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***The Maiden's Consent (El sí de las niñas),
or Women's Sense and Sensibility in
Absolutist Spain (1806)***

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THE FOLLOWING LINES ARE A TRIBUTE to Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, a novel that the editors of this volume laudably chose to commemorate on the second centenary of its publication. Seduced by the project, I decided to perform an exercise of comparative literature addressing the following questions: How did Spanish contemporary fiction represent *Sense and Sensibility's* main concerns? Could this comparison offer an interesting perspective on *Sense and Sensibility*, and even on the rest of Austen's writings? Could we use this comparison to measure Austen's conservatism or progressivism about key notions like love or obedience?

In Spain, the writing and publication of *Sense and Sensibility* coincided with two periods: the reign of Charles IV (1788-1808), the last Spanish "Enlightened Despot," and the Peninsular War (1808-1814), one of the most important conflicts of the Napoleonic Wars. Since the latter period was very prolific in publications (mainly political) but much poorer than the former in the quality of fictional narratives, the reign of Charles IV (1788-1808) was the period to examine for a proper comparison.¹ Further, since the Spanish government forbade the publication of novels in 1799 (Álvarez Barrientos), we will resort to the theatre. The most important play of the Spanish Enlightenment is *El sí de las niñas (The Maiden's Consent)*, penned by the playwright Leandro Fernández de Moratín and published in 1805.² Although a novel written by a woman in parliamentary England and a play for the theatre written by a Spanish man under an absolutist regime might seem difficult to compare, considering Austen's "dramatic powers" and her taste for long dialogues (Byrne ix), such a comparison might not be inappropriate. In spite of first impressions, there are important similarities between both works. Like Austen, Moratín has been criticized for reusing the same subject,

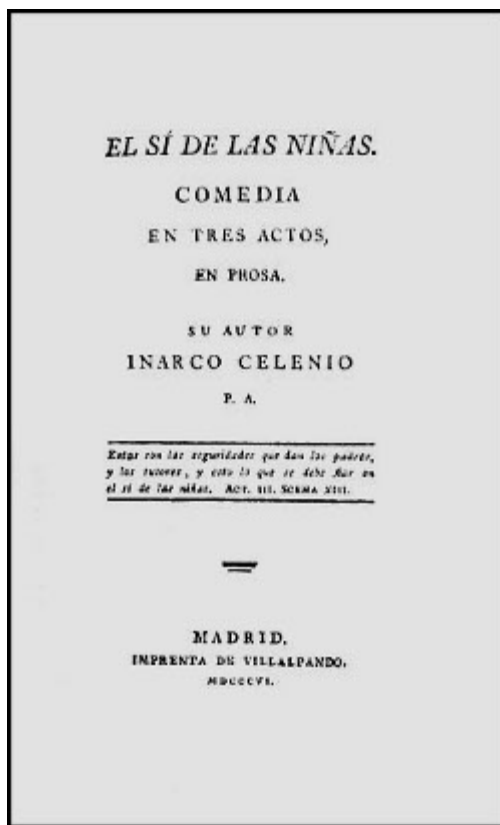


Leandro Fernández de Moratín by
Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1799)

which also underlies the main narrative of Austen's novels: the pursuit of an appropriate marriage. Moratin's characters, like Austen's, are also mostly among the well-off middle classes (the dramatist followed the neoclassical tradition of reserving the great characters for tragedies).

Common topics in both works (such as sense, sensibility, love, marriage, "the drama of woman" [Smith], education, obedience, or authority) could throw light on the discussions about *Sense and Sensibility* and its author, particularly, for example, in connection to the Enlightenment or Romanticism, and even their progressivism or conservatism. Though Austen and Moratín were unaware of each other's existence and were apparently so different because of their genders, their careers, and their countries, as intellectuals and writers they shared many concerns. Furthermore, the contrast between both texts reinforces Austen's relationship with the Enlightenment and Moratín's involvement in the intellectual and moral dialogue of his time, despite the wrongly supposed isolation of Spanish intellectuals.

