# Marital Relations and Family in Jane Austen's Works

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Sveučilišni diplomski dvopredmetni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti – nastavnički smjer i njemačkog jezika i književnosti – nastavnički smjer

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Diplomski rad

Mentor: prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

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Master's Thesis

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## Abstract

In the twenty-first century, it is still widely believed that a woman has succeeded in life if she is married and has children. Although the struggles of women over the centuries have borne fruit and brought women crucial rights such as education and the right to vote, some old-fashioned and traditional opinions still remain. The aim of this thesis is to discuss the marital and familial status of women in the Georgian society at the end of the eighteenth century in Great Britain in the works of Jane Austen, one of the most famous writers of that era. Using a feminist perspective, the analysis focuses on marital relations and family in Jane Austen's novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* and eventually answers the question whether Jane Austen can be seen as a (proto)feminist.

**Keywords**: Jane Austen, marital relations, family, feminism, women's literature, *Pride and Prejudice, Emma*

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# Introduction

Although women are still oppressed by certain traditional norms in today's society, they have a number of rights and are, at least on paper, equal with men. Unfortunately, this was not the case in the eighteenth century. Women had almost no rights and depended on the wishes and will of their male relatives or husbands. Women who dared to aspire for change encountered harsh social criticism, which prevented them from furthering their plans. The French Revolution, however, awakened not only the awareness of citizens in France but also throughout Europe. This change also affected neighboring Great Britain where women dared to ask for their rights and equal opportunities as men. One of the greatest and most famous fighters for women's rights of that time was Mary Wollstonecraft, who through her example encouraged women to criticize society and seek equality. As one of the first protofeminists, she paved the way for many women who wanted to share their thoughts with the world. One of these women was Jane Austen, a novelist living and writing in the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. Austen wrote novels focusing on the search for love and marriage. As she wrote novels about love and marriage, Austen was not considered a protofeminist or one of the women who challenged the social order. Yet, a closer analysis of her characters reveals that Austen, in her characteristically indirect way, expressed her disapproval of societal gender norms and mocked society. The purpose of this thesis is to confirm that Jane Austen is a (proto)feminist, by finding and analyzing familial and marital relations in her works *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*.

In the first chapter, England at the time of Jane Austen will be described. The following subchapters introduce Jane Austen, discuss parts of her life that influenced her works, present the historical background, i.e. the events and circumstances that took place during Austen's lifetime playing a role in her novels, as well as Austen's take on the aforementioned historical events, proving that she was aware of the events around her, and describe the status of women in society, their limited rights, and societal expectations. The next chapter looks at women writers during Jane Austen's time. The following subchapters explore the status of women writers in the Georgian society, their struggle for the publication of their works and the monetary compensation they received in return as well as discuss protofeminism and Mary Wollstonecraft, its most important representative. The third chapter attempts to prove Jane Austen's protofeminism. In this chapter,

the similarities between Wollstonecraft and Austen will be discussed and exemplified. In the final chapter, marital and familial relations in Austen's novels are analyzed from a (proto)feminist point of view.

# 1. Jane Austen's England

## 1.1. Jane Austen: Life and Work

Jane Austen, one of the most famous English female writers and the author of many worldwide recognised novels, was born in 1775 in Steventon, Hampshire, in southern England. Her family and surroundings greatly influenced her novels, meaning that her works reflected her personal life and the society in which she lived. Her large family counted eight children and two adults, her parents. Her father, Reverend George Austen, the rector of Steventon, encouraged children's education and their interests (La Faye 18-20). Her mother Cassandra, "sprightly and quick-witted and with a good sense of humour" (La Faye 11), married into the Austen family from a large family of a higher social status – "landed gentry rather than farmers" (Le Faye 11). In addition to marriage, the Austens confirmed their gentry status by spending time with the rest of a few gentry families in the parishes of Steventon, Deane, and Ashe (Le Faye 14). James Austen, the eldest brother in the family, organised theatrical performances at home, transforming his siblings, cousins, and friends into actors and reciters (La Faye 20). Being a part of the gentry society, the Austens attended balls in their county and nearby. Growing up, Jane was not described as captivating but when she entered society, she was noticed and described as "not a regular beauty, . . . [yet] nevertheless a very pretty girl" (La Faye 21). In *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels,* Deirdre La Faye reflects on an incident of Jane's appearance being belittled and mocked by a jealous lady at the ball and points out this situation as "an early manifestation of Jane's wit and ironical sense of humour, springing from an intelligence in advance of her years" (21). Anyone familiar with the work of Jane Austen will immediately see that the mentioned parts of her life could be found in her writings as she describes the society and the era in which she lived. With her humor and cynicism, inherited from her mother and developed by observing her surroundings, Jane Austen enriched her characters while criticizing society and their trivial problems.

## 1.2. The Historical Background

Born in the second half of the eighteenth century, Jane Austen witnessed a number of important historical events. To begin with, she lived through the Georgian era, the reign of the kings of the same name, George I – George VI (William IV), which lasted from 1714 to 1830 (1837). King George III reigned from 1760 to 1811, the period encompassing almost the whole of Jane Austen's lifetime. Although he was fond of architecture, astronomy, music, and gardening, George III is best known for losing the American colonies during his reign (La Faye 40). Furthermore, the French Revolution also took place, beginning with the fall of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, but turned into a tyranny of the leaders of the revolutionaries, causing many Frenchmen to flee to England. Shortly after the execution of King Louis XVI, the new French government declared war on Great Britain, and the war between two states continued for the next twenty years. At the turn of the century, there was a short respite, but then Napoleon Bonaparte overthrew the then government, taking power. Upon coming to power, Napoleon signed a peace treaty in 1801, promising an end to the war with Britain. However, the First Consul of France used that time to rearm and militarize and declared war on Britain in 1803. The Battle of Trafalgar followed in 1805 when the English army defeated the enemy fleets. Yet, the war continued until the fall of Napoleon in 1814 when the British finally defeated the French at the Battle of Waterloo (La Faye 48). In addition, the Industrial Revolution brought immense social changes and gained momentum in the first half of the nineteenth century. One of the innovations significantly facilitated the production of fabric, thus satisfying the demand in the country, which until then had to be imported. The steam engine improved transportation through railroads, ships, and similar machines.

### 1.2.1. "What calm lives they had those people"

"What calm lives they had those people. No worries about the French Revolution or the crashing struggle of the Napoleonic Wars."
*Winston Churchill Memoir Extract*

The Georgian Era critics underestimated Austen's writing abilities because she did not mention the French Revolution or the Napoleonic Wars in her novels even though she did include other important historical events that took place during her life. Given that some of the Austen brothers

were in the Navy and their relative's husband was killed by revolutionaries of the French Revolution, Lucy Worsley argues that Austen "made the political into the personal," indirectly inserting political details into her plots and characters, calling it her "unique contribution." Worsley further explains that the "subtle thread of anti-French feeling running through her novels" could be identified, for instance, in naming Mr. Hurst, who likes French cookery, "nasty" in *Pride and Prejudice* and in referring to Frank Churchill, who adorns his discourse with words like *naïveté* or *outré*, as "slippery" in *Emma*. Worsley notices that the Napoleon's wars started when Austen was seventeen years old and ended when she was thirty-nine, meaning that she spent more than half of her lifetime living under the constant threat of war. Worsley also states that "Jane's Hampshire became a kind of Home Front. It bristled with soldiers and sailors, while the county's roads brought them their supplies." It does not seem possible that a person who spent most of her life seeing soldiers stationed nearby, since she lived in the south of England and with her brothers in the army, did not in any way introduce such events into her works because the war was very much a part of her everyday life. To support such an assumption, Worsley points out that

> [o]bviously the officers make a huge impact on the lives of the Bennets in *Pride and Prejudice*, but not only socially. They bring the violence of the battlefield home to the village, just as Kitty and Lydia bring home the gossip: "several of the officers dined lately with their uncle, a private had been flogged, and it had actually been hinted that Colonel Forster was going to be married." The casual slipping-in of the flogging, as if it were just part of normal life, doubles the insensitivity of these silly girls.

