



## Deconstructionism of the heroine in the novel *The Grand Sophy* by Georgette Heyer.<sup>1</sup>

Deconstruccionismo de la heroína de la novela *The Grand Sophy* escrita por Georgette Heyer.

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### ABSTRACT

Jane Austen has become one of the English writers whose legacy continues to be admired two hundred years after the publication of her novels. She possessed a unique style and view of the English upper class, and her ironic settings and characters introduce readers to a vivid description of the daily lives of her heroines. Austen's influence in modern times made it possible for other women writers to emerge not only through Regency novels, but also through other literary genres, as is the case of Georgette Heyer, one of her literary heiresses or simply a contemporary admirer. Methods

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such as the historical-logical method, text analysis and analysis-synthesis contributed to this research. The main character of *The Grand Sophy* is analyzed through literary analysis from a deconstructionist approach. This article presents a study of the characteristics of Modernism and Postmodernism, a biography of Georgette Heyer, a comparison between Heyer and Austen, as well as a study of Deconstruction Theory. The comparative analysis of both novels demonstrates that *Sophy* is a deconstruction of the character of Emma from the eponymous novel written by Jane Austen.

**Key words:** Sophy. Emma. Deconstruction. Characterization

## RESUMEN

Jane Austen se ha convertido en una de las escritoras inglesas cuyo legado sigue siendo admirado doscientos años después de la publicación de sus novelas. Poseía un estilo y un punto de vista únicos de la clase alta inglesa, y sus escenarios irónicos y sus personajes introducen a los lectores en una vívida descripción de la vida cotidiana de sus heroínas. La influencia de Austen en los tiempos modernos hizo posible que surgieran otras escritoras no sólo a través de las novelas de la Regencia, sino de otros géneros literarios, como es el caso de Georgette Heyer, una de sus herederas literarias o simplemente admiradora contemporánea. Métodos como el método histórico-lógico, el análisis de textos y de análisis-síntesis contribuyeron en esta investigación. El personaje principal de *The Grand Sophy* se analiza a través del análisis literario desde un enfoque deconstruccionista. Este trabajo presenta un estudio de las características del Modernismo y el Postmodernismo, una biografía de Georgette Heyer, una comparación entre Heyer y Austen, así como un estudio de la Teoría de la Deconstrucción. El análisis comparativo de ambas novelas demuestra que *Sophy* es una deconstrucción del personaje de Emma de la novela homónima escrita por Jane Austen.

**Palabras claves:** Sophy. Emma. Deconstrucción. Caracterización.



## Introducción. Infancia y representación literaria.

English Literature has always been a vast source to the literary canon. The great English authors and novels studied around the world have been numberless. However, female writers did not have a good popularity for several years and their work were always differentiated from men's, especially in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Despite this, women as writers were extraordinarily talented, but some of them outstood from the rest: the Brontë sisters (Charlotte, Emily and Anne), George Eliot, Mary Shelley, Virginia Woolf, Jane Austen, etc. However, none of these women have been more admired two hundred years after publishing her novels than Jane Austen.

Jane Austen possessed a unique style and the point of view of the upper-intermediate English class, which was a central object for her novels and social critics, but not the only one. Austen's ironic scenarios and characters' thoughts introduce readers to a vivid description of her heroines' daily life which seems to trap their hearts and attention. Furthermore, Austen's influence in the modern times made possible for other writers to emerge not only through Regency novels, but through other literary genres, such is the case of Georgette Heyer, one of her literary heirs or simply contemporary admirer.

Heyer was one of the famous English writers from 20<sup>th</sup> century and a lover of Austen's work. She became a bestseller with 50 written books and a big influence in our days, mostly in the English-speaking countries.

In 2020, at the beginning of the actual worldwide pandemic situation, *The Guardian* newspaper released a list of 'joyful books for dark, lonely times' and in the second place were Georgette Heyer's *The Grand Sophy* (1950), which will be studied in this research.

This novel is the most famous among her Regency romance novels. For readers' captivation, she created a fearless and adventurous heroine who somehow not just resembles some of Austen's heroines' qualities but sometimes is superior to them or just discreetly seems to be far ahead of her timeline.



In previous research we carried out a literary analysis of Emma Woodhouse, the main character of *Emma* (2010) written by Jane Austen and we concluded that its protagonist is a singular heroine with a different lifestyle, education and character that other heroines did not share.

We will focus on the heroine of *The Grand Sophy* by Georgette Heyer from a deconstructionist point of view. Deconstruction proposes the critical analysis of the foundations of a system to prove that it is inconsistent, unreliable, and malleable. Deconstructionists argue that there was not one possible meaning for a text but multiple and contradictory meanings. (Valdés, 2016)

Nevertheless, this research will particularly focus on how Georgette Heyer created the heroine, Sophy Stanton-Lacy, from a deconstructive perspective. Therefore, the **objective** of this research is to ascertain that Sophy, the main character in *The Grand Sophy* is a deconstruction of the character of Emma from the homonymous novel.

For the fulfillment of this objective, the following **methods** will be used: critical bibliographical and referential analysis, to become familiar with preliminary theoretical information and perspectives; historical-logical method, to establish how the society and happenings at the Regency period in which the setting of the novel was set had an influence on the author and his work; induction-deduction, to infer important aspects of the data; literary analysis from a deconstructionist approach, to determine how the author draws on Austen's *Emma* to create her new work of fiction; comparative method, to establish a contrast in the novels object of analysis; analysis-synthesis, to summarize the data and write the paper.

## Literature in modern times

Virginia Woolf once wrote at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, "All human relations shifted, [...] and when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature." (Woolf, 1924, p.5)

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, humanity emerged in a completely new epoch, the dimension of humans' limitless capacities showed the world the atrocities of a period where Modernism led in a transformation in science, art, and culture in general. Modernism designates the broad literary and



cultural movement that spanned all of the arts and even spilled into politics and philosophy. The dates when Modernism flourished are in dispute, but few scholars identify its genesis as being before 1860 and World War II is generally considered to mark an end of the movement's height. However, a real distinct change in thought, behavior, and culture was noted at the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This movement started to influence painting, but after World War I some writers became significant personalities like Ezra Pound (1885-1972), Filippo Marinetti (1876-1944), James Joyce (1882-1941), and Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918). Their translation of the new advances of painting into literature gave an opportunity for a new transition in the literary world and as a consequence their style became popular in the late 1930s.

