

# THE LIST EFFECT IN JANE AUSTEN: PREAMBLES

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- **ABSTRACT:** No form of writing appears more matter-of-fact, pedestrian, and prosthetic (as long as memory is concerned) than the list. The logic and the rhetorical character of the list is not that of ordinary prose or flowing speech. Lists have attracted notable commentary and full-length volumes from anthropologists, philosophers, and literary theorists. The most crucial stylistic manifestation of the mobility of things and words in day-to-day petty irony and sarcasm may find its appearance in brief passages, and Austen succinctly alludes to it in the form of lists in her novels.
- **KEYWORDS:** Lists. Jane Austen. Novels.

Do you really believe, goes the objection, that Mallarmé consciously parceled out his sentence so that it could be read two different ways, with each object capable of changing into a subject and vice versa, without our being able to arrest this movement? Without our being able, faced with this “alternative sail”, to decide whether the text is “listing to one side or the other”. (DERRIDA, 1992, p. 179, emphases in the original).

For example: (I) The “yes” in question form: *oui? Allo?* as in “Yes? Buck Mulligan said. What did I say?” (14); (z) the “yes” of rhythmic breathing in the form of monologic self-approbation, as in “Two in the back bench whispered. Yes. They knew ... .” (30), or “yes, I must” (44); (3) the “yes” of obedience, as in “Yes, sir” (44); (4) the “yes” marking agreement on a fact, as in “O yes, but I prefer Q. Yes, but W is wonderful” (46); (5) the “yes” of the passionate breathing of desire, as in “Be near her ample bedwarmed flesh. Yes, yes” (63); (6) the “yes” of calculatedly and precisely determined breathing, as in “yes, exactly” (8r); (7) the “yes” of absentminded politeness, as in “Yes, yes” (88); (8) the “yes” of emphatic confirmation, as in “Indeed yes, Mr. Bloom agreed” (103); (9) the “yes” of open approval, as in “Yes, Red Murray agreed” (r19); (o) the “yes” of insistent confidence, as in “Yes, yes. They went under” (135). This list is in its essence open, and the distinction between explicit monologue and dialogue can also lend itself to all those parasitizing and grafts which are the most difficult to systematize. (DERRIDA, 1992, p. 307).

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The transcendental (presupposed in and necessary to experience, as in Immanuel Kant) and rather obscure (because not extensively studied) power of lists in Jane Austen's writings deserves closer examination. Her novels have been adapted to film and television, adopted by fanfiction writers, adjusted to the 21st century media craze in all its forms, and discussed in reviews, a list-like genre: of good and bad characteristics, which go back to the time the author was alive and which nowadays contribute to the rediscovery and updated reputation of past authors. No form of writing appears more matter-of-fact, pedestrian, and prosthetic (as long as memory is concerned) than the list. The logic and the rhetorical character of the list is not that of ordinary prose of flowing speech. Lists have attracted notable commentary and full-length volumes from anthropologists, philosophers, and literary theorists, including Michel Foucault, Umberto Eco, Philippe Hamon, Madeleine Jeay, Bernard Sève, Leo Spitzer, Jack Goody, Claude Lévy-Strauss and Jacques Derrida, among others. The most crucial stylistic manifestation of the mobility of things and words in day-to-day petty irony and sarcasm finds its appearance in brief passages, and I will briefly discuss the extent to which Austen succinctly alludes to it in the form of lists in her novels.

Readers of Austen will instantly recognize this passage in *Emma*:

Emma has been meaning to read more ever since she was twelve years old. I have seen a great many lists of her drawing-up at various times of books that she meant to read regularly through – and very good lists they were – very well chosen, and very neatly arranged – sometimes alphabetically, and sometimes by some other rule. The list she drew up when only fourteen – I remember thinking it did her judgment so much credit, that I preserved it some time; and I dare say she may have made out a very good list now. But I have done with expecting any course of steady reading from Emma. She will never submit to any thing requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding. Where Miss Taylor failed to stimulate, I may safely affirm that Harriet Smith will do nothing. – You never could persuade her to read half so much as you wished. – You know you could not. (AUSTEN, 1841, p. 30-31).