Furthermore, the life in the south of England deprived Austen of personal contact with the Industrial Revolution and its consequences, which mostly took place in the north, but she was aware that it was really happening. Le Faye confirms this view by pointing to a few situations in Jane Austen's work that directly or indirectly show Jane Austen's interest in this subject: the mentioning of very high-quality ceramics products in *Northanger Abbey*; Elizabeth Bennet and her uncle and aunt express wish to visit Birmingham in order to admire the factories; there are also the references to Manchester as the heart of cotton production: "the muslins that Harriet Smith chooses at Mrs Ford's shop in Highbury were by now made in Manchester rather than imported from India" (Austen, *Emma* 308). News and updates travelled a long way to where Austen lived because there was no radio or television at that time. Because she did not travel to the war-torn

parts of Europe, nor did she accompany relatives or a husband on their campaigns, Austen wrote about the war in her own way – from the perspective of a young, unmarried woman from the south of England (La Faye 149-50). “Her stories are therefore quite prosaic, recounting events which could have occurred in any middle-class family of Jane's own time” (La Faye 151). Jane Austen wrote about things she knew from her personal experience and about things she observed as a young unmarried woman of the gentry class – everyday life and interpersonal relationships. She also inserted indirect facts about the war as she experienced them: from conversations she had with other people, witnessing the arrival of soldiers in her area, or from gossips while running errands or shopping in the town.

## 1.3. Women in the Georgian Society

While men held the dominant position in society, having political and monetary power, rights to education and property rights, women were restricted in almost every possible way. “For the most part, a woman’s life was a domestic one and, whether or not she was married and regardless of class, it was accepted that her primary talents were all associated with running a household, bearing children and being ‘ornamental’” (Kloester 63). Women were expected to be at home and take care of the house because it was considered a woman's domain. Also, a woman's uterus was seen as her most important asset because it fulfilled her biological and vital purpose – the birth of children. Her role as a wife was to be in her husband's shadow and to pose as an ornament in his household rather than to act as an equal marriage partner. In order to better fulfil their role, young girls “were trained from birth to abide by the restrictions placed upon them” (Kloester 63). Apart from the basic skills they needed to run a household, such as reading, writing and arithmetic, women did not have the same right to education as men. In addition, girls were mostly educated in the domestic arts, singing, painting, embroidery, and playing piano forte, meaning that “a girl’s leisure time was generally spent engaged in one of these activities” (Kloester 67-68). Women were also expected to develop “a manner which was charming yet simple” (Kloester 70) by reading various books and articles, and their opinions and beliefs were to be delivered “elegantly,” in “a well-modulated voice and with just the right amount of deference to one’s social superiors and the exact modicum of condescension to lesser mortals” (Kloester 70). A woman was only worth as much as her developed skills, and even though her opinion was not

of any importance, she still had to keep up with what she could find in available books or magazines.

Having no legal rights, unmarried women and all their property, such as jewels, belonged to their father. After marriage, the woman and her property belonged to the man she married. In marriage, "as a wife she was viewed by the law as being one with her husband, and consequently she lost her legal status as a separate individual and with it the considerable legal rights" (Kloester, 73). Since girls could not work, except in the lower ranks of society where it was also considered a shame if they had to work, their role from childhood, as already mentioned, was to get prepared to find a good marriage match. For this reason, one of the roles of married women was to search for a suitable partner for their daughters. "An upper-class mother's first duty was as a marriage-broker; she was responsible for finding eligible partners for her offspring" (Kloester 72). In this way, the girls learned from their mothers a skill that belonged to the hidden skills that were not directly learned, and this category also included observation and recognizing situations in which she was allowed to talk. On the other hand, the situation was far worse for unmarried women. Legally speaking, they belonged to their father, and after his death to their male relatives. The only option for unmarried women who wanted to support themselves was the employment of a governess. However, society looked down on that position and the governesses did not have ideal working conditions or salary. Since women had almost no rights, marriage was the only opportunity for them to retain their social position or rise up the social ladder, and for this reason marriage is the subject of many works by female authors of that time. This is also the reason why women started to question their position and to demand their rights, both in society, literature, and other fields. In literature, women began to transform their female heroines into free-minded and intelligent women and to seek their voice through the works of protofeminist orientation.

# 2. Women Writers in Jane Austen's England

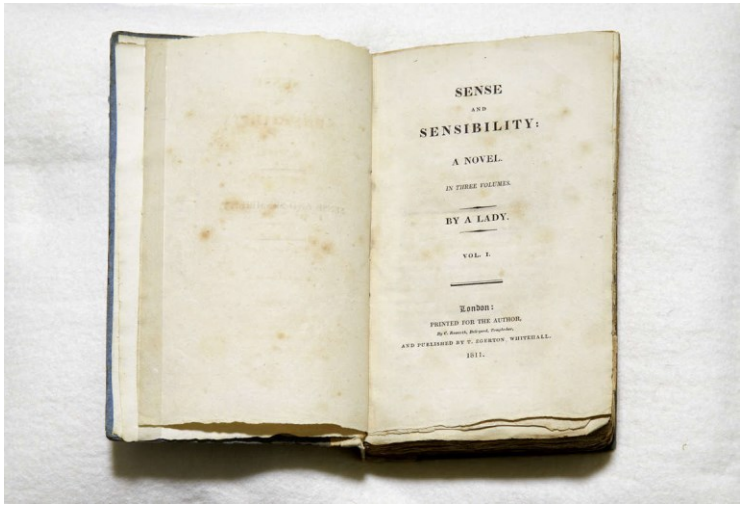
## 2.1. Women Writers in the Georgian Era

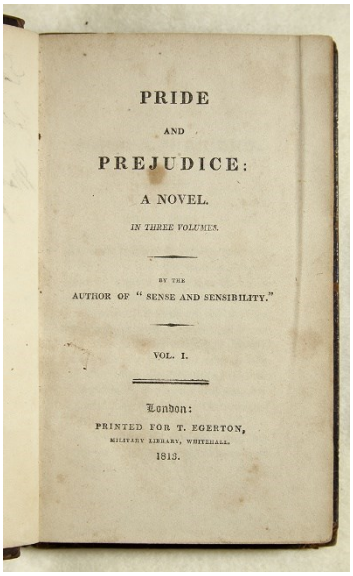
As already mentioned in the previous chapter, only women from the lower and poorer classes had to work, which was considered to be an embarrassment. The society implied that women of the higher ranks, including those who belonged to the gentry class, should not work and be financially dependent on their husbands, i.e. unmarried women on their fathers or brothers. However, more educated women devised the ways how to avoid the disapproval of society and at the same time demonstrate their voice and talent, publish a book, and get income. As "[i]n the late 18th and 19th centuries, writing as a profession was largely considered an activity unsuitable for women" (Buzwell), the trend of publishing books and poems by women anonymously or under a pseudonym flourished. "The percentage of novels published anonymously between 1750 and 1790 rose higher still, reaching over 80%" (Raven qtd. in Buzwell). While some women might have feared criticism or did not want to attract attention, others chose this way of publishing as it was almost the only way of publishing available to women. In addition to society's displeasure, women also faced a general rejection of their writings because of their gender or received negative reviews and rebukes (mansplaining in the purest form) that literature and writing were not for women, as illustrated by the example of Katherine Bradley, an English author. Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper were publishing their work under the name Michael Field. Bradley wrote to her mentor, Robert Browning, asking him not to reveal their identity, in fear of being rejected by the publisher because of their "lady-autorship" (Buzwell). According to Buzwell, Virginia Woolf also confirmed this trend of anonymity by asserting that "[she] would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman."