Ten years later, the world was a completely different place. The first power machines appeared to refresh and change humans' lifestyle. Humanity was amazed with these new inventions and scientific advances. Machines allowed them to see pictures in movement, a fact that contributed to build the solid foundations of the current international film industry. Traveling long distances at one hundred miles an hour and flying through the air were privileges humanity could afford. Communications also brought new outcomes like to transmit both voices and images without wires; to talk, in real time, with someone at the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Moreover, the world relied on the capacity of power machines, just as it is nowadays, but these new changes were not positive in everyone's eyes. Most modernist writers feared this new technology and what implications and consequences would bring to their time. Evidently, modernists did not often write about the new technology. Modern narration almost aimed to write about the past. Throughout these years, history registered too much horrors in World War I and World War II. The past seemed to be a more centered world to write about, and much more fascinating and mysterious. However, allusions were made in some poems and stories. Modernist writers did not forget events, places, and names related to history. (Gale, 2009)



Modernist fiction occasionally relies on the “interior monologue” technique<sup>2</sup>. This narration permits the reader to record and read as if they were literally listening the narrator’s thoughts within every line. Therefore, the modernist theories related to the omnipresence of the past make impossible not to find allusions in the modernist literature.

Among the modernist authors we can find names like T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), William Faulkner (1897–1962), and Virginia Woolf (1882–1941). Each of them provided excellent masterpieces such as *The Waste Land*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Mrs. Dalloway*, respectively.

### **Postmodernism: The Deconstruction Theory**

Postmodernism was a period of great development in literature as in society. Postmodernism is the name given to the period of literary criticism that developed toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The postmodern challenges our thinking about time, challenges us to see the present in the past, the future in the present, the present in a kind of no-time. (Bennett and Boyle, 2014) At this time, regardless the conspicuous advances in technology, science and rational thought of the modern time, the diversity of artists did not seclude themselves from writing, painting, and reacting to this arising new era. This difference was visible between modernists and postmodernists. However, what outstood in this movement was Derrida’s Deconstruction theory and a flourishing tide of feminist writers.

Derrida’s Deconstruction Theory was the center of Postmodernism. He criticized the very belief that a text possesses only a meaning and intention which is implied by the author. The term *deconstruction* refers to criticism of the criteria of identity, truth, and certainty. He purposes a text has one meaning until it is read for the first time. For instance, readers as external objects can vary the essence of a text, its inner meaning. Therefore, it is not correct to state that it has one meaning but endless meanings. Jacques Derrida argued that texts were not to be read according to (any method) which would seek out a finished signified beneath a textual surface, because reading is transformational. (Gale, 2009) He also commented on issues related to identity, mostly derived by

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<sup>2</sup> This kind of narration purports to record the thoughts as they pass through a narrator’s head.



the reliance on binary sets oppositions. He explained that these sets formulated what he called a violent hierarchy<sup>3</sup> where the first half was more important than the latter, and it was established as the center of the binary set opposition.

Feminist writers in Postmodernism, and not using the term only for female writers but also for men like Bruce Appleby<sup>4</sup> dedicated their writing to deconstruct rules and ideas of social norms, language, sexuality, and academic theories of other fields. Feminist writers were concerned about how society had prejudices against women, was male biased by a direct action, and excluded the female segment. For example, society disagreed with women's salary being equal to men's. Also, feminists defended the idea of not using the lexical term "man" to describe human kind and argued about how the binary sets oppositions established an unspoken hierarchy where in male/female defined the superiority of men and the other half was at a complete disadvantage.

### **Georgette Heyer: A versatile writer**

Georgette Heyer was born in August 1902, in Wimbledon, south-west London, England. She and her two younger brothers (George and Frank) lived in a middle-class family in which both parents Sylvia and George Heyer were exceptional. Georgette was born into a home in which class and breeding were taken for granted as indicators of a person's worth and social acceptability. (Kloester, 2011) Hence, she grew up learning concepts and attitudes of the structure of high-class society, which she included in her Regency novels.

According to Kloester (2011), the most recent Heyer's biographer, George Heyer was a really affectionate father and used literature to nurture a special bond with his daughter. Heyer had been educated at home by her father and never experienced school life until he departed to war. In the book *Georgette Heyer: Biography of a Bestseller*, Jennifer Kloester characterizes Georgette as an unusual girl, with no acquaintances, a person who could not make friends easily, but the few friends

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<sup>3</sup> It states that it gives precedence (called centering) to the central term (the first) and they marginalize the remaining term

<sup>4</sup> Appleby, Professor Emeritus of Southern Illinois University was a longstanding contributor to feminist writings and theory.





she did make were really attached to her. Despite her qualities and education, Georgette Heyer did not apply to University, she rather changed societal structures and attitudes. Jane Aiken Hodge, Heyer's other biographer, says that she was very popular with young men and liked to go out dancing and socializing. (Hodge, 2006)

In 1921, she published her first book *The Black Moth*. She started to write it when she was just 17 years old with the intention to entertain her brother George. Her father witness her talents and his encouragement motivated her to publish it. To Heyer's surprise, she obtained a contract for its publication in both the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Nine years after this achievement, Heyer had published eleven books. In 1920, she met her future husband George Ronald Rougier, a mining engineer. The couple got engaged in 1925, but a month later her father died of a heart attack. Georgette had to take care of her mother and younger brothers; consequently, she needed to strengthen her career to look after her family.

Both biographers refer to Heyer as a loyal wife, committed to her husband's interests. She travelled with her husband to his different mining spots and business journeys. Meanwhile, she published *The Masqueraders* in 1928 while they were in Africa. That same year, they travelled back to England, but this time the couple was focused on Heyer's career.