This excerpt exemplifies one of the established hallmarks of Austen's literary practice, the undetailed list of material objects featuring unspecific designation, quantification, and classification. Moreover, the interjection of narrative comments and repartee dialogues in so many other parts of *Emma* could pass unnoticed by the unexperienced reader, who would fail to recognize that accumulation and enumeration within the context of human activity are recurrent activities. The concreteness of the objects or things listed reduces considerably, for the most part when they almost completely lack individuating characteristics. In this way, Austen's attempts at producing lists remove things from material, contextualized relationships and enclose them in a zone of heightened (in)visibility. This concomitance, (in)visibility, may remind the reader of the older meaning of the list as a boundary (among other things, between prose and poetry) and as a space where combat (in its use in epics to highlight might in war and state politics) takes place.

It is not surprising that the list is part of the blind spots of literary theory. Questions without immediate answers arise: can there be a style in the list or to what extent does the list cut the narrative/descriptive process and introduce an alternative fiction? However, there are relatively clear reasons regarding the use of the list and its effects in literary texts: the list deserves an analysis that takes into account its rhizomatic structure. Hence a plethora of list types (enumeration- vanities, enumeration- encryption, misleading- enumerations, Rabelaisian accumulations and so many others) and a myriad of possibilities that are used for reading the list-effect. For example, that the lists would serve a radical questioning of the encyclopedic ambition. In any case, the list breaks the discursivity of a given text to reactivate the semantic virtualities and invites us to a well-informed reading that proceeds through connections and disconnections or reconnections of all kinds. In short, when it appears in prose narratives, the list seems to disrupt the syntax and give freedom to words.

Some generalizations about lists, at first, seem to be true, such as that every list tries to conjure up the “volume” of the world, or that the list is fundamentally under tension, divided between the ordering of the now and the lack of order in the future, even the argument that the list is successful in presenting virtualities. Therefore, its propensity to enter reactively and automatically into “comical” ventures of sabotage and parody of all institutionalized knowledge or any authority is common in literature. Furthermore, the list proposes a renewed content when it calls us to see anew a certain thing or state of things, it does not presuppose any previous synthesis, but it takes shape in the process of constant updating. A sensitive and perceptive reader seems to apprehend a reality that is not given, but whose characteristics gradually appear in and between lists.

On the one hand, there is the temptation of totality (the inventory list as a census of properties) and, on the other hand, the protest against monumentality (including an almost imperceptible homogeneity) of form and structure; between the encyclopedic ambition and the activation of any system, there are the triggering events occasioned by certain lists. Here, then, we come upon a beautiful phenomenological description of the list: the intersection between the temptation of wholeness and the protestation against monumentality indicates very well where the list stands as a technique. The list is one of the ways to revitalize language as an active principle: it loosens the bonds of speech; it evokes the bondage of chains and challenges the demands of meaning. The list can proceed with “de-grammaticalization” of fixed speech in its repetitive series and, further, with its decontextualization: in this, it is close to textual collage. Primarily, the list has an organizing function, it responds to the orderly instinct of the mind. The list, sometimes chaotic, simulates, through its expansion and its volume of space, an encyclopedic saturation, the writing of memories or taxonomic inventories, and it responds, even when it utterly fails, immediately to the ambition of language to structure reality.

The confusing (or “confusional”) and sometimes confessional enumeration rooted in some lists is typical of this anti-encyclopedic stance. It is not designed for us to find ourselves or for us to discover more about a given “paper being” or fictional character, but for us to get lost. The structure, the order, the architecture, the taxonomy of the list present a reality tailored to human reason - a domesticated, limited, and registered

reality. The confusing effect of the list, a disoriented exposure, presents a reality in terms of unreason. It is fundamentally anomie, a disruption of order, failure of the intellect. In short, the always already incompleteness of the list is what prevents it from taking shape, being constructed as a final system. Its disordered accumulation always invites a supplement/follow-up and, therefore, implies a lack/incompletion.

