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**JANE AUSTEN'S SOCIAL CRITICISM**

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## ABSTRACT

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The object of this undergraduate thesis is to connect Austen's characteristic style and approach of writing with her witty criticism hidden in her novels as well feminist aspects of her work. Analysis of her strong female characters who mock the uptight English society using their wit, wisdom and irony are also one of the goals of this thesis.

Austen's feminist approach is highlighted in the first major section of this thesis. The discussion about morals in eighteenth – century as well as the situation of women in those days and the beginning of feminism is presented in the very first part of major section. Austen's contemporary writer Mary Wollstonecraft was connected to Austen's work via her opinions and the second part of the first section describes the main links between them. The importance of female authorship and criticism of women are discussed in the third part. Various and unique heroines of Austen are presented in the fourth part entitled "Heroines in Jane Austen's Novels".

The second major section focuses on the beginnings and interpretations of two books (*Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*). A closer look on irony and wit used in *Pride and Prejudice* is brought along with the analysis of main strong features of *Sense and Sensibility*. Finally, there is the summarization of the whole thesis in the conclusion part.

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## INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth century literary world had experienced a phenomenon. Enlargement of moral discourse which allowed new topics to be considered in undiscovered ways. A very first woman to make a permanent mark on English literature in such an extended and powerful way was undoubtedly a conservative and moralist. Jane Austen. She was preoccupied in moral nature and principles and the social status of women in society. Her precise narrative technique demonstrated intelligence about morals and reached for an extended audience (Kirkham, 1983, p. 11). I would like to aim my thesis beyond the characters in her novels and plots they are involved in. A closer analytical comparison between Jane Austen and a one of the very first women with their own voice – Mary Wollstonecraft, is presented. Kirkham (1983) notes in her book that Wollstonecraft's thoughts in publication *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) are similar to Austen's enduring problems and personal criticism of her subject-matter of rational moral nature concerning female education, authority and the family, marriage and social status of women (p. 2). To be able to receive the full message of feminism in late eighteenth century we have to change our view of Austen's novels and rather think about them in the context of eighteenth century feminist ideas and feminist controversies. Furthermore I would like to analyze the phenomenon of female publications and the challenges women had to experience when they desired to be published. These nowadays unaccepted attitudes towards women were absolutely common those days and further exploration of how women began to change their unfortunate destiny as writers will be discussed in section entitled "Criticism of Women and Female Authorship." As Kirkham (1983) states in her book: "Austen was in agreement with the rational feministic point of view on social matters and morals" (p. 4). She projected her opinions and attitudes towards society using her heroines. Female characters in her novels are explored including their uncommon features.

In the next two chapters, an analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* is presented. Firstly focusing on what the titles of both novels tell us and what they imply through a discussion of their treatment of the need for women to have strong heads as well as good hearts. She created heroines who are fully representative of human nature in a larger sense. Austen's habit of laughing at ostentation of all sorts of kind is visible in *Pride and Prejudice*. Abounding in cheerful humor, irony and wit, Austen highlighted the pomposity of morals in a satiric and amusing way. Methodically, the



present work proposes a systematic exploration of selected issues concerning Jane Austen as well as women in general. Lives of women in eighteenth century were rather misfortunate and suffered from inequality. Nevertheless this statement does not exclude the fact that even nowadays women have hard lives. This matter is one of the most important matters of my thesis. What made women to stand up and say stop to inferiority and why is that not exactly working even now in the modern world? In my thesis I would like to pinpoint the hard beginnings of women who were not afraid and fought for the equality and appreciation throughout their literary work as that was considered to be the only save way of drawing the attention to problems.

## **AUSTEN'S CONTEXT AND SOCIETY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

To be a woman always took much of responsibility. In earlier days, specifically eighteenth century England it was hard to imagine what it must have been like to be born as a female. No power, no voice, no specific important personality. Women were simply all the same, with the exact one purpose. To get well married, have children, take care of the household and be obedient to their husbands. Private life for woman (above all single woman) was nonexistent. This schema of life always repeated itself. Of course to be born to a royal family, that is something different but it did not vary much from the facts mentioned above. Along with the Enlightenment, new ways of thinking were brought to Europe. Furthermore, everything which is new always desired to be discussed, written down or memorized for further use. Writers are slowly losing their fear of being published (even if they publish only via pseudonym) when criticizing new areas of human society and thinking. But in England is happening much more. Female writers, who are no longer, satisfied with submission towards society with every single step they take on their own way. Women were simply everywhere, not that they have not been here before, but they have become to strike out their own path and were no longer worried of threatened by a male. New forbidden issues were discussed and female writers were beginning to focus on topics which related to them. Female education, the possibility of becoming a feminist, unmarried or “unsatisfying” for society in any other meaning. It was inevitable that one of the many women, who can no longer stay silent, will be seen by the others. To be different, special acquires a certain amount of skills which Austen possessed without any doubt. Her strongest gift was that she was not afraid to take it to the next level. Even though she published via pseudonym, she was not afraid to take and discuss unpleasant issues which were already there. No one should put their own head from the crowd without any good reason. So when Austen started to write mostly about morals and society she did something unheard of, for a woman. Status of women and taking women as individual beings was certainly a good reason for Austen and why she could not stay silent any longer (Kirkham, 1983, pp 6-17). A good notion about Austen's writings pointed out Morrison in her book. Morrison (2005) noted in her book: “Her writings evince a strong allegiance to the literary and cultural traditions of the eighteenth century, but they also betray a debt to the conflicts and vast upheavals of the early nineteenth century” (p.9). Austen focused on rural gentry since that was the world which was safe and known to her.

This gentry was neither hard to criticize nor glorify. Her novels are packed with social commentary on various issues but above all morals, concerning society and community. “She always saw people in the context of ‘company’ and ‘community’ or the unhappy – or desired – lack of these” (Tanner, 1986, p. 13). It is almost astonishing when a person thinks about all the issues Austen has ever written when her concerning that her own personal experience had some limitations. When we compare all those Victorian women novelists such as – George Eliot, Charlotte Brönte or Elizabeth Gaskell we find out that Austen indeed did have a certain limitations in comparison of these women. Apart from female authors mentioned above, Austen never left the south of England (Gillie, 1974, p. 20). This puts Austen even more at a different place but still among leading writers of her time. She lacked a personal contact with these authors, isolated but still being able to write about social encounters and issues. Austen was a brilliant author with her unique style of narrating and creating witty characters. Her strongest side lies in her genius idea. Not openly criticize the society, but be smart about it and do it in a nice and polite way. Mock the society with clever conversations, use of tongue and proper selection of words. Simply playing with rational judgment, morals and the question of marriage or other topics, all by cleverness and clever use of tongue. Stafford (2008) states a good comment on this matter: “Making people laugh was also a way of making them listen” (p. 32). No harsh criticism is intended. Just a simple comment on the matter and add a polite smile to it. Austen mocked pomposity and we can find a good example in almost every conversation between Elizabeth Bennet and Lady Catherine de Bourg in *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen began to write in early age and kept her writings hidden only to herself. Also when her first novel came out, Austen’s family had no idea about their daughter becoming a writer (Gillie, 1974, p. 19). It was a surprise for everybody, when they found out that her own daughter is the author of the book they have purchased and brought home. “Austen started to write in the late 1780s, and like Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, was highly productive throughout the 1790s” (Morrison, 2005, p.11). The six novels she wrote during these years are comedies of manners. As Morrison (2005) pointed out: “They concern a young woman’s errant but ultimately successful voyage to self-discovery, and feature small groups of largely middle-class and provincial characters in a circumscribed (some say confined) environment” (p. 12). What concerned Austen even more than marriage was the question of money and fortune which can be seen in sources of income of many of her characters. Tanner (1986) mentions in his book the importance to stress the fact that the society Jane Austen was writing about was essentially based on landed