In 1930, Heyer started to experiment with thriller. This genre became very popular at that time, while Agatha Christie and Patricia Wentworth were writing as well. Although her novels were not her main source of income, they have been praised as excellent examples of the genre by Dorothy L. Sayers<sup>5</sup> and multiple critics in *The New York Times*. (Rayner & Wilkins, 2021)

While they lived at Blackthorns, she aimed to write historical fiction. She spent time researching about Regency history and made meticulous notes about that period as well as vocabulary books. The effort she put into researching proved why her Regency novels were so accurate. In 1935, Heyer's first Regency book, *Regency Buck*, was published. Georgette's health was a little deteriorated, because of the pressure. For that reason, her family travelled to Scotland to support her as she had to write seven new novels and deliver them to her publishers the next year.

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<sup>5</sup> English crime writer and poet. She was also a student of classical and modern languages.





Despite the chaos of World War II, the family moved in again to London. They lived close to the London Library which was perfect for Heyer. However, fame transformed Georgette in an enigma her fans wanted to decipher, which Heyer disliked and was convinced to be pointless.

Taxes were a problem in Heyer's career; as to release this stressful situation, in 1946 she and her husband started their own company: *Heron Enterprises*. The economic situation still did not improve; they were not good at financing. In 1967, their situation changed for good when they sold the company. Then, Heyer's works were so famous that she regularly appeared in magazines and journals or in a newspaper article. Subsequently, she had published *Friday's Child*, *The Reluctant Widow* and *The Foundling*. At this prosperous and successful time, other writers appeared in Regency fiction genre. To Heyer, it meant to live the bad experience of being plagiarized. Such happened with Barbara Cartland who had just published her own Regency fiction novels. (Rayner & Wilkins, 2021)

In 1963, she published *False Colours* and it became a sensation. In 1965, *Frederica* was another example of what a bestselling writer she was. She had incredibly transformed into a literary phenomenon, and the Queen supported it when she invited Georgette to lunch at the Buckingham Palace.

As the time passed by, her health did not join her literary spirit; she started to fade and suffer from kidney stones, falls, and chest infections. In this condition, she wrote *Cousin Kate* (1968) and *Charity Girl* (1970). In 1971, the family moved again to Knightsbridge. There she wrote *Lady of Quality* and published it in 1972. Although Georgette Heyer tried to keep writing, her health did not allow her to afford it. *My Lord John* was eventually published after her death. On 4 July, 1974 Georgette Heyer died of lung cancer.

More than 40 years after her death, Heyer still has loyal admirers and her books still generate great incomes. Despite her legacy has not yet been adapted into television, her books still persist in the market place.



## Jane Austen and Georgette Heyer: The literary legacy lives on

Literature endures through time, not because of the pen or technique by which is written, but by the hand of who writes. Jane Austen had a singular hand and a powerful writing and with that talent she immortalized herself. Katharine Metcalfe<sup>6</sup> argued that Austen's novels were a combination of old-fashionedness and modernness. (Lascelles, 1939) Austen's concentration upon character and personality and upon the tensions between her heroines and their society relates her novels more closely to the modern world. Her novels offer wit, realism, and timelessness of her prose style; her so beautifully constructed novels help to explain her continuing appeal for readers of all kinds. Modern critics are still fascinated by the commanding structure and organization of the novels, by the triumphs of technique that enable the writer to reveal the tragicomedy of existence in stories of which the events and settings are apparently so ordinary and so circumscribed. (Austen, 2022).

Understanding Austen's influences in almost all modern female writers drives us to acknowledge Katharine Metcalfe's research and contribution to Austen reappearance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1912, Metcalfe delivered a new edition of Austen's masterpiece, *Pride and Prejudice*, and changed in every respect how the world had imagined Jane Austen. The writer was seen from different angles and studies were dedicated to decode Austen's peculiar world. During World War I and World War II, Jane Austen's novels became a refuge to those who needed to escape from the horrors they were living in or had lived. Metcalfe did not conform to just editing one novel, she focused on bringing her back to life. With her husband's help and advisory, Katharine added to every edition appendixes and notes with information of social customs, manners, dancing, games and all regarded to the epoch Austen lived in. They created activities for readers to experience Regency lifestyle and be closer to Austen.

Even Austen's books were recommended to treat soldiers' post-traumatic stress disorders in the World War I. (Farrer, 1917/1987) Henceforth, Austen's stories ceased the pain of readers' heart and gave a new future to female writers.

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<sup>6</sup> Editor of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1912) and *Northanger Abbey* (1923)



Heyer is forever indebted to Katharine Metcalfe's work, and that new vision on Austen's novels made her the excellent writer she was. According to Rayner, Georgette Heyer's own view of her writing was ambivalent. She used to call herself as 'a scribbler of trivial romances'. (Rayner & Wilkins, 2021)

Heyer found herself captivated with Austen and dedicated time to learn from her. Georgette's determination to enter the Regency world did not make her lose his own original and peculiar humor, she learned to refine her own talents and fill the void Austen did not pay attention to in her writing. According to Rayner (2021), Austen's romcom formula sums up the outline plot of both *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Grand Sophy*.

Although Heyer's plots draw upon Austen's, she could manage Regency novels in her own manner. She amused readers with her description of characters' semblance, clothing, the environment and colors. Somehow in Heyer's stories we could find heroines almost comparable to Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, etc., but still original and adequate to sparkle in the Regency. With Georgette, the Regency history genre strengthened and Austen's legacy kept living.

## Deconstruction Theory

The term "Deconstruction", *Deonstruktion* in German, was firstly brought to existence by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger<sup>7</sup>. However, Jacques Derrida, perhaps the greatest philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gave a special meaning to the term and brought to existence a new theory: The *Deconstruction Theory*. Deconstructing does not mean to destroy, break, or decompose, but to take something and analyze its components separately. Derrida highlighted that Deconstruction is not a method, neither an act, nor an operation. Thus, he defined it:

"What is deconstruction? Nothing, of course. [...] (Derrida, 1991, p. 275)

[...] deconstruction doesn't consist in a set of theorems, axioms, tools, rules, techniques, methods...there is no deconstruction, deconstruction has no specific object... [...]