The list shows the passage of the work towards the text, according to the terminology of Roland Barthes, that is, from an organic closed system to an infinite productivity whose closure can only be accidental, not essential. The list, according to Jack Goody (1979), can always be read as a generalized system of equivalences. The list is a privileged form of what Dennis Hollier (1993) called epistemological charity in that it indiscriminately mixes elements belonging to different orders in a fragmentary and anarchic space. This sense-form represents not only the absence of structure or its disintegration or disjunction, but it translates the illusoriness of the referential field into an equalization of sense and matter.

It is possible to address the list as a practice of composition or as an integrated figure in the text, as well as the list generating new modes or genres (narrative list or narrative based on the list). If the list is associated with verticality, once inserted in the narrative, it is based on a rhetorical practice (accumulation, enumeration, iterative repetition) and takes the form of a series implanted horizontally. The enumeration transposes and thus metamorphoses the content of the lists into a certain pre-text or paratext. The use of the list in its usual form is a sign that the narrative displays its margins.

Pushing the principles of the list to their extremes, the enumeration can appear as the place for a diffraction of voices, the accumulation can give way to infinite mazes as well as puzzles and the list, in general, can become the liminal space, *par excellence*. In this sense, the list is liminal, not just liminary (placed at the beginning or at the entrance, previous, preliminary or transitional), and it is connected to liminality, that is, a limit or a transitional point in the crossing that is made between structural organizations and counter-structural phenomena<sup>1</sup>. What is of immediate importance is that the list is a relevant category to think about issues related to societal rules, their subversion, and the liminality between characters of different social classes, especially those found at the end of the eighteenth century and in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the timeframe most associated with Austen and her novels.

Back to Austen's novel, *Emma*, one of the first things we, readers, notice is that that pile of "discarded" lists of books appears, on the page, as a list. No doubt, we too are looking for lists and even expect them by now. Lists have burgeoned, after all, in so many literary texts before and after Austen's literary career that another way of thinking about the list would be in terms of *parataxis*, which is the arrangement of elements in a coordinate rather than subordinate relationship: flat, horizontal, and sequential rather than hierarchical, vertical, or "internestling".

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<sup>1</sup> While studying a small tribe called Ndembu, in northeastern Zambia, the anthropologist Victor Turner (1920-1983) developed the notion of liminality. Turner shows that the Ndembu society is characterized by being a mixture of structural phenomena (political, legal, and economic) and counter-structural phenomena (arts, creeds, sports, ideologies, among others). The counter-structure is where the phenomenon of liminality is found.

I take *parataxis* in a different direction, toward something that is deeply personal at the heart of prose fiction: not only in Austen's particularly descriptive narratives, but also in her ubiquitous and notorious dialogues in general. I will use the term *paratactics* to describe a form that abandons both subordination and coordination, perhaps a figure closer to the more severe *asyndeton*, with its omission of conjunctions. According to Jenny Davidson (2015, p. 264-265, emphases in the original),

Emma may be the only novel of Austen's where objects (the piano, the sticking plaster, Emma's bootlace, Mr. Woodhouse's gruel) are animated with the kind of precision and liveliness associated with the "novelistic detail", and although Sir Walter Scott, in an unsigned piece that appeared in the *Quarterly Review* in October 1815, allowed the book "the merits of the Flemish school of painting", he also attributed its faults to "the minute detail which the author's plan comprehended".

The *asyndetic*, and almost *ekphrastic*, in the words of both Davidson and Scott, list is a bit more reticent and it just throws everything together, like Emma, the narrator tells us, discarding her lists of books because she lacks industry and patience.