interests (p. 16). Her characters have landed property and therefore her heroines need a propertied man. Society people found themselves in was a notable environment full of rules and arranged systems. “The society had to become a political necessity as essential as property to the maintenance of order and peace in society” (Tanner, 1986, p. 18). Austen did believe in the values of her society but at the same time she saw her society threatened, but mainly from the inside. Bad manners were not simply a local and occasional embarrassment to be laughed at. They were real and present everywhere and therefore Austen had to encounter them. The world was a buzzing place of new ideas and views and Austen dared to take the risk and project these problems in the attitude of her characters (Kirkham, 1983, pp 12-15). Although she was not popular at her time she managed to found her own way of telling her concerns to the society. “There are few of Austen’s characters who seem fully qualified to act as the necessary maintainers of the society of her novels is a measure of her concern and incipient pessimism” (Tanner, 1986, p.18). Many of Austen’s characters are evidences of her inner thoughts about society and manners.

It was highly fashionable and desired to write about satire in eighteenth century England, but it also gave Austen a chance to criticize her society furtively. In her major novels Austen shows us how blind society was to its own faults, including its attitudes towards women, in particular. The difference between men and women and how this inequality played an important role in the eighteenth century society – especially the topic of marriage and domesticity. To be well married to the right gentleman from an appropriate family could suddenly put the ‘happy’ woman to a whole different status quo in her life. As Stafford (2008) pointed out in her book, “Even at the age of twelve, Jane Austen was aware that there seemed only two possible endings for a young woman’s story – either marriage or melancholy isolation” (p. 33). She considered it to be a necessary and important part of her life. Austen’s thoughts on marriage, as she projected them in her novels invalidates her own personal attitude. In her personal life she strongly resented marriage although she knew that it is the marriage which can secure woman in her life. Austen’s view was that marriage gave women an expanded arena of influence. Austen believed that neither one gender can be superior to the other one as she wrote in one of her letters to her sister Cassandra from Bath. Also in her novels there can be seen certain signs that Austen seems to think that some good qualities or faults belong exclusively to one gender (Kirkham, 1983, pp 55-56). The received image of eighteenth century society Austen often liked to write about can be presented as a stereotype. And as usually stereotypes do possess some general truth in the grounds of society then also Austen had

her own vision and opinion on morals and so we can call this exact perception of women is that of a quiet, thought absolutely brilliant, spinster living in the sheltered margin of her period (Tanner, 1986, p.1). As mentioned before, Austen is considered to be a moralist. The reason to that is her ideology which Tanner (1986) stated:

Her art opening out gentry/middle-class reality and assumptions to a genuinely exploratory fiction which takes alternative forms of life and aspiration seriously, Jane Austen systematically closes up her imagination against critical alternatives. (p.5)

It was natural for eighteenth-century moralists to use abstractions with far more wider perception than we do now. That was the distinction of the novelists and notably Jane Austen. Austen's vision on the society she lived in was rather critical and distinctive. Tanner (1986) reported in his book, "Clearly for Jane Austen society was much more a matter of 'company' and 'community' (face-to-face relationships) that the whole state system of institutions and relationships" (p.12). She was concerned with the laws of good manners or politeness and not with questions concerning the laws of justice. In her writings she hardly touched any question concerning politics, philosophy or medicine. Also skepticism about Romanticism in Austen's novels is present everywhere. This can be seen as a secondary product of Jane Austen's feminism. However her comic vision remained capable of bringing enlightenment, and of reaching towards the ideal, she is considered to be a representative of that true comic spirit which the Romantics admired in Shakespeare (Kirkham, 1983, p. 82).

## **Feminists and Moral Concerns Regarding Women**

First feminist ideas in eighteenth – century England came along with Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen. Bradbrook (1967) mentioned in her book, “The feminist tradition in the English novel was well established when Jane Austen began her writing, and though not particularly distinguished, the best work embodied a view of life which she could accept as partly valid and relevant” (p. 90). But there were more feminists in eighteenth century than might thought, such as mentioned above - Mary Wollstonecraft or Mary Astell, both writers. As Kirkham (1986) presented in her book, “Astell was the most outspoken feminist of her time, and the one who did most develop a feminist point of view about religious and moral questions, education, marriage and the value of women as authors” (p.8). She also put a highlight on the problematic of women to be taken as rational beings. In her book *Reflections on Marriage* (1706) she set out an ideal of Christian marriage where women are regarded as those rational beings (Kirkham, 1983, p. 6). The feminist impulse showed itself first in objection to the assignment of women to an inferior status as spiritual and moral beings. Kirkham (1983) highlighted in her book this fact:

The very first well-educated female (Wollstonecraft) claim of Enlightenment feminism was that women, not having been denied powers of reason, must have the moral status appropriate to ‘rational beings’ formed in the image of a rational God. Perhaps this claim was always tempered with a streak of irony, for feminist moralists, even in the Age of Reason and Enlightenment, were generally rather more aware of the irrationality of human nature and human society than men. (p. 4)

The quotation above points out that women have been always presented as the beings without their own judgment and personal attitude towards life. They were regarded as irrational and without their own voice apart from men who have been always assumed to be the ones with brain. The most important concern regarding women was the question of their education. A concern with education is central to Jane Austen’s work, though not the kind of education we might associate with schools or any pedagogical curriculum. The demand and desire for the equality between the genders brought with it the necessity to be educated on the same level as men are. But women were involved in orthodox moral discourse which caused them to be consigned to a special consideration with slaves, the

unlettered and lunatics when it came to a problem with female education (Tanner, 1986, pp 23-24). Nevertheless women were still convinced about their right and also personal need for the education. The improvement of women's education had to be done. Kirkham (1986) states in her book an interesting opinion on this precise matter:

The demand for an adequate education, the main practical concern of Enlightenment feminism, arose directly from this. The claim that women of the middle and upper classes should be taught to think may not now seem particularly revolutionary, but, as those who opposed it rightly saw, it opened the possibility of social change far beyond the schoolroom of the country house, and the drawing-rooms of the well-to-do. (p. 4)

As mentioned above the society was worried about the possibility of women having a right to think, judge and be independent. The new and revolutionary thinking of women was not appreciated at all. The concerns were about the general background of female being, which was to be the basis of authority in marriage and the family. The feminist demand for a rigorous intellectual education for women could not but carry a threat to the patriarchal basis of authority in the most fundamental of human institutions, the family (Kirkham, 1983, pp 83-84).