The Maiden's Consent: plot and context



The title page of *El sí de las niñas*.
Inarco Celenio is Moratín's pseudonym.

The Maiden's Consent was successfully performed in Madrid at the beginning of 1806. In these years, the Spanish Absolutist king Charles IV had increased control over theatrical representations, imposing a big reform. The neoclassical recovery of the idea of theatre as a great "school of customs" had hardly influenced Spanish Enlightened (or, at least, reformist) politicians.³ Although the theatre reform was the subject of a long debate during the second half of the Spanish eighteenth century, no king had undertaken a project as ambitious as Charles IV when he instituted the "Junta de Reforma" ("Reform Committee") in 1799, which imposed a strict supervision of authors and texts. Considered potentially subversive, many old Baroque plays and their current imitations were substituted for tragedies and particularly for comedies, which depicted the average portrait of an ideal subject: obedient and hard-working men and women satisfied with their social status.⁴ Being directly controlled by the Crown, Spanish theatre was full of indoctrinating plays that wanted to teach the official concept of morality to people of all classes and both sexes who made part of the public (Andioc, *Teatro* 541-52, *Del siglo* 569-646).

Leandro Fernández de Moratín was one of the intellectuals most compromised by this reform. His plays particularly focused on arranged marriages, especially those between an old man and a young girl.⁵ This custom was considered a great problem by the Spanish authorities, who thought that marriages against the will of one or both members were the source of fights, infidelities, and other scandals tending to destroy the fundamental pillar of absolutist society: the family.

The plot of *The Maiden's Consent* is as follows: Francisca (also called Paquita) is a sixteen-year-old girl educated in a convent. Her mother, a ruined widow, decides to marry her to Don Diego, a fifty-nine-year-old man. Don Diego may be forty-three years older than Francisca, but he is rich. The problem is that Francisca, who has spent a few days with her aunt after leaving the convent, has fallen in love with Don Carlos, a young Royal Army officer, who deeply reciprocates Francisca's love. When Francisca learns the terrible news of her betrothal to the old man, she writes a letter to Don Carlos begging for help. Francisca and her mother meet Don Diego in a discreet inn, where Don Carlos arrives to break up the engagement. But, unluckily, when Don Carlos reaches the inn, he realizes that the old man who is set to marry his secret girlfriend is none other than his uncle and tutor, upon whose authority

everything in his life—even love—depends. So all is lost: Carlos cannot disobey his uncle, and Francisca cannot refuse her mother's will. Fortunately, Don Diego is a good-hearted man who renounces the engagement after noticing the powerful love between Carlos and Francisca.

Despite the Spanish political system of this period, *El sí de las niñas* is not a reactionary text. Moratín was an enlightened writer and thinker. Although as a follower of Joseph I Bonaparte during the Peninsular War, he made no part of the Spanish liberal movement, Moratín was a progressive who had many connections with liberals. Before publishing his plays, the author had travelled around Western Europe, including France, England, and Italy, and he could translate in all three languages. (In fact he was, by profession, a translator for the government.) Ultimately, all European intellectuals shared the same major reference points (like Scottish and French Enlightened authors, for example) and spoke a similar intellectual language.

A reading of *The Maiden's Consent* dispels prejudices about Spanish literature during the Old Regime (held to be socially backward and deeply religious). This comedy is particularly fresh as Philip Deacon's study of its irony and its sense of humor suggests. Moratín failed to achieve the necessary equilibrium that every Spanish writer had to maintain between reformism and political and religious orthodoxy. Only because he was a *protegé* of Manuel Godoy, the king's right-hand man, did this play escape from the Inquisition, which disliked Moratín's criticisms against religious superstitions (Andioc, *Del siglo* 203-20). Ten years later, during the Spanish Restoration, with Godoy no longer in power, the Inquisition forbade the play to be performed or printed.

