, not embedded in the broader patriarchal and economy-driven society.
Finally, when talking about triangular relationships, Girard heavily draws on the theories of Freud, specifically “the Oedipal triangle, the situation of the young child that is attempting to situate itself with respect to a powerful father and a beloved mother” (Sedgwick, Between Men 22). It is common knowledge that Freud explains homosexuality in an adult as the result of “a child’s desire for and identification with the parent of each gender” (Sedgwick, Between Men 22). Both Girard and Sedgwick emphasize that in a triangular relationship that includes rivalry between two of the members “the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved” (Between Men 21). Moreover, Girard even deems the relation between the rivals stronger and “more heavily determinant of actions and choices” than the connection between either of the suitors and the object of their desire (Sedgwick, Between Men 21). In addition, Girard notes that “within the male-centered novelistic tradition of European high culture”, the triangle is most often formed by two males who are rivals for a female” (Sedgwick, Between Men 21).

The adjective homosocial has also been applied to women’s bonds by Smith-Rosenberg. With regard to transferring this label from male to female relationships, Sedgwick notes that the term homosocial does not stand in direct opposition to homosexual, it rather covers “the entire continuum”, since “the diacritical opposition between the ‘homosocial’ and the ‘homosexual’ seems to be much less thorough and dichotomous for women” (2), and a “relatively continuous relation” exists between “female homosocial and homosexual bonds” (Between Men 5). This stands in “strong contrast to the arrangement among males” (Sedgwick, Between Men 3). With regard to men, Sedgwick additionally notes that from the late nineteenth century onwards “‘obligatory heterosexuality’ is built into male-dominated kinship structures” and that “homophobia is a necessary consequence of such patriarchal institutions as heterosexual marriage” (Sedgwick, Between Men 3). Finally, with regard to female relationships, she states that “lesbianism also must always be in a special relation to patriarchy, but on different [sometimes opposite] grounds and working through different mechanisms” (Between Men 25). Smith-Rosenberg has investigated the significant female friendships and the loving emotional ties that existed between women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by situating these bonds within a cultural and social setting (1-2). She proposes, and I follow her in this, that “female friendship must not be seen in isolation; it must be analysed as one aspect of women’s overall relations with one another” (Smith-Rosenberg 3). In her research about female friendship in nineteenth-century American society, Smith-Rosenberg has pointed out that

[t]he ties between mothers and daughters, sisters, female cousins and friends, at all stages of the female life cycle constitute the most suggestive framework [...] to begin an analysis of intimacy and affection between women. (3)
I argue that this proposition can be expanded to and is true about British culture as well. It has been described, most notably by Faderman (see section 1.1.2), that during the eighteenth and nineteenth century (young) women in British society were not allowed to frequent the company of the opposite sex. However, they were very much encouraged to forge strong bonds and create profound relationships with other women in order to practise the appropriate social conduct and skills that were considered useful and necessary to associate with men later on in their lives (Faderman 1981). These relationships with friends, but also sisters and cousins, were thus considered indispensable.

To illustrate this theoretical account with literary examples, I do not focus on a separate homosocial canon. Instead, I look for instances of female homosocial bonds in the relationships of the female protagonists of the novels of Jane Austen. I will argue that for at least one of Austen’s major novels, more specifically, *Emma* (1815), the relationships between the protagonists can be described in terms of the Girardian theory of mimetic desire in a triangular relationship. Emma, the title character and protagonist, falls in love with her friend George Knightley after Harriet confides to her that she has fallen in love with him. Bearing in mind the discourse of romantic friendship, it is likely that Emma does not want to lose Harriet and she especially cannot bear the thought of losing her to a man.

### 1.1.4 Conclusion

It can be clear from the overview of theoretical approaches that there is much debate about this issue. Clearly, there are considerable ideological differences between, on the one hand, Faderman and Donoghue who maintain the argument that lesbianism has always existed. Castle, albeit accounted for from a more Foucauldian angle, largely belongs to this school too. And, on the other hand, Sedgwick, who develops a Foucauldian argument that sexuality is produced by social conditions and power differentials and that a crucial shift occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, creating lesbianism as we now understand it as well as the narrow conception of heterosexuality that we now regard as non-deviant. As mentioned before, I adopt a Foucauldian stance with regard to situating different manifestations of sexuality in history.

Considering the theories about sexuality and the history of homosexuality developed and described by Foucault, it would be unfounded to claim that there already was a binary split between heterosexual and homosexual in Austen’s day and that fans and fan fiction writers take up this distinction today to write homosexual adaptation of Austen stories. It is almost certain that contemporary readers and fan writers rely on today’s existing framework when reading and writing
their own original adaptations of Austen’s work. The relationships between the female characters in Austen’s novels can at least be characterized as homosocial, following the concepts developed by Girard and Sedgwick. Faderman even defines these bonds as romantic friendships. Female friendship in the eighteenth and nineteenth century has been thoroughly described by Faderman, Smith-Rosenberg and Sedgwick. However, there is disagreement in the theories of these scholars. Faderman professes a romantic thought of a linear, even teleological, evolution of sexuality which comes close to an a posteriori account for the existence of today’s homosexual identity. Sedgwick’s argumentation is grounded on the notions of Foucault, stating that sexuality is socially constructed, dependent on the environment. Even though Smith-Rosenberg’s claims are not in accordance with Foucauldian theory, with regard to female friendship in the nineteenth century, she has pointed out that the prevalent twentieth-century view on

love and sexuality within a dichotomized universe of deviance and normality, genitality and platonic love, is alien to the emotions and attitudes of the nineteenth century and fundamentally distorts the nature of these women’s emotional interaction.

(Smith-Rosenberg 8)

As pointed out earlier, women were even encouraged to maintain a very close and profound connection with other women, because it benefited their social skills needed in society later on. The femslash adaptations of Austen’s narratives do not necessarily indicate that there are similar female same-sex sexual relationships described or even hinted at in Austen’s original work. In fact, slash fiction has been described by Dhaenens et al. as having the potential for reversing the hegemonic structures that are described in the original literature (338). In addition, Jenkins has pointed out that the practices of an active audience have the “potential for resistance to the dominant hegemonic heteronormativity” in particular (Dhaenens 338). These notions will be elaborated upon in chapter three.
2. Jane Austen

2.1 Introduction

Jane Austen barely needs an introduction, as she is one of the best known and widely read British female authors. Austen was born in the winter of 1775 as the second daughter of the rector of a parish, with seven other siblings. She died in 1817 at the age of forty-one after an illness that lasted more than a year. As a young girl, Austen was sent to a family acquaintance in Oxford, together with her older sister, to be educated. After both had suffered from severe illness, the girls returned home, where they were home-schooled by their father, before they left again for boarding school. When she returned, Austen benefitted from her father’s extensive library, and she continued her intellectual development independently by reading a lot. In 1809, she moved to Chawton cottage, where she lived until her death, with her mother, her sister Cassandra and a friend (Wiltshire 58).

Perhaps contrary to common belief and in contrast to the biographical account written by her brother Henry, Austen can be considered a professional writer in every sense (Fergus, "Woman Writer" 12). She was not the amateur spinster who wrote “novels in moments of leisure” (Fergus, "Woman Writer" 12). In fact, writing and being a professional writer was “more important to her than anything else in her life” (Fergus, "Woman Writer" 13). In addition, Fergus mentions that Austen was determined “to see her works in print” and was “acutely conscious of her sales (as well as the possible future value of her copyright)” ("Woman Writer" 13). However, this was not self-evident at all since there were several social obstacles to authorship and female writers. Furthermore, “publishing her own writing could threaten a woman’s reputation as well as her social position” (Fergus, "Woman Writer" 13). However, Austen only managed to get her novels published quite late in her life, at which time she already “had three completed manuscripts available to her” (Fergus, "Woman Writer" 19). Grundy has claimed that “Jane Austen inherited no obvious, no precisely defined tradition” (189). However, Austen’s writing can be characterized as romantic realism with an undertone of social critique. Especially “Austen’s disagreement with the prevailing attitudes” towards women are evident in her writing (Monaghan 107). Heydt-Stevenson claims that in her writing, Austen “ridicules a system that is based on exploitation of women” by revealing the practices of the patriarchal, heteronormative world of conventional courtship as being awfully dangerous (322). Brownstein, then, points out that Austen’s writing is characterized by “conjunctions of romantic narrative and ironic commentary” (34). Austen was well-practised in and tried out various literary forms. She is most famously known for her novels, but she also wrote an epistolary novel Lady Susan, and composed poems, plays, and short stories when she was still relatively young, as a diversion for her family. These early works were later collected in The Juvenilia. Three of her well-
known and popular novels will be introduced and discussed in section 2.3, more specifically *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*.

Sedgwick refers to Jane Austen, as well as to the Brontë sisters, as “homosocially embedded women authors” (“Masturbating” 824). This ties in with Terry Castle’s argumentation in her review of Deirdre Le Faye’s book *Jane Austen’s Letters*. Castle argues that Austen’s relationship with her only sister Cassandra was characterized by “a strong degree of eroticism” (Quinn 61). The Austen sisters, both spinsters, lived together, “living in the same home, and sharing the same bed”, all their adult lives and Castle points out that “their sisterly affection […] could scarcely be exceeded” (Castle). In her edition of the letters of Jane Austen, Le Faye “suggests we consider Austen’s letters to Cassandra the equivalent of telephone calls between sisters – hasty and elliptical, full of family news, but little more” (Castle). Castle, contrarily, argues that “one is struck not so much by the letters’ hastiness or triviality”, but rather by the “underlying eros of the sister-sister bond” and the “the passionate nature of the sibling bond [the letters] commemorate” (Castle). After Austen died, Cassandra burnt a large number of her sister’s letters and censored others by cutting pieces out. However, Castle points out that “the letters from Austen that Cassandra allowed to survive testify to […] a primordial bond” (Castle). She even goes so far as to claim that it is likely that both sisters “found greater comfort and pleasure […] in remaining with one another”, rather than marrying a man (Castle). Castle concludes this rather far-fetched enunciation by proposing that “Austen’s fictions are works of depth and beauty and passionate feeling”, exactly because “she loved and was loved by Cassandra” (Castle).

It is important to bear in mind, however, that Castle nowhere claims that Jane Austen was a lesbian or that she had a sexual relationship with her sister. It was common practice for unmarried women, especially siblings, to share a bed. However, she underlines that

Austen’s relationship with Cassandra was unquestionably the most important emotional relationship of her life, that she lived with her sister on terms of considerable physical intimacy, and that the relationship – I believe – had its unconscious homoerotic dimensions. (Castle)

This claim does not only apply to the relationship between Jane and Cassandra, as “[s]ororal or pseudo-sororal attachments are arguably the most immediately gratifying human connections in Austen’s imaginative universe” as well (Castle). Castle’s statements have provoked a lot of criticism. Even though some of her claims are somewhat overdone, in fact she merely follows and echoes Faderman’s concept of significant female (romantic) relationships. Castle points out that
middle and upper-class English cultural life in the 18th and 19th centuries reinforced – far more than our own culture does today – same-sex intimacy of all kinds, resulting in relationships between women of a profound homosocial nature. The sexes were highly segregated, and powerful emotional (and sometimes physical) ties between persons of the same sex were both common in the period and often expressed in highly romantic or passionate terms. (Castle)

Thus, as an explanation for women’s conduct, Castle points to the “psychic complexity of female-female relationships in late 18th and early 19th-century Britain” (Castle). Hence, “to point to a ‘homoerotic’ dimension” in the relationship between Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra “is in one sense simply to state a truth about the lives of many English women in the early 19th century: that their closest affectional ties were with female relatives and friends rather than with men” (Castle). Lee Siegel rallies against this relatively recent ‘queering of literature’ that Sedgwick (“Jane Austen and the masturbing girl”) and Terry Castle (“Sister-Sister”) pursue in their publications. Quinn, however, thinks it “absurd to argue that Austen’s identity was un-eroticized before Sedgwick and Castle got to work” (63) and underlines that queer Austen predates Sedgwick and Castle for example in the work of Wilson (1944), Mudrick (1952) and Kaye-Smith and Stern (1943) (76). He furthermore underlines the “continuities between nineteenth- and twentieth-century depictions of Austen” and contemporary ‘queer’ interpretations of her writing (Quinn 63-64). Vincent Quinn argues that “academic versions of Austen-the-novelist owe a debt to Janeite eroticizations of Austen-the-woman” (see section 3.2.1) and this clearly undermines “Siegel’s notion that queer theory has sexualized previously chaste representations of Austen” (66).

Finally, it is common belief that interest in the author’s sexuality and hence privileging life over text “places a regrettable emphasis on unofficial discourses, such as gossip and hearsay” (Quinn 59). Quinn himself, however, claims that “biography, or forms of biographical speculation, are deeply implicated in literary-critical analysis” (59) and that “reading is always informed by biographical information or – more precisely – by biographical fantasy” (75). Nonetheless, biographical information about Jane Austen is not something I shall deal with in this paper, since knowledge about the life of an author does not make out a valid argument to ground a literary analysis upon, without making oneself guilty of a biographical fallacy. Or as Quinn states: “to concern oneself with an author’s sexuality is to fall into a prurient and epistemologically naïve form of reading” (Quinn 58-59).
2.2 Historical context

Even though Austen’s novels were only revised and published in the early years of the nineteenth century, the greater part of her work was already written much earlier, and the conceptualization of sexuality and relationships in Austen’s day was undoubtedly influenced by the eighteenth-century view on this aspect of life. The eighteenth century was in many respects a transitional period, during which various significant changes took place. The ancient world view was being questioned due to several findings in science and life-changing inventions in the field of technology. This general progress altered the world and changed the way society dealt with it. With regard to sexuality, the eighteenth century was an age of extremes. In England, outward prudishness contrasted with the emergence and development of pornography during that period. Concerning this paradox, the influential insights of Michel Foucault are again crucial for a better understanding of these developments. One of the key notions in Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, the distinction between *scientia sexualis* and *ars erotica* (see note 1) (67), is useful to interpret the differences between early modern and modern attitudes to sexuality. The main difference lies in the degree of secrecy and privacy. Foucault claims that sexuality in the early modern period was not a separate category, but rather part of a greater sphere of identity formation, embedded in a broader range of social domains. Sexuality in pre-Enlightenment England was thus not a private aspect of an individual’s life as it is considered today.

2.2.1 Female sexuality

The eighteenth century witnessed the birth of an obsession with the penis, redefining sex as penetration (Hitchcock 79). Consequently, eighteenth-century erotic and pornographic literature was dominated by a penis-centrism, reflecting the prevailing opinion of the entire society, which had a strong phallocentric orientation with regard to sexuality. Thus, sex between women was not considered a genuine sexual act. Overall, English texts which engage in realistic, elaborate descriptions of sex between two women are low in number. Constructions of female eroticism from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards emphasized women’s weakness and the damage this could possibly generate. It can be argued that female sexuality was regarded as a threat toward the male dominance in the patriarchal society. As a result, the figure of the passionless woman was derived from this concept of sexual difference. Thus, the argumentation that women experienced no passion made possible alternative concepts such as the romantic friend. The reasoning that led to the presumed identity of the passionless woman and the discursive category that accompanied this figure raised the possibility of alternative concepts that focussed rather on the emotional aspect of
relationships, such as the romantic friendship, which will be analysed in greater depth with regard to Austen’s novels in section 2.3.

2.2.1.1 The passionless woman
The notion of the passionless woman (see note 2) first occurred in the medical discourse. Very soon this construction had a significant effect on paramedical literature and later on influenced the literary field as well (O’Driscoll 103). As O’Driscoll has stated, this “new model of womanhood” experienced “little or no erotic desire” (103). Moreover, it was argued that female beings were “by nature chaste and domestic” (Harvey 5). In addition, women’s sexuality had always been connected to procreation. The discovery that the female orgasm was not a necessary condition for conception resulted in the idea that the role of women was passive and less important to reproduction than men’s involvement. Moreover, women’s sexual pleasure was considered dispensable (Harvey 82). Finally, the structural similarity of the male and female genital organs was used to legitimize penetrative, vaginal sex and was thus employed to promote heterosexual desire (Harvey 91-99). In this respect, and following Foucault’s train of thought that “homosexuality as a category of identity” only emerged after “the rise of a modern disciplinary apparatus”, Laqueur has argued that the eighteenth-century two-sex model, “the creation of men and women as opposites”, was the sine qua non for the creation of the lesbian and homosexual identity (Traub, Renaissance of Lesbianism 192). In any case, this sexual difference, which originated in medical discourse and was strongly propagated by the political discourse, heavily influenced the way the body was dealt with in erotic literature and conduct literature. As it is expressed in this extract, taken from Daniel Defoe’s pamphlet Some Considerations upon Street-Walkers with A Proposal for lessening the present Number of them, female sexuality was at one point only tolerated if it remained restricted to reproduction and motherhood:

The great Use of Women in a Community is to supply it with Members that are serviceable and keep up Succession. [...] It will readily be allowed, that a Street-walking Whore can never answer either of these Ends [...]. How very useless then is such a Subject? (Jones 69)

Defoe expresses here the idea that a woman’s value is entirely economic. For a woman to be useful both in marriage and to society, she has to “produce serviceable offspring” (Mudge, Whore’s Story 53). It is not unlikely that this entire argumentation resulted from men’s fear of sexually active women. Possibly, this anxiety grew even more when the increasing sexuality of women involved men’s roles losing importance and women gaining more independence. This might also explain the enormous amount of anti-masturbation tracts that were in circulation during this period. Arguably, one way of overcoming this paranoid fear might have been by ignoring and denying the mere
existence of such a thing as female sexual desire, resulting in the invention of the passionless woman.

