Trabajo Fin de Grado

Proto-Feminism in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*

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ABSTRACT/RESUMEN

Jane Austen is an English novelist who is essentially known for her six novels, which discuss the role of women at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, and criticise the British social class known as landed gentry. The aim of this Final Degree Project is to analyse the plausible feminist tendencies that can be found in one of her most popular novels, Pride and Prejudice. The unfair position of women due to the patriarchal society, the hierarchical division of society and favourable marriages are the main subject matters that will be developed in this essay.

Key words: Proto-feminism, Feminism, Gentry, Reason, Jane Austen, Social classes, Marriage, Elizabeth Bennet, Pride and Prejudice.

Jane Austen es una escritora británica conocida fundamentalmente por sus seis novelas, en las que analiza el papel de la mujer hacia el final del siglo dieciocho y principios del diecinueve, y critica a la clase social británica llamada aristocracia rural. El objetivo de este Trabajo de Fin de Grado es el de analizar las plausibles tendencias feministas que se pueden encontrar en una de sus obras más populares, Orgullo y prejuicio. La posición injusta de la mujer por la sociedad patriarcal, la clasificación jerárquica de la sociedad y los matrimonios beneficiosos son los temas que se tratarán en el trabajo.

Key words: Protofeminismo, Feminismo, Nobleza, Razón, Jane Austen, Clases sociales, Matrimonio, Elizabeth Bennet, Orgullo y prejuicio.
1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present essay is to analyse Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). In particular, this commentary will be focused on the possible presence of feminism and the role of women, and it will comprehend a number of subjects which will be interpreted, explained and accounted for. The project is divided in three parts: in the first one, the cultural background will be developed. The second one will be centred on the author. And in the last part, the analysis of the novel will be provided.

The first part will include the social, cultural and historical context on the one hand, and the definition of feminism and its development in the period on the other hand. The second part will introduce the author and her life, as well as her novels. The third part will have several sections: first, a summary of the composition and an analysis of its main characters will be offered. Then, an analysis on Austen’s criticism by writers and scholars will be provided. Afterwards, the focus will be placed on the possible inclination towards feminism on *Pride and Prejudice* and on the role of women at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Finally, it will also take into consideration Austen’s influence and the adaptations of her novel, focusing on the most acclaimed and on the most distinct ones. At last, a section for general conclusions will be included to recapitulate the essential contents and to propose a generalized outlook.
2. PART ONE: CULTURAL BACKGROUND

2.1 EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN AND REGENCY PERIOD

Before beginning with the development of this analysis, it would be necessary to introduce the historical, social and cultural backgrounds that affect directly the figure of Jane Austen. It should be mentioned that there is a certain discrepancy when classifying the author since she has been placed within several literary schools and literary periods. In chronological terms, Regency Period has been deemed the word that best characterizes Austen’s career path. The Regency started in 1811 when King George III was considered unfit to rule. His son George (the Prince of Wales) reigned as Prince Regent. This situation ended in 1820, just as George IV was crowned. Nevertheless, although this period officially lasted from 1811 to 1820, the Regency generally refers as well to the decades that preceded Victorianism. That is to say, to the period between 1795 and 1837, including therefore the reigns of George III, George IV and William IV.

The year after Jane Austen was born, in 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed. This was the moment in which the American Revolution started and Britain lost the American colonies, which meant a great loss of economic power. This event was followed by the French Revolution ten years later, in 1789, which marked the beginning of the rise of the middle class and the ascent of Napoleon, who became Emperor in 1804. For more than twenty years, Britain became involved in a conflict that led to a situation of monetary instability: the Napoleonic Wars (1793 – 1815).

The Regency Era is also significant as the Prince Regent supported and encouraged the development of architecture and the fine arts. This brought a situation of change in Britain in terms of politics, society and economy. An important aspect to consider is the fact that Austen would have been a witness of the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, though some of its consequences did not reach their culmination until the Second Industrial Revolution (1840 – 1870). This process of industrialization was the reason why the, until then, traditional way to make money (involving landowners, lands and peasants) was now in decline.
Although London remains absent in Austen’s novels, it is still relevant and influential on both her characters and the countryside at the time. By 1800, London had become larger than Paris and that any other city in England, reaching a number of 900,000 inhabitants. People moved from the countryside to London and, although there was a rise in wealth, it just affected the cities.

Jane Austen herself was part of the Landed Gentry, and her heroines belonged to that same social class. This was a wide social class, as it included both those who were clergymen and lawyers and those who possessed lands. The Gentry was the most important and influential group in both the 18th and 19th centuries, since they were the owners of the vast majority of the English land. Society was divided into hierarchies and there were as well quite stern inheritance laws used to consolidate the system. It was also at this time when the ideas of family and the role of women changed. Men could advance socially through the military or the church, but women could only improve their situation by marriage. Hence, their position renewed, since by means of successful marriages the families would be able to achieve a greater wealth.