Sense ruling Sensibility

We could say that sense and sensibility are not incompatible in Austen's novel. From the very first chapter we know that Elinor (the "sensible" character) is by no means an iceberg: "Elinor, too, was deeply afflicted; but still she could struggle, she could exert herself" (8).

The novel is not a Manichaean defense of women's sense against sensibility. Instead, Austen appeals for a correct administration of both. Behavior, therefore, seems to be the social (and even political) key. As Elinor tells her sister: "My doctrine has never aimed at the subjection of the understanding. All I have ever attempted to influence has been the behaviour" (108). From trivial conversations about the weather (or the roads), to the fundamental unbreakable condition of engagements, it seems that Elinor finds in social conventions a kind of protection for women. Although sometimes these conventions can be irksome, it appears in *Sense and Sensibility* that women who do not follow them are on the road to ruin. This was the case of Eliza Williams (Colonel Brandon's first love), who paid horribly for challenging the system, and it could have been Marianne's if she hadn't realized—through her experience—that her attitude was wrong. The didactical intentions of the novel are evident. Words like "prudence," "fortitude," or "moderation" accompany Elinor, whereas "excessive," "impetuous," or "inconsiderate" are linked to Marianne's inappropriate behavior, so out of place in society: "At every turn, the reader cannot avoid the appropriate conclusion" (Butler 183); if "Elinor Dashwood has learned to do her duty; Marianne must learn to do her duty at great emotional cost," Horwitz suggests (4). Being sensible means adopting appropriate behavior.

The debate between sense and sensibility in *El sí de las niñas* is related to a proper education. Moratín criticized the traditional education for girls. Although Doña Irene says that her daughter "was raised with no tricks or deceptions," the truth is that Francisca has been educated to hide her feelings. In public, she is the opposite of Marianne Dashwood. Some lines later, Doña Irene—in a very Elinor-like comment—says to her daughter's old pretender: "Please realize that it is not proper for an innocent young girl to say sincerely what she's thinking. Don Diego, it would look bad for a young lady who has a sense of shame and has been brought up according to God's commandments to dare say *I love you* to a man" (1.4).

Feigning love as an act of obedience is Doña Francisca's duty; she knows it and complains in

private about her gender's curse:

I've said plenty to him, and up to now I've tried to appear happy when I'm with him, although I'm certainly not, and I laugh and talk like a little girl would . . . All just to make my mother happy, for if I don't . . . But the Blessed Virgin knows very well that it doesn't come from my heart. (1.9)

Francisca is not as stoical as Elinor: she shows her feelings although never to an equal but merely to Rita (her servant and confidante). Rita relates Francisca's woes to another servant: "I can't begin to tell you how much the poor girl cried, for she was so afflicted. She didn't want to eat and couldn't sleep. . . . And at the same time she had to pretend so that her aunt wouldn't suspect the truth of the matter" (1.8). Those woes are very similar to those of Austen's broken-hearted Marianne, with the big difference that Marianne makes no efforts at pretence.

Afraid of disappointing her mother, Francisca does not dare to show her real feelings in public, an attitude of submission that is not portrayed as positive. During the third act, Don Diego has a long conversation with Francisca, trying to ascertain if she really wants to marry him. The next words of the gentleman are key to understanding the model of feminine education and conduct criticized in *El sí de las niñas*:

There you have the fruits of so-called education! This is called bringing a girl up properly: teaching her to pretend and to hide the most innocent affairs with perfidious dissimulation. They're well-educated if they've been taught the arts of secretiveness and lying! . . . It's an excellent education, indeed, this that implants in them the fear, the cunning, and the dumbness of slaves! (3.9)

Following his enlightened spirit, Moratín argues that a well-educated woman would be sensible enough to know when to hide and when to show her sensibility (a skill that none of the feminine characters of *Sense and Sensibility* and *El sí...* have). Somehow, we can read Francisca as a composite of Elinor and Marianne and as an embodiment of the dichotomy of Sense and Sensibility. Francisca cultivates her own sorrow like Marianne but hides it in public like Elinor. She has a secret fiancé to whom she has sent a letter asking for help, but she is also ready to marry Don Diego if it is her mother's will.