2.2.1 Female same-sex sexuality
The new conceptualization of the male and female physical body as radically different had implications for the interpretation of sexual intercourse. The concept of the passionless woman, which resolved the anxiety about women’s sexuality by denying that women had such a capacity, drove female sexual pleasure out of heterosexuality. It became a common argumentation that if women had any pleasure at all, it could be only self-pleasure and self-pleasure in its turn was associated with women finding pleasure with each other (O’Driscoll 104). This different conception of women’s sexuality led in turn to a new “fear about lesbianism” (O’Driscoll 104). With a peculiar line of reasoning, it was argued that a lack of passion was related to masturbation and lesbianism. Since women were considered passionless, they were thought to be incapable of sexual pleasure. The incapability of sexual pleasure was then displaced by masturbation, because if women had any sexual pleasure, it was sure to be self-pleasure (O’Driscoll 104). Obviously, this argumentation is paradoxical, since women cannot at the same time be asexual and passionless and keen to masturbate (O’Driscoll 111). However, ignoring this fallacy, a third step elaborated this train of thought, arguing that masturbation could also be mutual masturbation among two women. This idea led to the assumption that women who pursued sexual pleasure would seek satisfaction with each other (O’Driscoll 104).

Sedgwick points out that “one ‘sexual identity’ that did exist as such in Austen’s time [...] was that of the onanist” ("Masturbating" 825). Around the beginning of the eighteenth century, masturbation became viewed as a physical problem instead of the moral problem it used to be before (O’Driscoll 108). Sedgwick mentions that the origin of the “European phobia over masturbation” can be situated around 1700 ("Masturbating" 825). In addition, a discussion on mutual masturbation between two women was never far away in the discourse on masturbation. An enlarged clitoris was considered one of the possible dangerous consequences of masturbation and this, in turn, can lead to attraction between women and, eventually, clitoral penetration (O’Driscoll 109-10). O’Driscoll points out that the discussion on masturbation “leads inevitably to the problem of clitoral rubbing and penetration between women” (109). By the eighteenth century, Traub has argued, clitoral hypertrophy as a result of masturbation or even the mere mention of the clitoris prompts the figure of the lesbian ("Psychomorphology" 82-83). However, it should not be overlooked that this hypertrophy of the clitoris still invokes “a phallocentric model of sexual relations” (Wahl 28). It has been argued that
Austen has portrayed Marianne Dashwood, one of the protagonists of *Sense and Sensibility*, following the wide-spread discourse of the onanist, as a girl fixated on sexual arousal.

In conclusion, it was argued that women had no passionate sexuality. If, however, they did seek pleasure it was through masturbation, which was in turn more often than not associated with lesbianism. This widely accepted tripartite argumentation resulted in a split with on the one hand the chaste passionless woman and on the other hand the lesbian to whom all terrifying characteristics with regard to female sexuality were ascribed. O’Driscoll summarizes it as follows: “any female passion must be explained as an attempt to become masculine, thus the figure of the ‘lesbian’ was created as the necessary opposite of the passionless woman” (111-12). The conception that lesbian sexual interaction incorporated all the promiscuous characteristics that should be avoided by respectable women is clearly incompatible with the prevailing notion of phallicism that was typically associated with eighteenth-century sexuality. If lesbian sex was harmless because of the lack of a penis involved, one has to wonder where the need for the frantic anxiety toward female same-sex desire came from. This seemingly clear-cut distinction between the passionless woman and the licentious lesbian should, however, be nuanced. Homosexual women were not always rejected. Moreover, only if women adopted features of the opposite sex did they become a threat to the patriarchal society. Various scholars have pointed out that female same-sex desire was only reprehensible if it included usurping male prerogatives like independence, assertiveness and the ability to have penetrative sex (Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism* 181) (Faderman 52).

2.2.1.1 Representations of same-sex attraction in literature

The true “recognizable ‘Sapphic’ subject” emerged only in the eighteenth century. However, this figure was preceded by two other “modes of embodiment” in the sixteenth and seventeenth century: the tribade and the romantic friend (Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism* 231). It is useful to briefly present these two figures, the precursors of the lesbian in English literature. The figure of the tribade, at the time interpreted as a female hermaphrodite, emerged after the rediscovery of the clitoris in 1559 (O’Driscoll 112). As O’Driscoll puts it:

> [W]hile there were accounts and evidence of women having erotic relations with other women throughout history, their sexual practices were not associated with anything particular about their bodies until the clitoris became a site of medical anxiety.

(112)

The eighteenth-century problem of clitoral rubbing and penetration between women is not as revolutionary as one might think. In fact, this line of reasoning is a continuation and extension of the
discourse about the seventeenth-century figure of the tribade. This marginalized figure was generally associated with anatomical monstro
sity. It was believed that she had an enlarged clitoris and, thus, the frightening possibility of penetrative sex came into play.

As long as women acceded to male precedence and did not transgress by assuming male prerogatives […], there seems not to have been much reason to explore or to name what women might do with one another’s bodies. (Andreadis 15)

Exactly in this usurpation of male characteristics lies the threat for patriarchal society. Representations of this figure can be found in John Donne’s *Sapho to Philaenis* and Aphra Behn’s *To the Fair Clarinda* (Wahl 53).

In contrast to the feared tribade, the romantic friend was considered chaste and innocent (Traub *Renaissance of Lesbianism* 231). Romantic friendship was seen as a “less transgressive form of female intimacy” (Wahl, 8). According to Faderman, “romantic friends wanted to share their lives, to confide in and trust and depend upon each other” (142). Furthermore, she suggests that eighteenth-century intimate friends “disregarded the ‘sexual implications’ of their attachments” (Faderman 142). This can be expanded to the nineteenth century, when sex was still “considered an activity in which virtuous women were not interested and did not indulge unless to gratify their husbands and to procreate” (Faderman 152). It was simply “inconceivable to society that an otherwise respectable woman could choose to participate in a sexual activity that had as its goal neither procreation nor pleasing a husband” (Faderman 152). As a result of there being “no possibility that women would want to make love together” (Faderman 152), female romantic friends were generally not penalized for engaging in affectionate expression and demonstration, until “the growth of general sophistication and pseudosophistication regarding sexual possibilities between women” heightened the mistrust towards and awareness of the possible dangers of the of love and sexuality between two women (Faderman 152). As an example, Faderman quotes the transcripts of a trial against two young women who allegedly slept together at a girls’ boarding school and were sued for their actions. It is remarkable that their lawyers did not even “attempt to prove that Miss Pirie or Miss Woods never climbed into bed with the other and embraced”, simply because at the time “a woman being in bed with a woman” could never give rise to inferences of unnatural intentions (152). It is merely “the order of nature and of society in its present state. If a woman embraces a woman it infers nothing” (Faderman 152). In contrast, other scholars beg to differ. Moore, for example, argues that Faderman this way “unnecessarily limits” her analysis (Dangerous Intimacies. Toward a Sapphic History of the British Novel 9-10). Sedgwick also critiques scholars who declare, among other fallacies, that “same-sex attraction was extremely common […] – and therefore must have been
completely meaningless” (Epistemology 52). Following Faderman, I will analyse the many significant friendships between women in three of Austen’s novels, investigating whether these bonds can be identified as female romantic friendships.

By the end of the seventeenth century, then, the figure of the close friend began to absorb characteristics of the tribade. This is where Traub locates the beginning of “the historical perversion of lesbian desire” (Renaissance of Lesbianism 231). Moreover, the “more explicit articulation of feminine homoeroticism” was the starting point for the “demonization of a greater range of female bonds” (Traub, Renaissance of Lesbianism 231). According to Traub, the fact that these two figures became more and more intertwined during the eighteenth century “can be understood as one measure of the growing threat of the unnatural within the seemingly natural” (Renaissance of Lesbianism 323). Moore states that in the early nineteenth century anxieties about “improper female friendship” grew and lead to fear about “women usurping the positions of men” (Moore, “Romantic Friendship" 507). I argue that Austen’s novels, written in the nineteenth century, but without a doubt heavily influenced by the eighteenth-century customs and ideas, feature homosocial bonds and romantic friendship between the female protagonists.

2.3 Austen’s novels: analysis

Strong disagreement exists in both academia and popular publications about whether or not the theme of sexuality is present in Austen’s novels. Fergus points out that the subjects Austen and sexuality only “exclude one another [...] when ‘sex’ is narrowly defined as explicit, exhaustive detail about what people do and feel in bed” ("Sex and Social Life" 66). She claims that “Austen’s own understanding of sexuality is much less narrow” (Fergus, "Sex and Social Life" 66). According to Fergus, Austen “is interested in dramatizing sex in everyday social life – in the drawing room rather than the bedroom” ("Sex and Social Life" 66). She concludes by stating that “Austen’s rendering of everyday sexuality takes for granted in ways unthinkable to her contemporaries and often ignored by moderns that every relationship can carry a sexual charge” (Fergus, "Sex and Social Life" 83). Preus furthermore notes that Austen writes “at the end of a period were relations were primarily defined in terms of kinship and lineage [...] and when sexualities are emerging as the fundamental discourse of a society in transition” (212). During this transitional period “from kinship relations in the eighteenth century to a highly sexualized but prohibitionary norm” in the mid-nineteenth century, there is opportunity for redefinitions implicated in the emerging discourse of sexuality (Preus 212), and Jane Austen engages in this adjustment of definitions of relations and sexuality in her novels. Heydt-Stevenson, then, has investigated the “sexually risqué humor” in Austen’s novels, pointing out
the “erotically charged allusions, puns, and double entendres” (310). In contrast, after Sedgwick (1991) and Castle (1995) published their work on the queer nature of Austen’s novels, Siegel took it upon him to safeguard Austen’s reputation by strongly opposing any claims that Austen’s novels contain a sexual or erotic theme, let alone of a queer nature. As a reaction, Quinn claims that it would be “absurd to argue that Austen’s identity was un-eroticized before Sedgwick and Castle got to work” (63) and underlines that queer Austen predates Sedgwick and Castle” for example in the work of Wilson (1944), Mudrick (1952) and Kaye-Smith and Stern (1943) (76). In addition, he undermines “Siegel’s notion that queer theory has sexualized previously chaste representations of Austen” by arguing that “academic versions of Austen-the-novelist owe a debt to Janeite eroticizations of Austen-the-woman” (see section 3.2.1) (66). Next, concerning Austen’s oeuvre, Toker puts forward the notion of “conspicuous sexual charisma”. She claims that several female characters are determined by what she calls “invidious sexuality” (Toker 226). According to her, invidious sexuality constitutes a “significant semantic set in Mansfield Park, Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility” (Toker 232).

2.3.1 Sense and Sensibility (1811)

2.3.1.1 Introduction
Sense and Sensibility, published in 1811, but presumably written around 1795, was the first novel of the sequence that would become Jane Austen’s ‘six perfect novels’. When their father dies, the Dashwood sisters, Elinor, Marianne and Margaret, together with their mother are compelled to leave their home and move to the more modest Barton Cottage, as the estate they had until then occupied is passed to their half-brother John and his wife Fanny. In this new environment, Elinor and Marianne meet various new acquaintances, among which a number of pleasant and attractive men. Consequently, both young women experience infatuation, love and heartbreak. Soon upon their arrival, the two sisters are introduced into the society and the circle of friends of their host, Sir John Middleton. It immediately becomes apparent that one of Sir John Middleton’s friends, Colonel Brandon, has taken an interest in Marianne. However, Marianne considers him too old and too cold. In addition, the reader learns that Elinor, the elder and more reserved and considerate of the two sisters, is missing Edward Ferrars, the older brother of her sister-in-law, with whom she has fallen in love shortly before the move. Marianne, then, falls in love with the handsome, young John Willoughby, who helps her when she injures her ankle during a walk. Thus, both sisters have a man on their mind and in their heart. Marianne confides in Elinor and tells her how she feels about Willoughby. In contrast, Elinor burdens no one but herself with her emotional life. During winter, Elinor and Marianne are invited to join Sir Middleton’s mother-in-law, Mrs Jennings, to London, along
with Anne and Lucy Steele, lady Middleton’s cousins. Marianne, who has convinced herself that Willoughby returns her love and is equally attached, repeatedly attempts to contact him. When they meet again at last, he behaves distant and cold. A little later, Marianne receives a note in which Willoughby admits to having a long-standing engagement to a lady of greater fortune. At the same time, Lucy Steele informs Elinor that she has been engaged to Edward Ferrars for years. Elinor is deeply grieved upon hearing this news, but still she relies on her good sense and does not bother her mother or sister with her sentiments. When Anne Steele lets out her sister’s secret engagement to Edward, Edward is disinherited after refusing to give up the engagement out of a sense of honour. Instead, Lucy Steele loses her interest in him and instead turns to the now prosperous Robert Ferrars. This way, Edward can still marry the woman he truly loved all along, Elinor. Finally, Colonel Brandon, who knew about Willoughby’s immoral character, later returns and marries Marianne.

2.3.1.2 Analysis
At the centre of the novel’s narrative are the friendships and romantic relationships Elinor and Marianne enter into. However, often overlooked is the most significant relationship, namely between that Elinor and Marianne themselves. Edmund Wilson has addressed the notion of “sisterly passion” in his 1944 essay ‘A Long Talk about Jane Austen’, claiming “that the most passionate relationship in Austen’s novels is between Elinor and Marianne Dashwood” (Castle). In particular the love Elinor feels for Marianne seems to betoken more than affection from one sister to another. Various scholars, most notably Eve Sedgwick, have argued that between the two sisters exists a profound and significant bond that can be characterized as homosocial (Sedgwick 1991). Moreover, in her article “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl”, Sedgwick argues that, perhaps contrary to common belief, there is a clear “erotic axis” underlying the story of Sense and Sensibility ("Masturbating" 826). According to Sedgwick, the erotic thematic of the novel is encoded in the family structures and this is most obvious in the “unwavering but difficult love of a woman, Elinor Dashwood, for a woman, Marianne Dashwood” ("Masturbating" 826-27). Their relationship is not distinguished by a straightforward or unproblematic same-sex love. Sedgwick has argued that their relation is characterized by “Marianne’s erotic identity” ("Masturbating" 827). According to Sedgwick, the love between these two women originates from a certain type of character Marianne adopts, one that “no longer exists today as an identity: that of the masturbating girl” ("Masturbating" 827). Sedgwick points out that Marianne displays “the classic consciousness-symptoms”, that were related to the identity of the masturbating girl, as they were noted by Samuel Tissot in 1758” ("Masturbating" 827). Some of the specific features that point to the onanist identity in Marianne are “the impairment of memory and the senses”, her “inability to confine the attention”, and a general
“air of distraction, embarrassment and stupidity” (Sedgwick, "Masturbating" 827). For example, when Marianne is introduced, she is described as “eager in everything”, and as having very little control over her emotions as “her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation” (Austen, S&S 5). Furthermore, Elinor’s sisterly love, compassion and concern for Marianne seem almost excessive. In addition, her aversion towards Willoughby does not seem to spring solely from good intentions and protectiveness toward her sister. Rather, it seems there is a more self-interested ground for her behaviour that stems from her fear of losing Marianne. Faderman also points out that “women who were romantic friends were everything to each other [...] and were jealous of other female friends (and certainly of male friends)” (84). Sedgwick has also picked up on this. She specifically refers to the moment when Elinor almost manipulates her sister “into rejecting Willoughby’s gift of the horse” (Sedgwick, "Masturbating" 828) (see appendix 1). Elinor’s endeavour can be interpreted as a desperate and unavailing attempt to hold back Marianne’s enthusiasm. Consequently, this scene easily be read as Elinor trying to persuade – manipulate – Marianne to reject not only the present, but Willoughby altogether. Sedgwick goes even further and links Elinor’s reticence to accepting Willoughby’s gift – a horse – to “Marianne’s overresponsiveness to her tender ‘seat’ as a node of delight, resistance, and surrender –and its crucial position, as well, between the homosocial and heterosocial avidities of the plot” ("Masturbating" 828). To further demonstrate this, Sedgwick refers to a number of instances when Marianne’s agitation compels her to move around in the room or forces her to keep shifting whenever she is sitting, “to both pleasurable and painful effect” ("Masturbating" 828).