Similarly, a decade before becoming famous for her *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë elected some of her poems and sent them to the poet laureate Robert Southey for review, but he discouraged her from further writing by saying that "literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it even as an accomplishment and a recreation" (Southey qtd. in Buzwell). Southey's remark might have contributed to the Brontë sisters decision to first publish a collection of their poetry in 1846 under the pseudonym Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. In 1850, when *Wuthering*

*Heights* was published with her real name, Emily Brontë did explain their decision of publishing under the pseudonyms: they "had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise" (Brontë qtd. in Buzwell). The famous writer George Eliot was actually another *nom-de-plume*, hiding a woman writer named Mary Ann Evans. Like her female contemporaries, Evans did not want her work to be disregarded because of her sex. As the number of women who read and wrote books increased, by the middle of the eighteenth century a distinctive label was created to indicate works written by female authors. The label "By a lady" developed into a normality on title pages, and implied not only the sex of the author, but that "the book was by somebody of a certain class and thus suitable for perusal by respectable women" (Buzwell). This tag was also used by the most famous novelist and the author whose works are the subject of this thesis – Jane Austen. Jane Austen published *Sense and Sensibility* in 1811, but the novel was without her name and wore a tag "By a lady." *Pride and Prejudice*, published two years after, had instead of the author's name a line "By the author of *Sense and Sensibility*." Her authorship was revealed after her death, during the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* (Buzwell).

Fig.1. *Sense and Sensibility* in "Women Writers, Anonymity and Pseudonyms"


SENSE
AND
SENSIBILITY:
A NOVEL.
IN THREE VOLUMES.
BY A LADY.
VOL. I.
London:
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,
AND PUBLISHED BY T. EGERTON, WHITEHALL.
1811.



PRIDE

AND

PREJUDICE:

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "SENSE AND SENSIBILITY."

VOL. I.

London:

PRINTED FOR T. EGERTON,

MILITARY LIBRARY, WHITEHALL.

1813.

Fig.2. *Pride and Prejudice* in "First Edition: *Pride and Prejudice*"

However, prose fiction gained momentum, and women entered secular literature by writing novels from the 1780s to the 1810s. For example, William Lane, a late eighteenth century publisher from London, established the Minerva Press, which handled almost entirely women fiction – written by women and for women (Franklin 64). The women fiction market opened the door for women who wanted to write professionally and earn money by writing and publishing their work. Franklin further asserts that the copyright for a book of an unknown writer was usually sold for £10 (64), but also mentions Charlotte Smith as a receiver of £150 for a three-volume novel as well as Ann Radcliffe, who received £500 and £800 for *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797) respectively (64). It was "a Herculean task for an unknown writer to attain the minimal respectable income of £50 p.a. simply by selling copyrights" (Turner qtd. in Franklin 64). Mary Wollstonecraft, nevertheless, was one of the pioneers of her generation and managed to succeed in this trade. Not only did she write professionally, but she was also making a living from it, having no other sources of income. In comparison, even her male contemporaries such as William Godwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were sometimes penniless and depended on richer supporters of their work (Franklin 65). Yet, Wollstonecraft did not want to be labelled as an author because even though "writing was becoming more acceptable for women supplementing inadequate incomes at home, . .. it was a different matter for a 'lady' to acknowledge keeping

herself entirely by paid work" (Franklin 65). For example, the afore-mentioned Charlotte Smith was a single mother who wrote in order to provide for her children while Jane Austen wrote about domestic and rural subjects as "the dutiful daughter of a clergyman; having too little commercial success to be embarrassed over her remuneration (Franklin 65). Despite the fact that Austen did not "abandon . . . the compromise of a quasi-familial writing life" (Franklin 65) like Wollstonecraft, she was one of the female authors who dared to publish her works and thereby contributed to the development of female authorship for the future generations.

## 2.2. Protofeminism

According to *The Cambridge Dictionary*, the term *feminism* refers to "the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state." It was first coined in 1837 and initially marked feminine character but has been ever since the term referring to the fight for equal rights between sexes. Although the term was coined in the first half of the nineteenth century, women tried to fight against oppression and chauvinism even before the already mentioned period. Therefore, all the feminists, who were active before feminism was recognized as such, are named protofeminists, marking the period of protofeminism. "To write of pioneers and protofeminism is to explore the diverse texts, voices and lives that articulated feminist ideas and feminist critical positions before such categories existed" (Plain 6). Gill Plain states that such texts are to be found even in the Medieval times, with Carolyn Dinshaw stating that those "texts affect lived lives, and . . . if women had relatively little opportunity to author texts, they nonetheless felt their effects" (qtd. in Plain 6). Although Dinshaw does not confirm that this period could be named protofeminist in the exact meaning of the word, she claims that

> there are important historical continuities that need to be acknowledged, and a recognition of the relationship between gender and textuality is integral to understanding the literature and culture of the medieval period, from Chaucer's iconic *Wife of Bath* to Margery Kempe's autobiographical acts of self-construction. (qtd. in Plain 7)

During the Renaissance Period and the seventeenth century, a woman could "play the part of a protofeminist simply by virtue of her decision to write" (Wilcox qtd. in Plain 7). Women became active participants in literary culture, from pamphlets to poetry, from devotional writing to guidance books. Their position, however, was not uncontested, as showed by the then primary disputes that raged around women's character, literature, social standing, and relationship to Eve's legacy (Plain 7). As for the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many women can be regarded protofeminists as their "thinking, writing and 'living' challenged the tenets of patriarchal social organisation and questioned the prescriptive norms of gender" (Plain 7). Jane Austen's Britain was marked by the protofeminist wave, with the authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth, Charlotte Brontë, Mrs Gaskell, and George Eliot. These authors created "unconventional texts" (Plain 7) while some of them also lived unconventional lives, proving that they resisted the socially accepted behaviour among women both by publishing their work and leading controversial lives, at the time this being allowed only to men. Plain also names "the seemingly conventional" (7) Jane Austen as one of the members of the pre-feminist literature. As one of the most important and well-known protofeminists, Mary Wollstonecraft and her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) represent, among other things, the foundations on which feminism was later built. Her work had heavily influenced other protofeminist writers and is even today considered one of the pillars of feminism.

### 2.2.1. Mary Wollstonecraft

The French Revolution brought many changes and influenced the lives of a significant number of people. One of those people was Mary Wollstonecraft:

> [i]t prompted Wollstonecraft to experiments in her own life – her love affairs, her illegitimate child, her friendships with men and her determination to live independently – as well as giving impetus to her ideas about female sexuality and sensibility, and women's status as writers, intellectuals, mothers and citizens. (Manly 46)

Wollstonecraft began to question her life, her status, and her possibilities as a woman and author. She expressed those thoughts in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and her last novel *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798), with *A Vindication* as her most famous non-fiction work.