In view of the feminine canon of this period, any moralist would prefer Francisca, who at least is obedient.⁶ But as a consequence of negligence and of equally inconvenient models of education, both Marianne and Francisca have a lack of sense, which affects them in opposite but equally socially inappropriate ways. Marianne, spoiled (or wrongly advised) by her mother, cannot master her sensibility; Francisca, repressed by a strict religious upbringing, suffers because of her inability to show her true feelings. Between the two extremes, Marianne and Francisca, there is a didactic middle ground that somehow could be Elinor, "the heroine of a modern comedy" (Gay 42). Indeed, lest we exaggerate Elinor's self-control, we must not forget that the most sensitive moment of this Austen novel is her discovery that Ferrars's engagement to Lucy is broken as she "burst[s] into tears of joy" (408)—a great literary device, and a final redemption for sensibility.

Since Austen and Moratín wrote about (and for) different societies, we could ask ourselves whether any of Austen's heroines would be exemplary in Moratín's eyes. In the case of *Sense and Sensibility*, the best answer again would be Elinor, who is a well-educated woman according to the social virtues "conspicuously grounded in the Enlightenment" (Knox-Shaw 152). She is a sensitive woman, but her sensible duty comes before sensibility, and in the end she is rewarded for her attitude. Her only taint could be that, like Francisca, she hides her real feelings. While it seems that the main character of *Sense and Sensibility* knows perfectly well how to handle herself in society, she needs the final *deus ex machina* or Providence's reward (the wedding between Robert Ferrars and Lucy Steele) to have a happy ending.

We do not know how Elinor would react to the problem faced by Francisca, an arranged marriage. There is considerable evidence in the novel of her trust in and sincerity towards her mother, a kind of relationship completely different from that of Doña Irene and Doña Francisca. Among the forced or socially convenient (but undesired) marriages in other Austen books, there are examples of independence, such as Lizzy Bennet's rejection of her cousin in *Pride and Prejudice*, or Anne Elliot's refusal of Charles Musgrove in *Persuasion*, but there are also examples of submission, such as young Anne Elliot's renunciation of a marriage that Lady Russell found inconvenient. We can suspect that Austen does not defend the absolute eclipsing of women's opinion. Probably the key is not obedience but duty: a well educated woman knows her duty and can disobey an order if she finds it inappropriate. For example, according to Barbara J. Horwitz, "Elizabeth Bennet . . . is pressured by her mother to marry Mr. Collins for economic reasons, but she is correct in refusing him, according to her father and to the conduct books, because he is a fool" (44).

We will return to Francisca's sense of obedience and duty later.

Sensibility, love, and marriage

As the definitive association between love and marriage is the result of the bourgeois or gentry conception of domestic life, and as Romanticism is the cultural movement linked to this social group, it is reasonable that Romantic characters (passionate, sentimental, individualistic, etc.) arose strongly during the transition from Enlightened Neoclassicism to nineteenth-century Romanticism.⁷ In this transition, we cannot forget the influence in the second half of the eighteenth century of the sentimental novel, a genre in which there was a shift towards marriages for love, rather than simply arranged marriages. Sentimental literature had triumphed in Europe, much to the chagrin of neoclassical writers, thanks to books like Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-1748), Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (*Julie or the New Heloise*, 1761), or August von Kotzebue's *Menschenhass und Reue* (*Misanthropy and Repentance*, on stage in England as *The Stranger* [1790]), but "by the end of the eighteenth century several writers were preaching against the excessive emotionalism [sentimental literature] seemed to encourage" (Horwitz 11).

The Sentimental triumphed among the Spanish public, thanks to its introduction in comedies. For example, Kotzebue's *Misanthropy and Repentance* (translated into Spanish in 1800) was a great success. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, many neoclassical writers had overcome their prejudices against the genre by adopting in their pedagogical plays the strength of feelings and their faculty for moving the public. The publication of Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos's *El delincuente honrado* (*The Honored Delinquent*) in 1774 had proved that neoclassical precepts were compatible with sentimentalism, and little by little authors stopped condemning sentimental works merely on the basis of genre, instead judging them on the basis of their quality (García Garrosa).