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was a key German philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is best known for contributing to phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism.



...deconstruction is neither an analysis nor a critique. ... I would say the same about method. Deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one.... It must also be made clear that deconstruction is not even an act or an operation ..." (Derrida, 1991, p. 218).

The theory became important not only in Philosophy, but also in the study of languages. As Derrida explained, almost everything at Philosophy occurs in writing. (Derrida, 1991) Surprisingly, what makes it so interesting is the existence of oppositions, and this affirmed Derrida's thinking about languages been an unstable and undetermined system. The first binary set opposition set by Derrida was *speech/writing*. This proved how there is an inner contradiction in languages (structurally necessary to produce sense and meaning to a text), where in binary set oppositions there is an established hierarchy; the first half of the opposition it is concerned as to be the center and be in advantage over the other half. At this starting point, Derrida realized that a text can be invariable until the first moment it is read. As languages evolve constantly, a text varies according to readers or external objects. A person's ideology, the context in which a text is written or read are external factors that influences the meaning of a text. Therefore, he concluded that a text has infinite meanings. Deconstruction theory gave the opportunity to interpret a text from different perspectives. With this theory, specialists were able to analyze art in general by studying each component, finding its contradictions among them and proving its inadequacy.

There were several influences from other minds in Derrida's Deconstruction theory like Ferdinand du Saussure<sup>8</sup> and Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>9</sup>. From Saussure, Jacques Derrida learned how to apply this theory to the philosophy of language in general. Likewise, he agreed that a language is a system of signs and words, and it only has meanings because of the contrast between these signs. Consequently, he focused this idea to the violent hierarchy he defined in the use of set binary

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<sup>8</sup> Ferdinand du Saussure (1857-1913) was a Swiss linguist, semiotician and philosopher. His ideas laid a foundation for many significant developments in both, linguistics and semiotics, in the 20th century.

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a German philosopher, cultural critic and philologist whose work has exerted a profound influence on modern intellectual history.



oppositions. In Western culture, as he exposed, people express their ideas in terms of oppositions. Thus, the first task of this theory is to find and overturn these oppositions in texts.

Nietzsche's *Daybreak* expressed a deeper contradiction that occurs between men's morality and men's behavior. He argued that philosophers are always trying to pursue reason and logic, but in the end, what they always find is unreason. (Nietzsche, 1997) This idea was another starting point for Derrida's Deconstruction. Yet, he went beyond Nietzsche's ideology.

### Deconstruction in Literature

After Derrida, several authors forayed into Deconstruction theory and they often focused on its application in Literature. In this case, deconstruction has been identified not only as literary critique but also as a literary approach. "A literary approach that uses the critical examination of the basis of an argument with the purpose of revealing its inadequacy." (Valdés, 2015, p. 19)

Deconstruction in literature involves a close reading of texts to demonstrate that any text has contradictory meanings instead of being a unified and logical whole. The main purpose of using deconstruction as a literary approach is to determine these contradictory meanings within the text in such a way that its relation is thrown into question. As J. Hillis Miller, a contemporary deconstructionist, defines: "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock but thin air." (Miller, 1976, p. 30)

Deconstruction was also created to (re)read philosophy texts again. The same principle it is used in literature when we aim to analyze a text through this approach. Deconstruction is a means to question what no one else has questioned before. "There are generally two main purposes in deconstructing a literary text [...]: (1) to reveal the text's undecidability and/or (2) to reveal the complex operations of the ideologies of which the text is constructed." (Tyson, 2006, p. 259)

Deconstruction theory has brought great impact in the analysis and study of texts and literary works as such, but its real contribution is to provide a new magnifying glass to study our own world and breadth.



## Deconstruction in characters

Studying the character of a book from a deconstructive approach involves taking into consideration several elements. It depends on how you will focus your analysis. A character, such as people are, is a universe itself. Therefore, there will always be indefinite opportunities to study that character, we just need a good magnifying glass. The elements we should always take into consideration are the character's background, motives, and examining the implications and consequences of the character's behavior. It is true that some archetypes are used to create characters we might have read in books. Studying them from a deconstructive approach demands to analyze characters in real-life situations or in different contexts from the one they might have experienced in their stories.

For Instance, the popular high school blond girl with a perfect life who is bullying others, is an overused character archetype; however, when this kind of character does not follow the same roots from which it was created, there is a clear deconstruction of that archetype. Let's imagine that character is not completely confident about herself, she is literally poor, and she needs to hide the part-time job she has for paying the hospital bills to keep her father alive. When this character deviates from the original archetype and roots, there is, as we observed, a clear deconstruction of that original archetype. Subsequently, there is a new creation, there is a new character, and to understand this, we need to study each component and the origins of the original character archetype, which is one of the main objectives of the Deconstruction theory. In the case of Regency novels, we might find several characters, new creations like this one that succeeded others and varied from the original roots. Such study we are going to hold in the next section to ascertain that the character of Sophy in *The Grand Sophy* is a deconstruction of Emma Woodhouse from Austen's *Emma*.

## Literary Analysis of *The Grand Sophy*

*The Grand Sophy* is a Regency Romance novel as it mostly tells the life and customs of a particular social class. *The Grand Sophy*, as the name says itself, tells us the story of a young English woman



who appears in her relatives' lives to change it for good, although some people think otherwise. However, Sophy proves not to be a regular gente girl, but a strong-minded woman whose abilities for managing people is as simple to her as riding a horse; she achieves her goals most of the time. The novel is complemented with remarkable characters, each one of them is unique. This book is structured in 18 chapters and 462 pages with the story of this incredible protagonist, whose adventures sometimes leave the reader breathless.

Theme: Women's struggle to break societal stereotypes in which they must depend upon a marriage to be a figure of respect and dignity in an early 19<sup>th</sup> century chauvinist English society.