Austen's heroines – Elizabeth, Emma, Fanny, Anne -- possess such inward freedom that their individualities cannot be repressed. Austen's art and artifice as a novelist is not to obsess much about the socioeconomic genesis of those fictional worlds, the iteration of her characters' fault-lines or about the semi-illusion of their inner or outer freedom. In Austen, irony becomes the instrument for invention, a conception of supposed inner freedom that centers upon a refusal to accept esteem except from one upon whom one has conferred esteem, which is a conception of a high degree of irony. Austen's heroines, with their attendant ironies, are a valuable example of how a landscape and an "innerscape" come to be invented: the whole matter is, in several respects, about the invention of scape, about the power to create something not from scratch, from *ex-nihilo*, but from preexistent materials, such as things, objects, words and people fetishized as objects. Scape, even when one finds oneself in the midst of it, is always, somehow, before us, facing us, and inviting us to face it. In *Emma*, the potential for "innerscapes" to appear in front of our eyes is reinforced by the frequent use of *hypotyposis*<sup>2</sup> and the repeated veiled injunctions to the reader to "picture the scene" as a list:

"I certainly must", said she. "This sensation of listlessness, weariness, stupidity, this disinclination to sit down and employ myself, this feeling of every thing's being dull and insipid about the house! – I must be in love; I should be the oddest creature in the world if I were not – for a few weeks at least. Well! evil to some is always good to others. I shall have many fellow-mourners for the ball, if not for Frank Churchill; but Mr. Knightley will be happy. He may spend the evening with his dear William Larkins now if he likes" (AUSTEN, 1841, p. 246).

I must, therefore, make a distinction between immediate scape, where the invasion threatens the viewer, distant scape, where the object of the gaze appears irretrievably

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<sup>2</sup> A vivid, picturesque description of scenes or events.

lost, and medium scape, where one can avoid both excessive presence and radical loss. Furthermore, I must add that lists saturate all of those scapes in Austen. Emma, who inhabits an intermediate scape from which she can conjure up the whole plot, of its shape and transformations, summons up these trite lists that stand both too far and too close. Too far from a land from which she has been uprooted, a land lost forever; too close to a place to which she has remained viscerally attached, a place to which she still belongs, body and soul.

Austen's anthologizing habit, either of an imagined landscape or of a supposed "innerscape", did not confine to conversations or to fashionable cant. The whole artifice naturally extended to typical novelistic situations, and there are several summary-treatments, of which the best examples concern Mrs. Smith in *Persuasion*. Having identified a state of mind analogous to perceptions of resilience, Austen proceeds to enumerate the elements that enable Mrs. Smith to achieve that frame of mind: a "disposition to be comforted" (AUSTEN, 2008, p. 94), along with the "[...] power of turning readily from evil to good, and of finding employment which carried her out of herself" (AUSTEN, 2008, p. 94). Even though a prominent enumerative-summarizing style is found in the novels, it is subdued in comparison with the extravagant exercises in dialogue and their tendency to the free indirect form. Behind these enumerative dialogues lies the tradition of fictional rhetoric. Austen illustrates the "disposition to be comforted" in Mrs. Smith's reflections on her state of health in comparison with her condition when she first arrived in Bath: "Then, she had indeed been a pitiable object – [...]. She had weathered it however, and could truly say that it had done her good. It had increased her comforts by making her feel herself to be in good hands" (AUSTEN, 2008, p. 94).

Like some novelists before and after Austen, who expanded on the exquisite, reasonable world, the author of *Persuasion* attempts to develop the ethical scape (denoting a specified type of scene) of the novel with the list, among many other techniques and artifices. Two modes of enumeration are involved, one implying exhaustiveness:

The disproportion in their fortune was nothing; it did not give her a moment's regret; but to have no family to receive and estimate him properly, nothing of respectability, of harmony, of good will to offer in return for all the worth and all the prompt welcome which met her in his brothers and sisters, was a source of as lively pain as her mind could well be sensible of under circumstances of otherwise strong felicity. She had but two friends in the world to add to his list, Lady Russell and Mrs Smith. To those, however, he was very well disposed to attach himself. Lady Russell, in spite of all her former transgressions, he could now value from his heart. While he was not obliged to say that he believed her to have been right in originally dividing them, he was ready to say almost everything else in her favour, and as for Mrs Smith, she had claims of various kinds to recommend her quickly and permanently (AUSTEN, 2011, p. 304).