Addicted to "rapidity" (SS, p. 75) and "requiring at once solitude and continual change of place" (SS, p. 193), she responds to anything more sedentary with the characteristic ejaculation: "'I could hardly keep my seat'" (SS, p. 51). Sitting is the most painful and exciting thing for her. Her impatience keeps her "moving from one chair to another" (SS, p. 266) or "[getting] up, and walk[ing] about the room" (SS, p. 269). (Sedgwick, "Masturbating", 828)

The culmination of this characteristic first rises to the surface when Marianne and Margaret experience a “superior felicity” when “running with all possible speed down the steep side of the hill” (Austen, S&S 39-40). This scene of great excitement is followed by Marianne’s enthusiasm for riding and her “[eagerness] for ‘the delight of a gallop’ when Willoughby offers her a horse” (Sedgwick, "Masturbating" 828). In addition, Marianne projects her pleasure and jouissance onto Elinor when she rejoices over Willoughby’s offer: “[i]magine to yourself, my dear Elinor, the delight of a gallop” (Austen, S&S 55-56). Marianne’s need to share this sensation and joyful prospect indicates that she associates the pleasure she has in mind (which, according to Sedgwick, we should situate in her “tender ‘seat’”) with her sister Elinor (Sedgwick, "Masturbating" 828). In addition, Sedgwick remarks
that “[b]edroom scenes are not so commonplace in Jane Austen’s novels” (“Masturbating” 822). However, she points out that Sense and Sensibility features at least one “particularly devastating bedroom scene” (“Masturbating” 822). The bedroom scene to which Sedgwick refers includes two women, Elinor and her sister Marianne (see appendix 2). Elinor wants to comfort Marianne, who is heartbroken after she senses that Willoughby is not as committed to her as she is to him. According to Sedgwick, the “naming of a man, the absent Willoughby” marks this passage “as an unmistakably sexual scene” (“Masturbating” 823). In addition, she argues that the “sexuality” of the scene is “displaced” as a result of the mentioning of Willoughby (Sedgwick, "Masturbating" 823). I agree with her that this scene initially centres around Elinor’s concern and her love for Marianne, but I reject that it hints at a unique atmosphere of possible homoeroticism. By mentioning Willoughby, and hence bringing to mind Marianne’s crush, the homosocial tension is weakened. Originally, the bedroom was the “space of same-sex tenderness, secrecy, longing and frustration” (Sedgwick "Masturbating" 823). By referring to Willoughby, the object of Marianne’s desire, the same-sex tenderness and attraction, of which Elinor is the source, is pushed to the background. Sedgwick explains it in a more graphical way: “if love is vectored toward an object and Elinor’s here flies toward Marianne, Marianne’s in turn toward Willoughby” ("Masturbating" 823). Another indication of Elinor’s profound love for Marianne is her reaction to Marianne’s illness and her exhilaration when Marianne finally recovers. The ever-composed Elinor experiences just one moment of elation, and she undergoes “the profoundest happiness when Marianne is restored from a grave illness” (Sedgwick, "Masturbating" 831). Following Sedgwick, I propose that the main source of Elinor’s profound love can be traced back to a maternal tendency to protect and stand in for Marianne, who would otherwise undoubtedly be brought into discredit within the society, due to her socially awkward behaviour and her youthful irrepressibility. When we generalize this quality of Elinor, we can conclude that “Elinor’s heterosexual plot with Edward Ferrars” does little more than divide her care and affection “between the sister who remains her first concern, and a second sufferer from mauvaise honte” (Sedgwick, "Masturbating" 830). Sedgwick concludes that “Sense and Sensibility is unusual among Austen novels” because of the “undeviating consistency with which Elinor’s regard [...] is vectored in the direction of her beloved” ("Masturbating" 829-30). Because “the masturbatory identity” is no longer as prevalent today as it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the “authority of [...] the scientific, therapeutic, institutional, and narrative relations originally organized around it” has increased (Sedgwick, "Masturbating" 837). However, with regard to Sense and Sensibility, Sedgwick claims that it resists a similar movement, in so far as we succeed in making the “homo-erotic longing” perceptible and debatable ("Masturbating" 837). I argue that this is exactly what happens in femslash adaptations of this and other novels in fan fiction. Fan fiction writers pick up on the latent themes of female same-sex sexual desire that can be read in the narrative, even
though they are not necessarily intentionally written into the novel. By reworking the story, and focusing on the disregarded characteristics such as the love and passion that exist between two sisters, fan fiction can revitalize or put forward new, valuable, but all too long neglected interpretations and can bring about original or at least renewed readings of Austen’s work.

As was mentioned in section 1.1.3, Haggerty considers female homosocial bonds most likely to occur within a family situation. Following Castle’s contention about the ‘ghosting’ of lesbians in English cultural history, he deems the family “the best place to hide lesbian desire” (Haggerty 75). However, I oppose to an interpretation of female homosocial relations as “a threat to patriarchal protocol”, as female-female profound friendships and even physical relationships did not pose any danger to male authority (Haggerty 75) (see section 2.2.1). With regard to Sense and Sensibility, Haggerty also remarks that “the quality of affection that Elinor feels for Marianne is unusually rich” (Haggerty 77). In addition to Sedgwick’s claim about the displaced sexuality in the bedroom scene, Haggerty argues that Willoughby’s name is rather “used as the symptom of Marianne’s sensibility” (Haggerty 77). Haggerty defines Marianne’s recovery from illness as the “climax of the novel’s emotional action”, as Marianne’s infirmity marks out the time during which both sisters’ feelings for each other are tested (Haggerty 83). In addition, Haggerty claims that Sense and Sensibility puts forward “sisterly love as the answer to destructive emotion” (Haggerty 84). The notion of sisterly love that is central to this novel functions as an alternative to heteronormative desire and relations, much like romantic friendship does and is furthermore “coded as ‘naturel’ because it forms the basis of the female homosociability” (Haggerty 87).

As a reaction to Castle’s review of Le Faye’s edition of Austen’s letters, in which she points to the homosocial bonds or the possible homoerotic undertone of the sororal bond, it has been argued that the relationship between the Dashwood sisters in Sense and Sensibility might even be regarded as an example of a sister-sister ‘marriage’. In addition, theirs is a relationship that has “nothing at all to do with the masked or unconscious homoeroticism that might be induced by the warmth of the sisterly shared bed of Terry Castle’s imagining” (Castle). Rather, their connection

is far more intimate, inward and passionate than any other described by the novel, a marriage to which no impediment could or should be admitted were it not that in Austen’s world a single woman may best survive, if she’s lucky, by giving herself in marriage to that single man in possession of a good fortune who must be in want of a wife.

(Castle)

In contrast, Siegel deems Sedgwick’s reading of Sense and Sensibility highly improper and to him this exemplifies his contention that “academia has sexualized everything” (Quinn 63). I argue that it
cannot be denied that the love between Elinor and Marianne is the central narrative structure in *Sense and Sensibility*. In addition, it may be clear from the scholarly arguments and the literary examples that this love exceeds the affection that normally exists between two sisters. I agree with Vanita that Austen “eroticized sisterly love” in *Sense and Sensibility* (135).

Finally, I will demonstrate how Elinor’s protective attitude vis-à-vis her younger sister Marianne signifies more than a desire to ensure her sister’s well-being and happiness. It is important to bear in mind that Elinor also experiences strong emotions and passions, even though she better succeeds in masking them. Marianne assesses the situation aptly when she states that neither of them has “any thing to tell; you, because you [do not] communicate, and I, because I conceal nothing” (Austen, S&S 163). However, Elinor’s reserve and politeness are not only to be attributed to a perfect upbringing. I argue that there is a hidden agenda that motivates her reticence. Marianne, advised to do so by everyone close to her, finally marries colonel Brandon, a man who is a financially interesting party, but who is not her equal with regard to emotional intensity. Several passages throughout the novel indicate that Elinor prefers for her sister a marriage in which Marianne cannot surrender to the overflow of passion, as Elinor wants to preserve their sisterly bond as the more intense relationship for the both of them. The clearest manifestation of Elinor’s desire to prevent Marianne from “falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion” is her stern rejection and adversity towards Willoughby (Austen, S&S 372), who is said to be “passionately fond” of music and dancing, just like Marianne (Austen, S&S 44). This becomes clear through Elinor’s determination to find fault in Willoughby after she has picked up on the exuberance he elicits in Marianne.

A short, a very short time however must now decide what Willoughby's intentions were; in all probability he was already in town. Marianne's eagerness to be gone declared her dependence on finding him there; and Elinor was resolved not only upon gaining every new light as to his character which her own observation or the intelligence of others could give her, but likewise upon watching his behaviour to her sister with such zealous attention, as to ascertain what he was and what he meant, before many meetings had taken place. Should the result of her observations be unfavourable, she was determined at all events to open the eyes of her sister.
(Austen, S&S)

Elinor only reveals the true intensity of her emotions when she loses her composure at the news of the (alleged) marriage of Edward Ferrars and Lucy, but I believe that she is equally passionate about her sister, only masking these feelings as mere sisterly concern.
2.3.2 Pride and Prejudice (1813)

2.3.2.1 Introduction

Pride and Prejudice, published in 1813, features Austen’s personal favourite heroine, Elizabeth Bennet. The protagonist Elizabeth is the daughter of a country gentleman, growing up in a society of landed gentry, together with her four sisters; Jane, Mary, Catherine, and Lydia. When Mr. Bingley, a young and charming bachelor, moves into the neighbouring estate, Mrs. Bennet is determined to get to know the new occupant of Netherfield House and introduce her daughters to him. Mr. Bingley proves to be the well-mannered and pleasant young man that he was rumoured to be. His friend, Mr. Darcy, on the other hand, leaves a disagreeable impression after behaving condescendingly towards the Bennet sisters at an assembly at Meryton. Elizabeth is appalled by Mr. Darcy’s bad behaviour. Before long, Jane Bennet becomes close friends with Caroline Bingley, Charles Bingley’s sister. One day, on her way to visit Caroline, Jane is surprised by a downpour. She falls heavily ill and is too weak to travel back home to Longbourn. Elizabeth sets out for Netherfield House to take care of her sister there. Much to her own regret, this means she frequently meets Mr. Darcy as well. Contrarily, Mr. Darcy comes to realise he is growing rather fond of Elizabeth. Elizabeth herself becomes acquainted with Mr. Wickham, who claims to have been mistreated by Mr. Darcy in the past, which does not improve Elizabeth’s regard of the latter. At a ball at Netherfield, hosted by Mr. Bingley, it becomes clear that there is a general expectation that Mr. Bingley will marry Jane. The next day, the pedantic clergyman Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth, but she refuses him and he immediately readdresses his proposal to Elizabeth’s friend Charlotte, who gladly accepts. Mr. Bingley, on the other hand, unexpectedly leaves for London without explaining his motivation to the Bennets. Elizabeth suspects Mr. Darcy has something to do with Mr. Bingley’s sudden departure, as she thinks he has agreed with Caroline Bingley to prevent Mr. Bingley from proclaiming his love for Jane. Some time later, Elizabeth travels to Kent visit her friend Charlotte and Mr. Collins. During her stay they are repeatedly invited by Lady Catherine de Bourgh. During one of those visits, Lady Catherine’s cousin, Mr. Darcy, also turns up. When Elizabeth and Darcy meet again at Rosings Park, Darcy is reminded of his feelings for her and he impulsively proposes to her. However, Elizabeth is still distrustful of him. She suspects that he had a role in the separation of Jane and Mr. Bingley and she declines the marriage proposal. Moreover, she confronts him with her conjectures about wilfully sabotaging her sister’s happiness and future, in addition to his mistreatment of Mr. Wickham and his bad conduct at the ball at which they first met. Mr. Darcy responds to these allegations in a letter to Elizabeth. He explains how he has known Mr. Wickham for a long time and how the latter wanted to trade in his legacy for cash money, which he then all gambled away. Nearly bankrupt, he then eloped with Darcy’s sister, out for her fortune. A few months later, Elizabeth visits Darcy’s Pemberley estate, having been told that the
proprietor is away for the day. Unexpectedly, Mr. Darcy is present and he receives them very welcomingly. Elizabeth is pleasantly surprised by his well-mannered behaviour and starts changing her mind about him during the visit. However, when she receives word that her sister Lydia has eloped with Mr. Wickham she must return home immediately. Before long, Wickham and Lydia are located and married. After Lydia mentions that Mr. Darcy was present at the wedding, it becomes clear that it was he who found the couple and convinced a clergyman to wed them. Elizabeth, who in the meantime had become afraid that Mr. Darcy would no longer want to be associated with her, due to her sister’s disgrace, comes to realise that she ought to believe the things Mr. Darcy stated in his letter. Subsequently, Mr. Bingley returns from London and asks for Jane’s hand. Finally, Mr. Darcy visits Longbourn and proposes to Elizabeth again, and this time she accepts.

2.3.2.2 Analysis

With regard to *Pride and Prejudice*, Mudge has commented that the romantic love narrative banishes the “sexual body from the novel’s field of vision” (“History of Pornography” 5). It is true that sexuality is nowhere explicitly addressed in Austen’s oeuvre. However, I argue that the strength of Austen’s writing lies exactly in its suggestive nature. Sexuality is displaced to the field of assumption, certainly in the case of *Pride and Prejudice*. The discourse of romantic friendship, however, is repeatedly invoked. As mentioned before (see section 2.3), Castle argues that *Northanger Abbey*’s protagonist Catherine Morland is especially elated about the prospect of getting a close connection to the sister of her fiancé out of her marriage with Henry Tilney. Critics have doubted this contention, arguing that there are only few other examples in Austen’s oeuvre of a protagonist wanting to get closer to the hero’s sister. However, I argue that this practice can be found repeatedly in *Pride and Prejudice*, albeit in a reversed order. Whereas Catherine is already engaged to Henry Tilney and looking forward to establishing a close connection and a profound friendship with his sister, several young women in *Pride and Prejudice* become friends with the sister of the man they are romantically interested in, in order to win the man himself over (Jane Bennet and Caroline Bingley), or before they become convinced that the marriage is favourable (Jane and Elizabeth). This is an example of a near-Girardian triangular connection, one in which a woman’s friendship to a man’s sister is a necessary condition for attraction to develop into a marriage between said man and woman.

After Jane and Elizabeth have met some of the other guests at the Meryton assembly, among which Mr. Bingley and his company, they discuss and evaluate their new acquaintances. Jane remarks that “Miss Bingley is to live with her brother, and keep his house; and I am much mistaken if we shall not find a very charming neighbour in her” (*P&P* 15-16). Afterwards, it becomes clear that Jane’s
pleasing manners grew on the goodwill of Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and though the mother was found to be intolerable, and the younger sisters not worth speaking to, a wish of being better acquainted with them was expressed towards the two eldest. By Jane, this attention was received with the greatest pleasure.

(Austen, P&P 21)

Elizabeth, in contrast, “saw superciliousness in their treatment of everybody, hardly excepting even her sister, and could not like them” (Austen, P&P 21). Moreover, she observes that “their kindness to Jane, such as it was, had a value as arising in all probability from the influence of their brother’s admiration” (Austen, P&P 21). We can conclude from this impression that Miss Bingley strengthens the bond with Jane Bennet, because this girl has caught the eye of her brother. Jane, on the other hand, wants to like and be liked by Mr. Bingley’s sister, as a means of getting closer to him and earn his approval. Shortly after the ball, Jane is invited to Netherfield House by Caroline. The invitation is addressed to “MY DEAR FRIEND” and signed with “Yours ever, ‘CAROLINE BINGLEY’” and this heralds the beginning of a long and intense correspondence between the two women (Austen, P&P 28). In one of the later letters, Miss Bingley extensively praises Miss Darcy (already indicative of the second triangle described below), claiming that she does not think “Georgiana Darcy has her equal for beauty, elegance, and accomplishments; and the affection she inspires in Louisa and myself is heightened into something still more interesting, from the hope we dare entertain of her being hereafter our sister (Austen, P&P 99). Jane is upset after reading this and asks Elizabeth “Does it not expressly declare that Caroline neither expects nor wishes me to be her sister; that she is perfectly convinced of her brother’s indifference; and that if she suspects the nature of my feelings for him, she means (most kindly!) to put me on my guard?” (Austen, P&P 99). From Jane’s reaction we can conclude that becoming Caroline’s sister (in the double interpretation of a very close friend in addition to a family connection) is of vital importance if she wishes to become engaged to Mr. Bingley.