The theme of female education was a controversial topic. Bradbrook (1967) mentions in his book:

The theme of education, the mistakes caused by self-deception encouraged by wrong standards and ideals, the attempt to live in accordance with principles that cannot be applied to the world of ordinary, normal personal relationships, lie behind much of Jane Austen's criticism of feminine triviality. (p.90)

Austen is definitely balancing on the frontier between exaggerated idealism and extreme cynicism which lies behind her criticism. Also pessimism she uses is one of the main skills she had abounded throughout her productive years. In several books of Austen's we can find a theme of education and common knowledge. Tanner (1986) reflects that in the second chapter of *Mansfield Park* the main character Fanny Price is mocked for the deficiency in her education by her cousins (concerning the knowledge about geography) and both Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris decide that she is 'far from clever'

(p. 24). On one hand Fanny lacks the true knowledge about stated facts in textbooks, on the other hand she has more real moral intelligence than anyone else in *Mansfield Park* and she ends up on the position of being a 'moral' teacher of them all. And what is more important, to have true knowledge about facts or to be gifted with the intelligence of ethics.

Heroines of Austen have to be educated. Above all sometimes the heroines became their own tutors when they found themselves in a precarious situation and have to act upon what their own head tells them. Tanner (1986) states in his chapter entitled Jane Austen and Education that, "In this more comprehensive sense of education, all of Jane Austen's heroines have to be educated or tutored – by men, an older woman or sister, experience, or themselves (never a parent). Or they in turn act as educators" (p.24). Various examples of becoming a tutor can be found in almost every book of Jane Austen's. Emma has to be tutored and guided by Mr. Knightley. Then we have the case of educating each other, as seen in *Pride and Prejudice* with Elizabeth Bennet and Darcy. Furthermore, Anne Elliot has to educate herself, after being miseducated by Lady Russell and so on.

Education for Jane Austen was much more a matter of proper conduct and truly good manners than any range of skills or information. Moral knowledge which was present in conversations. We rightly think of Jane Austen as a leading artist of conversation and probably correctly deduce that she herself was notable both for the wit and intelligence of her own conversation. Yet in her novels she can mark very clearly and subtly the uses and abuses of conversation. "Some of the most seemingly clever talkers are notably deficient in 'virtue' – though the apparent cleverness may reveal itself as mindless froth or more or less vapid self-aggrandizing display" (Tanner, 1986, pp 25-27). Very often the biggest chatterers do not possess an implication towards virtue. Although their knowledge puts them on sunny side of manners, they still lack a common sense.



## Comparison of Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft

It is hard not to notice feminist elements in Austen's novels. Going all the way back to the acclaimed author Mary Wollstonecraft. Both the women had similar ideas in their heads yet they were different in larger sense (Kirkham, 1983, p. 3).

The first thing both the female writers had in common was their interest in female education, more precisely how Wollstonecraft entered the public world of authorship. She was interested in female education and had first-hand experience of it. As Kirkham (1983) remarks: "She had, with her sisters Eliza and Evelina, and her friend Fanny Blood, set up a school for girls in Newington Green" (p. 10). Having been acquainted with this experience influenced Wollstonecraft to such an high extent that she decided to enter the world of publishers and began to write *Vindication of The Rights of Woman* (Kirkham, 1983, p. 35). Austen's conception of feminism was rational and the ground of it lies in her effort to find and analyze women's roles. Therefore she adopted the same point of view as Wollstonecraft. Frank W. Bradbrook (1996) in his *Jane Austen and her Predecessors* spoke of Austen as belonging to a 'feminist tradition' of fiction. He defined this tradition narrowly, excluding controversial novelists like Wollstonecraft and he found little of importance in it:

The Feminist tradition in the English Novel was well established when Jane Austen began her writing, and though not particularly distinguished, the best work embodied a view of life which she could accept as partly valid and relevant. (p. 90)

We can easily connect Austen with Wollstonecraft but with Austen being a feminist moralist she is in agreement with Wollstonecraft on various points. Above all there are more female writers who regarded themselves as feminists and to whom Austen looked up. She strongly admired Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth and thought of them as her teachers. Almost generation older than Austen, Burney was not a feminist novelist because she did not criticise patriarchy but she held an important place in the history of women's literary emancipation and therefore connected to Austen. Edgeworth was known for her Irish novels, which were so highly appreciated that even Austen herself included Edgeworth's *Belinda* in *Northanger Abbey*. Although she praised the novel at first, the excitement vanished in the criticism which she put in the very same passage as she put the admiration, of chapter five (Kirkham, 1983, p. 35). Kirkham (1983) also states:

Austen undoubtedly learnt from the success of Burney and Edgeworth in their handling of the novel as domestic comedy, but she also learnt from Wollstonecraft's failures of *Mary: A Fiction* (1788). (p. 36)

In the mentioned above we can clearly see where Austen discovered her source of ideas to write domestic novel. For all those who felt in obligation to somehow comment on the situation of women in the nineteenth-century there was Mary Wollstonecraft. From the conservative critics at the end of eighteenth-century, to Victorian suffragists and all the way to twentieth-century feminists. They were all shaped by their experiences as being daughter, pupil, philosopher and later on a mother and wife with all different sorts of statuses. Another important name is Wollstonecraft's role model Catherine Macaulay who was another strong female concerned with female education. Macaulay's *Letters on Education* where she argued about the co-education of boys and girls maintaining that there is: "no characteristic difference between women's and men's intelligence, only differences in their education" (Craciun, 2002, pp 22-23).

Astonished Wollstonecraft admired Macaulay for these opinions. The precise definition of female mis(education). Wollstonecraft showed her gratitude for this statement even in such a high extent that she wrote her: "You are the only female writer who I coincide in opinion with respecting the rank our sex ought to endeavor to attain in the world" (p. 24).

For Wollstonecraft it was almost unbelievable that someone shared the same wishes and thoughts on this matter. Wollstonecraft showed that not only she sympathized with Macaulay's ideas, she admired her for showing that women could make a serious contribution to learning (Kirkham, 1983, p. 40). The women novelists naturally loved and praised each other's work and almost every female author was swept away by Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*. It was the younger writers who looked up to the oldest ones and also Mary Astell highly appreciated *Vindication* and admitted that it had a great influence on her. It was inevitable that Austen would find her own way towards Wollstonecraft too (Craciun, 2002, p. 9).