The other mode intimates satirical selection, as we see in the three excerpts below:

Her knowledge of her father and Elizabeth inclined her to think that the sacrifice of one pair of horses would be hardly less painful than of both, and so on, through the whole list of Lady Russell's too gentle reductions. (AUSTEN, 2011, p. 47).

She had only navy lists and newspapers for her authority, but she could not doubt his being rich; and, in favour of his constancy, she had no reason to believe him married. (AUSTEN, 2011, p. 67).

When she could let her attention take its natural course again, she found the Miss Musgroves just fetching the Navy List (their own navy list, the first that had ever been at Uppercross), and sitting down together to pore over it, with the professed view of finding out the ships that Captain Wentworth had commanded. (AUSTEN, 2011, p. 102).

In fact, both modes are satirical and selective. The first type tends to hint at indefinite extension, but it may in practice be as brief as the second, concluding in a Rabelaisian or Swiftian “or the like” or some other rhetorical *et cetera*. The underlying paradox is that, given unlimited time, a diligent scholar may compile the complete catalogue with many lists in need of elaborate analysis in either *Persuasion* or in the other novels penned by Austen.

I, for one, tend to read the foregrounding of the list effect as part of a larger project of novelistic self-assertion in the novels of Austen in general, and especially in *Sense and Sensibility*. The following piece of fictional narrative presents itself as a discourse, a list, so to speak (especially with the repetition of annuity and its derivatives) that can engulf, and thus both represent and reflect upon, other modes of ordering and mediating social reality.

Certainly not; but if you observe, people always live for ever when there is an annuity to be paid them; and she is very stout and healthy, and hardly forty. An annuity is a very serious business; it comes over and over every year, and there is no getting rid of it. You are not aware of what you are doing. I have known a great deal of the trouble of annuities; for my mother was clogged with the payment of three to old superannuated servants by my father's will, and it is amazing how disagreeable she found it. Twice every year these annuities were to be paid; and then there was the trouble of getting it to them; and then one of them was said to have died, and afterwards it turned out to be no such thing. My mother was quite sick of it. Her income was not her own, she said, with such perpetual claims on it; and it was the more unkind in my father, because, otherwise, the money would have been entirely at my mother's disposal, without any restriction whatever. It has given me such an abhorrence of annuities, that I am sure I would not pin myself down to the payment of one for all the world. (AUSTEN, 1864, p. 11-12).

It is in *Sense and Sensibility* that this self-referential function of the covert catalogue of “annuities” and this list effect for the idea of exhaustiveness and expansion (especially with ending on “one for all the world”) are at their most conspicuous, and in this sense this novel is a special case. However, the general tendency to use the list to suggest credibility

connects to contemporaneous systems of thought, stages interiority (or what I called before “innerscape”), and negotiates the status of the novel as a text type saturated with enumerations and accumulations, where “[...] people who live forever when there is an annuity” recur throughout chapters, sections or long passages. From Emma’s “[...] great many lists of her drawing-up at various times of books that she meant to read” (AUSTEN, 1864, p. 11-12), to the comic calculations of Emma herself that she sensed something like listlessness (out of love), to Mrs. Smith’s dispositions to be comforted as well as her musings about the disproportions in their fortunes or the ridiculous fixation of Sir Walter Elliott in *Persuasion* on the Baronetage cataloguing the members of English nobility, lists as motifs, methods, and effects are indispensable elements for Austen’s exploration (with much satire and ridicule) of contemporaneous realities.