Next, two other triangles have a mutual vertex in the figure of Mr. Darcy. The first triangle also involves Caroline Bingley, in addition to Mr. Darcy and his sister Georgiana Darcy. The other triangle involves Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy and Georgiana. Caroline Bingley is partial to Mr. Darcy, whom she has known for quite some time. In order to get closer to Mr. Darcy, Caroline has dedicated herself to make friends with his sister. Caroline wastes no opportunity to socialize with Georgiana. In addition, she blatantly praises Georgiana in Darcy’s presence. When the entire company is assembled at Netherfield House, Caroline inquires: “Is Miss Darcy much grown since the spring?” [...] ‘will she be as tall as I am?’ [...] ‘How I long to see her again! I never met with anybody who delighted me so much. Such a countenance, such manners! And so extremely accomplished for her age! Her performance on
the pianoforte is exquisite” (Austen, *P&P* 35). We can assume a twofold motivation behind this. On the one hand she attempts to make Elizabeth jealous about the fact that she is better acquainted with the Darcy family and has met Mr. Darcy’s sister, and, on the other hand, also to curry favour with Mr. Darcy himself. During her visit of Pemberley, Elizabeth notices “that she was herself closely watched by Miss Bingley, and that she could not speak a word, especially to Miss Darcy, without calling her attention” (Austen, *P&P* 218). It is clear that in Caroline Bingley’s eyes any social gathering is a struggle for Miss Darcy’s attention and approval. Especially after she has picked up on Mr. Darcy’s taking an interest in Elizabeth, she attempts to prevent Mr. Darcy from getting attached to Elizabeth, and is rude and contemptuous to her. It becomes very clear in the dénouement of the novel that any connection with Mr. Darcy depends on a relationship with his sister. Upon hearing the news of Mr. Darcy’s marriage to Elizabeth, “Miss Bingley was very deeply mortified [...] but as she thought it advisable to retain the right of visiting at Pemberley, she dropt all her resentment; was fonder than ever of Georgiana” (Austen, *P&P* 312). Even when all hope of a romantic relationship is long gone, Caroline still maintains with her friendship with Miss Darcy, in order to keep at least a certain connection. In addition, Darcy is very pleased with the sisterly bond that has developed between his sister and his wife. “Pemberley was now Georgiana’s home; and the attachment of the sisters was exactly what Darcy had hoped to see. They were able to love each other even as well as they intended. Georgiana had the highest opinion in the world of Elizabeth” (Austen, *P&P* 312).

In the Darcy-Elizabeth-Georgiana triangle, however, Darcy himself is the agent. At first, neither Elizabeth nor Mr. Darcy have a particularly high regard of one another. “Mr. Darcy had at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty; he had looked at her without admiration at the ball”. When they next met “he looked at her only to criticise”. However, no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she hardly had a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness. (Austen, *P&P* 23).

From the moment Darcy realises he is attracted to Elizabeth, he encourages his sister to establish a friendship with her. Clearly, Darcy is convinced that a close bond between the two women will benefit his changes with Elizabeth. When Elizabeth visits Pemberley with her uncle and aunt, they are received by Miss Darcy, as Darcy himself is absent (Austen, *P&P* 218). Georgiana Darcy seems to be aware of the significance of their visit, as her “reception of them was very civil, but attended with [...]

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embarrassment [...] proceeding from shyness and the fear of doing wrong” (Austen, P&P 218). The conversation is awkward and difficult, and all the while Georgiana “looked as if she wished for courage enough to join in it; and sometimes did venture a short sentence when there was least danger of its being heard” (Austen, P&P 218). Suddenly, after the arrival of her brother, “Miss Darcy, exerted herself much more to talk” (Austen, P&P 219). In addition, Elizabeth observes how Mr. Darcy himself “was anxious for his sister and herself to get acquainted, and forwarded as much as possible, every attempt at conversation on either side”, to the great dissatisfaction of Miss Bingley (Austen, P&P 219). Julia Gasper, quoted in Castle, has developed a similar argumentation, claiming that “Elizabeth Bennet never finds Darcy attractive until she has met his sister (a female version of him perhaps?) and never wants to marry at all until both her closest women friends” (Castle). Gasper situates the cause of this development in Elizabeth sudden lack of female friends, since both her friend “Charlotte Lucas and her sister Jane, are married or engaged and so taken from her” (Castle). Finally, Gasper points out that “the conclusion of [Pride and Prejudice] spends longer telling us about the ‘love’ which grew up between Elizabeth and Georgiana, her sister-in-law, than it does describing Elizabeth’s happiness with Darcy” (Castle).

A final note is related to the role of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mr. Darcy’s aunt, who has been aptly described as “one of the most memorable and least likeable characters in Jane Austen’s novels” (McMaster 115). Lady Catherine claims a place in two additional triangles that are not about friendship ties, but brought about solely by her interference. Toker points out that by the end of the eighteenth century “the ideal of a companionate marriage” had replaced the previous prevalent practice of “arranged and dynastic marriages” (236). However, the latter were still “routinely practiced among the aristocracy” (Toker 236). It is in the context and to the service of this policy that Lady Catherine travels all the way to Longbourn “in order to demand that [Elizabeth] should not accept Darcy’s proposal” (Toker 236). Lady Catherine requires Elizabeth’s refusal, because she plans to “unite the two estates” (Austen, P&P 71), by arranging a marriage between the two cousins Mr. Darcy and Miss de Bourgh, and thus “cement an already existing family alliance” (Corbett 237). In addition, she “shapes another other cousin-marriage plot”, by “offering Mr. Collins ‘particular advice and recommendation’ concerning matrimony” (Corbett 237). Mr. Collins decides upon Elizabeth as his future spouse, thus “reflecting the aristocratic influence of his patroness and aping the marriage strategy of her class” (Corbett 237). Elizabeth, however, values the “principle of individual choice” too much to be forced or manipulated into marrying a man she is not interested in (Corbett 237). Hence, both triangles initiated by Lady Catherine are violated by Elizabeth, who denies “Collins's
appeal to marry him in the interests of her family” as well as “Lady Catherine’s representation of Darcy’s familial duty” (Corbett 237).

In the end, both Jane and Elizabeth only marry after having met and befriended the sister of their suitor. Jane exerts herself, even at the expense of her health, to establish a friendship with Caroline Bingley. Elizabeth accepts Darcy’s second marriage proposal only after they have met a second time on his estate, where she has met and was enchanted with his sister first. It has been pointed out that “[t]he majority of [Pride and Prejudice] characters [are] unwilling to acknowledge publically their romantic impulses, [and] Bingley and Darcy, like Jane, are reluctant to ‘feel more than [they] acknowledge’” (Allen 425). I argue that in Pride and Prejudice, a novel in which most emotions, and especially those of a romantic nature, are by all means concealed, men and women channel their feelings for each other through the man’s sister.

2.3.4 Emma (1815)

2.3.4.1 Introduction

In A Memoir of Jane Austen, James Edward Austen-Leigh notes that Austen claimed Emma to be a heroine “whom no one but myself will much like” (158). It is true that Emma Woodhouse, the protagonist of Austen’s fourth perfect work, published in 1815, is not portrayed as a very amiable young woman. She is introduced as “handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition” (Austen, Emma 7). But the comfortable arrangements that allow Emma to enjoy her life have resulted in a feeling of superiority and an attitude of haughtiness. It is in this context that, from the very beginning, Emma shows herself to be a meddler. At the wedding of her former governess, Miss Taylor, to Mr. Weston, Emma attributes the success of their relationship to her excellent matchmaking skills and decides that from now on she will put this ‘talent’ to good use. Emma lives with her overly sensitive and protective father and has only one close friend who attempts to keep her two feet on the ground, George Knightley. However, he also cannot keep Emma from her new pastime. When Emma pitchforks Harriet Smith, a girl a couple of years her junior, into the role of protégée, she sets herself the task of finding her new friend an appropriate partner. First, Emma persuades, nearly manipulates, Harriet into rejecting the marriage proposal of Mr. Martin. Next, she convinces herself and Harriet that the attention of Mr. Elton is proof of his growing affection and love for Harriet. Emma’s persistent need to get involved in other people’s lives causes her to lose control over her own life. Mr. Elton believes that Emma’s interest and kindness mean she is romantically interested in him and he proposes to her. After Emma rejects him, Mr. Elton leaves town, and Harriet
is heartbroken. Before long, Mr. Elton returns from his trip with a snobbish wife, and they affront Harriet at a local ball. Fortunately, Mr. Knightley takes the initiative to dance with Harriet, and, this way, resolves the awkward situation. After the arrival of the charming Frank Churchill, the entire society seems to expect that he will soon become Emma’s partner. After some flirting, Emma realises she does not sincerely love Mr. Churchill and she decides to introduce him to Harriet instead, who has at last recovered from the heartbreak. Harriet almost immediately takes an interest in him. However, soon after their introduction, the secret engagement to Mr. Churchill and the impoverished and feeble Jane Fairfax becomes public. Much to Emma’s surprise, Harriet does not seem to be bothered by this, and Emma is disappointed to find that she has miscalculated the entire situation and the characters and preferences of all the people involved. Harriet reveals that she has actually set her sights on Mr. Knightley. This makes Emma realize that nobody should marry Mr. Knightley but herself. All friendship and relationship ties seem to collapse, but the sensible Mr. Knightley takes it upon him to restore everything Emma has destroyed with her interference. He persuades and encourages Mr. Martin to propose to Harriet again. Jane Fairfax marries Frank Churchill, and, finally, Emma inevitably marries her long-time friend Mr. Knightley.

2.3.4.2 Analysis

Of all Austen novels, *Emma* best lends itself to a queer reading. It is easy to recognise female romantic friendship in the narrative of Austen’s fourth major novel. Already at the very beginning, a strong connection between two women is referred to. The bond between Emma and her governess, Miss Taylor, is described as characterized by the “intimacy of sisters” (Austen, *Emma* 7). However, the central (romantic) friendship in the novel is that between Emma and her new friend, or rather, protégée, Harriet Smith. Emma resolves to take care of the young and innocent (not to say gullible) Harriet. One of the first things that she decides to help Harriet with, is the choice of a suitable partner. After she claims credit for the successful match between Miss Taylor and her husband, Emma decides to take it upon herself to find her friends and acquaintances an ideal partner.

“And you have forgotten one matter of joy to me,” said Emma, “and a very considerable one—that I made the match myself. I made the match, you know, four years ago; and to have it take place, and be proved in the right, when so many people said Mr. Weston would never marry again, may comfort me for any thing.”

(Austen, *Emma* 13)

When her father bids her not to make any more matches after Miss Taylor’s marriage, Emma replies: “I promise you to make none for myself, papa; but I must, indeed, for other people. It is the greatest amusement in the world! And after such success, you know!” (Austen, *Emma* 13). However, almost
immediately it becomes clear that she overestimates her skill, insight and judgement. In fact, due to her self-satisfied attitude and arrogant behaviour, combined with misunderstandings caused by her self-involvement, Emma causes distress rather than marital bliss. Moore explains Emma’s self-willed attitude and precociousness as the result of an “unregulated female friendship” (Intimacies 111). This type of profound connection poses a threat to Emma as a novelistic heroine because it makes possible for her ‘power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself’, and such autonomy and self-approbation work against the necessary compliance of the heroine with the social hierarchies to which her story, as a story of marriage contributes. (Moore, Intimacies 111).

I propose an alternative reading of Emma’s initial failure. I would like to argue that it is not due to Emma’s ignorance and wrong judgement of character that she sabotages two possible successful connections for Harriet. On the contrary, I argue that Emma is highly manipulative and very much aware of her actions and the inevitable causes. As one of the few people in Emma’s social circle who is not influenced or blinded by her, Mr. Knightley understands how matters stand. When Emma notes that she does not think Mr. Martin a suitable partner for Harriet, Mr. Knightley openly speaks his mind and says he thinks it madness that Harriet refuses Mr. Martin. When Emma replies that she has seen the note with Harriet’s answer, so it must be true, he exclaims: “You saw her answer!—you wrote her answer too. Emma, this is your doing. You persuaded her to refuse him.” (Austen, Emma 59). In addition, Mr. Knightley displays an excellent understanding of the underlying structures and motivation, remarking: “Emma, your infatuation about that girl blinds you.” (Austen, Emma 59). Moreover, he condemns their relationship: “I have always thought it a very foolish intimacy,’ said Mr. Knightley presently, ‘though I have kept my thoughts to myself; but I now perceive that it will be a very unfortunate one for Harriet’. (Austen, Emma 62). Emma’s motivation for her actions and the reason why she finds it so important to pull the strings is seem to stem from a fear of losing Harriet to a man. This situation is comparable to Elinor’s mistrust and jealousy as Marianne is smitten when she is suited by Willoughby. Emma’s attraction to Harriet is clear from their first encounter. In addition, it is made clear that Harriet’s beauty was one of Emma’s motivations for sabotaging the relationship between Harriet and Mr. Martin, as Emma feels that Harriet is far too pretty and graceful to be wasted on Mr Martin, who is a farmer rather than a gentleman. Harriet is introduced as being “a very pretty girl” (Austen, Emma 23). In addition, her beauty happened to be of a sort which Emma particularly admired. She was short, plump, and fair, with a fine bloom, blue eyes, light hair, regular features, and a look of great sweetness, and, before the end of the evening, Emma was as much pleased with her manners as her person, and quite determined to continue the acquaintance.
It cannot be denied that Emma loves and desires Harriet. Concerning the dénouement and Emma ending up marrying Mr. Knightley, I argue that Emma mimics Harriet’s desire, or rather, the desire she has selected for Harriet. The desire Emma shows can be seen as an example of the aforementioned Girardian mimetic desire. In this case, in accordance with the theories of Stendhal and Girard, the “impulse toward the object is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator” (Girard 10). Korba also states that Emma projects “her own feelings about Harriet onto the various men of their acquaintance (150). Emma ultimately desires Harriet, but expresses this through her desire for Mr. Knightley. Following this premise, I interpret Emma’s character as a Stendhalian vaniteux, in this case vaniteuse, one who “desires any object so long as she is convinced that it is already desired by another person whom she admires” (Girard 7). I do not agree with Wiltshire, who, also following the theory developed by Girard, argues that it is in fact Mr. Knightley who “learns how he feels about Emma from his own homosocial jealousy of Frank”, and that “Emma’s desire for Mr. Knightley (as distinct from her admiration and regard for him) is out of her own awareness” (73). However, I follow Wiltshire’s contention that the strength of Emma lies in the way the narrative “conveys to the reader that the marriage [...] is plausible” (Wiltshire 73). The novel “has to make the reader desire Emma’s union with Mr. Knightley [and] has to find ways of conveying her unconscious erotic desiring attachment to him” (Wiltshire 73). Preus claims that this happens by “using Harriet as a stand-in for her [Emma’s] own desire in her encounters with Mr. Elton, Frank Churchill and Mr. Knightley (200). Sedgwick’s alternative, queer interpretation of Austen’s novels was anticipated long before the rise of queer studies. Marvin Mudrick, for example, has closely analysed Austen’s writing and attempted to alter the interpretation of her novels by pointing out her constant use of irony. In his influential essay ‘Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery’, he also argues that Emma “prefers the company of women, more particularly of women whom she can master and direct” (Mudrick 192). Initially, he investigates Austen’s novels “looking for tender marriage plots”, but he “is scandalized by their absence” (Johnson, "Austen Cults and Cultures" 221). In addition, Mudrick argues that Emma’s rather deviant aloof personality manifests itself “sometimes as frigidity and sometimes as lesbianism” (Johnson, "Austen Cults and Cultures" 221). Mudrick explicitly states, and I agree with him, that Emma Woodhouse is in love with Harriet Smith. According to him, “Emma’s interest in Harriet is not merely mistress-and-pupil, but quite emotional and particular: for a time at least... Emma is in love with her” (Quinn 67). By saying so, Mudrick aligns himself with earlier work by Edmund Wilson. In his treatise ‘A Long Talk about Jane Austen’ (1944), he observes that “Emma is prone to ‘infatuations with women’” (Wilson) (Quinn 67). Wilson aptly states “that Emma’s off-stage lesbianism is
‘something outside the picture which is never made explicit in the story but which has to be recognised by the reader before it is possible for him to appreciate the book” (Castle). In contrast, Wayne Booth (1961) “passionately defends Emma Woodhouse's heterosexuality, which Wilson and Mudrick have doubted” (Johnson "Austen Cults and Cultures" 221). Quinn, however, correctly remarks that Mudrick still “pathologize[s] romantic friendship as a neurotic avoidance of heterosexual engagement” (Quinn 67). He points out that in Mudrick's interpretation Emma falls for Harriet only to avoid “the necessary challenge of masculine desire” and her motivation comes forth from her fear of commitment to a man (Quinn 67). Johnson agrees that early suggestions about Emma’s lesbian tendencies were merely “misogynistic projections” of critics who could not get their head around a female character preferring a significant friendship with another woman over a relationship with a man (Korba 140) (Johnson, Women & Politics 123). However, Korba notes that in more recent publications, Johnson nuances her stance, admitting that Mudrick and Wilson were essentially right in their assessment of Emma (161). In addition, Korba states that many — heterocentric — critics resist the idea of a homoerotic matrix, as suggested by Sedgwick, to be present in Austen’s oeuvre (140-41). According to Korba, Emma’s deep connection with Miss Taylor and her friendship with Harriet

exemplify her attraction to and infatuation with docile malleable members of her own sex, women over whom she exerts control and influence, and in whose sexual destinies she evinces a passionate and active involvement. In addition, her attitude toward most of the men in her direct environment demonstrate her “sexual indifference to men” (141).