Kirkham (1983) highlighted a link between the two of them:

This is important in itself, and also in considering the connections between Wollstonecraft and Austen, for not only was there a direct

influence of the older woman upon younger, but they were both heirs to a common tradition of feminist development. (p.40)

Wollstonecraft's famous *Vindication* (1792) can be understood as a general summary of all the feminist ideas which had been developing in heads of other women over nearly a century and not only that *Vindication* concerns itself mainly with women of middle class but who these women actually are, what their future will be like and what is going to happen when they will marry (Craciun, 2002, p. 10). In the following excerpt from *Vindication* we can clearly see one of the major issues which Austen later pursued:

In the government of the physical world it is observable that the female in point of strength is, in general, inferior to the male. This is the law of nature; and it does not appear to be suspended or abrogated in favour of woman. . . . . men endeavor to sink us still lower, merely to render us alluring objects for a moment; and women, intoxicated by the adoration which men, under the influence of their senses, pay them, do not seek to obtain a durable interest in their hearts, or to become the friends of the fellow creatures who find amusement in their society. (p. 7)

In this short excerpt we can find obvious basics of Austen's heroines. Not that Austen would have wanted to fight against this 'law of nature' but she quietly except it and incorporated it in the mockery of her characters.

Another issue Wollstonecraft and Austen had in common was their resistance towards Dr. Fordyce and his *Sermons to Young Women* (1766). Neither had patience with Fordyce's perception of women as angels. Wollstonecraft reacted to his thoughts in her *Vindication* thus:

I know not any comment that can be made seriously on this curious passage and I could produce many similar ones; and some, so very sentimental, that I have heard rational men use the word indecent when they mentioned them with disgust. (p.93)

Austen reacted with much more of a hidden agenda. The same sermons were Mr. Collins' choice to read aloud to the Bennet ladies in *Pride and Prejudice*. They ridiculed Mr. Collins at the beginning of his reading when he reads, "a stout well-grown girl of fifteen," and is interrupted by Lydia.

Austen and Wollstonecraft rejected the sentimental treatment of girls as angels because it makes them less than a rational human beings and it invites hypocrisy, since everyone who has much to do with them knows that girls are not really like angels anyway (Kirkham, 1983, p. 44). Women should not be titled as angels depending on their looks and also both the female writers simply denied the fact that girls should be taught to think of themselves as angels or queens because they would only highlight their beauty according to this definition and therefore would be seen only as an object in a male surroundings. Women were not liberated in eighteenth-century Age of Reason but in the sense when liberty is understood in a Romantic way as 'making one's world'. Total liberty was according to Wollstonecraft and as Austen implied – for man or woman (especially for woman) to be found in the service of God. All Austen's novels are in perfect accord in this argument. It can look old-fashioned now, but it should be mentioned that Austen is often most radical, as a feminist, where she sounds worst outdated and most like Mary Wollstonecraft (Kirkham, 1983, p.50). Both incredible enlightened women who were way ahead of their time and especially Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* will definitely remain amongst the most powerful feminist attack on the chauvinistic conventions of her time.

## **Criticism of Women and Female Authorship**

Role of an individual in the world started to change due to the revolution in France. Working class started to make demands and the upper class was not pleased by the disagreement. The rights of women were suppressed. During the eighteenth century it was even more difficult to write about social situation of women. Women were also criticised in general by the superior males and this issue was present in men's literary work. They used women as a source of inspiration but not in the good sense of meaning. Countless female characters in novels written by men were characterized as something evil and sinful or above all the servants of devil himself. Women were considered to be manipulative creatures. They were all created just to amend some important task or journey of certain male characters. In the following excerpt it is possible to see situation of women. Gilbert and Gubar (1979) stated:

The female monster populates the works of the satirists of the eighteenth century, a company of male artists whose virulent visions must have been particularly alarming to feminine readers in an age when women had just begun to attempt the pen. (p. 30)

As mentioned above females faced prejudiced convictions in the 'male world'. It was a common thing when males considered themselves as superior creatures. When female writers started to publish their work it was even harder for men to acknowledge their attempts. According to men no woman could learn to use language as an art was according to men something no woman can possess or achieve. They thought that when women use words, the words lose their proper meaning and the literary messages perish. Women were considered to be monstrous and they were criticised cruelly. Horace Walpole remarked on Mary Wollstonecraft that she was a "hyena in petticoats," and other similar opinions on females or female writers are to be found in the works of such authors as Swift, Pope or Gay (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 31).

There is one important thing all women had to do before they could become writers. They had to become readers first. In the eighteenth century the novel was a new genre that engaged with the contemporary world and its problems. And of course women could not be avoided in the novels. Moreover, they were accepted as participants in the moral issues which emerged from novel. Bradbrook (1967) points out: "Their importance as readers was always clear; soon they were important also as critics and authors" (p. 14).

Men were concerned about the question of authority in the case of women as a new ‘species’ in writing or readership would disrespect as Bradbrook (1967) stated “the whole basis authority in morals and literature” (p. 14). If women would distance themselves from their trivial daily routines of picking the right gown for the evening and start to criticize novels to such an extent as they are criticizing these gowns they could easily establish their authority. They might be excluded from universities but still they were engaged readers and were quickly catching up with men.

Samuel Richardson portrayed eighteenth century ideals of male and female virtues. The heroines are presented to be virtuous to an almost impossible extent. Jane Austen hated this perfection. Kirkham (1983) stated:

No wonder Jane Austen declared that ‘pictures of perfection’ made her ‘sick and wicked’, for the new species of writing, of its very nature, required, if it were to be a truth-telling form of literary art, a breaking with ‘the solemnities of professed morality’ in favour of an examination of what was natural and probable in sexual and familial, as in other kinds of social relationships. (p. 17)

Austen’s criticized this distortion of human nature and she rejected the ‘mixed characters’ and in her late novel *Sanditon* she as Kirkham wrote, “takes up the cudgels against it, dismissing her comic anti-hero, Sir Edward Denham, as having been misled by too much reading of sentimental fiction” (p. 17).