Before we go into further analysis of Wollstonecraft's life and work, we need to briefly look at Elaine Showalter's definition of consumer and producer feminist literary criticism (qtd. in Manly 47) as it offers a starting point in our discussion of Wollstonecraft. The consumer criticism concentrates on the study of women as readers and topics in/of books, written by both female and male writers:

> [i]n other words, feminist critique is concerned with woman as "the consumer of male-produced literature," with what happens when we consciously reflect on what it means to read as a woman, and to become aware of the significance of the sexual codes and stereotypes embedded within a given text. (Showalter qtd. in Manly 47)

The producer criticism, or gynocritics, concentrates on women as authors, namely on a "woman as the producer of textual meaning" (Showalter qtd. in Manly 47). Wollstonecraft merges both types of criticism in her *A Vindication* as she "attacks the false sensibility that she labels as corrupt and artificial in Edmund Burke's work" (Showalter qtd. in Manly 47). In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke equates the sublime with power, masculinity, and the sensation of pain whereas the beautiful is associated with weakness, femininity, and the experience of pleasure (Manly 47-48). While discussing Burke's theories, Wollstonecraft implies that Burke's aesthetic categories indirectly legitimize and naturalize the power hierarchy over the powerless. She criticises Burke's belief that the social, sexual, and political inequalities are a result of the natural order of things. Furthermore, she explains that Burke "uses a discourse of beauty to attach his readers to the idea of aristocracy and monarchy, in short, to induce them to love the idea of inequality, as women are supposed to do" (Manly 49). Wollstonecraft reflects on the already mentioned idea of false sensibility and beauty, presenting them as corrupt and inauthentic as exemplified by the plantation-owners' wives who "'compose their ruffled spirits and exercise their tender feelings by the perusal of the last imported novel to recover themselves after having dreamt up new tortures and punishments for slaves" (Wollstonecraft qtd. in Manly 49). Also, Burke could be one of the "men of genius" (Wollstonecraft qtd. in Manly 49), whom Wollstonecraft mentions in the introduction to her *A*

*Vindication*, claiming that women are harmed by reading texts that "enfeeble" their minds with notions of false refinement – a consequence not only confined to those who read frivolous novels but also communicated through the "books of instruction, written by men of genius" (Wollstonecraft qtd. in Manly in 49). She constructs a non-gender identity, contributing to both sexes, as she regards the existing identity division as "degraded by sexualised and oppositional models of identity" (Manly 49).

As already mentioned, Wollstonecraft uses both types of literary criticism: while her attack on Burke is related to the consumer criticism, she also rewrites "her own authorial femininity as a regenerated natural discourse of rational, humane feeling and ethical imagination" (Showalter qtd. in Manly 47). Her *Vindication* was published using her title as a woman writer, but her main goal was to present writing and thinking as the "activities in which the body and its sex are transcended" (Manly 50). For Wollstonecraft,

> it seems necessary to assert this transcendence in order to reach beyond women's objectification and the idea that female subjectivity, conventionally defined by sexual submission, acceptance of intellectual inferiority and delicate sensibility, was distinct from male subjectivity, defined in diametrically opposed terms. (Manly 50)

Wollstonecraft designs a concept of the woman writer as the non-gender opposite of (Burke's) corruption and artifice – a woman non-gender author who avoids chauvinistic brainwashing by thinking about what she reads and thinking about what she writes.

Not only does Wollstonecraft address the concept of the woman writer in her works but she also emphasizes the importance of education. Wollstonecraft believes that education in childhood affects the building of character and that we develop automatic habits and thoughts already in childhood, which are more difficult to change later. In her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), Wollstonecraft advocates for equal education of women while also providing a proposal for a national school system. With other radical protofeminists, she challenges one of the pillars of patriarchal society – little or no education for women so that they can only be tied to the household and family (Richardson 25-26). They argue for "the development of a sound moral understanding over the mindless cultivation of 'exterior' accomplishments like drawing and music" (Richardson 26). The reality was the complete opposite, with girls being left with the servants if they had no opportunity of going to a boarding school. Early marriages should be

avoided because of the mother's youth, i.e. she is a child herself and thus will not be able to help the child in his self-realization (Richardson 27). Wollstonecraft believes that the female mind should be "[s]trengthen[ed] . . . by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience" (50). Women should have equal rights to education as men. By being denied this right, women are indirectly denied their full potential for self-realization, and thus they have to subordinate themselves to men. Wollstonecraft also advocates critical thinking and moral values by stating that if women are

> taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison. Men have various employments and pursuits which engage their attention, and give a character to the opening mind; but women, confined to one, and having their thoughts constantly directed to the most insignificant part of themselves, seldom extend their views beyond the triumph of the hour. (70)

The quote also shows Wollstonecraft's view of education as a means of liberation from the conservative gender roles in society, which with the help of critical thinking can empower women to make independent decisions and thereby contribute to society. She wanted to correct the injustice of a dominating patriarchal society, condemning women to domestic life and denying them rights – the same rights that allowed men to have the upper hand in society.

To summarize, it is hard to describe protofeminism or feminism in general without mentioning Mary Wollstonecraft. Wollstonecraft fought for women's rights and her legacy has influenced the lives women have today. She criticized the greatest thinkers of her time in favour of female gender and put her ideas on paper herself, thinking critically and demanding equality with men.

# 3. When Jane Austen Met Mary Wollstonecraft: Jane Austen As a (Proto)Feminist?

Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft lived and published their works in Great Britain in the second half of the eighteenth century. If the readers of this thesis are in favour of the fact that Austen is a feminist, we could say that the young Austen had heard or read Wollstonecraft from earlier days – keeping in mind the fact that Wollstonecraft was older than Austen by twenty years. Since there is no evidence that Wollstonecraft and Austen ever met, or that Austen read or possessed *A Vindication*, it cannot be said with certainty whether Austen was influenced by Wollstonecraft, and thus we can rightfully doubt the connection between the protofeminist ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft and the novels of Jane Austen. Similarly, some critics and readers of Jane Austen's work do not consider Austen as a proto-feminist author at all. One of the main reasons would be that her novels revolve around love and marriages and almost all her novels end with a happy ending, with female characters achieving the desired marriages. Due to such themes in her novels, she was regarded as a conservative author who submitted to the demands of society in which a woman must marry in order to be worth something. This is exactly the opposite of what Mary Wollstonecraft and other protofeminists fought for. However, there are obvious similarities between Wollstonecraft's beliefs and certain characters and their behaviour in Austen's work, which could be considered the evidence that Jane Austen was indeed a protofeminist.

Primarily, as the leading protofeminist, Mary Wollstonecraft argues for women's equality in terms of rights and education, opposing the dominant gender stereotypes of her era. She encouraged women's education as a way of intellectual empowerment, advocating for equality and independence between the sexes: she did "not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves" (Wollstonecraft 90). While Jane Austen's novels do not explicitly address protofeminism or challenge social standards, they frequently portray strong and clever heroines who navigate societal limits and seek personal satisfaction within them. In addition, Austen's women characters give priority to intellect and savvy in their partners. In *Emma,* for example, Emma values intellectual compatibility and forms a friendship with Mr. Knightley based on mutual respect. They have intellectual debates, which reflects Austen's conviction that shared principles and understanding are of the utmost importance in relationships.