## Plot

*The Grand Sophy* is that kind of book that needs to be read with eyes wide open. Conflicts are so well introduced that readers may lose while Sophy is pulling the strings with her manipulations and intrigues. The story starts introducing Sir. Horace and Lady Ombersley, Sophy's father and aunt respectively. Sir Horace Stanton-Lacy is an English diplomat, he comes with his sister to ask for her permission to let Sophy stay for a season in her home while he is on a journey to Brazil and also asks her to find a good husband for Sophy. Initially, Lady Ombersley is not pleased with the idea of bringing her niece because of the complicated family situation they are living in. For example, Lord Ombersley was drowned in debts because of his gambling addiction. His older son, Charles Rivenhall, inherited his uncle's fortune (Matthew Rivenhall) and became the head of the family. Charles paid his family's debts and started to run the house; therefore, everything was made according to Charles interests. Hence, Lady Ombersley could not bring her niece without Mr. Rivenhall's permission, besides Sophy had not visited her since she was very young, which meant Sophy was almost a stranger to the family.

"Yes, but--Horace, Matthew Rivenhall left his whole fortune to Charles!" ... "So it is Charles who calls the tune!" said Sir Horace.





"Well, Horace, you might not know it, because you are always abroad, but poor Ombersley had a great many debts." (Heyer, 1950, p. 5)<sup>10</sup>

Although Lady Ombersley tried to explained her reasons for not taking Sophia into the house, Sir. Horace forcedly insisted on bringing Sophy, his gentile girl with no intensions to give them problems. Finally, Lady Ombersley allows it and the real story begins when Sophia Stanton-Lacy arrives at the Ombersley's house.

As soon as she entered, the house went up-side down and she found herself in defiance with her cousin, Mr. Rivenhall. She understood the gravity of the situation. She found the older son running the house with arrogance, blindness and deafness. The youngest son, Hubert Rivenhall, was still studying at Oxford, but he could not even give his opinion and it was really clear he was hiding something. The younger daughter, Cecilia Rivenhall, was ready to get married but she could only take for husband the man Mr. Rivenhall selected. Cecilia was in love with a handsome poet, but as far as Charles denied Cecilia's idea of marrying Augustus Fawnhope, the bigger her feelings grew for him. Similarly, Charles was engaged to a beautiful English lady, Eugenia Wraxton, but Sophy realized they had nothing to do with each other. She could not just ignore all these problems around her relatives.

Days went by and Sophy helped Cecilia to see Augustus' flaws. Charles never understood Sophy's intentions to allow Cecilia and Augustus to spend time together in every occasion she planned. However, Sophy's true plan was to show Lord Charlbury's great qualities and let Cecilia's jealousy grow. In the end, Cecilia falls in love with Lord Charlbury, opportunely the man Charles approved to marry his sister. Sometimes, Miss Stanton-lacy was a capricious, headstrong girl who always wanted to annoy her cousin Charles:

...Mr. Rivenhall said to Sophy, "If this is your doing--!"

"I promise you it is not. If I thought that he had the smallest notion of your hostility, I should say that he had rolled you up, Charles, foot, and guns!"

<sup>10</sup> All quotes from the novel come from Heyer, *The Grand Sophy*, 1950, and will be referred as HEYER,, from now on.



"I told you that I was not at all nice in my ideas. Come, don't let us talk of him! I have sworn an oath to heaven not to quarrel with you today."

"You amaze me! Why?"

"Don't be such an ape!" she begged. "I want to drive your grays, of course!"

... "Oh, that! When we are clear of the town, you shall do so." (Heyer, p.60)

That is how she discovered Charles real personality, right behind that strong gentleman posture, there was a kind heart and an affectionate and timid man. They found out at the end that they loved each other since their first fight, even though their romance is not clearly exposed until the last chapter. Both succumb to each other's charms. Likewise, Sophy helped her younger cousin Hubert. She risks her own life and dares to see a money lender in a suburb with a pistol on one hand. This is the most breath-taking chapter of this book, how the protagonist is able to put herself in danger, and how well she knows herself as to predict she will succeed no matter the situation. During the story, Sophy seemed a tempestuous sea, but after the storm, each of her victims found real happiness. In the last Chapter, Sophy manages herself to reunite all characters in one place. There is when each of them sees Miss Stanton-Lacy was the only one who knew what they really needed. They never comprehended Sophy's actions until then.

## Setting

The story is set in 1816 in the city of London. After the Battle of Waterloo<sup>11</sup> was over and Napoleon<sup>12</sup> was exiled from England, Sophy and his father return to their homeland. The story moves around the city and makes difficult to sketch a map of the places the characters have been. Most of the places are distant; nevertheless, the author takes time to describe a part of them.

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<sup>11</sup> The Battle of Waterloo was fought between the French army and the British and Prussian armies. It was the last battle of the Napoleonic Wars.

<sup>12</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte was a French military and political leader. He was Emperor of the French from 1804 until 1814 and in 1815 again.



Most of the scenes occur indoors which permits the long dialogues to take place. However, there are important events that occur when the main character is driving her new carriage or is galloping with Salamanca. There is a large movement of crucial information that Miss Stanton-Lacy receives during her rides. In addition, she meets some characters of importance during these moments that also help her to project their plans and manipulations. Sophy is a girl that knows how to protect herself, she has travelled around Europe and met peculiar people, so as to be aware of how she needs to act and behave, and for that same reason she is not a person that likes to be in the same place for too long. The London society does not intimidate her, she actually knows how to fit in and how to be the center, and when it is necessary to be off sight.

The novel is not influenced by the war between England and France. Actually, Georgette Heyer decided to touch this topic and move around the story as Jane Austen did. She made a great effort when she selected some characters like Sir. Horace and other soldiers to be part of the story and showed the existence and importance of these historical passages, but not to be the main topic of the story.