Lists feature in particularly conspicuous ways in Austen’s novels, and they are instrumental in establishing a sense of heightened attention to the details of the past and to the contemporaneous world. The power of the list, therefore, is on Eleanor’s side, allowing her and others, virtually and in a list-oriented fashion, to “sell” Marianne to satisfy “obligations”. However, the body’s denial, which some religious and philosophical systems endorse, reflects itself on a rather reductive enumeration or on a satirical and selective accumulation. This denial leads to blindness, to Marianne’s near-mortal illness before she is sacrificed in marriage, but those systems also mandate that Eleanor sacrifice her own and Edward’s happiness to their principles, as in the gratitude that secures Henry Tilney for Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*. Austen shows that the triumph of virtue, carried out as a list of satirical selection and reductive itemization, can exact a terrible price. Eleanor’s self-identification with stoic values is nearly overt in her reflections on Mr. Palmer’s snide, affected, and contemptuous manner.

Again, the function of the list in suggesting credibility, probability, and contemporaneity is already prominently visible in that Mr. Palmer was nice in his eating, uncertain in his hours; fond of his child, though affecting to slight it; and idled away the mornings at billiards, which ought to have been devoted to business. She liked him, however, upon the whole much better than she had expected on the small faults, so to speak, and in her heart was not sorry that she could like him no more. Epicurism or mere self-indulgence sums up this catalogue of Mr. Palmer’s characteristics, and Eleanor’s complacency in noting Edward’s opposite traits refracts endorsement of her own particular values.

There are many key moments in *Northanger Abbey*, which revolve around or short-circuit the effect of a list in the plot: “Dear creature! How much I am obliged to you; and when you have finished Udolpho, we will read the Italian together; and I have made out a list of ten or twelve more of the same kind for you” (AUSTEN, 2008, p. 175). As Dorothee Birke (2016, p. 300) pointed out, “Catherine Morland, the excitable protagonist, has been invited to stay at the old Abbey, where she hopes to find mystery and intrigue”. Naturally, the list is the chosen technique for this mystery and intrigue. There is an investigation of her bedroom and the inspection brings to light a scroll of paper that has been shoved, in the manner of the cabinets of curiosities (and very much unlike Poe’s “The Purloined Letter”), amidst so many other items into the back of a drawer:

Her greedy eye glanced rapidly over a page. She started at its import. Could it be possible, or did not her senses play her false? – An inventory of linen, in coarse and modern characters, seemed all that was before her! If the evidence of sight might be trusted, she held a washing-bill in her hand. She seized another sheet, and saw the same articles with little variation; a third, a fourth, and a fifth presented nothing new. Shirts, stockings, cravats and waistcoats faced her in each. (AUSTEN, 1877, p. 138).

Susan Wolfson (2014, p. 248), in her notes to the Belknap edition of the Harvard annotated version of the novel, specifies, “[...] this laundry-list signifies nothing more than some previous male”, but it is the hilarious mundanity of the laundry list creates a comic effect in this scene. The listed items are mundane, they are everyday objects and they put the things away in a very ordinary and verisimilar manner. Moreover, the list presents a matter-of-fact inventory, almost a satirical accumulation, rather than the linear, chronological, expected narrative of intriguing misdemeanors linked or not to male characters.

Austen’s genre-defining country house novels, fraught with misdemeanors and peccadillos, encompass the estate as an ordered physical structure, which in turn serves as a *metonym* for other inherited, imagined structures that fold out as a list: society, morality, manners, culture, humour, religious and philosophical system of ideas, language, discourse, and the like (SEABOYER, 2005). As long as we make a list here to classify the Austenian country-house novel, this elusive, protean construct, this paradoxical, rhetorical device makes it an apt vehicle for enumeration, accumulation, and its random sequence makes it apt for a display of formal order or, in a simultaneously flamboyant fashion, for a pyrotechnical exhibit of chaos and destruction. In *Mansfield Park*, we see that