What is more, as Scudeler states, both Wollstonecraft and Austen advocate education in philosophy, history, and classics. While they did not devalue accomplishments (dancing, singing, embroidery, etc.), they emphasized that education and various knowledge should be equally represented in the upbringing of girls and women. Scudeler also points out Wollstonecraft's argument that women are more than decoration, that they are human beings with a functional mind who are able to choose and deal with the consequences of their behaviour: "Women have been allowed to remain in ignorance, and slavish dependence many, many years . . . and vanity makes them value accomplishments more than virtues" (Wollstonecraft qtd. in Scudeler). Similarly, in *Pride and Prejudice,* Austen vocalizes the Georgian society's demands on women through Caroline Bingley:

> [a] woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions. (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 23)

To counteract this opinion, Mr. Darcy emphasizes that "to be truly "accomplished," a woman, like her male counterpart, "must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 24). Austen's Elizabeth Bennet dismisses Mr. Darcy's statement by saying that she is "no longer surprised at [him] knowing only six accomplished women. [She] rather wonder[s] now at [him] knowing any" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 24). In a slightly sarcastic tone, Austen intends to say that society's expectations of women are truly too low and that according to these standards, women are of almost no value in society.

Next, both Austen and Wollstonecraft criticize their society's limitations and injustices. Wollstonecraft's criticism is more direct, addressing concerns such as women's lack of education and unjust societal expectations. In her *A Vindication,* she criticizes Rousseau's opinion that women are inferior to men: women

> should never, for a moment, feel independent, . . . [they] should be governed by fear to exercise [their] natural cunning, and made a coquetish slave in order to render [them] a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax himself. (Wollstonecraft 61)

Wollstonecraft dismisses this argument by saying that "it cannot be demonstrated that woman is essentially inferior to man because she has always been subjugated" (Wollstonecraft 63). Similarly, Austen's novels also include subtle criticism of her era's oppressive social system, particularly the expectations placed on women to secure favourable marriages for financial and social stability. Her characters, such as Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, quietly challenge the accepted gender norms. She refuses the societal demand to marry for the sake of financial stability, which is showed by her rejection of Mr. Collins' proposal. This marriage would be purely for financial reasons as he "could not make [her] happy" and the other way around (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 66). "Elizabeth's rebelliousness, then, is quiet, and is not intended to alarm. It invites the conventional female reader to identify with unconventional energies" (Newton 37).

Furthermore, in their roles as authors, Wollstonecraft and Austen use their writing skills to comment on the state of society. Wollstonecraft uses her nonfiction and fiction work to convey her views on the equality between men and women and societal improvement. Similarly, "[b]y mocking authority figures in . . . [her] novels, as Wollstonecraft did in her *Vindication*, . . . Austen reaffirm[s her] own authority over and against male domination" (Bilger 135). Unlike Wollstonecraft who was radical with her *A Vindication* publications, Austen was not so direct. Austen's novels are frequently seen as a social commentary in their own right, employing humour, sarcasm, and satire to illustrate the limits and defects of the upper-class society she portrays. Bilger explains Austen's attitude by saying that "radicalism is not inherent in comic expression, but comedy can serve as an excellent vehicle for making radical ideas palatable to an audience that might otherwise be offended by them" (9). Humour is Jane Austen's strongest weapon and it is what makes her a unique protofeminist. Austen, a seemingly conservative author, utilizes humour and sarcasm to "contribute to the ongoing debate about women's proper place in society by criticizing, among other things, eighteenth-century gender politics" (Bilger 9). Rebecca Barreca also highlights the importance of laughter and humour in feminism by arguing that "anytime a woman breaks through a barrier set by society, she's making a feminist gesture of a sort, and every time a woman laughs, she's breaking through a barrier" (qtd. in Bilger 10). Similarly, Gloria Kaufman states that the "persistent attitude that underlies feminist humour is the attitude of social revolution—that is, we are ridiculing a social system that can be, that must be changed" (qtd. in Bilger 10). Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), a poet and a novelist, reviewed *Emma* and also "recognized the radicalism inherent in Austen's gender politics and chastised her for it in

politically charged terms" (Bilger 29), asserting that "women have a responsibility to preserve young men's illusions about love and ideal femininity because loving a woman is supposed to contribute to the ennoblement of male character" (Bilger 29). Sir Walter Scott is just one of the voices of an obviously conservative male-led society, trying to maintain an image of romance and the ideal woman – but only by male standards. He recognizes the power of criticism hidden in Austen's works and marks *Emma* as a "treason" because of its "departure from romantic values" (Bilger 29). Likewise, Johnson observes that Austen's treatment of clergymen like Mr. Collins, Mr. Grant, and Mr. Elton would be enough to "evict her from the conservative camp, and her treatment of fathers is even more critical" (Johnson qtd. in Bilger).

Moreover, in their works, both Austen and Wollstonecraft address the complications in relationships and marriages. Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel *Maria, Or the Wrongs of Woman*, a sequel to her *Vindication,* depicts the difficulties that women endure in marriage and society. The novel focuses on a woman who was put in a mental institution by her husband, the plot being used by Wollstonecraft to draw attention to the marriage laws of her time, in which women were property, and the non-existent rights of women. In her *Vindication*, she fights to "eliminate the treatment of women as sexual and reproductive 'slaves' within patriarchal marriages and societies as a whole" (Botting 7). Botting also mentions Wollstonecraft's remarks about divorce, child custody, property ownership in marriage, and sex education (7). Austen's work, especially *Pride and Prejudice*, also explores the complexities of wooing and marriage, frequently emphasizing the conflict between true devotion and conventional expectations while also stressing the importance of emotional connection and shared beliefs. Aside from the example of Mr. Collins's proposal and Elizabeth's refusal, the readers also witness Elizabeth's refusal of Mr. Darcy's first proposal. Although Mr. Darcy is far wealthier than Mr. Collins, Elizabeth has no intention of marrying him. At the time, Lizzie despised Mr. Darcy and declined his offer despite his wealth and his love for her.

Finally, according to Scudeler, Austen and Wollstonecraft share similar ideas about education and parenthood. Scudeler asserts that Wollstonecraft believes that educating women would increase the possibility that they would want to teach and educate their children: "To be a good mother, a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands. Meek wives are, in general, foolish mothers" (Wollstonecraft qtd. in Scudeler). Mrs. Dashwood is one of the mothers in Austen's work who

values the happiness of her daughters more than whether they would be able to make a financially successful marriage:

> But Mrs. Dashwood was alike uninfluenced by either consideration. It was enough for her that he appeared to be amiable, that he loved her daughter, and that Elinor returned the partiality. It was contrary to every doctrine of hers that difference of fortune should keep any couple asunder who were attracted by resemblance of disposition (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 12)

Wollstonecraft equally supports the idea of fatherhood being an important part of man's life, by stating that "the character of . . . a husband, a father, forms the citizen imperceptibly, by producing a sober manliness of thought, and orderly behaviour" (Wollstonecraft qtd. in Scudeler). For example, Sir Thomas Bertram is Austen's character in *Mansfield Park* who "only begins to grow in virtue as a father once he understands the moral failings of his children" (Scudeler). While debating Jane Austen's protofeminism, Gary Kelly presents her as a distinctive (proto)feminist author as her work complies with its basic principles of being "always socially and historically particular, advancing the rights and claims of women within specific historical, social, and cultural conditions" (qtd. in Bilger 10).

The first chapter in this thesis provided a brief overview of Austen's life and historical events of her time. The influences on her works can be discerned from that chapter. Austen was the daughter of a priest, in a large family and a member of the gentry, which could be seen in her work. Very likely inspired by the French Revolution and Mary Wollstonecraft, although unproven, Austen found a way within her limited conservative environment to express the then-modern feminist ideas in her own unique way.