She also criticized and mocked those people who fear that females could not be trusted as readers and she made sure that in the centre of her criticism there are novelists and critics who acts like this. Kirkham (1986) states:

Once women readers had begun to think in that way they were not to be content with villainous heroes and ‘picture-of-perfection heroines. As Mary Wollstonecraft was to put it, in 1792, even if women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree, or virtue is a relative idea; consequently their conduct should be founded on the same principles, and have the same aim. (p. 22)

When Austen published *Sense and Sensibility*, she named herself as A Lady and did not use her full name. Beneath the title *Sense and Sensibility* was printed A Novel. This

title should announce right away the new species of writing in which, “the Head/Heart question was also the Man/Woman question. And it is ‘By A Lady’ (Kirkham, 1983, p. xv). Austen wanted people to know her female gender. And she wanted to do that because it needed to be understood that her opinions on the Head/Heart question comes from a head of a woman. Female writers often adopted a pseudonym. It is speculated that Austen also had one. She titled herself as a ‘Sophia’ or ‘Eugenia’. But here is the straight difference. Austen’s pseudonym was a female name. She never presented herself as a man. Never did what George Sand or George Eliot did. She cleverly used the title ‘By A Lady’ because that was the best way of showing a female viewpoint. If she would have used ‘Woman’, that woman could be regarded as “a woman of pleasure, the ascription used by Cleland for Fanny Hill” (Kirkham, 1983, p. xvi). Also at the bottom of the title page of *Sense and Sensibility* there can be found the word ‘author’ not ‘authoress’. This tells us that the author had to publish at her own expense because no publisher would take to risk to make money from some literary work which came from a woman (Kirkham, 1983, p. xvi).

In my view, the criticism Austen’s novels was inevitable. Austen herself characterized the novel *Pride and Prejudice* with the following words: ‘Too bright and light and sparkling’. Gilbert and Gubar (1979) pointed out:

Yet, decorous though they might first seem, Austen’s self-effacing anonymity and her modest description of her miniaturist art also imply a criticism, even a rejection, of the world at large. (p. 108)

Austen was well aware of the vulnerability of authors. She saw her art in a metaphorical way and wanted to define a secure place for female writers. Gilbert and Gubar (1979) stated:

And always, for Austen, it is women – because they are too vulnerable in the world at large – who must acquiesce in their own confinement, no matter how stifling it may be. (p. 108)

Multiple writers rejected Austen’s work and mocked it. Sir Walter Scott compared her novels to “cornfields and cottages and meadows” as opposed to “rugged sublimities of a mountain landscape” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 109). He assumed that her novels can be easily forgotten since they do not propound deeper values. Also Charlotte Brönte

described *Pride and Prejudice* as something connected to gardens, flowers but lacking fresh air and etc. Emerson wrote about Austen's domestic triviality following words:

...vulgar in tone, sterile in artistic invention, imprisoned in the wretched conventions of English society, without genius, wit or knowledge of the world. Never was life so pinched and narrow. The one problem in the mind of the writer in both stories I have read, *Persuasion*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, is marriage-ability. All that interests in any character introduced is still this one, Has he or (she) the money to marry with, and conditions, conforming? 'Tis "the nympholepsy of a fond despair," say, rather, of an English boarding-house. Suicide is more respectable. (p. 109)

I used the words mentioned above intentionally. To highlight the obvious contrast between lovers and haters of Jane Austen. Emerson is not the only one who disliked Jane Austen. Of course, in those days works were discussed much more critically than nowadays and above all the writers themselves were criticizing each other all the time. Austen fought against male superiority towards women using satire in her novels. This artistic tool she often used was supposed to criticize men and society. Austen was using it in the way which sent hidden and not overt message to avoid suspicion. How she projected her social criticism and criticism of men in her heroines will be discussed in the following chapter.



## Heroines in Jane Austen's Novels

Jane Austen differs from other novelists of her time in the issues she is writing about. As Carter and McRae (1995) notes, "Her main interest is in the moral, social and psychological behaviour of her characters" (p. 121). She focuses on young heroines as they grow up and search for personal happiness. Also her personal observation of people applies to human nature and manners in general. Her comedies of manners offer mainly the same. A young girl who is not married at the beginning of the novel but somehow later ends up in marriage. On this journey the heroines struggle with life-changing choices. But at the end these choices lead to a happy ending in the form of marriage.

Many of Austen's heroines found it difficult to be an individual in the society. They are at four disadvantages: material, family, social and personal. Also there is the issue of male superiority. Austen always defers to the economic, political and social power of men because she dramatizes the fact that women's survival depends on male's approval and protection (Gilbert & Gubar, 1974, p. 154). Every category is of course portrayed differently depending on the course of the novel. For example the material disadvantage is almost not present in *Northanger Abbey*, when Catherine Morland discovers that she is less rich than she was supposed to be. In *Sense and Sensibility* it is the Dashwood family who finds itself at the edge of poverty after the death of Mr Dashwood (though they remain maintaining rich manners). In *Mansfield Park* the heroine Fanny Price is rather a poor acquaintance and has to fight against the worst oppression towards her. In *Pride and Prejudice* the poverty is the future menace of the Bennet girls when their father's estate is passed to Mr Collins, which leaves the five girls in a situation in need of a husband to make them financially secure. Emma in Austen's next novel does not have any financial problems, and this later results in the important source of her personal and social difficulties. Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* is no financial catch but with the family problem of her refusing to marry the man she is in love with because it would be inappropriate to marry a man from low background. This decision still does not give her the slightest voice in the financial affairs of her family (Gillie, 1974, pp 95-96).

Considering her families in Austen's novels we notice like Gillie (1974) that, "there are no satisfactory parents in Jane Austen's novels" (p. 96). Austen definitely brought a large amount of difficulties on her heroines and she discussed the family issue concerning parents which are no role models for their descendants. Most of the heroine's problems

arise from the deprivation of their home. But these predicaments Austen's heroines experience are the same predicaments which will form their unique personalities. If Emma Woodhouse would have a mother and not only a father, she would not be able to dominate her father because she would have had a mother to restrain her. And Elizabeth Bennet is truly intellectually independent and able to manage her relationship using her wisdom. Dispositions like these you have to gain somewhere and so it was that Elizabeth's opinions came from the inertia of her father and from the foolishness of her sisters and mother. All the heroines are searching some other authority in the appearance of a man. This originates in the rejection of inadequate fathers and the search for a better, more sensitive man (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, p. 154). Though Elizabeth's temperament did not come immediately, she inherits it from the latter family experiences (Gillie, 1974, p. 97).