Although Moratín was the leader of neoclassical writers in Madrid (rivals of pre-Romantic writers like Manuel José Quintana [Derozier]), he was familiar with sentimental language. Old Don Diego aspires to a marriage very similar to the one between Marianne and Brandon, a friendship which becomes love:

I'm not the sort of man who tries to hide his defects. I know that neither my figure nor my age is such as to cause anyone to fall madly in love with me. But also I thought it was not impossible that a sensible and well-bred young girl might come to love me with that tranquil and constant love that is so much like friendship and is the only kind of love than can create happy marriages. (2.5).

Francisca is sixteen years old and Don Diego is fifty-nine, a difference of forty-three years, while in *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne says that Brandon, eighteen years older (she is seventeen, he thirty-five), could be her father (44). The death of Henry Dashwood, presumably older—we don't know how much—than his second wife, is the cause of the troubles suffered by the female Dashwoods and the beginning of

the whole story.

Don Carlos, the young and reciprocated pretender, knows very well the difference between love and marriage and for the first and last time challenges his uncle, cursing his marriage: “You will be married to her, she will call you her husband, but if one or many times you notice she is crying, you will know that those tears are for me! . . . Don’t ever ask the reason for her melancholy. . . . I, I will be the cause” (3.10). This last melodramatic scene shows an enlightened Moratín siding with sentiment rather than reason. Throughout *El sí de las niñas*, Carlos and Francisca speak like romantic lovers (like Romeo and Juliet⁸), they consider each other their first and last love, they prefer to die than to be separated (this idea appears many times), and, finally, they say that they would do anything for love. Despite the influence of sentimental literature, this exaltation of love is not common in Spanish neoclassical plays as Baroque long-winded exhibitions of feelings had been forbidden during the eighteenth century. But Moratín had a reason to defend love, a reason supported by the authorities and moralists.

If women’s happiness is Austen’s priority (Smith; Johnson), this altruism doesn’t seem to be the principal motivation of Moratín, driven by another kind of preoccupation. During her first voyage to Spain (between 1802 and 1805), Lady Holland observed that Spanish people did not link love and marriage. She noticed that noble women had arranged marriages and loved someone else with total naturalness (19-20). In Spain at the end of the eighteenth century, upper-class husbands who denied their wife a *cortejo* (a kind of lover) were considered jealous and antiquated (Martín Gaité).

Moralists vociferously complained about this situation, which they linked with feminine dissipation and a general descent from religious principle. In turn, reformists perceived the problems in a practical way and were always optimistic about the possibility of intervening in society like surgeons. Arranged marriages were the origin of this social and political problem, and didactic theatre could be the first step to changing social conventions. According to the official perspective, in marrying Don Diego, Francisca was a potential moral problem (the possibility that she would find a lover) and even a demographic one (the probability that she would become a young widow).

Moratín served his king as one of the most important writers concerned with this situation. Before *El sí de las niñas*, he wrote *El viejo y la niña* (*The Old Man and the Girl*, performed for the first time in 1790). The alliance between love and marriage was very convenient to His Catholic Majesty in his efforts to put an end to this upper-class custom. At the end of the Old Regime, the absolutist monarchy tried to adapt its propaganda to the new times, and marriage for love was one of its tools.

Moratín was a neoclassical writer who considered that love was a means to reform society; the author of *Sense and Sensibility* was equally against arranged marriages, reflecting upon the importance of sentiment for the establishment of a proper engagement. The English writer, however, seemed more concerned about following social conventions.