The weather does not have any influence on the story or the main character. To be precise, there is only one moment when the weather plays its part. In the last chapter, when Sophy is trying to maintain all the characters together in the same place it can be considered as a prelude of something bad is going to happen; but it is just the storm before the calm. It also helps Sophy to fulfill her tasks as if it were a divine sign. The weather is the perfect justification to keep the characters in the house.

Why do you send for me so suddenly, and when it is raining, moreover? Su conducta es perversa?"

Sophy at once told her that she had been summoned to play a duenna's part, an explanation which made an instant appeal to one in whose veins ran the purest Castilian blood. (Heyer, p. 145)



## Characters

One of the reasons why this novel is excellent is the magnificent group of characters the author created. Each one of them is so well designed with their qualities and flaws. Apart from their social status they seem to be real people, complex, with their own questions and needs, but above all, each of them amazes the readers.

Sophia (Sophy) Stanton-Lacy is the main character of the book. She is a round and dynamic character. She is a strong-minded, capricious girl. She is tall and intelligent. Sophia is a girl who travelled part of the world with his father. Sir Horace had a dangerous job which taught Sophy how to defend herself and how to be independent, something not common at that time. She adores to ride her horse Salamanca, and she always had the liberty to buy whatever she needed, and do whatever she thinks is right. She apparently has an extravagant personality, but deep into that layer, she has a beautiful and kind heart. She is sympathetic and too perceptive.

Sir Horace Stanton-Lacy, Sophy's father, is a flat and static character. Sir Horace is a diplomat who dedicated his life to raise Sophy the best way he could. He loves his daughter, but he gives her too much liberty to do whatever she wants. In the book, he hurries to leave Sophy with his sister's family and urges Lady Ombersley to find a husband for his daughter. He travels to Brazil and asks his fiancée to travel to England and wait for him to marry as soon as possible.

Charles Rivenhall is one of the most important characters. He is a round and dynamic character. He gives the impression of being an arrogant man who believes is always right. Nevertheless, when he meets Sophy he shows that character he was hiding. He is described as a handsome 26-year-old man with a large fortune. He is responsible for his family's debts and economic situation; hence he adopts a strong position. As time passes by, he starts to feel attracted to Sophy and finds her entertaining. Unexpectedly, every quarrel with Sophy proved him she was the woman he wanted to marry with.

Elizabeth, Lady Ombersley, is a flat and static character. She is always suffering because of her nerves. She adores her children and suffers for each of their problems. Her health is most of the time complicated. She is an elegant woman, with a great dignity, worried all the time about Sophy's



actions and adventures; but she is very fond of her and loves the way she changed the routine at home.

Lord Ombersley is a flat and static character. He is Charles' father. He spent most of the night in clubs gambling. He is not very responsible and does not pay attention to his family. Sophy believes he is a charming and funny man. She thinks the family must pay him more attention as the Lord of the house.

Miss Eugenia Wraxton is a foil character. She is Charles' fiancée. Since the beginning she did not like Sophy's presence and she thought too much of herself. Although she is a remarkable young lady, her actions only help Sophy shine and look like a true heroine. She is a conservative girl, and dedicates too much time in making Sophy look bad in Charles' eyes. When Charles' little sister Amabel stayed in bed with a strong and contagious illness, she returned to her place and try to support Charles from the distance. Nonetheless, Sophia took care of Amabel every day. Those actions perfectly described the character of both women.

Lord Bromford is a flat and static character. He is an admirer of Sophy. In one occasion, he tried to propose to her. He is very talkative, and does not seem an agreeable man to anyone but Miss Wraxton. He has a very delicate health and tries to spend most of the time close to Sophy. In some journeys he complains because of the close relation Sophy has with Lord Charlbury and he is not completely fond of Sophy's independence.

Cecilia Rivenhall she is a dynamic and round character. Cecilia is an innocent girl with no experience in love. She believes Mr. Fawnhope is her soul mate but he is just a Don Juan with no future at all. In Cecilia's mind, her older brother Charles does not understand her and forces her to marry a man she does not love. Yet, his brother wants only a gentleman who can love her and protect her. During the story, Cecilia finds herself attached to Sophy and understands how wrong she was about her brother and surprisingly falls in love with Lord Charlbury.

Lord Charlbury is a flat and static character. He is the classic English gentleman. He is a gentle and polite man. Since the first time he saw Cecilia, he fell in love with her. Furthermore, he asks Cecilia to marry him, but Cecilia had no intentions to do it. Lord Charlbury meets Sophy in one of his



visits and becomes a close friend with her and when he saw how well she and Cecilia took along, he asks her to help him earn Cecilia's heart. Thanks to Sophy, Cecilia found a place in her heart for Lord Charlbury and they became a beautiful couple.

Augustus Fawnhope is a foil character. He is only devoted to poetry and literature. In his hands poetry is a tool to enchant women. Cecilia's beauty was object of his verses and he found a muse in her to write. Augustus dedicated time to pursue her, but he was not the man any woman should fall in love. Earning women's hearts was a hobby for him. However, we can say he has a great knowledge about literature. Some of the allusions the author made is through Mr. Fawnhope's speeches.

Hubert Rivenhall is a round and dynamic character. He is mostly a shy character. He is involved in a serious problem and does not know how to tell his family about it. Hubert inherited his father's enjoyment for gambling and borrowing money from a dangerous money lender. However, Sophy is the one who saves him from that disgrace. For Hubert, Charles was that figure of admiration and he did not want to be another gambler in his eyes. Therefore, Sophy manages herself to sell the earrings Sir Horace gave her and deliver the money to the criminal who was threatening Hubert. In the end, Hubert confesses it to Charles and asks for forgiveness.

Miss Adderbury is a flat and static character. She is the governess of the Rivenhall's children. Miss Adderbury is the kind of woman who wants to have all in control, mainly the education of the children. When Sophy arrives, that peace is broken and in more than one time she did not have any good regards from Sophy's presence.

Sancia is a flat and static character. The Marquesa is intended to be Sophy's stepmother. She travels from Spain to London to marry Sir Horace, but she meets Sir Vincent Talgarth and becomes interested on him. Sancia is not too fond of Sophy because of her independent behavior and the liberty her father gave her.