Middle-class women were given little formal schooling in Britain. In the Eighteenth-century, young girls did not receive proper education. Even though private schools oriented towards this group had augmented, they were not invested in educational achievements. Their discipline consisted in teaching these young girls manners, as dancing and singing, and preparing them for marriage. Those who could not afford private education would opt for home-schooling, and they would be taught by their mothers, their older sisters, their fathers, or even by governesses.

By the beginning of the Nineteenth-century, there had been a growth in the literacy of the population in England. As a consequence, most people in the upper and middle classes were able to read, and the rest of the community also began to improve from then on. In addition, there was an increase in the publication of novels due to the expansion of the printing machine. This technological development made books more affordable and accessible, and brought new forms of printing. Nonetheless, the most inexpensive novels were those that depicted the lives of those in the upper classes. That is to say, other kinds of works were not as easy to access as these were; especially since there was a rise in the price of texts later in the century. These taxes became effective because England wanted to restrict the
access to knowledge that lower classes had after certain outbursts and the French Revolution took place.

In the fiction produced throughout the Regency Period, authors as Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen should be mentioned. Moreover, it was as well in this era in which we can find poets such as John Keats, Lord Byron and William Blake. Traditionally, these writers have been described as part of the Romantic Movement, which began towards the end of the 18th century as a reaction against the Enlightenment.

2.2 PROTO-FEMINISM AND FEMINISM

The dictionary definition of feminism is “the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim.”¹ The term originates from the French word féminisme, which was first coined in France in the 1880s. This concept was a combination of femme (woman) and isme, which made reference to an ideology or a social movement. It began to be used throughout the so-called First Wave of Feminism (19th century and the beginning of the 20th century), which was focused in women’s oppression and suffrage. It should be mentioned that the label feminism has always been surrounded by certain controversy. Even nowadays it is still associated with violence and extremism, and accused of being woman-centered. Nonetheless, by the start of the 20th century, French feminism had several subdivisions as “radical feminism”, “socialist feminism” and “integral feminism”. Feminism is concerned with autonomy, freedom, women’s emancipation and the eradication of the patriarchal thought and society.

Since the 20th century, historians and scholars have adopted both feminism and feminist as anachronisms. That is to say, these words have been employed with regard to the Renaissance, the Middle Ages and even to Ancient Greece. To avoid this situation, other

critics have preferred to borrow the terms “precursor”, “pioneer” and “proto-feminism”. The concept of *Protofeminism* or *Proto-feminism* is used when referring to a period in which *feminism* was not known or did not exist. Some scholars utilize *Proto-feminism* to cover the time span up to the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, though others do not, as they consider that feminism already existed in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries. Additionally, few have applied this word to works that were published in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, since they contemplated that the authors had been born in countries which had different situations concerning women equality, and were moving slower when compared, for instance, to other European nations. Hence, *Proto-feminism* could be used as well when trying to make a distinction between compositions that had an “incipient” feminism and those who have been defined as “Modern” feminist works.

### 2.3 FEMINISM IN THE PERIOD

It could be stated that the appearance of female writers occurred during the Medieval Age. But it was not until the Victorian and Modern epochs when the greatest quantity of women writers can be found. Nevertheless, it is considered that the first dissertation regarding feminism is *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792. According to Monroe (1987: 143-152), Wollstonecraft created this treatise as a response to the French Revolution and the national educational system, and the rise of dogmas related to liberalism, humanitarianism and egalitarianism. The emergence of these middle-class beliefs led her to conceptualize new roles for women. It also served as a rejoinder to those works produced by male philosophers of the time.

In accordance with Ascarelli (2004: 25.1), in spite of the fact that Jane Austen never mentioned Wollstonecraft or her works in her novels or in her letters, Austen would have known Wollstonecraft’s dissertation and therefore, there would be a connection between both authors. One of the reasons for this resolution could be how concerned they both were with the role of women in society. Nonetheless, other ideas should be also mentioned. Austen, as Wollstonecraft, was cognizant of marriage as a financial institution, considered women as
rational human beings and held the belief that women had to come to know how to think for themselves.

With respect to the representation of feminism and female authors within the period, Mary Shelley (1797 – 1851) should be mentioned as well. According to Hoeveler (2003: 45), Shelley’s \textit{Frankenstein} has appeared in the three primary branches of feminist literary criticism and theory; that is to say, British, American and French criticism. For instance, Hoeveler (2003: 46) states that in \textit{Literary Woman} (1976), the American scholar Ellen Moers argues that Shelley blamed herself for her mother’s and her daughter’s deaths throughout her novel. This critic deemed that \textit{Frankenstein} had arisen as the result of these experiences.