# 4. The Analysis of Marital Relations and Family in Jane Austen's Works

## 4.1. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)

"It is a truth universally acknowledged,
that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."
(Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 1)

With this ironic introduction, Jane Austen begins *Pride and Prejudice,* her most famous novel. Right from the beginning, Austen criticizes society where the only goal (for women) is to marry for social status:

> Some single men, it would appear, have independent access to money, but all single women, or "daughters," must marry for it. Families with daughters, therefore, think a great deal about marriage, while single men with fortunes do not. Families with daughters may try to control men too, to seize them as "property," but it is really "daughters," the sentence implies, who are controlled, who are "fixed" by their economic situation. Single men, in contrast, appear at liberty to enter a neighborhood, for example, and presumably to leave it. Single men have a distinct mobility and a personal power that daughters do not. (Newton 28)

Although Austen speaks about men of enormous wealth who must marry, she actually mocks the accepted social imperative telling women to marry rich in order to have a respectable status in society. Since, just by being male, men possess money, reputation and all the rights, they are not pressured by society to get married if they do not want to. In contrast, women have almost nothing and have to get married in order to get a somewhat more substantial identity. This view is visible at the very beginning of the novel, in the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, which also gives an insight into the state of their marriage. Their marriage is an example of the marriage of convenience, like the one explained in the introduction of this chapter. Mr. Bingley, a wealthy young gentleman, has just rented Netherfield Park and Mrs. Bennet begs Mr. Bennet to visit Mr. Bingley because she sees him as an excellent match for one of her five daughters. As a man, Mr. Bennet is the head of the Bennet family and makes the decisions. Mrs. Bennet approaches the conversation excitedly while Mr. Bennet responds coldly and sarcastically: "[he] take[s] delight in

vexing [her] and that [he] ha[s] no compassion on [her] poor nerves" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 2). Mr. Bennet sarcastically answers that he respects her nerves as they are his friends for the last twenty years. Austen also offers an explanation of their characters:

> Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news. (*Pride and Prejudice* 2)

The differences between their characters are visible and they are reflected in their marriage as well. Although they have five daughters, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are somewhat reserved towards each other and behave more like acquaintances than a husband and a wife. Of course, Mrs. Bennet has to respect that he is the head of the house, and that is why she tirelessly asks for his permission, or in this case, she asks him to visit the newcomer because only he, as a man, can do that. Jenkyns describes their marriage as "[t]he rash marriage to a pretty, lively girl, whose liveliness seemed to be good humour when it was only silliness and the charm of youth; the loss of love and respect for her; the retreat into a world of books and the private, sardonic amusement of the human comedy" (9).

Austen further presents Mrs. Bennet as a classic Georgian mother. Her main concern is the marriage of her daughters, preferably to richer gentlemen. The first thing she tells Mr. Bennet about the newcomer is that he has "four or five thousand a year," making him "a fine thing for [their] girls" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 1). Worrying only about her daughters' marriages, visits, and the possessions of young gentlemen, Mrs. Bennet, as a classic Georgian mother, is also the object of ridicule and satire because she is portrayed as an unintelligent character. Through the example of Mrs. Bennet, Austen expresses her attitude towards that role in society. Furthermore, from the conversation of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet we get an insight into their family. Mrs. Bennet intends to marry the eldest and the most beautiful daughter to Mr. Bingley while Mr. Bennet thinks that Elizabeth is a better choice. Mrs. Bennet protests, saying that Elizabeth is not half as "handsome" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 2) as Jane, nor half as "good humoured" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 2) as Lydia, commenting that the father always favours Elizabeth. He contradicts

her, by saying that "[t]hey have none of them much to recommend them," as "they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 2). Here, Austen criticizes the mother, that is, the society that the mother represents, because she considers beauty and sociability as a virtue, that is, a skill that is more important for a successful marriage than intelligence supported by Mr. Bennet.

Here it is also visible why Mr. Bennet favours Elizabeth "whose occasional forwardness and want of perfect good breeding, with her powers of amusement, love of the ridiculous, and her real excellence and ability, make her alternately a person to like or be provoked with" (Pollock 106): her father appreciates her intelligence and maturity. Being close to her and also similar to him in the character, Mr. Bennet "knows that Elizabeth knows; and he knows that she knows that he knows" (Jenkyns 12) that he "despises his wife" (Jenkyns 12). On the other hand, "Jane Bennet is one of those attractive and gentle persons whom everybody must like, but without the interest of peculiarity" (Pollock 106). The eldest Bennet sister is, according to her mother, the most beautiful of her daughters. Jane is also every mother's ideal daughter: she is beautiful, not stubborn and sharp like Elizabeth, not restless like Lydia or Kitty, or absorbed in books like Mary, which is often seen in the book: "Jane was so admired, nothing could be like it" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 7). However, this means that Jane possesses almost no personality other than her beauty and the fact that she is a nice person who pleases everyone, not showing too much emotion. With her character and her story, Austen presents the desired depiction of marriage: a beautiful and lovely girl who marries a rich young man. Unlike Elizabeth and Jane, Lydia is the reckless sister in the family. With the character of Lydia, Austen shows what happens when women break the unwritten rules by exploring sexual freedom – they are condemned by society and they also drag their family in that shame:

> Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson; that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable—that one false step involves her in endless ruin—that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful—and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 173)

Lydia's case can also exemplify Wollstonecraft's advocacy for better relations between parents and children: if Mr. and Mrs. Bennet had paid more attention to Lydia's behavior and

education, she might not have been so rash and naive. Kitty does not have a significant role in the novel; she follows in Lydia's footsteps and becomes similar to Lydia under her influence. Austen uses her example to represent those who just follow others without thinking about the consequences. Yet, Kitty's character does develop in the novel. After Lydia leaves home, Kitty spends time with her elder sisters, and "removed from the influence of Lydia's example, she became, by proper attention and management, less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 233). Austen's character development shows what happens when women are exposed to good influences, here specifically Kitty grows into a conscious person under the influence of Elizabeth, who is certainly one of Jane Austen's greatest (proto)feminist characters. Mary also does not have a significant role in the plot. She is a girl who is engrossed in books and playing piano, but she does not really understand what she is doing. Austen uses this character to depict women who do what society demands of them – they develop skills without thinking about it. Austen once again uses the character of Mr. Bennet to mock Mary's character:

> What say you, Mary? for you are a young lady of deep reflection I know, and read great books, and make extracts."
> Mary wished to say something very sensible, but knew not how.
> "While Mary is adjusting her ideas," he continued, "let us return to Mr. Bingley." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 4)

In creating the Bennet family, Austen cleverly uses family dynamics and the marriage of spouses to portray the state of society. Each character has its own role and through the behavior of other characters Austen shows what she thinks about a certain character, or what the character represents in society. It is clear that Austen has the greatest sympathy for Elizabeth, who, along with her father, is the most reasonable member of the family.