Sir Vincent Talgarth is flat and static character. He is a colonel acquainted with Sir Horace and Sophy. This colonel is well known for being a fortune hunter. He tried more than once to propose to



Sophy, but Sophy never let herself fall for his gallantry. Then, he selected Sancia as his next victim, Sir Horace's fiancée.

### **Point of View**

The Grand Sophy is told by an omniscient, third person narrator. Although, Georgette Heyer was inspired by her idol Jane Austen, she tries not to imitate her. Her writing is always taking readers close to characters, as if their thoughts were more valuable than the narrator's opinion. She allows the reader to stay close to Sophy's mind most of the time, because she is the one pulling the strings. A particularity is the great amusement in which the narrator follows the events, she delights the reader with funny moments, but witty is the main reason of it. The narrator never loses the main topic through these events and never deviates the rhythm of the story. In the end, The Grand Sophy is a mix of intrigues, sly wit and fun.

### **Symbols**

#### ***Sophy's phaeton***

Since the moment Sophy arrived, she demanded a carriage of her own. When Sophy emphasized she wanted to drive it herself, Charles could find reasons enough to deny that petition. Sophy made sure to buy a phaeton and good pair of horses herself. In this moment, they both knew they had found a rival. The phaeton shows Sophy's determination to achieve whatever she aims. It also shows the beginning of the intern war between Sophy and Charles, and apparently the beginning of their romantic adventure. The phaeton was also a scandal, since Sophy put great effort in demonstrating what a woman can do and why they should not be limited by chauvinism.

"No wish to raise false hopes," said Mr. Wychbold, "but can't help thinking that that's just what you're about to do, dear fellow! Though why your cousin should be driving Manningtree's bays beats me!"





"What?" Ejaculated Mr. Rivenhall sharply [...] Very much at home in the perilous vehicle, seated high above her horses, [...] and holding her whip at exactly the correct angle, was Miss Stanton-Lacy... (Heyer, p. 43)

### ***Sophy's small pistol***

Sophy had a pistol hidden for a long a time. She used it when she visited Mr. Goldhanger, the man who was threatening her cousin Hubert Rivenhall. The pistol shows Sophy adventurous and fearless personality. She already was scandalous to her family and the society, but that pistol is that inner strength Sophy has. She expresses how fearless she can be to protect what she loves and the people she cares about. After this, Charles confronts her and asks her to show him that famous pistol. In that moment, they both knew they had more in common than they thought. Charles understood that Sophy was an incredible lady. She was a unique and courageous lady.

"You with that slimy villain! Were you not afraid, Sophy?" he asked wonderingly.

"No, not a bit." She added apologetically...

"Sophy, he might have done you some mischief--!"

"Yes, but I had my pistol with me, so he very soon thought better of that notion!" she explained. (Heyer, p. 94)

### **Style and Tone**

It is true that Georgette Heyer never tried to imitate Jane Austen, but when it comes to Regency novels, it is hard not to find some features that remind us to that incredible precursor. However, Georgette never lost a chance to be original. For example, the extensive dialogues among the story loaded with information. The main characters are so well characterized, the term witty described them in all terms. A different aspect from Austen is that Heyer gave more space to describe landscape, clothing, and places. She also used that mix of techniques to introduce characters and characters' actions with that distinctive humor only she possessed. She dedicated time to study the vocabulary of the Regency, but she made her narrative so fresh that readers can enjoy her historical



novels without confusing them, but feeling more attracted to her style of narration and her stories. When you read Georgette Heyer, you wish to have more of her, you wish to keep reading her for more time.

## Stylistic Devices

Writing a novel of Regency as in any other genre, stylistic devices are needed. Heyer gave a proper use to each of them. Here we present some of them.

### Metaphor

We can find metaphors to describe places and objects:

These, through the circumstance of Sir Horace's being not only an absentee but also a careless landlord, had become overgrown of late years, so that ***the shrubbery was indistinguishable from the wilderness, and unpruned rose bushes rioted at will in unweeded flower beds.*** The sky had been overcast all day, but a fitful ray of sunlight, penetrating the lowering clouds, showed the mullioned windows of the house much in need of cleaning. (Heyer, p. 131)

### Verbal irony

Heyer as well as Austen provided an important use of irony, we may find in each intent of humor and wit the presence of irony. In this case, we identify a clear example of verbal irony:

"Miss Wraxton recognized your voice, and could not help but overhear something you said to Bridge."

Her hand, which was lying on the back of a chair, closed tightly on the polished wood, but relaxed again after a moment. She said, in a voice from which all emotion had been banished, ***"There is no end to Miss Wraxton's solicitude. How very obliging of her to have interested herself in my affairs! I expect it was delicacy that forbade her to speak to me rather than to you."*** He flushed. (Heyer, p. 96)



## Sarcasm

Also, sarcasm was identified in more than one opportunity:

***"Your fate is writ clear; you will be murdered. I cannot conceive how it comes about that you were not murdered long since!"***

"How odd! Charles himself once said that to me, or something like it!"

"There is nothing odd in it; any sensible man must say it!" (Heyer, p. 131)

## Imagery

We may also find another stylistic device as imagery. The author uses it on this case to describe Charles Rivenhall:

***The Honorable Charles Rivenhall was twenty-six years old, but a rather harsh featured countenance, coupled with a manner that combined assurance with a good deal of reserve, made him give the impression of being some years older. He was a tall, powerfully built young man, who looked as though he would have been better pleased to have been striding over his father's acres than exchanging civilities in his mother's sitting room. He nearly always wore riding dress in preference to the more fashionable pantaloons and Hessians, tied his cravat in the plainest of styles ...*** (Heyer, p. 7)

## Allusions

In the novel, the author tells about some poems and books, most of them help readers understand characters' personality:

Sophy enthusiastically applauded Cecilia's taste, announcing that her copy of ***The Corsair***<sup>13</sup> was so well worn as to be in danger of disintegrating. (p.24)

*The reason was explained by Hubert, who rode beside the curricule for a little way and disclosed that the subject under discussion was **Dante's Inferno***<sup>14</sup>. (Heyer, p. 60)

<sup>13</sup> *The Corsair* is a tale in verse by Lord Byron published in 1814.