Mrs. Norris was ready with her suggestions as to the rooms he would think fittest to be used, but found it all prearranged; and when she would have conjectured and hinted about the day, it appeared that the day was settled too. Sir Thomas had been amusing himself with shaping a very complete outline of the business; and as soon as she would listen quietly, could read his list of the families to be invited, from whom he calculated, with all necessary allowance for the shortness of the notice, to collect young people enough to form twelve or fourteen couple: and could detail the considerations which had induced him to fix on the 22nd as the most eligible day. William was required to be at Portsmouth on the 24th; the 22nd would therefore be the last day of his visit; but where the days were so few it would be unwise to fix on any earlier. Mrs. Norris was obliged to be satisfied with thinking just the same, and with having been on the point of proposing the 22nd herself, as by far the best day for the purpose. (AUSTEN, 1992, p. 181).

Presumably obliged and satisfied with such displays of orderliness, sequence, arrangement, organization, disposition, structure, succession, layout, array, set-up, line-up, *et cetera*, Mrs. Norris and Austen could oppose another list-oriented character:

He did not want abilities but he had no curiosity, and no information beyond his profession; he read only the newspaper and the navy-list; he talked only of the dockyard, the harbour, Spithead, and the Motherbank; he swore and he drank, he was dirty and gross. (AUSTEN, 1992, p. 278).

Satire, selectiveness, and reduction also reverberate with the following list in *Mansfield Park*, let alone, of course, a touch of derision and caricature:

Fanny read to herself that “it was with infinite concern the newspaper had to announce to the world a matrimonial fracas in the family of Mr. R. of Wimpole Street; the beautiful Mrs. R., whose name had not long been enrolled in the lists of Hymen, and who had promised to become so brilliant a leader in the fashionable world, having quitted her husband’s roof in company with the well-known and captivating Mr. C., the intimate friend and associate of Mr. R., and it was not known even to the editor of the newspaper whither they were gone.” (AUSTEN, 1992, p. 316).

Austen has learned from the nascent novel tradition and adapted this knowledge for her own purposes, the use of period slang, of a tongue-in-cheek narrative voice, of list effects that destabilize the *doxa* and *decorum* simultaneously (not to mention gender politics) to produce a double-voiced discourse, which both enjoys and sends up the conventions of either form. In her novels, Austen deployed an Austenian, which later became Austenesque, irony to the same ends, and whose silhouettes have taken up, from then on, the form of the satirical, selective, and, at times, sartorial, list.

Austen plays with the presuppositions of her readers, luring them into making erroneous assumptions based on their expectations about the novel’s theme and genre. There is a cultivated purpose to this technique: it epitomizes the struggle between an artfully promiscuous piece of literature (in the words of Virginia Woolf), it pinnacles the effects of very subtle, ironic lists, with an unprecedented finesse, and it baffles the reader’s implicit desire to unify the plot’s many tiered situations through judgment, without ever being completely successful;

“It is amazing to me”, said Bingley, “how young ladies can have patience to be so very accomplished as they all are”. “All young ladies accomplished! My dear Charles, what do you mean?”. “Yes, all of them, I think. They all paint tables, cover screens, and net purses. I scarcely know anyone who cannot do all this, and I am sure I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished”. “Your list of the common extent of accomplishments”, said Darcy, “has too much truth. The word is applied to many a woman who deserves it no otherwise than by netting a purse or covering a screen. But I am very far from agreeing with you in your estimation of ladies in general. I cannot boast of knowing more than half-a-dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished.” (AUSTEN, 1861, p. 38-39).

In the case of life writing, or shall we say, list writing, the implicit obligation to serve the ready at hand and the long (last) forgotten in the matter of accuracy, fairness, and respect to the memory of those things heretofore present is framed in *Pride and Prejudice* in terms of aesthetics as well as of ethics. *Ça va sans dire*, ethics intrude into the formal choices of novelists, from primal scenes to major controversies through to the novels' end and, possibly, to plot twists. It is less a developmental and comprehensive study of the list we attempted than a preliminary mapping of an epistemological and ethical grid whose broad outlines were already perceived heavily reliant on detail and list making (from painting tables to a supposed list of ladylike accomplishments).