Multiple novels were Austen's models and source of ideas for her own work. One of the novels was Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, which was published in 1752. Mrs Lennox's satire was an obvious source of inspiration for writing the *Northanger Abbey* (Bradbrook, 1967, p. 90). And as a subject of the old romances has been usually a love set against the background of the heroine. As Bradbrook (1967) notes, "Mrs Lennox and Jane Austen ridicule the false taste and behaviour caused by reading romances and melodramatic literature" (p.90). This ridicule is obvious in Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Lennox's *The Female Quixote*. The mistakes which are caused by self-deception, wrong standards and ideas cannot be applied to the world of ordinary, normal personal relationships (Bradbrook, 1967, p. 91). Charlotte Lennox's leading character Arabella has ideas which are similar to those Isabella Thorpe from *Northanger Abbey* only pretends to have:

Her ideas, from the manner of her life, and the objects around her, had taken a romantic turn; and, supposing romances were real pictures of life, from them she drew all her notions and expectations. By them she was taught to believe, that love was the ruling principle of the world; that every other passion was subordinate to this; and she often consulted, always showed her a form so extremely lovely, that, not finding herself engaged in such adventures as were common to the heroines in the romances she read, she often complained of the insensibility of mankind, upon, whom her charms seemed to have so little influence. (p. 5)

When reading about Catherine Morland, the heroine of *Northanger Abbey* it is hard not to notice her being sentimental, delusional and sensible girl. Although her delusions are temporary and will disappear at some point. As Bradbrook (1967) remarks:

Jane Austen appears to be stressing this difference in the early chapters of the novel, where she emphasizes the complete ordinariness of her heroine, deliberately contrasting her with the romantic Arabella, whose conceit and egoism Mrs Lennox clear. (p. 91)

It is more than clear that Austen had been influenced by Charlotte Lennox, which she proved in *Northanger Abbey*.

Austen began to write several novels which she never finished or did not publish. One of these novels is an unfinished sketch called *The Watsons* written in 1803. In this sketch we can find out as Gillie (1974) noted, "that Emma Watson is poor and that she attaches importance to education and feeling, that her eldest sister considers her refined" (p. 102). Above all, Emma Watson is too proud to hunt a man only to become secure in her life. Her sisters call this attitude refinement. The view lies in placing the personal interests based on feelings above material opportunities. Gillie (1974) marks an interesting opinion on this matter:

The antagonists to what is personal, sincere, and sensitive, are of two kinds: the crude vices of affectation, unscrupulousness, and arrogance, and also the more subtle weaknesses of misjudgment and ignorance of the self. The first sort implies what is merely social (in opposition to the personal) and the second implies confusion between them. Both sorts occur throughout Jane Austen's novels; the earlier ones emphasize the cruder antagonists; the last three are more concerned with the subtler ones. (p. 102)

This kind of character at the centre of the story has another, yet early and unpublished work *Lady Susan* which is written in letters. The story is about a middle-aged widow with a great personality. She has a daughter who is soon old enough to get married and Lady Susan finds her a rich husband with whom she ends up herself. Lady Susan similarly controls her daughter and puts a pressure on her so just as it is the daughter's problem of her mother trying to control her, so it is Emma Watson's problem that the Lady Susans tend to be in control there, too (Gillie, 1974, p.103). It is the same society which

controls the conditions in which most of the people have to live in. Gillie (1974) notes, “the vulnerable are opposed to the ruthless, and in the Jane Austen theatre, the vulnerable come off best” (p. 102). For Austen it is essential to show that this is correct and not only to show how it happens.

We can classify Austen’s characters as the ones who deeply influence the heroine and are open to her misjudgment as the complexity of their nature allows them. What is more interesting was when exactly these heroines were meeting their possible good match. Social circumstances they found themselves in were not allowing them to show their admiration and therefore dispose the manners of men in order to attract them. It was difficult in Jane Austen’s society for girls to meet men. In two of Austen’s later novels, the heroine begins with a special relationship with the hero at the beginning. Fanny grows up with Edmund, like it was her brother and Mr Knightley is an old friend of the Woodhouses. These special relationships have an impact on the thinking of the heroine in perceiving men as their possible husbands (Gillie, 1974, p.112).

All heroines of Austen are confident and witty in a conversation. As Tanner (1986) noted:

Since men effectively dominate the discourse of conversation even when they seem not actually to dictate it, men must be held to a large extent responsible for the ‘female conversation’ which they both provoke and solicit. It is no wonder that sometimes Jane Austen’s heroines have positively to struggle to speak their own words – to own their own voices. (p. 31)

The theme of word games can be seen in *Emma*. She likes to think that she had discovered all the hidden meanings in conversations, charades or puzzles. But at the same time it is precisely her who misinterprets every riddle. In other words, Emma’s imagination has led to the point where she behaves ‘unladylike’ and as Gilbert and Gubar (1979) stated, “her complete mortification is a prelude to submission as she becomes a friend of Jane Fairfax, at one with her too in realization of her own powerlessness (p. 160). It is therefore obvious that Austen did not make it easy for her heroines at all times. Another important issue to mention is the antagonists. They are perceived as the subjects of the misjudgment which will later lead them to the right person. As Gillie (1974) described them:

Thus General Tilney is the antagonist to Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*; Willoughby to Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*; Wickham to Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*; the Crawfords to Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*; Frank Churchill to Emma Woodhouse; and Mr. Elliot to Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*. (p. 104)

These 'villains' are not the necessary evil. They will confuse the desires and assumptions of the main heroines but Austen still gives a clue of a right judgment and it is on the reader himself to realize where the truth lies. At some point the reader has to notice the falsely, romantic, masculine type of character, such as Willoughby or Wickham (Tanner, 1986, p. 93).

Gillie (1974) summarized the women in Austen's novels thus:

Jane Austen's heroine has to live from her personal resources in a space which has confined them and offers her little scope: yet happiness and fulfilment are achieved. The art of the novels lies in showing how are achieved against the weight of improbability. (p. 97)

Because Jane Austen's strongest theme in her novels was writing about human relationships she could easily create a wonderful female characters, which were the beginning of the strong female characters in latter novels. Women gained voices and stood up against society, by that time only in novels, but their time was about to come also in real life.

## MAJOR NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN

### **Sense and Sensibility in The Context of Criticism**

The original title which preceded *Sense and Sensibility* was *Elinor and Marianne*. Austen entitled her novel with the names of the heroines in 1795. She rewrote it and published in 1818 although under different title – *Sense and Sensibility* (Thornley & Roberts, 1984, p. 115). After reading the book one does not have to argue why Austen changed the title. The contrast between two sisters is evident. Elinor is rational and self-controlled, therefore she represents sense and Marianne is emotional and sensitive which is the reason why she represents the sensibility in the novel. Also the contrast of these two characters represents the contrast between the Romantic and Augustan ages (Carter & McRae, 1995, p. 121).