<sup>14</sup> *Dante's Inferno* is the first part of the Italian Dante Alighieri's 14-century epic poem *Divine Comedy*.



## ***Emma Woodhouse and Sophy Stanton-Lacy: A Lady of imperfections and an untamable Lady***

In *Emma* we observed all the imperfections of English society of her time. We knew Emma Woodhouse was especial to Austen. She was a spoiled girl, unexperienced and with too much responsibility over her shoulders. She lived in a small town where the noble families were a few and where she had quite a reputation. She believed she had the right to manipulate and use people according to her interests. However, Emma was never a malicious person, she thought she was right in all her actions and never thought of the consequences. She had not lived enough as to understand herself. For that reason, this novel is about personal growing and self-knowledge. *Emma* deals with romance, secrets, intrigues and manipulations as well as *The Grand Sophy*. In this current work, we learned about Heyer and her admiration for Austen. Yet, what is so astonishing is the link between *Emma* and Heyer's *The Grand Sophy*. When we read this book, it almost reminds us of *Pride and Prejudice*, but there is more of Emma Woodhouse than of Elizabeth Bennet in Sophy Stanton-Lacy.

*The Grand Sophy* conveys the story of a 20-year-old English woman who also manipulates and uses people to achieve her own interests. She interferes in other characters' lives, and encourages them to act. But Emma and Sophy are not alike. Both novels are focused on the position of women in society but *The Grand Sophy* goes more directly to the matter than *Emma* does. Heyer observed in detail all of Emma's flaws, and where Emma failed, Sophy was victorious. Heyer created a heroine who knew herself too well. Thus, she knew her own limits and capacities. She had travelled half world her entire life and faced complex and dangerous situations. Consequently, she learned how to deal with people, how to take the thunder and when to be off sight. Sophy is reckless, strong, and fearless.

Definitely, she is not a common lady. She is bold enough as to hold and use a pistol with expertise. She drives her own phaeton, rides horses with strong complexions, not the ones proper for a lady. She is independent and does not care for others' opinions. In the majority of these aspects, Emma is in complete disadvantage. It is true that both manipulated other characters, but they had different reasons to do it. Emma had too much time and decided to dedicate it to Harriet,



she thought she knew best how to help her dearest friend to have a better perspective in life, but she did not have experience in analyzing people's character. On the other hand, Sophy understood since the first moment the serious situation their relatives were handling. She knew how to act and what they needed, even though readers still were not conscious of this. Neither of them acted maliciously but experience was a variable which defined the field of action of both heroines. They are both emotional, warm, and gentle; they are protective when they need to be. Moreover, they both take their time to learn from their mistakes and coincidentally both heroines find love at the end of the story. They were so much focused on helping others and planning others' lives that they did not pay attention to what was happening around them. Sometimes, Sophy moves around Charles like Elizabeth Bennet did around Mr. Darcy. She left Charles unarmed, with no protections. She dismantled him with her charms. In this case, Charles Rivenhall is a mix of Mr. Knightley and Mr. Darcy. We can say that Sophy and Charles met and interacted like Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy did. However, there is more of Mr. Knightley in him and it is proven by every time Charles lectured Sophy, reminding her that she must never cross the line.

In *Emma*, the protagonist had feelings of envy towards a character that was almost equal to her: Jane Fairfax. In the case of Sophy, there was Miss Wraxton, but the situation was different. Miss Wraxton was beautiful and had no comparison to any other women. However, Sophy never felt envy, she just was ashamed that Miss Wraxton with her qualities was so conservative and boring. This particular situation made Sophia Stanton-Lacy outstand more than ever.

In conclusion, there are several evidences that prove Emma Woodhouse was that archetype that Heyer followed to create Sophy Stanton-Lacy. This contemporary heroine is a clear deconstruction of Emma Woodhouse. In a nutshell, Emma could have been the Sophy we already read, if Austen would have let her get out of Highbury.

## Conclusions

We have acknowledged that the English Literature has great female exponents and we have studied their work from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Several researchers focus on the



Victorian era, but there is such a significant compilation of great books in contemporary times. In the past March 2020, we read about Georgette Heyer and her versatile collection of Thriller stories and Regency novels. She followed the path Austen initiated with her style and that is how we encounter *The Grand Sophy*, an excellent book, a bestseller like every Heyer's book. Reading it reminded us of Emma Woodhouse. In that case, we aimed to ascertain that the character of Sophie in *The Grand Sophie* is a deconstruction of the character of Emma from the homonymous novel.

In this research, we analyzed Heyer's biography, elements of Modernism and Postmodernism. Likewise, we selected and studied information of Derrida's Deconstruction Theory and how it is applied to the analysis of the characters' archetypes. Since reading, according to this theory, is transformational, studying in detail Heyer's process of characterization of Sophy Stanton-Lacy we realized that there is a clear deconstruction in this character. Sophy interacts with characters the same way Emma does, but she does not make mistakes, she is always victorious in every aspect in which Emma fails. There is a clear deviation of the original archetype, both heroines had the same economic situation, they are both elegant, educated and sometimes arrogant. However, Sophy knows herself too well because she spent most of the time travelling, facing strange situations and meeting complex people. Moreover, she always moved around the high society in different countries, something that Emma lacks. They both are good at manipulating, but their reasons are different as well as their intentions. In *Emma*, the protagonist needs to understand herself to grow, but in *The Grand Sophy* the rest needed to understand the main character. In one book, the protagonist was wrong compared to the world, in the other one, the world was the one who needed to change. *The Grand Sophy* taught us that women can be marvelous, accurate, fearless, and they can follow their own feelings and instincts without the pressure of society and still be decorous, elegant and worthy.



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