If the spirit of the Enlightenment was sense, the soul of Romanticism was sensibility. In her novel, Austen shows a Neoclassical spirit by making her Romantic (and romantic) character, Marianne, constantly look bad.⁹ In *Sense and Sensibility* Austen appears to be opposed to Sentimentalism and even to Romanticism. She uses the adjective “romantic” almost pejoratively. For example, when defining Mrs. Dashwood’s excessive tolerance of Marianne, she writes: “common sense, common care, common prudence, were all sunk in Mrs. Dashwood’s romantic delicacy” (98). Of course, Marianne’s first encounter with Willoughby could not be more novelistic: rain, a handsome young man, a rescue, and the like, although the story proves later that these first impressions eclipse sense and are not trustworthy in falling in love. Not every attitude proper to a character of Romantic novels, however, is criticized in *Sense and Sensibility*; indeed Edward Ferrars can be considered a Romantic character because of his suffering, his melancholic nature, and his rejection of politics in favor of a small country parish.

While Austen usually matches the moments of Marianne’s deep and uncontrolled sadness with

Romantic scenery, the two conversations in which Marianne's Romantic spirit is ridiculed are particularly interesting. When Marianne nostalgically recalls the autumnal sights of home, Elinor replies, "It is not every one . . . who has your passion for dead leaves" (101). Even more significant is Edward's answer to Marianne's opinions on landscape:

I like a fine prospect, but not on picturesque principles. I do not like crooked, twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight and flourishing. I do not like ruined, tattered cottages. I am not fond of nettles, or thistles, or heath blossoms. I have more pleasure in a snug farm-house than a watch-tower." (113)

If Marianne were the heroine of the novel, the fact of her recollecting emotions in tranquillity could be considered as an exaltation of Romanticism by Austen, but the omniscient narrative voice tends to criticize Marianne's conduct as affected or even immature.

At the end of the book, Marianne surrenders completely, deeply apologizes for her attitude, and recognizes that Elinor's unwavering commitment to sense is the only option (or, at least, that artificial sensibility is an erroneous way of life). Marianne, who always had the romantic idea of loving just once, finally gets married to Colonel Brandon, someone whom she previously considered old, boring, and the kind of man to whom engagement is a business contract. Accepting Brandon, Marianne begins a marriage "with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship" (429). Nothing could be further from romantic love.¹⁰

As we have just seen, passionate romance was more welcome in *El sí de las niñas* than in *Sense and Sensibility*. In the case of Moratín there were moral and political reasons: Spanish politicians and moralists realized that arranged marriages went against customs and families, and were the origin of lovers and quarrels. We could say that a modern argument supported conservative aspirations. In the case of *Sense and Sensibility*, we have to wait until the end of the novel to see the "model" marriage formed by Colonel Brandon and Marianne, which despite being very sensible and completely dispassionate, carries a happy and everlasting love as well.

Moratín and Austen shared their ends, but did they use the same means? Maybe they did: Moratín and his contemporaries also appealed to common sense to avoid arranged marriages. Supporters of conservative interpretation of Austen may think that *Sense and Sensibility* is old fashioned in terms of couple relationships even when comparing it with a Spanish play of 1805. For example, Brandon and Marianne's model of marriage is based on reason and friendship, not in passion or romanticism (much more fashionable in the literature of the time). The big question is whether or not Austen was defending a conservative and dispassionate society (Roberts). Her ideas are probably echoes of the Enlightenment (Knox-Shaw) or perhaps a simple matter of literary preferences (rejecting exaggerated sentimentalism). Or maybe neither, given that sensible marriage was pragmatic from women's perspective (Smith) but not necessarily conservative. Mary Wollstonecraft recommended in her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) to "love rationally": "when we find we have been led astray by our passions, and that it was our own imaginations which gave the high colouring to the picture, we may be certain time will drive it out of our minds" (qtd. in Horwitz 12).

Sensible obedience before love

So far, many of the social and sentimental issues explored in *Sense and Sensibility* also appear in *El sí de las niñas*. There is a big difference, however, in how the characters react before paternal authority. Despite the conservative interpretations of Austen (Butler; Roberts), even if she could be considered anti-Jacobin (which is not saying much, as many European intellectuals—liberals included—were against Jacobin violence), we see that Austen's perception of authority is more progressive than any a Spanish Enlightened writer could ever send to press. (What he or she might think in private is a different matter.)