However, I do not agree with her assertion that the novel’s “principal erotic relationship” is the one between Emma and Jane Fairfax (Korba 142). Korba argues that it is “Jane’s inaccessibility” which ultimately leads Emma to Mr. Knightley (142). As a counter-argument, I would like to refer to the many instances in which Emma rejoices over Harriet’s character and appearance that cannot be overlooked, as opposed to her annoyance that comes to the surface every time anyone compliments Jane. In doing so, Emma often adopts a male, dominant point of view. Clearly, Emma experiences little difficulty following the line of reasoning in adopting a man’s view. “I know that such a girl as Harriet is exactly what every man delights in—what at once bewitches his senses and satisfies his judgment” (Austen, Emma 62). In addition, there are countless instances when Emma comments on Harriet’s beauty. Clearly, she considers Harriet to be “a very pretty girl” (Austen, Emma 63). Throughout the novel, various passages make clear that Emma is attracted to Harriet because of her alluring physical features. Emma’s affection has to do with Harriet pleasing her senses, and there is sexual attraction at play. Harriet, on the other hand, is in awe for features in Emma that could improve her and make their friendship beneficial for her position in society. In contemporary terms,
Emma’s feelings would come closest to a bisexual preference, whereas Harriet’s inclination rather comes forth of a social opportunism. As Moore accurately states: “The possible threat of social mobility opened up by female friendship is efficiently closed down by marriage” by the end of the novel (Intimacies 141). Next, Fergus argues that “in Austen’s novels, infatuation [...] frequently operates through the attraction of opposed energies” (“Sex and Social Life” 73). It is in this sense, she claims, that “Emma and Harriet are mutually infatuated, Emma by Harriet’s soft blonde beauty and mindless yielding, Harriet by Emma’s charm, wit and social position” (Fergus, "Sex and Social Life" 73). This does not mean, however, that Harriet’s feelings for Emma are not as strong or as genuine as Emma’s for her. Their affection merely has a different source and motivation. For example, the idea of no longer seeing Emma startles Harriet and she exclaims:

“That would have been too dreadful!—What an escape!—Dear Miss Woodhouse, I would not give up the pleasure and honour of being intimate with you for any thing in the world.” [...]
“Dear me!—How should I ever have borne it! It would have killed me never to come to Hartfield any more!”
(Austen, Emma 52)

Korba also picked up on the distinct physicality of Emma’s interest. Even before their first encounter, Emma is already enthralled by Harriet’s beauty, “for Miss Smith was a girl of seventeen whom Emma knew very well by sight and had long felt an interest in, on account of her beauty” (Austen, Emma 23). In addition, Emma “was not struck by any thing remarkably clever in Miss Smith’s conversation [...] , she was so busy in admiring those soft blue eyes” instead (Austen, Emma 24). Moore claims that “female friendship is the mechanism” through which a space is established “in which qualities of physical attractiveness are explicated and commented on” (Intimacies 123). Not only is Emma lyrical about Harriet’s appearance, Mrs. Weston also praises Emma’s beauty enthusiastically (Moore, Intimacies 123). Whereas Mr. Knightley restricts his judgement to a mere polite affirmation, “I shall not attempt to deny Emma's being pretty”, Mrs. Weston elaborates on Emma’s features in more detail:

Pretty! say beautiful rather. Can you imagine any thing nearer perfect beauty than Emma altogether—face and figure?” [...] “Such an eye!—the true hazel eye—and so brilliant! regular features, open countenance, with a complexion! oh! what a bloom of full health, and such a pretty height and size; such a firm and upright figure! There is health, not merely in her bloom, but in her air, her head, her glance.
(Austen, Emma 38)

Towards the end of the novel, Emma’s friendship with Harriet gradually disintegrates. This loss is masked by Emma’s replacing Harriet with Jane Fairfax (Moore, Intimacies 130-31). The evolution of “Emma’s struggle to like Jane is described as a struggle to find her attractive” and her “reconciliation
to the idea of befriending Jane” is addressed in terms of the discovery of her beauty (Moore, *Intimacies* 131). Emma starts warming up to Jane, and especially shows this through her appreciation of Jane’s physical beauty. At first, Emma repeatedly mentions how much she dislikes Jane’s “coldness and reserve” (Austen, *Emma* 156), but in the end she comes to find her “a very pleasing beauty” (Austen, *Emma* 57).

Next, Moore contends that this novel can even be used as a means of investigating the “history of female friendship and lesbian identity” (*Intimacies* 109). In her book *Dangerous Intimacies*, Moore offers a queer reading of a number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels. She looks for instances of what she calls “sapphism” in *Millenium Hall, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, Belinda* and Austen’s *Emma*. Even though there is no explicit imagery or descriptions of female-female sexuality, Moore claims that “[f]or a heroine-centered novel to represent female friendship at all is to invoke the possibility of sapphism” (*Intimacies* 111). It is true that these possibilities are only “raised marginally or intermittently in the text itself, but become “visible and effective” in the relation between one “textual representation of female friendship and another” (Moore, *Intimacies* 111). It has often been argued that *Emma* represents instances of romantic friendship between women, because the novel subscribes to a larger discourse, “the ideology of female friendship” and because the story refers to other texts that feature the same theme (Moore, *Intimacies* 111). Moore asserts that in *Emma*, readers can recognize references to Millenium Hall and the other novels that stage (sexual) relationships between women (*Intimacies* 110). Even though there is little explicit textual proof of this claim, it can be argued that some of the friendships Emma maintains are literary renditions of female romantic friendship as described by Faderman. Mr. Knightley picks up on the “great intimacy” that exists “between Emma and Harriet Smith”, and considers their connection “a bad thing” (Austen, *Emma* 127). Mrs. Weston, his conversation partner, not only defends Emma and Harriet, but stands up for female friendships in general, as Moore has pointed out (Moore, *Intimacies* 127). In addition, the outside world also proves not to be blind for their profound and valuable relationship. Emma’s father comments that “Emma could not have a better companion than Harriet” (Austen, *Emma* 100).

In the conclusion of her book, Moore states that sapphism and female friendship cover very different practices, but are not mutually exclusive and we can consider them alike, since they both fall under the overarching categorisation of dangerous intimacies that were associated with female relationships and sexuality (*Intimacies* 152). In addition, she points out that “romantic friendship, with its potential associations with excessive, exalted feeling and unworldly attachment, could be
considered by reactionaries to be as symptomatic of dangerous revolutionary immorality itself” (Moore, *Intimacies* 151). Austen may well have been aware of the sexual nature underlying this friendship bond. However, defining this awareness as a bisexual one would be to “attach more importance to it than she would” (Fergus, ”Sex and Social Life" 73).

2.4 Conclusion

In the previous section it has been demonstrated that “[s]ororal or pseudo-sororal attachments” make up the core of Austen’s oeuvre (Castle), as well as being crucial in her personal life. From the analyses of three major novels, it becomes clear that the female protagonists of Austen’s novels are not necessarily desperate to get married. There are various instances to be found in Austen’s novels of a female character declining a man’s proposal for marriage. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth first refuses Mr. Collins and then Mr. Darcy’s first proposal. Emma exercises her authority over Harriet to make her refuse the advantageous marriage proposal of Mr. Martin. In addition, marriage dismissal is a recurrent theme in other Austen novels. *Mansfield Park* recounts how Fanny Price rejects Henry Crawford. *Persuasion*’s Anne Elliot also turns down Captain Wentworth’s, even though this refusal takes place before the events of the novel. Not only are Austen’s women not rushing into marriage, it becomes apparent that they even attach greater value to sororal and friendship bonds. It has been claimed that “Austen’s most profound studies of sexuality occur [...] in *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*” (Fergus, ”Sex and Social Life" 75). However, I chose to focus on *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* in addition to *Emma*, because these novels deal with profound female homosocial bonds, especially between sisters and friends. Moreover, I argue that *Emma* is the only novel I have analysed that features a female-female relationship that approximates the romantic friendship, as described by Faderman. The relations in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* focus on bonds between sisters and sisters-in-law, and these can at most be characterized as homosocial. I agree with Amanpal Garcha that Austen’s narratives more often than not move to the conclusion of an inevitable marital heterosexuality “through a progression of proto-Freudian ‘phases’” (288). Hence, the novels “afford the heroines (and their readers) variously perversely ‘pregenital’ and/or ‘nonprocreative excitations”’ (Garcha 288).
3. Contemporary popular cultural production: internet fan fiction

3.1 Theoretical background

We are all fans of something: a television show, an actor or an actress, an author or a specific character, but only some people actually act upon this status. One of the best examples of an active audience are writers of fan fiction. I propose an interpretation of the practise of fan fiction as an active form of reception, the result of a text invoking creative production as a reaction. Hence, fan fiction will here be analysed as a contemporary literary practise, rather than as a social phenomenon, which it undoubtedly also is. Parrish aptly states that “fan fiction is more than the product of people who might be identified as fans; indeed, fan fiction is also the work of people who identify as readers and writers” (6).

3.1.1 Readerly and writerly texts

When talking about popular texts, it is useful to include Roland Barthes’ theory of reading practises. Barthes made an important and well-known distinction between readerly and writerly tendencies in texts (Fiske, Understanding 103). The difference between these two categories lies in the types of “reading practices they invite” (Fiske, Understanding 103). A closed, readerly text is undemanding and “invites an essentially passive, receptive, disciplined reader who tends to accept its meanings as already made” (Fiske, Understanding 103). A writerly text, by contrast, “challenges the reader constantly to rewrite it” and to engage in meaning-making (Fiske, Understanding 103).

Fiske adds a third category, that of the producerly text. A producerly text is a “popular writerly text whose writerly reading is not necessarily difficult” and “does not necessarily challenge the reader” to participate in the construction of meaning (Fiske, Understanding 103). The producerly text thus combines traits of both other classifications, since it has the accessibility of a readerly text and the openness of the writerly text (Fiske, Understanding, 104). The core difference, according to Fiske, is that a producerly text “does not require the writerly activity” per se (Understanding 104). The producerly text offers itself up to popular production; it exposes, however reluctantly, the vulnerabilities, limitations, and weaknesses of its preferred meanings; it contains, while attempting to repress them, voices that contradict the ones it prefers; it has loose ends that escape its control, its meanings exceed its own power to discipline them, its gaps are wide enough for whole new texts to be produced in them – it is, in a very real sense, beyond its own control. (Fiske, Understanding 104)

Before the late 1980s, fan fiction had hardly been under scrutiny of traditional academic analysis or professional criticism. Fiske suggests that the popular analyst should investigate what has been
ignored by traditional criticism and that “[t]he combination of widespread consumption with widespread critical disapproval is a fairly certain sign that a cultural commodity or practice is popular” (Understanding 106). I argue that fan fiction is an example of a response to such producerly popular texts. As Fiske points out: [f]ans are excessive readers and fan texts are excessively popular (Understanding 146). As a result, “fans are productive: their fandom spurs them into producing their own texts” (Fiske, Understanding 147). Moreover, fics are in their turn new producerly texts, prompting answers, additions, new variations. Fan fiction is a polysemic commodity, capable of producing multiple meanings and pleasures (Fiske, Understanding 158). Therefore, it can always give rise to new fics that follow from the individual interpretation of an individual reader.

3.1.2 Intertextuality

In addition to Barthes’ theory of readerly and writerly texts, the notion of intertextuality is key to fan fiction theory, since fan fiction writing is by definition explicitly intertextual. The term intertextuality was introduced by Julia Kristeva in 1966. For Kristeva and Barthes the term originally designated a synthesis of Ferdinand de Saussure’s structuralist linguistics and the literary theory of Mikael Bakhtin (Irwin 227). According to Barthes’ view on intertextuality in literature, the meaning of a certain text is not situated in the text itself, but it is rather created by the reader in relation to the text and the complex network of texts that is called forth in the reading process. Or as Fiske puts it: “any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and a range of textual knowledge is brought to bear upon it” (Television Culture 108). Intertextuality takes readers beyond the text, since it invites them to bring their cultural knowledge that is needed to recognize and understand the intertextual reference (Gwenllian-Jones 186). In the case of fan fiction, intertextuality is about reworking a product rather than simply using it (Fiske, Understanding 10). In addition, when Fiske wrote his book on popular culture, “contemporary cultural theory [argued] that all texts are incomplete and can be studied only intertextually” (Understanding 123). Moreover, fan fiction takes this phenomenon one step further, since the internet’s “hypertextuality is the technological realization of intertextuality” and contemporary fan fiction is predominantly created and spread on the internet (Gwenllian-Jones 187). Michel De Certeau’s claim that popular culture is about “making do with what the system provides” ties in with the notion of intertextuality (Fiske, Understanding 25). Fan fiction is a way of working with the dominant culture, within a framework of power that still allows for resistance, and this is often described in terms of poaching (Brooker 92). Poaching is the main metaphor Henry Jenkins uses when talking about fan fiction practices. In doing so he picks up a notion that was described and

3 Jane Austen’s novels are both popular and belong to the realm of highbrow literature, as will be explained further on in this paper (see section 3.2.1).
developed by de Certeau, who claimed that the “poaching analogy” was apt to characterize the “relationship between readers and writers as an ongoing struggle for possession of the text and control over its meanings” (Jenkins 24). However, it has been pointed out in more recent academic work that this metaphor does not (or no longer) offers a comprehensive and universal account for the practices that reading and writing fan fiction involve, not in the least because so much has changed since Jenkins published his *Textual Poachers* in 1992 (Parrish 5) (see section 3.1.3). Today, fan communities have largely migrated to the internet, whereas when Jenkins wrote his study, the “communities were relegated to conventions and fanzines” (Sandvoss). The most significant difference between early studies of fandom and fan writing and more recent research can be attributed to the rise of the internet, which provides a new forum for fans and their work today and significantly changed fan practices. The hypertextuality that is typical of the internet, for example, “forces the reader/user into the active construction of the text’s boundaries” (Sandvoss 23). Cornel Sandvos states that “[i]ntertextuality is [...] the essence of all texts” (24), and, according to him, “the difference between intertextuality in mediated and literary texts is thus one of degree rather than kind” (25). In addition, he points to a “process of growing intertextuality, mediated narrative figures, and multiple authorship that has eroded the concept of the author that, as Barthes (1977) notes, reached its zenith in the formation of high modernity” (Sandvoss 25). Fan fiction is dually intertextual. On the one hand because the prompt or inspiration for a fan work is already an existing original cultural product and thus fan fiction is “an expansion to the source universe” and, on the other hand, because of the fact that fan writing is inherently characterized as a work in progress. This term describes “a piece of fiction still in the process of being written but not yet complete”, thus inviting “interpretive fan engagement” (Busse 6). It has been pointed out that “[t]he appeal of works in progress lies in part in the way fans can engage with an open text: it invites responses, permits authorship, and enjoins a sense of community” (Busse 6). Jenkins also mentions that “[f]ans thrive on debate and differences in opinion must be perpetuated so that the process of interpreting an otherwise completed narrative [...] may be prolonged” (88). Following this, we can consider fan fiction, as a serial production of writing, “the ultimate writerly text” (Busse 6).

### 3.1.3 Definition and characterization of fan fiction

Fiske claims that “people cannot produce and circulate their own commodities” (*Understanding* 27). I do not agree with him on this point and argue that fan fiction is an example of how people can indeed produce their own non-commercial product, sometimes deviating from the canon, to be distributed within a certain fandom that constitutes the market for these creations. The term canon, as it is used here and more generally in the context of fandom, refers to “a source, or sources, that
are considered authoritative by the fannish community [...] and what fans agree that actually happened in a film, television show or novel” (“Canon”). Fan fiction is not only about reworking what already exists, but also about taking an existing work as a prompt to create something original and even innovative. In addition, according to Fiske, “popular pleasures arise from the social allegiances formed by subordinated people and exist in some relationship of opposition to power that attempts to discipline them” (Understanding 49). However, I have argued that the writing of Austen fans is not motivated from a punk-like anger or opposition (see section 1). In addition, more recent studies of fan fiction tend to emphasise that fan writing does not always spring from guerrilla-like motivation. For example, Parrish quotes Penley, who argues that “fan writing is not about guerilla [sic] action, borrowing from a system, or taking the goods that belong to others; instead it is ‘a way of thinking’” (68). To Parrish this statement clearly shows “that it is entirely possible to conceive of fan fiction practices in terms that do not align with the dominant construction of textual poaching” (68). How, then, should we conceive of fan fiction and what is an apt comprehensive definition of the phenomenon, or does this not even exist? According to Parrish, internet fan fiction, what is discussed here, is writing

1) by amateur fans of a particular media text or texts (television program, book, film, role-playing game, anime, cartoon, etc), 2) commencing from (but not limited to) some of the characters and sometimes premises of that text or those texts, 3) explicitly calling attention to itself as fan fiction, and 4) published on the internet (11).

Sheenagh Pugh defines fan fiction as “fiction based on a situation and characters originally created by someone else” (9). Even though this description is very often applicable to fan fiction, as a definition it is far too far-ranging, since not “any fiction based on pre-existing work qualifies as fan fiction per se” (Parrish 12). Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse argue that it is exactly the marking out of boundaries that makes defining fan fiction such a difficult task (26).