Perhaps the most famous marriage in Jane Austen's work, as the title of *Pride and Prejudice* suggests, is the marriage of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy. Already characterized as one of the most famous (proto)feminist figures, Lizzie Bennet chooses marriage in accordance with her wishes and not according to the norms of society. Thus, "Jane Austen's major study of the links between intelligence and freedom is cast as a love story" (Morgan 56). Their marriage is based on love and not on the society's compulsion or convenience: Lizzie is "a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody; and Darcy had never

been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 32). Morgan also describes their relationship as "a tale of love which violates the traditions of romance" (56). The very fact that their marriage is based on love and free will makes it indeed the opposite of what was customary at the time when marriages were made for financial gain (as already explained in the first chapter). Their romance is not based on the idea of a damsel in distress and a prince on a white horse, but rather on the story of a bright stubborn lady wanting to preserve her "self" and an arrogant prince. Also, intelligence is what both Elizabeth and Darcy are characterized by and it is one of the main reasons of their attraction. Newton thus notes that the "real power in *Pride and Prejudice*, as is often observed, is to have the intelligence, the wit, and the critical attitudes of Jane Austen" (34). Similarly, Morgan depicts Lizzie as "witty" and "self-confident," stating that these qualities attracted Mr. Darcy to her (54):

> "Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?"
> "For the liveliness of your mind, I did."
> "You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little less. The fact is, that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking and looking, and thinking for your approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike them." (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 230)

Elizabeth Bennet's appeal lies in the fact that she "has wit, a quality of mind Darcy only gradually comes to appreciate" (Thaden 51). While he is attracted to her wit, Lizzie challenges his prejudices. Austen uses Lizzie not only to challenge "Darcy's traditional assumptions of power as a male directly," but also "women's extreme eagerness to please men" (Newton 34-35). Consequently, their marriage is established on intellectual equality and mutual understanding, which confirms that it is not a marriage of financial security or Lizzie's attempt to climb up the social ladder by obtaining the title of Lady Pemberly.

As already stated, Lizzie wants marriage in which she can be happy, which does not necessarily mean that she will not benefit financially from getting married. This idea is at first called into question by Elizabeth's rejection of two proposals in which she was offered good opportunities. It is significant

> that the only proposals of marriage recorded in the novel are unsuccessful, and that both suitors are so immersed in their sense of power that they blindly offend the woman whose affections they mean to attach and in the process provoke what must be two of the most vigorous rejections in all of literature (Newton 32)

Mr. Collins's and Mr. Darcy's proposals are the proposals in which the man is wealthy and confident in his power and the woman does not "dwell on their power to choose" or "debate about getting a husband" (Newton 32-33). They both point out to Elizabeth the faults of her family, emphasizing that they, despite this, still offer their hand and a favorable marriage. Yet, "as long as Elizabeth believes this attitude, she abhors" (Thaden 49) them. Darcy's proposal is also a sign that he has finally realized that Elizabeth is his equal and his proposal is a sign that he acknowledges this. "However, admitted that he had equals – he only had to be convinced to admit Elizabeth among them" (Thaden 49). Lizzie blames Darcy the most for his involvement in the relationship between her sister Jane and Bingley, who at Darcy's persuasion leaves Jane. Darcy's insults of Lizzie's family and his keeping Bingley away from Jane is no match for his wealthy status. "If money, for example, were really a force in the novel, we might find Elizabeth heedless, radical, or at best naive, for insulting and rejecting a man with £10,000 a year" (Newton 35).

After Mr. Darcy's first proposal, the events unfold through which Elizabeth meets Darcy and realizes that behind his arrogant and cold exterior there is a good man. His kindness does not come to the fore due to his cold and reserved nature until he meets Elizabeth and realizes that he had hurt her. "Elizabeth's world, moreover, allows [Austen] the power to change her lot through acting upon it, in that it allows her the power to alter Darcy's behavior" (Newton 35). Newton describes the development of Darcy's character as Austen's attempt to change men's behavior through Elizabeth's world – which of course was not possible in Jane Austen's real world – and thus does not limit women's autonomy only to witty and sarcastic comments on situations in the story (Newton 35). He corrects his mistake and advises Bingley to go back for the girl he wants, even though her family is of a lower class. He also helps fugitive Lydia save her reputation even though it means helping his enemy Wickham. He states all this in a letter to Lizzie, in which he also apologizes for his feelings for her and the proposal she refused.

> Elizabeth's rebel energies retain a quality of force because . . . they really act upon her world; they change Darcy, change the way he responds to his economic and social

> privilege, change something basic to the power relation between him and Elizabeth. Without intending to, Elizabeth renders Darcy more courtly, less liable to impress upon her the power he has to choose and to give her benefits, less liable to assume control of her feelings (Newton 37).

Reading Darcy's letter, Elizabeth decides "to consider, to weigh, to choose which male's regard she really values" (Newton 39). Therefore, she is the one who autonomously decides to choose Darcy – neither his first proposal nor some kind of social pressure. Austen rewards her autonomy and defiance of male dominance with a good marriage. Even though a "good marriage" usually connotes great wealth, Austen also rewards Lizzie with a dignified marriage, a marriage of love, a marriage based on respect and mutual support (Newton 39). It is possible that in this work Austen wants to turn the story of society's expectations for women: in this novel, she wants to set the expectations of women (Elizabeth) for a good husband (Darcy). At the end of the novel, he thus fulfils all the conditions such as "Pemberly, £10,000 a year, rank, looks, intelligence, flexibility, wit, and a convincing reality" – "all the economic and social powers of the traditional hero" (Newton 41). With all the above-mentioned powers and providing the proof that he is a moral man, Darcy makes Elizabeth realize that she loves him; she accepts his second proposal, knowing that he will treat her as she deserves: "[h]aving kept Elizabeth unaware of her love, though not her respect, for Darcy, Jane Austen can claim naturalness and worth for love based on gratitude and esteem, and can scorn the sentimentality of love at first sight" (Shaw 288).

Jane Austen gave Elizabeth the (limited) power to shape her own life according to her own rules as she wanted all women of her time to do so. Aware of the limited rights and injustices that befell women of her time, Austen in this way allowed women to live a life that should be allowed to everyone, regardless of their gender. Everyone should have the right to love and marry without coercion, whether financial or social.

## 4.2. *Emma* (1815)

> "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence;
> and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her."

(Austen, *Emma* 2)

Although Austen does not open *Emma* ironically such as *Pride and Prejudice*, this novel is equally interesting, with perhaps another (proto)feminist heroine on the trail. As the epigraph shows, Emma is a rich young girl who has everything and whose life runs without disturbance. Yet, Austen is also mildly ironic with regard to how the plot will unfold. This heroine will engage in arranging marriages wherever she goes, but she will avoid her own:

> I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing! but I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall. And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want. (Austen, *Emma* 75)

Emma is very similar to Elizabeth Bennet, so we reencounter a new (proto)feminist heroine who refuses marriage for financial benefit. This heroine is also looking for mutual love and criticizes the society in which women are only the ornaments and not the real mistresses of the house: Emma "believe[s] few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house as [she] [is] of Hartfield" (Austen, *Emma* 75). Emma lives with her elderly father and, without a governess who recently married and left, Emma runs the house. Accustomed to such level of freedom, she does not want to give it up just to get married for financial security, she "looks to a future she expects to control" (Todd 94). Her views can be seen in her conversation on marriage with Harriet: she does not expect to "be so truly beloved and important in any man's eyes as . . . [she is] in [her] father's" (Austen, *Emma* 75). However, like Elizabeth, Emma will gradually and unconsciously fall in love with Mr. Knightley, who "allows her to be a daughter at Hartfield" (Todd 110) and eventually marry him. Entering a love marriage can be one of the proofs of (proto)feminism in this novel. As a rich heiress, whose dowry would amount to thirty thousand pounds, Emma certainly does not have to worry about who she will marry because she is financially secure and belongs to the upper social class. By securing her financial status, Austen grants Emma the possibility to have unconventional views on marriage. And by being already financially secured and used to enjoying a certain level of freedom, Emma looks for the same in a potential marriage partner, who throughout the course of the novel turns out to be Mr. Knightley.