It should of course be stated that paternal authority is as important in *Sense and Sensibility* as it was in society. Elinor herself thinks that parents must be obeyed, even when they might have ill-conceived prejudices: “The old, well established grievance of duty against will, parent against child, was the cause of all. She would have been glad to know when these difficulties were to cease, this opposition was to yield,—when Mrs. Ferrars would be reformed, and her son be at liberty to be happy” (118). This interesting sentence announces better times, when the present son and daughters become parents. The despotic Mrs. Ferrars acts like a tyrant who must be dethroned as soon as possible; obeying her—thereby breaking a promise of marriage—would be dishonorable for the Ferrars brothers.

Confronting authority is possible in *Sense and Sensibility*, particularly for the men, as is the case of young Brandon or the Ferrars brothers. The women’s situations are not equal to those of the men: they do not have the option of confronting authority. This difference is not restricted to sons and daughters but also extends to fathers and mothers. It is thus “practical” for Austen’s narrative that paternal authority is absent from both the Dashwood and the Ferrars families, as it is obvious that, in patriarchal societies, mothers can be disobeyed more easily than fathers: defiance of fathers would be more iconoclastic. Austen and Moratín had something in common above all: both were reformists, not revolutionaries.

If we focus on the importance of obedience and the perception of authority in the Spanish play, we see that Moratín’s political environment and circumstances were much different from Austen’s. In absolutist monarchies, the king is the father of his subjects, so observing the Commandment “Honor thy father and mother” was a symbolic reflection of political obedience (Calvo, “Mi Rey”). *El sí de las niñas* is no exception, and paternal authority seems a representation of royal authority (Prieto). The submission is complete. As a king, a father must be obeyed, regardless of whether he is right or wrong. However, the authority figure should advise the enlightened subjects, never impose. According to this idea, Don Diego says: “Orders my child! In such delicate matters, wise parents do not order. They propose, advise and hint” (1.5). Don Diego’s attitude throughout the play is very similar to the way despotic kings were portrayed during the Enlightenment by official propaganda: all powerful yet indulgent and concerned for their subjects’ welfare (Fernández Albaladejo; García Cárcel).

Carlos and Francisca are not obedient automatons: Francisca—as a “mature young woman” (Deacon xx)—writes letters to Carlos asking for help, and Carlos leaves the military camp to win back her love. In the end, however, they cannot defy authority. Rita, the servant, describes the circumstances of Francisca’s consent, of how her mother’s authority and the nun’s persuasion had forced the girl to accept Don Diego:

Paquita’s mother began writing letters and more letters saying that she had arranged her marriage in Madrid to a rich, honourable and well liked gentleman. In short, he was excellent and perfect for her, and one couldn’t desire anything more. The poor girl was so harassed by such ideas and constantly upset by that blessed nun’s sermons that she finally felt obligated to say, and felt forced to say, she was ready to do whatever they told her to do. (1.8).

Francisca shows her docility and subservience to her mother many times, as well as her sensible solidarity with her family’s necessities,¹¹ for example in a conversation with the old pretender, Don Diego: “I will do what my mother orders me to do, and I will marry you” (3.8).

When Don Carlos arrives at the inn with the intention of stopping the engagement, he cannot imagine anything strong enough to intervene between Francisca and him: “To take her away from me! No, sir. . . . No matter who he is, he won’t take her away from me” (2.9). Once Don Carlos realizes that his opponent is his uncle, he says immediately: “Everything is ruined!” (2.11). A young officer, deeply in love, cannot avert this personal disaster. His tutor’s authority far outweighs the strength of his

feelings. Don Carlos says to Don Diego, “Now I’ve told you. . . . But, let’s end this odious conversation. . . . May you live long and happy and not hate me, for I’ve never wanted to displease you. . . . The greatest proof I can offer you of my obedience and respect, is to leave here immediately” (3.10).