Whereas Fiske locates pleasure in “seeing the dominant, controlling explanations of the world at the point of breakdown” (Understanding 116), I argue that this is not the primary motivation for writing fan fiction. However, I agree with him that a subordinate group in society dealing with a certain commodity more often than not involves a certain degree of creativity, leading to subversive adaptions of this commodity (Fiske, Understanding 19). Fan fiction does not spring from an angry mind-set per se, but the result can still prove to be of a subversive nature. Fiske claims popular pleasures are necessarily those of the oppressed and “they must contain elements of oppositional, [...] the resistant” (Understanding 127). However, I argue that fan fiction writing does not or does no longer by definition stem from frustrated opposition. Instead, its subversive nature can be positive
and progressive rather than radical and aggressive (Fiske, *Understanding* 161). Fan fiction takes what is in the text, or even what is not there, and elaborates on it, taking things much further, and thus opening up to new alternatives and a renewed discourse. Fiske states that “excessiveness [as a central feature of producerly texts] is meaning out of control, meaning that exceeds the norms of ideological control” (*Understanding* 114). In addition, it is “[s]peculations about things left unsaid or actions left unresolved” that prompt a creative reworking (Jenkins 102). Early fan communities generally agreed that “speculation should not contradict anything offered by the [original] stories” (Jenkins 102). However, that is no longer true as a rule today. Depending on the fandom and the specific subgroup within a fandom, people can treat the original with much more freedom than in the early years. It is important to bear in mind, however, that a reading “cannot of itself be [...] resistant or conformist: it is its use by a socially situated reader that determines its politics” (Fiske, *Understanding* 45). Since this is not a sociological or ethnographical study, the identity and interests of readership don’t fall within the scope of this paper.

When talking about fan fiction, I will use the term interpretation to refer to the practise of deciphering the original. There is no single, fixed meaning inscribed in any text or cultural product. Meaning only comes about during the reading process. An expression that is often mistakenly used is: “it is definitely in the book”. Patricia Rozema claims exactly that about “Mary Crawford’s attempted seduction of Fanny” in her 1999 film adaptation of *Mansfield Park* (Quinn 72). This way, Rozema, like many creators and audiences of film adaptations, borders on being guilty of seeing the novel characters as real people and “giving her [Mary Crawford] ‘character development’ beyond that supplied by the novel” (Quinn 72). In addition, following this train of thought, she risks of over-interpreting the original literature. I argue that such “an imaginative interaction with the words of another”, as Quinn calls it (73), is exactly what happens in fan fiction writing. In addition, it is important to consider that what is not in the text is simply not in the text, and we should not look for what is implied subconsciously or hypothetically, what “might have been” or read things in a text because “why could it not be there”. Fics rather present alternatives to what was actually in the original text, and “all of the individual ‘what ifs’ of fan fiction contribute to a larger mega-text, one that derives from but is not the same as, the canon of the show; this meta-text is sometimes referred to as ‘fanon’” (Parrish 33). Some alternative plotlines are repeated in so many ways and by so many fans “that they take on the status of fan-produced canon”, called fanon (Parrish 33). Fan fiction takes up the original text as a cue to let flow the own imagination and to write original stories, inspired by Austen’s (or other authors’) novels. In this regard, Quinn mentions that Rozema, Korba, and even Sedgwick, are closely related to slash fiction writers (Quinn 74).
In the introduction, I already discussed the terms ‘shipping’ and ‘pairing’. These terms are central to the phenomenon of femslash that is at the centre of this thesis. I will limit the overview of fan fiction terminology to the terms that are used in and relevant to this thesis. Fan fiction has been described as a “community-centered creation of artistic fannish expressions” (Busse 6). This already indicates that the traditional notion of the author as a single person should be replaced by the idea of an author as “a collective entity” (Busse 6). The Internet facilitates and even promotes the “[p]ublic sharing that shifts fannish interpretations from individual to collective responses” (Jenkins 77). This community, also called fandom, is in itself not cohesive, and there are many different types of fandom (Busse 6). This “ultimate erasure of a single author”, in order to create a shared space, intersects with the notion of intertextuality (Busse 6) (see section 3.1.1). A fandom consists of both readers and writers of fandom-created texts, who have a common identity in being a fan. As pointed out by Jenkins, the term ‘fan’, originally an abbreviation of fanatic, often was and sometimes still is associated with negative stereotypes (12). In addition, fans were classified according to gender, as “the psychotic fan [was] usually portrayed as masculine” and “the eroticized fan was almost always female” (Jenkins 15). Traditionally, slash was written almost exclusively by women and this only started to change recently.

3.1.4 Definition and characterization of femslash

The term slash “refers to the convention of employing a stroke or ‘slash’ to signify a same-sex relationship between two characters and specifies a genre of fan stories positing homoerotic affairs between […] protagonists” (Jenkins 186). Even though some scholars have argued that folk stories about Robin Hood and King Arthur are also fan fiction, it is generally accepted that this subdivision of fan fiction “originated as a genre of fan writing within Star Trek fandom in the early 1970s” when fan fic writers began to develop plotlines about Kirk and Spock not only caring for each other or even loving each other, but becoming true lovers (Jenkins 187). Femslash, then, is short for ‘female slash’, “a genre of fan fiction featuring female characters involved in a romantic or sexual relationship” ("Femslash"). This niche within the slash subgenre came about in the 1980s when fans “begun to generate […] lesbian stories envisioning this type of reciprocal relationship occurring between two female characters” (Jenkins 197). Slash is a significant subgenre of fan writing and has been called “fandom’s most original contribution to the field of popular culture” (Jenkins 188). It has been

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It should be pointed out that fans do not necessarily have to be readers and/or writers of fan fiction—fans have been defined as people who have “developed a relationship with an artifact of popular culture,” and participate “in a range of activities that extend beyond the private act of viewing,” reading, or playing (Davisson and Booth 33-34). Someone who attends SciFi conventions, comic-cons or collects memorabilia, but does not read or write fan fiction, also qualifies as a fan—and may become the object of fan studies. However, the members of the fandom who read and write fan fiction are most relevant to this research.
argued that slash fiction refuses “repressive forms of sexual identity and provides utopian alternatives” to gender patterns by favouring a fluid erotic identification (Jenkins 189). However, the significance and value of slash lies in the “questioning of sexuality” by exploring possible alternatives rather than in providing clear and definite answers (Jenkins 190).

As described in section 1.1.3, Sedgwick posits a continuum between the homosocial and the homoerotic and homosexual (*Between Men* 20). Jenkins picks up on this, and points out that the same counts for a continuum “between female friendship and female-female love” (Jenkins 202). Jenkins has argued that slash writing makes “visible invisible aspects of sexual experience, pulling to the surface the subtext of male homosocial desire” (Jenkins 205). Hence, “slash turns that subtext into the dominant focus of new texts” (Jenkins 205). In addition, Sedgwick argues that “a patriarchal society consistently constructs boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable forms of male friendship”, whereas for female friendship there is no strict subdivision between acceptable friendship and unacceptable sexual behaviour (Jenkins 202-03) (*Between Men* 20). Typically, fandoms produce a lot more regular (male/male) slash than femslash. With regard to the relative scarcity of femslash, Jenkins draws on the theories of Sedgwick to conclude that this dissimilarity is likely to be due to the fact that “women have historically enjoyed a more fluid movement through the homosocial continuum” (Jenkins 205). Whereas virtually all women experience “longstanding female friendships” in real life, the idea of male slash seems to be more ground-breaking, “a total fantasy” (Jenkins 205). In addition, within feminist studies, it has been pointed out that sexually explicit narratives of female sexual pleasure are predominantly consumed by a largely female readership (Sonnet 254). However, with regard to the femslash corpus I have investigated, I should point out that fics that are marked as femslash do not always imply an explicit depiction of sexual intercourse. The categorization of a fic as femslash, as indicated in the heading of the text, does not always correspond to an explicit sexual content and readers also seem to define profound friendships and homosocial relations as femslash. For example, many fics which are rated G (General), a rating that implies they do not contain a sexual content, are also tagged as femslash and include a reference to a female/female pairing in the disclaimer.

Esther Sonnet mentions Janice Radway’s research, which suggested that “real people can use romance to address their unmet needs experienced precisely because that ideal relationship is made highly improbable by the institutional structure and engendering practise of contemporary society” (256). It can be argued this is certainly true in the case of a large amount of slash and femslash fics. Even though it has been pointed out that femslash is “usually written by and for queer female authors”, I am not suggesting that all femslash writers are lesbian (“Femslash”). However, I do
contend that they describe a fantasized, ideal world. Today, homosexuality and lesbianism are still often condemned in society. Authors of this subgenre of fan fiction envision and write about a world in which there is a relationship continuum, pairing people who deeply care for each other and love each other, regardless of sex. I am not suggesting that writers of fanfics let the characters play out situations and relationships they would personally like to experience, but merely that they write about what they would have liked to have seen concerning the plot or specific pairings, or, as is sometimes the case in Austen fics, how it should be according to them, if the narrative was set in contemporary society.

3.2 Austen as writerly text: Austen-based fan fiction

3.2.1 Austen fandom

Jane Austen’s novels have often been used as prompts for readerly responses. Clearly, Austen’s corpus invites an active reception and constant (re)interpretation from the readers. Over time, Austen has become a “cultural fetish”, since the reception of Austen does not always address her work, but rather “the culture [she] has been thought to represent” (Johnson, "Austen Cults and Cultures" 212).

Austen fans are known as and refer to themselves as Janeites (see note 3). Early Janeites adopted the form of address ‘dear Aunt Jane’ from James Edward Austen-Leigh, cousin and writer of the 1870 biography Memoir of Jane Austen (Quinn 64). Janeitism “did not burgeon until the last two decades of the nineteenth century” (Johnson, "Austen Cults and Cultures" 211) and flourished in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth (Quinn 64). Quinn points out that “[b]y emphasizing the supposed grace, gentility and conventional femininity of Austen’s life and fiction, Janeite appreciation tended to construct ‘dear Jane’ as a sentimental object of affection” (64). For this they also heavily drew on Austen-Leigh, “who stressed the domestic and the personal over the literary and intellectual” (Quinn 64). Janeitism can be defined as the “self-consciously idolatrous enthusiasm for ‘Jane’ and every detail relative to her” (Johnson, "Austen Cults and Cultures" 211). Moreover, it has been pointed out that “Janeites constituted a reading community whose practises transgress the dogmas later instituted by professional academics presiding over the emergent field of novel studies” (Johnson, "Austen Cults and Cultures" 214). Some of the practises the Janeite community did not consider inappropriate and which we can still recognize today within the fan fiction community are talking “about characters as if they were real people” and speculating “upon their lives before, after or outside the text itself” (Johnson, "Austen Cults and Cultures" 214). As already mentioned, I argue that this is also done in much of the contemporary fan fiction writing
and even the screen adaptations of Austen novels. Early in the twentieth century, it became clear that Jane Austen was not just a novelist “about whom one might talk dispassionately, but a commercial phenomenon and a cultural figure”, and many Austen admirers “have been unhappy with this extravagant popularity” (Johnson, "Austen Cults and Cultures" 211). Henry James was a well-known avid opponent of this “commodification by publishers and marketers” (Johnson, "Austen Cults and Cultures" 211). “[A]cademic critics have deprecated Austenian admirers outside the academy”, in much the same way, as Jenkins has shown, trekkies, mass media enthusiasts and fans in general were for a long time “derided and marginalized by dominant cultural institutions” (Johnson, "Austen Cults and Cultures" 224). However, Johnson points to an important difference as, unlike for example Star Trek, “Austen’s novels hold a secure place in the canon of high as well as popular culture” (Johnson, "Austen Cults and Cultures" 224). The principal sites and forums that house Jane Austen fan fiction are The Derbyshire Writers’ Guild (however, all stories here are rated PG-13 – suitable for readers aged thirteen and up – or below), The Republic of Pemberley, 50 miles of good road, Jaffindex, A Happy Assembly (Meryton, formerly a happy alternative or AHA). Since the stories that are published on these sites are more often than not true to the original plots and pairings, and, therefore, rarely feature femslash, I turned to other sites such as Livejournal, Fanfiction.net and adultfanfiction.net to find Austen-based femslash. However, it should be pointed out that several stories that circulate within the Austen fandom can be found on various sites. For example, a number of femslash stories can be found on both the Jaffindex and Adultfanfiction.net. For this reason, I especially focused on sites that aim at collecting all circulating fics in one place, such as Archive of Our Own.

Ultimately, my fan fiction corpus consists of twenty-five femslash rated fics, seven of which I decided to analyse more closely. However, twenty-five fics is only a fraction of the total number of Austen-based femslash. First of all, I limited my corpus to fics that are based on the three novels I analyse in this paper, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice and Emma. In addition, I opted for fics that are original and innovative, interesting fics that add an extra dimension to the novel they are based upon. The seven fics I investigate by means of a closer reading represent a continuum that describes an evolution from sexually explicit fics that fit within a heterosexual framework to fics that describe a homosocial friendship and belong within a discourse that is closer to that of Austen’s day, overcoming today’s strict dichotomy. In addition, I argue that all Austen femslash can be classified along this continuum.
3.2.2 Austen fan fiction

Mapping the online Jane Austen fandom or JAFF (Jane Austen Fan fiction) is nearly impossible, let alone analysing all existing fics or even only the femslash fics. For the purpose of this paper, I will analyse only a handful of Austen femslash fics. Interesting fan fiction is creative and original, and adds another dimension to the original, rather than just reworking or even copying what is already in Austen’s writing. Examples of creative reworkings involve unexpected pairings, including characters that are neglected in the actual novels. I want to underline that the texts discussed and analysed below are not representative of internet fan fiction in general, nor of the subgenre of femslash or of the sites they were found on. My comments and conclusions are derived from the corpus of Austen-based femslash fics I have read and analysed. However, the thorough readings of the fics that are presented here is enough demonstrate the theories and concepts I have discussed above, and this creates an opportunity, however tentatively, to open queer studies of fan fiction to interesting new insights.

I investigate the possible subversive character with regard to the representation of sexuality of fan fiction writing in comparison to the original that served as an inspiration. In this second part of the comparison of female homosocial bonds, I want to check whether Austen femslash is stereotypical or has a subversive value. Stereotypical femslash would affirm and reproduce the prevailing heteronormative, patriarchal and dichotomized discourse of contemporary society. Abigail Derecho has argued that fan fiction is inherently a subversive genre. She claims that it is mainly “subordinated groups” in society who engage in “this type of writing that undermines conventional notions of authority, boundaries, and property” (Derecho 72). From its very inception, fan fiction has been a freer form of literature. The very origins of the genre are situated in slash fics pairing Star Trek’s Spock and Kirk. The choice to write about same-sex sexuality immediately demands extra liberty and a critical attitude towards the dominant culture. Susanne Jung endorses to the claim that fandom is a utopian society and that fan fiction overcomes our straight/gay divide, in creating a society beyond heterosexual norms (Busse 22). Initially, I thought that many fan fics would express a desire to return to the pre-dichotomised situation of Austen’s time, especially since a large number of fics describe significant profound female friendships, which are valued equally important as either heterosexual relationships or today’s lesbian relationships. As already mentioned in the previous section, writers and readers of femslash not only expect an explicit depiction of hard-core sex, but also profound friendships and examples of these close relationships can indeed be found in the novels of Austen. I presumed that this would mean that the fan writers from the corpus I deal with rather reproduce a feminine “continuum”, similar to the one that existed in Austen’s day, rather than the “masculine”
heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy. In conclusion, I sought to argue that (especially femslash) fan fiction wants to overcome today's gay/straight divide and return to the spirit of the age in Austen's time were no such split existed. However, after having analysed my corpus of fics, it becomes clear that a significant portion of the Austen-based femslash echoes the contemporary discourse. I expected to find some fan written stories describing profound friendships between women without a sexual or even physical aspect, which would then indicate that attempts are made to deal summarily with a black and white view on female relations. However, it became clear that the heterosexual/homosexual binary framework cannot be escaped and that the contemporary fan fiction reader and/or writer cannot overcome the dichotomized idea about sexuality that is prevalent in contemporary society. However, fan writers produce a hybrid discourse: they cannot entirely escape the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, but they make attempts at representing the homosocial dimension, too. Ultimately, however, the discourse that underlies these stories is decidedly modern.