On the one hand, Austen is famously sparing in her descriptions of the physical appearance of people, interiors, and places. The novelist, on the other hand, is much more likely to render character by way of conversation than description, by showing than telling, especially in the case of her satirical and selective lists. Below, three excerpts from *Pride and Prejudice* best exemplify the use of the list effect by the author:

“Already arisen?” repeated Mr. Bennet. “What, has she frightened away some of your lovers? Poor little Lizzy! But do not be cast down. Such squeamish youths as cannot bear to be connected with a little absurdity are not worth a regret. Come, let me see the list of pitiful fellows who have been kept aloof by Lydia’s folly”. “Indeed you are mistaken. I have no such injuries to resent”. (AUSTEN, 1861, p. 196).

It is not of particular, but of general evils, which I am now complaining. Our importance, our respectability in the world must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia’s character. Excuse me, for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her character will be fixed, and she will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made herself or her family ridiculous; a flirt, too, in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person; and, from the ignorance and emptiness of her mind, wholly unable to ward off any portion of that universal contempt which her rage for admiration will excite. (AUSTEN, 1861, p. 196).

In this danger Kitty also is comprehended. She will follow wherever Lydia leads. Vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrolled! Oh! my dear father, can you suppose it possible that they will not be censured and despised wherever they are known, and that their sisters will not be often involved in the disgrace? (AUSTEN, 1861, p. 196).

Austen’s focus on detail tends not to have the tantalizing and paralyzing force it would for late Victorians and early modernists, but it is fair to say of Austen’s novels, more generally, that the parataxis (let us not forget *asyndeton* and *ekphrasis*) of the telling thing, object or person, is largely present and optimized to reach its potential. Based on Sève’s

(2010, p. 120, my translation)<sup>3</sup> statement that, “[p]aradoxically, the word on the list is cut off from the world and is one with the world that is, the word becomes a piece of the world”, I have briefly shown that the list overcomes description by undermining it in its fundamentals. Especially so in Austen, where telling takes center stage and lists help to light, highlight, lighten up and delight circumstances and personages alike. If description, in general, aims, in principle and sometimes in vain, to give a credible and tangible reproduction of reality, the list seeks to augment it emotionally or in an affective/effective way. The presence of the list in Austen is both common for its frequency and diverse purposes. It submits to an economy of fullness and emptiness, it has a compulsion of the world (reality), but it seems to reside in infinite uncertainty, in almost otherworldly scenes or scapes. The list in Austen is, therefore, a privileged point of observation for the analysis of humor and irony, of that almost getting there by never leaving the place.

SÁ, L. O efeito da lista em Jane Austen: preâmbulos. **Revista de Letras**, São Paulo, v. 60, n. 1, p. 93-105, jan./jun. 2020.

- **RESUMO:** *Nenhuma forma de escrita parece mais prática, trivial e protética (no que diz respeito à memória) do que a lista. O aspecto lógico e retórico da lista não é o da prosa comum da escrita fluente. As listas atraíram comentários notáveis e volumes completos de antropólogos, filósofos e teóricos literários. A manifestação estilística mais crucial da mobilidade das coisas e palavras na ironia mesquinha do dia a dia e no sarcasmo cotidiano encontra seu aparecimento em passagens breves em Austen e a autora faz alusão a elas (mobilidade e ironia) sucintamente na forma de listas em seus romances.*
- **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Listas. Jane Austen. Romance.*

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<sup>3</sup> «Paradoxalement, le mot en liste est coupé du monde et fais corps avec le monde. [...] Le mot [...] devient un morceau du monde». (SÈVE, 2010, p. 120).

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