The first conversation between Elinor Dashwood and Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility* is about gradual maturity. Austen began to use fictional dialogues as a way of opposing views. So when Elinor expresses her wishes that ‘a few years’ will modify her youngest sister’s romantic notions and ‘settle her opinions on the reasonable basis of common sense and observation’, Colonel Brandon replies, ‘No, no, no not desire it, - for when the romantic refinements of a young mind are obliged to give way, how frequently are they succeeded by such opinions as are but too common, too dangerous!’ (Stafford, 2008, p. 65). It is obvious that Marianne is considered to be the ‘childish one’ in this novel. Though two years older than Marianne, still Elinor is more rational. Austen is aware that growing older brings advantages. It is hard to argue whether are these visible advantages anticipated by Elinor or they’re brought by limitations observed by Colonel Brandon. In *Sense and Sensibility* there are different elements in her mature fiction are seen as conflicting tendencies. Fiona Stafford (2008) highlights an interesting notion:

Was imagination invariably at odds with reason? Impulsiveness with restraint? Sense with sensibility? The pain experienced by both the heroines, and by so many others in the novel, is indicative of the seriousness of a problem that was both artistic and moral. Jane Austen resolutely tackled the inherent difficulties of revising old work that somehow embodies a younger self and in the next work she prepared for publication, the mood is very much lighter and less troubled. (p. 66)

When Austen revised the novel she may have introduced a different narration she also used in *Northanger Abbey*. Fictional letters are turned into proper conversations. It is hard to say whether the original novel *Elinor and Marianne* consisted of the correspondence between the sisters.

As have been mentioned before, *Sense and Sensibility* is based on omnipresent contrast. Although Dashwood sisters might have been Austen's personal reflection of her own personality, they are still independent creations. Stafford (2008) states:

The obvious contrast between them may derive from Jane Austen's own complicated internal divisions, but it also serves as a means to explore ideas from different angles, and to reveal underlying unities in the face of more serious opposition. (p.68)

We can think of Elinor as a figure with certain restraints and self-control. Marianne's more outspoken attitude supplements Elinor but it is more than obvious that both the sisters are characterized by their sensitivity. Mockery of sensitivity is defined by criticism of those characters who either find it difficult to show their true nature and sentimentality or they lack it. Elinor inclines towards truth and does not appreciate lies. Both the Dashwood sisters found themselves in a situation when their trust is abused by others such as Willoughby (Stafford, 2008, p.69).

The title of the novel may seem quite primitive but its content is anything but simplistic. Austen was already enough of a novelist that she knew that no truth is simple. Therefore we have Marianne, who in fact also possesses much sense and Elinor who is not devoid of sensibility. These qualities may exist in pure isolation as abstractions and actually occur in various people, in confusion with other qualities. These certain configurations can resolve in problematical which Dashwood sisters certainly were. Their personalities were complex (Tanner, 1986, p.77).

In the novel *Sense and Sensibility* two important issues arise which were not mentioned before – the themes of secrecy and sickness. There are secrets amongst the characters who are either relatives or close friends: the closer the friends the more complex and delicate secrets. Mrs Jennings cries in one chapter 'Come, come let's have no secrets among friends'. Also when Lucy reveals herself to be a rival to Elinor letting her know that she is in fact engaged to Edward Ferrars the entire time she says – 'it was always meant to be a great secret'. She had no idea about Elinor's feeling towards Ferrars so her statement was not intended to be cruel. The same cannot be said of Willoughby's revelation to

Marianne about marrying certain Miss Grey –‘It was no longer to be a secret’. There can be found plenty other secrets in the book but at the end they are all revealed and come to the surface. The other issue, sickness, becomes apparent when Marianne is ill. The true impact of Willoughby leaving Marianne causes Marianne to fall into melancholy isolation and very serious illness. Tanner (1986) stated:

Austen traces the progress of her illness with such detail that we get some idea of the language of symptomatology and diagnosis of the time. She suffers from melancholy and has ‘headaches, low spirits, and over fatigues’. Later she is ‘wholly dispirited, careless of her appearance, and seemingly quite indifferent whether she went or starved’. For a while she is almost catatonic, without once stirring from her seat, or altering her attitude. (p.81)

Marianne’s illness is clearly psychosomatic because of the events she experienced with Willoughby.

Austen creates characters which fully represent human nature in the larger sense than the schema allows, she discovers its imperfections. These inadequacies become particularly clear in the final chapters whereas Kirkham (1983) states: “Marianne’s marriage to Colonel Brandon fulfils the requirements of the schematic design, but is felt as betrayal of the developed character she has become” (p. 87). The single heroine should not be interpreted as a representation of heroine with good head and sensible heart. Showing up one sister against another, rather than endorsing their superior judgment in the view of prejudice and deficiency and turning them into less sensitive and sensible people.



## Irony and Wit in *Pride and Prejudice*

The novel *Pride and Prejudice* is filled with wit, cheerful humor and above all ubiquitous irony. Peter Conrad (1991) noted that, “for the ironist’s peculiar occupational hazard is to be taken at his word, to have his subtle inversions and devious disavowals understood literally” (p. 10). Austen’s strong heroines mocking uptight English society with their wit and wisdom were long ahead of their time.

The very first title Austen gave to what would later become *Pride and Prejudice* was *First Impressions*, which gave a strong clue about the content of the book. There can be seen several ‘first impressions’ in the novel. Elizabeth’s first impression of Darcy’s mansion Pemberley but also her first impressions of important figures such as Mr Collins or Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Austen changed her mind, reckoning that the title of the book should characterize the two main characters – Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy (Tanner, 1986, p. 109).

Of all Austen’s novels, the most famous and appreciated is *Pride and Prejudice*. The spectacular comedy of manners in the English society found its roots in Austen’s life. Austen described her world full of arranged and unhappy marriages together with an arrogant English society with an enormous lightness. A good notion on irony in *Pride and Prejudice* noted Conrad (1991):

For *Pride and Prejudice* is not only ironic in its procedures and assumptions: it is also about irony, the instrument by which Elizabeth separates herself from a shaming family, asserts her own claims against an overbearing society, and tests emotion without betraying herself into commitment to them. Irony is Elizabeth’s stratagem for survival. This is the secret of the perfect self-sufficiency of *Pride and Prejudice*: irony is both form and content, and each is an image of the other. (p. 10)

In eighteenth century women did not have a lot of possibilities of how to protect themselves from inappropriate remarks. The only safe way was through the use of language. For Elizabeth Bennet it was the irony which saved her individuality.

All the characters in the book are somehow connected, whether it is family, friendship or deeper and more complex feelings. Elizabeth often hides her moralization behind ironic banter, whether she is commenting on Lydia’s defection or affections of Mrs.