Mr. Knightley is also a wealthy man, a modern landowner, and the "neighbourhood's most eligible bachelor" (Todd 110). Furthermore, they are comfortable with each other from the very beginning of the story. Thus, their relationship is based on the pleasant closeness they feel to each other and mutual respect based on knowing each other. Although Mr. Knightley first has the role of an "elder 'brother', who knew her from an infant" (Todd 110) or a substitute father, maybe even a mentor, as the story progresses his subtle love words hint that there is something more behind his friendly behaviour – "so the final marriage seems as familial as romantic" (Todd 110). This is best exemplified by a scene in which when "Emma and Harriet discuss a conversation about spruce beer, Emma remembers exactly where Mr Knightley was standing, while he looks sourly at Frank Churchill for little other reason than that he seems licensed to flirt with Emma" (Todd 112). Moreover, the marriage to Mr. Knightley changes Emma as a person and for the better. Emma likes to poke her nose into other people's business and to scheme, often misinterpreting the behavior of people around her. Emma grows up with Mr. Knightley and learns from him. A step towards that is the moment when Emma realizes it herself: "What had she to wish for? Nothing, but to grow more worthy of him, whose intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own" (Austen, *Emma* 422). This quote can also be understood as anti-feminist, namely as if a woman could only change for the better with a man. However, Austen's intentions are quite different: she actually emphasizes the equality between the sexes as it takes two to tango. The love they feel for each other has opened Emma's eyes, enabling her to see her behavior for what it was. In addition, much like Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship, Emma and Knightley also value intelligence and conversation. Throughout the novel, we witness their discussions and conversations and their obvious mutual respect. Todd observes that Mr. Knightley's "patriarchal notions of marriage have been dented by his choice of a wife without a 'delightful inferiority', one who will not, like Mrs. Weston and Isabella, constantly respond to the moods of her husband" (111). In addition, "his is the only criticism she will listen to" (Thaden 50). Austen makes him a progressive figure who does not want an angel in the house, i.e. he does not want his wife to be an easily controllable doll with whom he will not be able to have a quality discussion since she will always obey his wishes, as women did then. Throughout *Emma*, we can observe Austen's idea of an ideal husband, who should possess "upright integrity, that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness, which a man should display in every transaction of his life" (Austen, *Emma* 354). Austen also makes him honest and moral, depicting him as a person who

cares more about the persons themselves than their social status as is visible in the scene when Mr. Knightley comments on Mr. Martin's proposal to Harriet, calling Mr. Martin "respectable, intelligent gentleman-farmer!" (Austen, *Emma* 53).

Because Emma's characterization dominates the novel, it is a bit harder to notice another (proto)feminist figure that Austen has created in the novel: Jane Fairfax. Thaden considers Jane Fairfax "the traditional Austen heroine" (55), "growing up with no advantages of connexion or improvement, to be engrafted on what nature had given her in a pleasing person, good understanding, and warm-hearted, well-meaning relations" (Austen, *Emma* 143). As Elizabeth, she has to put up with the senseless and sleazy members of her family and as Fanny she has to remain quiet in society because of her secret relationship and her disrepute as a future governess (Thaden 55). In addition, "in terms of fictional conventions we would most expect Jane Fairfax to be heroine of *Emma*" (Morgan qtd. in Thaden 48). Austen, nevertheless, chooses Emma as the protagonist of the novel. In contrast to Jane, Austen gives Emma the status and power to perhaps do more than her other protagonists. However, Austen marries both heroines and gives them a marriage of love. It could be said that Jane's marriage was a bit more of a financial benefit since she was disreputable and had a job as a governess waiting for her. The relationship between Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill begins even before the start of the novel and remains a secret until his aunt's death. Namely, Frank was financially dependent on his aunt, who did not approve of Jane, and only after her death Frank admits that they were secretly engaged the whole time. Although possibly a (proto)feminist icon, Jane's silence about her engagement to Frank is questionable since she is of a lower social class. For a true Austen heroine, money should not be the reason for marriage, but the question remains how far Jane was willing to go to secure a comfortable life for herself. As readers, we do not have insight into Jane Fairfax's mind, yet on the other hand, we can understand Jane's silence as a proof of a great love and sacrifice for Frank. In this way, we can also see Frank as a self-sacrificing lover. By flirting with Emma and telling stories about Jane, Frank tries to hide any connection between him and Jane. And yet, Frank has the social status and money and could have chosen any other girl to wed, but he still chooses to be engaged to Jane in secret, waiting for the right moment to announce it to the world. In this way, Austen rewards her (proto)feminist stymied heroine with a marriage: an upper-class marriage where she will no longer have to depend on her job as a governess. Although their relationship cannot be compared to the relationships like Elizabeth and Darcy's or Emma and Knightley's, Jane Fairfax and Frank

Churchill have nevertheless earned a place in Jane Austen's novel. Jane's resemblance to the other heroines and Frank's commitment to their secret relationship suggest that we could analyze their relationship as a departure from the traditional marriage for financial gain, i.e. a marriage in which there is no room for love between spouses.

# Conclusion

To summarize, in the first chapter, we could see the conditions in which Austen lived and wrote her works. Her large family, priest father, and status in society found their place in her novels. Historical events that were, in one way or another, included in her novels give her the status of a serious writer. This chapter also discussed the status of women in her time, which can be observed in her novels and her resentful attitude towards it, which is one of the main reasons to see her works as (proto)feminist. In the second chapter, the status of women as authors and the adversities they struggled with were explored. Austen's struggle over the very publication of novels under her name was observed, as well as the lower fees that women authors received for their works. The discussion of protofeminism then followed, with special emphasis on Mary Wollstonecraft, its most important representative. Wollstonecraft's protofeminist ideas shed light on the late eighteenth century world and the position of women in it. They were also helpful in our analysis of Jane Austen's seemingly conservative novels. In the third chapter, the similarities between Wollstonecraft and Austen were discussed in an attempt to prove that Jane Austen was actually a (proto)feminist and that her novels are much more than typical romances with their search for love and marriage. The fourth and final chapter presented an analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* from a feminist perspective, placing Austen among other protofeminist authors.

Although she was not as radical and direct as the protofeminists of her time, Jane Austen deserves the title of protofeminist. She advocated for women's rights through her novels in which she condemned and mocked society through her characters. With humor and irony, she imperceptibly criticized society and thereby avoided harsh condemnation from society, which enabled her future work to be unhindered. Austen's characters are seemingly ordinary people who spend their days talking or gossiping with others, while striving to meet the demands of society in order to enjoy a certain reputation. One of those social demands is a good marriage match. Austen tries to get her characters to marry for love, showing the rejection of marriage proposals that were made for financial stability. Also, the protagonists in her novels are smart and headstrong women who refuse to be the puppets of conservative society. Although they eventually get married, marriage brings them happiness and the love of their spouses.

This thesis can be counted among other studies that give Jane Austen the credit she deserves. With the topic of this thesis, the attention can also be drawn to the current position of women in society. It is true that women have their rights and today they can be doctors, scientists, lawyers and pilots, but they still encounter strong chauvinistic opinions. Today's society judges women in terms of their clothes, appearance, behavior, choice of partner, and, of course, marriage and children. If women do not submit to society's expectations, i.e. if they do not wear the "prescribed" clothes or if they enjoy sexual freedom, which is natural and allowed to men, they are degraded and insulted by society. Although we are progressing as a race, conservatism still persists, attempting to stifle women's freedom and to make them conform to the oppressive values of the past, such as male domination and authority in the family.

Women are finally independent, but conservative stereotypes and opinions stifle them like they used to in Jane Austen's time. This thesis will hopefully point out the similarities between the society's past and present gender expectations and encourage women not to give up in the fight for their full independence.

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