### 3.2.2.1 Analyses

The actions described in “Duets”, a *Pride and Prejudice* fic, take place after Elizabeth’s return from Kent, after she has turned down Mr. Darcy’s first marriage proposal. It is the thought of Mr. Darcy and her “daydreaming about his physical aspect” that instigates Elizabeth’s desire that is at the centre of this fic (Asimov, "Duets"). She acts out her desire for Darcy with the first person that enters her room, her sister Jane. Throughout the scene of tenderness that follows, both sisters ponder their single status and wonder whether they will ever find a suitable man to marry. In addition, the story, which clearly can be identified as being heteronormative, incorporates a number of aspects of the “h/c” genre. “H/c” or hurt/comfort fics involve physical pain or emotional distress of a character, who is then taken care of by another character. The initial hurt, in this case Elizabeth’s doubt and confusion, allows an exploration of the relationship between the characters. Here, Jane wants to help Elizabeth recover from the turmoil she has experienced. By doing so she more or less accidently goes on to discover her sister’s sexual body. Throughout the narrative, Elizabeth’s innocence is emphasized. As Jane comforts Elizabeth, she becomes aroused but does not seem to be aware of what exactly it is that comes over her. Elizabeth is startled and thinks her sister does not feel well. What follows is an account of Elizabeth’s sexual initiation by her sister.

‘Was it truly a wonderful experience dear Jane?’ ‘I have felt none other like it’ Jane replied. ‘I do love and care for you so much Jane. Perhaps I could have a similar divine intervention for the care I show you?’ Elizabeth asked. ‘Oh Lizzie lets try to give you the same feeling’. (Asimov, “Duets”)
Remarkably, however, the tone of voice that is used to describe the love between the two sisters, resembles Austen’s description of the love between Elinor and Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*. For example, Elizabeth feeling “that if one of them were to marry it would be difficult for the one remaining sister, better both marry or neither” echoes the jealousy that surfaces in Elinor when Marianne falls in love with Willoughby. I argue that this story does not present any novel idea, but rather reproduces a feature that is already present in Austen’s oeuvre, namely the concept of passionate love between sisters. In addition, this fic undoubtedly confirms and reproduces the hetero standard that characterizes present-day society, and lacks imaginative dealing with love and sexuality between two women.

“Duets again”, the sequel of Asimov’s *P&P* fic, describes a continuation of the actions and behaviour described in the first fic about Jane and Elizabeth Bennet. This second fic centres on and is narrated from the viewpoint of Mr. Bennet, Jane and Elizabeth’s father, who is suspicious about the relationship between his eldest daughters’ relationship and experiences difficulty assessing the nature of it. He has remarked that

[t]he girls were close especially Lizzie and Jane. Especially Lizzie and Jane. There was the root of his discomfort. Lizzie and Jane. Jane and Lizzie. His two innocent, loving and best loved daughters. Except things had changed in the Bennett household and he did not know what to do. He did not know what normal sisterly behaviour was and what was something more. (Asimov, “Duets Again”)

Mr Bennet suspects that his two eldest daughter are inappropriately close and physical with each other. This turn of events already indicates that the story is written within a contemporary, heteronormative framework, as a close, even physical, bond between sisters would not have been suspicious in Austen’s age. However, this fic also expresses a certain degree of knowledge about the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society. Mr Bennet “knew women could be intimate with each other; he was a widely read gentleman and knew much of the world. He had a few spicy books with illustrations that had fuelled the images he had of his daughters”. Here, the writer displays some knowledge of the widespread phenomenon of female same-sex sexuality in eighteenth-century erotic literature. Mr. Bennet becomes determined to find out whether his suspicion is grounded and follows his daughters when the rest of the family is on an outing. He witnesses Jane and Elizabeth having sex, upon which he himself becomes aroused and has to relieve himself in his study. The actions in this second fic are described much more explicitly and graphically, representing the more advanced stage the affair between the two sisters has developed to. Probably unwittingly, a widespread eighteenth-century trope is invoked here. According to Paul Englisch, voyeurism is a commonplace in libertine literature and especially characteristic of the pornographic novel (Englisch
Eeckhout 63

631). This theme also features repeatedly in for example Venus in the Cloister or The Nun in her Smock and Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure. Sexual arousal is derived from witnessing sexual interaction of other people. These voyeuristic scenes can be considered meta-narrative comments on the reader’s standpoint. The realistic narrative in its turn can possibly provoke titillation and sexual stimulation in the reader, who becomes a secondary voyeur. The very open and striking depiction of sexual actions in this fic clearly exceeds the discourse of female friendship. The idea that is evoked here is that of two women having sex with the aim of arousing a man. This way, the male ascendancy takes over again. Moreover, the theme of voyeurism has long been associated with same-sex sexuality, and, hence, this fic also does not succeed in doing much more than repeating literary commonplaces.

“Never Enough” by Barneyrockz describes Charlotte Lucas paying a visit to Elizabeth. They take a walk together to discuss the nature and future of their relationship now Charlotte is engaged to Mr. Collins. Elizabeth is devastated by the news and the description of her emotional reaction brings to mind the discourse of romantic friends. Faderman explains how romantic friends sometimes considered their relationship exclusive and often felt jealous and betrayed when their partner developed a significant friendship or love relationship with another woman, and especially with a man (Faderman 84). In this particular case, Charlotte’s commitment to a man impedes their friendship and makes it impossible to continue their relationship. In addition, Charlotte states that the love they shared was not sufficient or complete enough to function as a full member of society, especially with regard to financial autonomy. "I'm sorry but love just isn't enough. Love, alone, is never enough." (Barneyrockz).

‘Because he offered security. Because it frees my parents from having to provide for me. But,’ Charlotte took a deep breath, ‘mostly because we both knew that this would not last forever.’ Elizabeth turned away again and allowed herself the luxury of a single tear.

(Barneyrockz)

This narrative presents a relationship between two women and a marriage to a man as mutually exclusive and, thus, also relies heavily on the present-day dichotomized framework which dictates that a woman, married to a man, cannot maintain a passionate and loving relationship or friendship with another woman.

The second fan fic about Charlotte and Elizabeth by Lefaym (at the time of the analysis still an unfinished fic or work in progress, “WIP”), takes a similar stance toward their relationship and intimacy. This short story also follows the original plot which states that Charlotte marries Mr. Collins. Similar to the previous fic, Charlotte displays a pragmatic acceptance of her situation.
However, it becomes clear that the marriage was arranged by Lady Catherine, and that Charlotte’s heart is still with Elizabeth. This desire, however, is banned to the realm of fantasy and masturbation. The fact that Charlotte’s desire is displaced to secrecy and onanism indicates that the love and sexual desire of a woman for another woman is something that should be covered and ignored.

Completely opposed to the narrative of the original story, which describes how Miss Bingley is envious and hateful towards Jane Bennet, “Miss Bingley regrets” deals with the desire Caroline Bingley feels for Jane. The second person narration creates a certain distance, but it cannot be denied that Caroline Bingley is overcome with love for Jane. “You find yourself counting each treasured smile and then comes the moment when Miss Bennet looks to you with—dare you think it?—admiration. You decide to invite her to visit you on her own at the first convenient occasion” (Biichan). The narrative hints at the obligation of a heterosexual marriage, even though Caroline unmistakably has fallen in love with Jane. However, this fic is peculiar and unique in that it hints at the possibility of two people getting married simply to soothe their family and community, as Caroline considers a union with Darcy, even though she is not in love with him.

You aren’t in love with Darcy. You never pretended to be. But he’s a handsome enough man of good breeding and no little wealth—not to mention the Seat in Commons—and so ever since Charles introduced you to Darcy, you’ve felt proprietorial. As a woman you must marry and if you must marry you certainly could do much worse than Mr Darcy. (Biichan)

Unfortunately, when Darcy falls in love with Elizabeth Bennet, those plans are also thwarted.

And of course, Darcy had never seemed to be all that interested in women. You’d liked that, too. Perhaps he wouldn’t bother you after you bore him a son. That was before. Now, however, he is head-over-heels in love with Eliza Bennet and it is all you can do not to scream. You feel betrayed, bamboozled, bereft. You weren’t in love with Darcy, but he was yours and now? Now your only hope from that quarter is that Darcy is able to keep a clear enough head to remember that the wretched girl has no dowry to speak of and low relations. (Biichan)

When it becomes clear that Jane is in love with her brother, Caroline is very upset and wants to flee the company at Netherfield Hall and leave for London. For a moment Caroline shifts her interest to Mr. Darcy’s younger sister, Georgiana, but since she can only imagine this well-off young lady as a suitable partner for her brother, she has to let go of this possibility as well.

Except. Except Georgiana isn’t yours any more than Jane was. She, too, is for Charles. You’ve talked it over with Darcy. It’s a very good match. She has money, a good name, and a kind heart. He has even more money, a name that will be better for her wearing it, and an even kinder heart. And Georgiana, at least, lacks useless younger sisters for Charles to someday provide for. And you are not in love with Georgiana nor lover to. That is the most important
reason why. You could be. Oh, you could be. But you will not allow yourself to cuckold Charles nor be cuckolded by him. (You will not, you cannot let that future you glimpsed at the Netherfield Ball come true. For Charles' sake, for the sake of your sanity, you cannot let him marry the woman you love, whoever she may be. You cannot let yourself love the woman he will marry, no matter how easy or tempting.) There are other woman in London. Perhaps you will find someone else.

(Biichan)

The way Caroline Bingley expresses her feelings for Jane, Georgiana and another, original, female character, a certain “Miss Elliot”, and the relational alternatives she imagines echo the Austenian thinking in terms of acceptable love relationships between women.

“Wedding is Destiny, and Hanging Likewise” is the first part of a three part series “An agreeable companion” that consists of two fics and one fan art drawing (amateur art based on a specific TV show, movie or book that is not owned or created by the artist) of Pride and Prejudice. “Wedding is Destiny” is an example of a fan fic that develops a certain novel character that is not given much attention in the original text. In this story, the character of Mary Bennet is central. Mary, the third daughter in the Bennet family, is least included in the novel, but in this fic she is developed far beyond her limited role in the book. After her older sisters get married and leave the house, she becomes the companion of Miss Anne de Bourgh. The author of the fic uses her personal experience with chronic illness to develop the plot in which Anne is chronically ill and needs a companion to assist her and read to her. Mary, living at Pemberley with Mr. Darcy and his sister Georgiana, meets Miss de Bourgh, who visits her cousins. After getting to know each other better, they agree that Mary will become Anne’s new companion and move to Rosings Park with her. At first the relation between the blabbermouth Mary and the somewhat arrogant and distant Miss de Bourgh is rather difficult and awkward. However, soon they acquire more insight in each other’s character. On several occasions Miss de Bourgh expresses a wish to remain unmarried. In addition, when Mr. and Mrs. Collins have a son, Mary is surprised by Anne’s unexpected reaction.

‘I suppose I did not ever really let myself believe it. She is fully bound to him now.’ She sniffed and wiped her eyes and looked far more miserable than one would expect for someone whose friend had just successfully given birth to a much awaited child.

(sqbr)

Furthermore, Mr. Darcy occasionally hints at his cousin’s peculiar preferences: “He turned to Miss Bennet ‘Do you know, when she was a girl, Anne declared that not only had she no interest in marrying any man her parents chose, but that she would marry a woman?’” (sqbr). Mary is astonished by this seemingly trivial remark, and Darcy continues:

‘Yes, I believe she had someone in particular in mind too, a pretty young friend of the family by the name of Miss Finch. Lady Catherine would never have approved the match though,
‘her portion was far too small.’ He grinned ‘There’s a thought: we should get Darcy to settle some large sum on you, then I am sure there could be no objection to your suit. After all you are not only a woman but part of the family now, and are already accustomed to all of Anne’s peccadilloes.’

Even though Darcy is clearly joking, the author of this fan fic presents this topic as being remarkably discussable. Thus, I argue, this fic combines the present-day conception of relationships and sexuality, in the comments of the society and family members who stimulate both young ladies to find a man, and the Austenian idea, not distinguishing between male or female relations, as both Mary and Anne value their friendship equal to a heterosexual marriage. In addition, their romantic friendship is fairly unproblematically characterised by physicality and tenderness as well. The young women share a bed and sincerely enjoy each other’s close proximity (see appendix 3).

“London” is the second fic by sqbr that deals with a close relationship between Mary Bennet and Anne de Bourgh. It is told from the perspective of Lydia, the youngest of the Bennet sisters, who visits her sister Elizabeth in London and surprisingly finds Mary to be there as well. Cleary the Bennet sisters do not enjoy each other’s company: Lydia feels superior and behaves patronizing towards her sister. Mary, on the other hand, is very happy in her position as Miss de Bourgh’s companion and she loves spending time with her alone, and, as it turns out, Anne de Bourgh grows very fond of her as well.

“Would you like me to escort you back to your room? Since you are tired.”
"Thank you, Mi…Mary, but I have slept enough these last few days for a lifetime. If you are willing I would rather sit here quietly with you.”
Mary smiled. “I can think of nothing better.”

In addition, the nature of their relationship and friendship is explicitly commented upon (see appendix 4). This clearly indicates an awareness of the possibility of (romantic) friendship between women.

Of the corpus of femslash fics I have analysed, “Wedding is Destiny” and “London” come closest to the discourse of romantic friendship of Austen’s time. The relationship between Mary and Anne starts off as a companionship, a relation between an assistant and an employer, a superior. It is made clear that both young women have a very different rank in society and the disparity in standing is explicitly commented upon as complicating their initial contact. However, the narrative reveals how their relationship evolves into a loving bond between two equals, and this is done without necessarily referring to a possible sexual nature or explicitly depicting physical aspect.
3.2.2.2. Conclusion
The corpus of fan fics I chose to analyse generally depicts a lesbian relationship (or affair) and lesbian sexuality as we would conceive of them today. In addition, these relationships are more often than not put in opposition to the acceptable heterosexual love for a man. This suggests that female relationships are classified according to a strict binary framework and conceived in strict opposition to a heterosexual identity. In his response to Toker’s article, Garcha claims that “[n]ovels such as Sense and Sensibility and Emma obviously […] conduct their heroines (and their readers) toward the triumphant genital heterosexuality enshrined in the institution of marriage” (Garcha 288), and it has become clear in the analyses above that this is also the case for many of the fics that are discussed. It can be argued that the fics I have analysed in this paper do not consistently challenge the discursive categories that circulate in contemporary society, such as the dichotomy between heterosexual-homosexual and the continuum of sexual preferences. This means that the prevailing assumption that slash writing is by definition a subversive genre is flawed. In fact, many femslash fics echo the binary framework that dominates contemporary conception of relationships and sexuality. However, this observation has to be nuanced, and it should be pointed out that some fan writers also reproduce certain features of Faderman’s concept of romantic friendship, albeit in a different context. A clear example that attempts are being made within fan fiction writing to sidestep today’s rigid view on same-sex relationships and sexuality is the fact that some fics that describe profound friendships, without any mention of sexuality, are also listed under the designation of femslash. This indicates that fan writing acknowledges the romantic nature of Austenian close friendships. Thus, femslash texts can be considered subversive at times, but femslash writers do not reproduce Austen’s categories as such to overthrow the discursive structures we use today. Instead, they reimagine Austen’s novels in modern terms, still departing from the contemporary discursive framework along a continuum that includes homosexual-homosocial and heterosocial-homosocial relations. Finally, within femslash writing we can discern between fics that are written spontaneously, with the primary aim of titillating, and qualitatively well-considered fan writing, which adds something valuable to the original. Remarkably, the fics that can be considered qualitatively good are also the ones that challenge the present-day commonplaces by incorporating Austenian romantic friendships, whereas the more suggestive and even provocative fics are the ones that fall back on the dichotomous heteronormative framework.
4. Comparison: Austen novels versus Austen-based fan fiction

In this section, I will compare my findings concerning the analyses of various instances of female homosocial bonds in different literary genres. I will present and discuss the similarities and differences between the homosocial (sororal) bonds in Jane Austen’s novels and femslash in fan fiction writing. Concerning the first component of the comparison, I have verified the hypothesis of the subversive character of Austen’s writing. I have investigated whether the female bonds in three of Austen’s novels can be considered early representations of lesbianism avant-la-lettre, checking whether these relationships are of a homosexual nature, before the Foucauldian insights. With regard to Sense and Sensibility, several scholars have argued that a certain erotic tension characterises the relationship between the Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne. However, following the analysis in section 2.3.1 and Sedgwick’s theory contentions about homosocial relationships, I concluded that this sororal bond can be defined as homosocial. However, this does not devalue the importance and intensity this relationship is characterised by. Elinor especially deems the relationship with her sister to be invaluable, as is demonstrated by her attempts to dissuade Marianne from starting a passionate relationship with Willoughby, and her very strong emotional reaction to Marianne’s illness and recovery. Next, Pride and Prejudice repeatedly invokes the discourse of the romantic friendship. I have applied the theories of Faderman and Girard to the different relationships in this novel. I argue that the female-female bonds in Pride and Prejudice can be defined as Girardian triangular connections. Several female characters enter into near-romantic friendships with a man’s sister in order to establish a basis for a love relationship and marriage with the man. Hence, it seems that a profound relationship between a woman and the sister of the man she is partial to is a necessary condition for the initial attraction to develop into a relationship. Emma, finally, features the clearest example of a romantic friendship. The relationship between Emma and Harriet displays many of the characteristics that were attributed to romantic friendship by Faderman, for example Emma’s jealousy towards the men Harriet is interested in and her attempts at persuading Harriet to reject marriage proposals. In conclusion, the female-female relationships that are represented in the Austen novels that are analysed in this paper can be characterized as being of a homosocial nature. The homosocial relationship was quite common and at the time not questionable or reprehensible. Even though this does not diminish the importance and intensity of the connections between people of the same sex, talking about these bonds as lesbian relations or homosexuality would be anachronistic and annul the significant work of Foucault.