At the end, Don Diego renounces Francisca only because he decides to do so (nobody even begs him): everything depends upon his royal grace. This conclusion establishes the great difference between the free will of characters in *El sí de las niñas* and *Sense and Sensibility*. While the image of young Colonel Brandon running away with his lover conjures up a romantic hero, for another military man like Don Carlos, the same action would be represented as dishonorable. Brandon failed, but the point is that he, an indubitable man of honor, challenged his father for love. We can say the same about the Ferrars brothers: both are (at least temporarily) rejected by their mother because of Lucy Steele. Edward Ferrars has two priorities before his mother: his honor (he has to fulfill his promise to Lucy) and then his love for Elinor, a girl whom his mother dislikes. The established order of the novel gives the Ferrars brothers the option of disobeying their mother, and they do so. In the case of Edward, that disobedience is defined as honorable.

The basic fact dictating the big difference between both books, both authors, and, ultimately, all their characters is that Colonel Brandon and Edward Ferrars are citizens whereas Don Carlos is a subject—and that is something not even love can change.

NOTES

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1. The best English-language work on the reign of Charles IV of Spain is still the book by Herr. For Spanish speakers (or readers) I recommend La Parra and Egido.
2. The play has been translated into English with various titles, including *Paquita’s Assent* (Brighton: King, 1902), *A Daughter’s Consent* (Leicester: Minerva, 1938), *The Maiden’s Consent* (Great Neck, NY: Barron’s, 1962), and *An Innocent Girl’s Consent* (Lampeter: Mellen, 2005). Probably the most widely known title is *The Maiden’s Consent*, so that is the one we use here. Quotations are from the 2005 edition translated by Robert G. Trimble. For a Spanish version with English notes, see Philip Deacon’s very valuable edition, which includes an extensive bibliography: *El sí de las niñas* (London: Bristol Classical, 1995).
3. Many Spanish authors at the time wrote about pedagogical reform. Probably the most important essay is the *Memoria sobre espectáculos y diversiones públicas*, published by Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos in 1790.
4. The famous *La vida es sueño*, by Calderón de la Barca, was included in the list of forbidden plays.
5. To learn more about Moratín, see the cited works by René Andioc and his editions of Moratín’s texts. Moratín published only five original plays. Four (*El sí de las niñas*, *El barón*, *La mojigata*, and *El viejo y la niña*) were critical of arranged marriages or tyrannical parents: “How often do we see unhappy marriages, monstrous unions, sanctified only because a foolish father undertook to order what he shouldn’t have. Oh! No sir, that’s not a good idea” (*El sí* 2.5).
6. Despite the religious treatises, some enlightened Spanish authors wrote about the importance of a good

education for women. One of the most important works is *Discurso sobre la educación física y moral de las mujeres* (1790), by Josefa Amar y Borbón. On the archetypes and stereotypes of women in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Spain, see my book about the queen Maria Louisa and her dark legend (*Maria Luisa*).

7. Although both meanings are chronologically related, may the reader bear in mind the difference between the adjectives Romantic/Romanticism (referring to an artistic and literary movement or period) and romantic/romanticism (popularly connected to love and feelings).

8. Moratín knew Shakespeare well and made the first Spanish translation of *Hamlet* directly from English (not from French versions). The translation includes an interesting introduction by the Spanish author.

9. Despite the interpretations of Austen as Romantic (e.g., Tuite), I don't think that landscapes, dead leaves, and ruins have a positive image in *Sense and Sensibility*.

10. This model of love was also defended by other writers like Mary Wollstonecraft (Horwitz 44-47).

11. "She is prepared to marry someone for whom she feels repugnance, while admitting that he is a good man, because that is what her mother wants. She is aware of her mother's precarious financial situation and, since Doña Irene constantly mentions the economic benefits for *both of them* to be gained by the marriage to Don Diego, Doña Francisca sees no alternative but to comply with her mother's wishes and go through with the marriage" (Deacon xix).

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