Darcy. Conrad (1991) points out that, “the diplomatic efficacy of irony is that it judges deftly and discreetly, without needing to disrupt the external exchange of insincere compliments“ (p. 11). The ironic attitude of Elizabeth can be further explained by the characterization her as an underdog. What else is left for a poor girl from a family full of inappropriate manners than the smart move of using language as a defense. Elizabeth was witty and she found her own way of dealing with her uncomfortable family and familiars. According to Peter Conrad (1991):

Elizabeth answers the authoritarianism of Lady Catherine with epigram and envision, disobeying by pretending incomprehension. Emotionally, irony saves Elizabeth from her own dangerously vulnerable and errant feelings: a means of assault against others, it is a means of control in her own case. But irony is, as Wordsworth said in of poetry, the recollection of emotion in tranquility. (p. 12)

Usually the ironist sort of protects themselves against the attack of the others by pretending that they enjoy their comments and conversations. The same did Elizabeth Bennet in order to avoid Lady Catherine to hurt her feelings as mentioned above. It is a well-played balancing act and defense so that the pride is not taken away. Nevertheless also the irony itself can be dangerous sometimes and bring misunderstandings along. According to Peter Conrad (1991):

Irony, however, has its frustrations and liabilities. Subtle to a fault, it can seem merely illusory, and often the ironist, enraged by his inability to speak out savagely and satirically, irritates and disconcerts himself rather than his victim. This is the case of the inexperienced Miss Bingley, whose ironic campaign against Elizabeth during her stay in Netherfield only incites Darcy to a rebuke which silences the baffled ironist, who was not so entirely satisfied with this reply as to continue the subject. (p. 12)

In the excerpt mentioned above it is clear that irony which used Miss Bingley during Elizabeth’s stay in Netherfield proved the exact opposite than Miss Bingley’s expectations. She balanced on the frontier between being a truly ironic and between becoming a fool in the eyes of Mr. Darcy.

In the first two chapters of *Pride and Prejudice* also Mr. Bennet appears as ironist in his conversations with Mrs. Bennet. She is hardly emotionally touched by Bennet’s ironic

comments and invasions. Mrs. Bennet does not even understand her husband's mocking and therefore she stays calm. Naturally Mr. Bennet has such an amusement from his wife's ignorance and folly that he is practically tied to it. As Peter Conrad (1991) wrote about Mr. Bennet:

The ironist can only wound parabolic ally, in fantasy, with a fearful malicious hope which is an admission of his helplessness, as when Mr. Bennet, vexed by the account of Bingley's capering at the ball, wishes 'Oh! That he had sprained his ankle in the first dance! , or, when Mr. Bennet is complaining that the entail will demand the family's eviction from Longbourn after his death, slyly wishes himself a widower: 'My dear, do not give way such gloomy thoughts. Let us hope for better things. Let us flatter ourselves that I may be the survivor. (pp 13-14)

Mr. Bennet was amused by the foolishness of his wife and he almost never took all these serious concerns to his heart. But he also desired for his daughters to be well married because that was in line with the society of these days and it was a proper thing to concern about (Gillie, 1974, p. 116).

The task of being an ironist is to laugh at things which are more depressing to be naturally amusing and funny. Elizabeth laughs at Darcy's pride quite often (when she heard that Mr. Darcy commented on her appearance by using the words 'tolerable' good looks ) at the prejudice of Lady Catherine (-during her visit of Mr. and Mrs. Collins) , the embarrassing courtship of Mr. Collins (-when Mr. Collins is proposing-). When Wickham's version of a secret is revealed to Elizabeth, she finds easier to hate Mr. Darcy than to mock him. Therefore as rightly pointed out Peter Conrad (1991):

Love allows her the affectionate revenge of irony, and such is the intimate family feeling of the novel, inextricably entangling good and bad qualities, that their marriage becomes an ironic replica of that, of her parents. Irony is its style, but also its subject (referencing to the title). Irony permits them at last the liberty of disown their pasts: in such cases as these. (p. 17)

Elizabeth's marriage to Mr. Darcy at the end of the novel can be considered as an ironic marriage because of the events which preceded this reunion. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a comedy of manners full of energy and eternal delight.

Reason coming together in not a way of reconciliation of opposites but rather in marriage of complementaries. As Tanner (1986) states:

She makes it seem as if it is possible for playfulness and regulation – energy and boundaries – to be united in fruitful harmony, without the one being sacrificed to the other. Since to stress one at the expense of the other can either way mean loss, both to the self and to society, the picture achieved congruence between them offered in *Pride and Prejudice* is of unfading relevance. It is perhaps no wonder that it has also proved capable of giving eternal delight. (p. 141)

The main reason why this work of Austen's has been so long admired by people from all over the world is because the problems which are discussed in the novel remain contemporary. The issues concerning marriages can be seen even nowadays. History will repeat, of course not to such an extent (especially the part about marriage) but the basics of human manners will not change. And where better to take a good example than in an extraordinary novel as *Pride and Prejudice*.

## CONCLUSION

In the eighteenth-century England the world had experienced a new phenomenon. Women slowly tried to attempt the pen and female writers came on the literary scene. They also wanted something else. The equality of sexes. Napoleonic wars and the French Revolution also brought a new outlook on social issues. Women started to be criticized and the criticism was even more evident when female writers started to publish their works which were full of feministic ideas and issues never discussed before. Topics concerning marriage, female education and social equality between men and women were also the topics which were important to Jane Austen. She highlighted marriage as one of the most important issues of her society.

Austen also emphasized respect, the question of land possessions and financial security. Often discussed issue presented by Austen is the argument that men are superior to women. She never claimed that men are superior to women but stressed that they are equal which was unusual and revolutionary thought. One chapter is dedicated to Jane Austen and her feminist colleague Mary Wollstonecraft who was even more interested in the equality of males and females.

The major purpose of this thesis was to describe Austen's social commentary on upper class and roles of women in society. She hardly criticized common people and focused on aristocrats instead. The issues Austen discussed are limited to some extent but at the same time she discussed something which was necessary and inevitable. She used allusion, irony, wit and satire in her novels to uncover the problems of her society. All concerns mentioned above are present in her six major novels.

Finally I came to a conclusion that Austen's problems which she revealed in her eighteenth-century society are the same problems which are considered to be problematic in all of society. Her novels are universal. Austen's arguments concerned equality of the sexes as well as equal education and they are still the topics which are present in our society. Austen's literary work went beyond gender and time. Austen approached and highlighted social problems which were important two hundred years ago and which are still important today. In my point of view, her legacy will be here even in another two hundred years from now.

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## SUMMARY IN CZECH

Předmětem této bakalářské práce je sociální kritika ve společnosti, která se objevuje v románech Jane Austenové, anglické spisovatelky a zakladatelky moderního rodinného románu, v osmnáctém století.

Tato práce je rozdělena na dvě hlavní části. První část se jmenuje: Kontext Jane Austenové a její společnost v osmnáctém století a je rozdělena na několik podkapitol. Pojednává o problémech, kterými se Austenová zabývala, autorky, kterými byla ovlivněna, o hrdinkách v jejích románech a také o kritice a problematice žen, které publikovaly svá literární díla. Druhá část bakalářské práce má dvě podkapitoly a každá rozebírá jeden z mých vybraných románů Austenové, které jsou podle mě nejdůležitější. První pojednává o románu *Pýcha a předsudek* a druhá o románu *Rozum a cit*. Za těmito kapitolami následuje shrnutí, které stručně rekapituluje celou práci.