It is generally assumed that fan fiction is a subversive form of writing (Derecho 72). I have investigated whether Jane Austen femslash is stereotyped or has a subversive value, by analysing
seven longer fics. The succeeding fics *Duets* and *Duets Again* describe the development of the sexual relationship between Jane and Elizabeth Bennet. However, the narrative does not challenge today’s dichotomous heteronormative discourse, as the initial desire is roused by Elizabeth thinking about Darcy, and Elizabeth and Jane’s relationship is explicitly placed in opposition to a normative heterosexual relationship. In both “Never Enough” and an unfinished fic, the reader is confronted with the separation of two female friends. When in “Never Enough” Charlotte Lucas informs Elizabeth that she is marrying Mr. Collins, Elizabeth’s reaction echoes the discourse of romantic friendship as described by Faderman; she is disappointed, very emotional, and jealous. However, the story as a whole is written from a heteronormative point of view, which is clear from Charlotte’s acceptance of the marriage and the fact that their relationship can no longer be maintained, as it probably would have been the case in Austen’s time. The unfinished story, then, focuses on Charlotte, who in this fic also keeps a resigned attitude concerning her compulsory marriage. In addition, when she returns home, she locks herself in a room and masturbates while thinking about Elizabeth. There is little romance involved, as she merely uses the thought of Elizabeth’s pleasing appearance to get aroused and elicit sexual responses her husband cannot bring about. “Miss Bingley Regrets” recounts how Caroline Bingley is in love with Jane Bennet, but realises a relationship between two women is unacceptable, and cannot possibly have the same value as a marriage to a man. This clearly indicates that the story is set in a society in which relationships are determined by a heterosexual norm. Finally, the diptych “Wedding is Destiny, and Hanging Likewise” and “London” develops a plotline that concerns two characters not extensively addressed in the original novel. In these fics, Mary Bennet becomes the assistant, then companion, and finally romantic friend of Anne de Bourgh. These stories describe two women getting to know each other and becoming romantic friends, without comparing this newly established bond to a heterosexual relationship or without calling forth sexual images. Thus, these fics return to the Austenian framework, invoking non-reprehensible meaningful female-female relationships. In conclusion, perhaps surprisingly, I have found that femslash fan fiction is not by definition subversive. Many fics reproduce the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy that is prevalent in today’s society and dominant in many other discourses, such as the political, social, and cultural. However, some fics do have some characteristics that point to homosocial bonds, similar to those that existed in Austen’s time. These fics do not simply address female-female relationships from a purely sexual angle, nor define them in opposition to female-male relations, and can hence be identified as being subversive.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society regarded close female same-sex relationships as acceptable and even socially advantageous. No binary split between heterosexuality and homosexuality existed at the time. Also, it cannot be argued that Austen’s writing is subversive.
within this framework. The female relationships she depicts in her novels are strictly homosocial. The profound friendships between female characters display characteristics of what has been described as romantic friendship. In addition, fan fiction also does not consistently try to overcome today’s dichotomous discourse that dominates sexuality and love relations. More often than not, fics fall back on the heterosexual norm. Only a small number of fics that are written with an Austenian framework in mind result in subversive and progressive writing. It is only a small part of fan fiction writing, one that returns to a pre-foucauldian discourse in today’s dichotomous framework, that succeeds in presenting subversive writing.
5. General Conclusion

In this thesis I set out to map the similarities and differences between the representation of female same-sex relationships in three of Austen’s novels and Austen-based femslash. With regard to the Austen novels, I have examined the hypothesis whether Austen’s work can be considered subversive, and whether the female-female bonds can be defined as lesbian avant-la-lettre. Concerning fan fiction, I have equally looked into the subversive character of this popular form of contemporary writing. In order to do so, I have analysed and compared three of Austen’s major novels and seven Austen-based femslash fics.

First, I looked into three important theories by influential scholars: Michel Foucault, Lillian Faderman and René Girard. Foucault has delineated the history of sexuality, especially describing the development of the discourse of homosexuality. He has stated that a separate new category, the homosexual, only emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century. Even though the discourse of sexuality began to develop from the seventeenth century onwards, the true homosexual identity was only fully established in the twentieth century. Faderman, then, has developed an alternative concept to describe the loving relationships and friendships that existed between two women that avoids using the term homosexual or lesbian, since Foucault has pointed out that these cannot be applied to the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Faderman refers to profound female-female bonds as romantic friendships. She has argued that these relationships were characterized by features and practices that later became strictly associated with normative heterosexual love, such as vehement expressions of their strong feelings for each other or jealousy when one of the friends entered in another relationship, especially with a man. Finally, Girard has developed the notion of the homosocial to describe same-sex connections in which two men who are interested in the same woman engage in a strong homosocial relationship, in the context of a patriarchal marital economy.

These three theories are central in my research, as I have subsequently used them to analyse Austen’s writing and the corpus of femslash fics. I have examined a couple of scenes in three of Austen’s novels and determined that, following Foucault, it would be wrong to describe the relationships between Austen’s female characters as homosexual. However, several of these relationships display characteristics that fit within the conceptual discourse of romantic friendship and can therefore be identified as homosocial. Following Girard’s description of the erotic triangular relationship, I argue that especially Emma and Pride and Prejudice feature examples of reversed triangular homosocial relationships. There are two possible instances of a reversed homosocial triangle: one where the close connection between two women has developed out of jealousy...
because one of the friends engages in another friendship; the other possibility is two women becoming close friends because they are partial to the same man, similar to the original erotic triangle described by Girard. Furthermore, I have argued that Emma is a clear example of a Stendhalian “vaniteuse”, as her desire is directed towards a person, in this case Mr. Knightley, whom is already desired by the person she admires, Harriet. Finally, femslash fan fiction proved to be much less homosocially embedded than initially anticipated. Many fics echo the contemporary dominant hetero/homo divide and even proclaim a clear heteronormative stance. As it simply reiterates today’s society’s prevalent discourse on sexuality, this type of writing is hardly subversive. However, some fics invoke features or include characters that are typical of the concept of romantic friendship. These fics describe significant relationships between two women, without incorporating a sexual plotline or putting this connection in stark opposition to a heterosexual normative relationship.

I bring this paper to a close by saying that Jane Austen’s novels and contemporary fan fiction writing based on Austen are more alike than one might expect. It is impossible to prove a causal relationship between the relationships Austen describes in her novels and contemporary fan fiction based on those novels, but both representations of female same-sex relations cannot be considered subversive in their respective contemporary context. Austen’s writing is undoubtedly pre-foucauldian; this means that there is no display of any awareness of the later split between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Hence, I am not claiming that Austen’s work is characterized by “a utopian bisexual erotic pluralism” (Sedgwick, "Masturbating" 824). Austen could not have been aware of different sexual preferences. Her exploration of love and sexual tension between women cannot be regarded as an opposition against the dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality that arose only much later, since the female homosocial relations she stages in her novels were at the time standard and accepted. However, Austen is not favouring a romantic ideal or zealously proclaiming heterosexual love and arranged marriages either. I claim that the relationships between the female characters in Austen’s novels can often be read as romantic friendships, and that it is by focusing her narratives on these profound female-female bonds that Austen critiques the patriarchal society. I argue that the dynamics between the “female homosocial networks in relation to the more visible and spectacularized, more narratable, but les intime, heterosexual plots” is what makes Austen’s novels so enthralling, entertaining and interesting (Sedgwick, "Masturbating" 824). The female homosocial entails love, tenderness and intimacy, and some of the most intimate moments in Austen’s writing occur between two women. However, even though the original novels do not feature sexuality, the relationships described often get a sexual load in fan fiction writing.
It has become clear that fan fiction authors who base their fics on Austen’s novels reinterpret her stories from a contemporary framework in which heterosexuality and homosexuality are well-established. It is very likely that fan fiction reflects today’s ways of dealing with sexuality, rather than opposing to them. Fan fiction writers do not speculate about what Austen could have written, as this would be inspired by the “why not”-fallacy, which is also condemned in academia. Fan fiction writing prompted by the question “what Austen could have wanted to write” would be based on an intentional fallacy, even though hypothetical. I propose an understanding of the practice of fan fiction writing as trying to find points in the text, certain gaps, which fan fiction writers can then fill with their preferred scenarios, thus presenting alternative plotlines that ‘should’ have been written according to them. Even though Austen’s novels prove not to feature lesbian characters, and even though femslash is not always subversive, I conclude this thesis by stating that the merits of fan fiction lies in the fact that writing and reading fan fiction, and especially femslash, raises awareness for a homosocial reading of the original novels, and this is something worth exploring in greater depth in later research.
6. Notes

1. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, volume 1: The Will to knowledge*. Part III: Scientia Sexualis. Foucault elaborates on how the discourse on sex (sexual truth, because sex is considered a problem of truth) is produced in two ways. *Scientia sexualis* is the way the truth of sex is produced today, through confession:

> Let us consider things in broad historical perspective: breaking with the traditions of *ars erotica*, our society has equipped itself with a *scientia sexualis*. To be more precise, it has pursued the task of producing true discoursed concerning sex, and this by adapting—not without difficulty— the ancient procedure of confession to the rules of the scientific discourse. (Foucault, 67-68).

In the erotic art, or *ars erotica*, on the contrary, “truth is drawn from pleasure itself” (Foucault 57). In this case, truth is “understood as a practice and accumulated as experience” (Foucault 57).

2. I borrow the term “passionless woman” and “passionlessness” from Sally O'Driscoll, who in her turn gets it from Nancy Cott (O'Driscoll 125). Cott uses these terms to convey the view that women lacked sexual aggressiveness, that their sexual appetites contributed a very minor part (if any at all) to their motivations, that lustfulness was simply uncharacteristic. The concept of passionlessness represented a cluster of ideas about the comparative weight of a woman’s carnal nature and her moral nature; it indicated more about drives and temperaments than about actions and is to be understood more metaphorically than literally.

> (Cott 220)

3. Claudia Johnson points out that “[a]ccording to the *Supplement* to the *OED*, the word ‘Janeite’ entered the language in 1896, but the self-consciously hyperbolic zeal for her works surely predates this” (Johnson, "Austen Cults and Cultures" 224).
As Elinor and Marianne were walking together the next morning the latter communicated a piece of news to her sister, which in spite of all that she knew before of Marianne's imprudence and want of thought, surprised her by its extravagant testimony of both. Marianne told her, with the greatest delight, that Willoughby had given her a horse, one that he had bred himself on his estate in Somersetshire, and which was exactly calculated to carry a woman. Without considering that it was not in her mother's plan to keep any horse, that if she were to alter her resolution in favour of this gift, she must buy another for the servant, and keep a servant to ride it, and after all, build a stable to receive them, she had accepted the present without hesitation, and told her sister of it in raptures. "He intends to send his groom into Somersetshire immediately for it," she added, "and when it arrives we will ride every day. You shall share its use with me. Imagine to yourself, my dear Elinor, the delight of a gallop on some of these downs."

Most unwilling was she to awaken from such a dream of felicity to comprehend all the unhappy truths which attended the affair; and for some time she refused to submit to them. As to an additional servant, the expense would be a trifle; Mama she was sure would never object to it; and any horse would do for HIM; he might always get one at the park; as to a stable, the merest shed would be sufficient. Elinor then ventured to doubt the propriety of her receiving such a present from a man so little, or at least so lately known to her. This was too much. 

"You are mistaken, Elinor," said she warmly, "in supposing I know very little of Willoughby. I have not known him long indeed, but I am much better acquainted with him, than I am with any other creature in the world, except yourself and mama. It is not time or opportunity that is to determine intimacy;—it is disposition alone. Seven years would be insufficient to make some people acquainted with each other, and seven days are more than enough for others. I should hold myself guilty of greater impropriety in accepting a horse from my brother, than from Willoughby. Of John I know very little, though we have lived together for years; but of Willoughby my judgment has long been formed."

Elinor thought it wisest to touch that point no more. She knew her sister's temper. Opposition on so tender a subject would only attach her the more to her own opinion. But by an appeal to her affection for her mother, by representing the inconveniences which that indulgent mother must draw on herself, if (as would probably be the case) she consented to this increase of establishment, Marianne was shortly subdued; and she promised not to tempt her mother to such imprudent kindness by mentioning the offer, and to tell Willoughby when she saw him next, that it must be declined.

She was faithful to her word; and when Willoughby called at the cottage, the same day, Elinor heard her express her disappointment to him in a low voice, on being obliged to forego the acceptance of his present. The reasons for this alteration were at the same time related, and they were such as to make further entreaty on his side impossible. His concern however was very apparent; and after expressing it with earnestness, he added, in the same low voice,—"But, Marianne, the horse is still yours, though you cannot use it now. I shall keep it only till you can claim it. When you leave Barton to form your own establishment in a more lasting home, Queen Mab shall receive you."

This was all overheard by Miss Dashwood; and in the whole of the sentence, in his manner of pronouncing it, and in his addressing her sister by her Christian name alone, she instantly saw an intimacy so decided, a meaning so direct, as marked a perfect agreement between them. From that moment she doubted not of their being engaged to each other; and the belief of it created no other surprise than that she, or any of their friends, should be left by tempers so frank, to discover it by accident.
Before the house-maid had lit their fire the next day, or the sun gained any power over a cold, gloomy morning in January, Marianne, only half-dressed, was kneeling against one of the window-seats for the sake of all the little light she could command from it, and writing as fast as a continual flow of tears would permit her. In this situation, Elinor, roused from sleep by her agitation and sobs, first perceived her; and after observing her for a few moments with silent anxiety, said, in a tone of the most considerate gentleness, 'Marianne, may I ask?' 'No, Elinor,' she replied, 'ask nothing; you will soon know all.' The sort of desperate calmness with which this was said, lasted no longer than while she spoke, and was immediately followed by a return of the same excessive affliction. It was some minutes before she could go on with her letter, and the frequent bursts of grief which still obliged her, at intervals, to withhold her pen, were proofs enough of her feeling how more than probable it was that she was writing for the last time to Willoughby.'

It was very dark in Miss de Bourgh's chambers. She often rested during the day, and so had very thick curtains that blocked the light of the sun almost completely. The only illumination was the guttering remains of the fire, casting a weak orange glow that reflected dimly off the furniture and left the bed in virtual darkness. Miss de Bourgh was a dark and indistinct form to Mary's left, curled in on herself on the far side of the bed. Mary had never liked sharing a bed with her sisters (nor they with her) and Miss de Bourgh felt that it was an insult to both Mary's virtue and Colonel Fitzwilliam's honour that Lady Catherine insisted on Mary and Miss de Bourgh sharing a bed during his stay. Yet Mary liked sharing a bed with Miss de Bourgh, and part of her wanted nothing more than to curl up beside her and go back to sleep.

This left Mary trapped sitting up in the cold with no covering beyond her nightgown. She looked at Miss de Bourgh, trying to decide if there was any way to move without disturbing her. Her hair glinted a dull copper-red in the light of the fire, and seeing that some had fallen into her face, Mary gently pushed it back with her fingers. Miss de Bourgh's face was colder than Mary liked. Deciding that there was no help for it, Mary shuffled back down under the blankets and went back to sleep. Mary woke again a while later to an awareness of Miss de Bourgh stirring beside her. She had wrapped one arm across Mary's stomach and nestled her head against Mary's chest. Miss de Bourgh opened her eyes and smiled at Mary sleepily before seeming to become aware of her position, at which point she went a little pink and sat up quickly.

Anne smiled again and Mary was struck by how beautiful she was. And she had said that she and Mary were friends! The thought filled Mary with happiness. Since it felt like the right thing to do, Mary leaned across and kissed her.

Miss de Bourgh gasped and pulled away. "I am sorry," said Mary. "I did not mean... I have been too forward. Forgive me." She blushed and shifted back across the sofa. Miss de Bourgh's face had become flushed again. "There is no need to apologise," she said. "I was only surprised."
"No, indeed, I have every need to apologise," said Mary. She could still feel her cheeks burning. What had she been thinking? Her motivations seemed hazy and insufficient in retrospect. "You have been very kind to me, Miss de Bourgh, and I... I must always hold in the forefront of my mind that when two people are thrown together, as we are, there must naturally develop a certain amount of familiarity, and of course a woman of your rank has an obligation to act with the concerns with your dependants in mind, which may sometimes..." She took a breath. "One of the key features of the English language, it is often said, is the complex range of meanings which a single word may manifest depending on context. The... the word "friend" for example may refer in some contexts to a person to whom one is joined in mutual benevolence and intimacy, but it may also simply refer to a person without hostile intentions. It behooves me, as it behooves all of us, to remain vigilant to such double meanings, lest we cause offence or injury."
8. Works cited