Hoeveler (2003: 47) also made reference to another study made by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar: \textit{The Madwoman in the Attic} (1979). In this text, these two scholars analysed Victorian literature from a feminist point of view. Namely, they examined the works of Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson and Mary Shelley, among others. Gilbert and Susan focused their commentary regarding Shelley in the roles that Victor portrayed, with the role of Victor as Eve as their prime focus, since they had interpreted the novel as a rendering of \textit{Paradise Lost}. 
3. PART TWO: JANE AUSTEN

3.1 BIOGRAPHY

Jane Austen was born on the 16th of December, 1775, at Steventon Rectory, in the county of Hampshire. She was the daughter of the Rector of that parish, George Austen, who served as the rector and resided there until he was seventy years old. When he left the active service, he went to Bath with his wife Cassandra, and his two daughters (Jane and Cassandra). The authoress’ father was a scholar and also had profound knowledge in literature, which would have made Jane cognizant and interested in nurturing her own store of learning and language.

Both Jane and her sister Cassandra were mainly educated at home. They were taught by Mrs Ann Cawley for a short period of time, but then they contracted a disease and as a consequence, they were home schooled. Furthermore, both of them also attended Abbey School in 1785.

After the decease of her father, Jane, her sister Cassandra and her mother left to Southampton for a short time span, and then moved to the village of Chawton. During her last years in Steventon, Austen created three works: First Impressions, Elinor and Marianne and Susan. These novels were later published as Pride and Prejudice (1813), Sense and Sensibility (1812) and Northanger Abbey (1818), respectively. It was in this place where she started to write her renowned novels.

While the author stayed in Bath and in Southampton, apparently she felt unhappy and displaced, which made her unable to continue with the production of new novels. These places offered several types of amusement, which left behind their previous ways of entertainment. The writer’s first compositions were used as a form of distraction among the family; they would spend their pastimes by means of these private literary diversions. However, there are scholars who believe that Austen did not go through a period of absence of inspiration, and they seem to think that there might have been too many interests, which

Fig. 1: Jane Austen
would have restricted her compositions. Notwithstanding, as soon as she left these hectic cities and returned to the countryside, to Chawton village, her imagination seemed to blossom once more.

Jane and her sister Cassandra maintained a very intimate relationship. It is believed that this bond might have been the foundation for the association between sisters, which she described in several of her works. None of them married, though both of them had had offers. In between 1801 and 1804, it is said that Jane met the only man she ever thought she could have married, for she is considered to have had a strong opinion when it came to relationships. Still, since Austen did not get married, she was able to focus on her writings and to observe the details and actions of those who were surrounding her.

In her last years at Chawton, Austen had already published several of her novels. She remained anonymous, though her family and some other friends and acquaintances knew about her. By 1816 Austen began to feel unwell, but she took no notice of her symptoms and even continued to write. In May 1817, she was urged to move to Winchester, for there she would be able to receive ceaseless medical assistance. In spite of that, she died two months later at the age of 41, on Friday the 18th of July, 1817, surrounded by Cassandra and her brother Henry.

3.2 WORKS

It is not possible to declare the age at which Austen began to write, but it could be stated that she must have started when she was a young girl, for some copybooks consisting of tales where found. By the time she was sixteen, the number of tales had increased considerably; which made scholars conclude that she must have started her compositions at a very early stage. Her first stories have been described as nonsensical and not too solid, and her style was depicted as pure simple English (Austen-Leigh, 1871: 42).

The authoress wrote her first work in her twenties, and by the time she was twenty-five, she had completed three stories. Even though the manuscript novel of her first composition (Sense and Sensibility) was written in 1795, it would not be published until 1811. Her next manuscript (Pride and Prejudice) was published two years later, and it was
highly acclaimed by her audience. Her next work (Mansfield Park) was not as successful, and it was followed by Emma (1816), which was the last composition to be published while the novelist was alive. Both Northanger Abbey and Persuasion were printed in 1818 posthumously, along with a biographical sketch by Jane Austen’s brother; Henry Austen.

Sense and Sensibility was disregarded by critics until the twentieth century in favour of Austen’s other novels. Austen dealt with the dichotomy between being rational and showing one’s emotions. At the time, the trend was inclined towards emotions and sentimentality, leaving rationality as man-made. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood have parallel story lines; the both seek love, according to their nature and ideals. In the end, Austen portrayed sensibility as vulnerability, while sense was redeemed.

Mansfield Park has been described as one of the authoress most reflective and pragmatic novel. It focused on slave trade, corruption and extortion. Austen contemplated the opposition between superficial attractiveness and uprightness. Fanny, the main character, is humble and prudish, but she also has a great strength of character.

Some critics have considered Emma as Austen’s finest and most emblematic work. It approaches the themes of marriage, social status, the power of imagination and the restricted nature of women’s life. Emma is described as rich, clever, alluring, spoilt and fixated with matchmaking. It is said that Austen described Emma as a heroine “whom no one but myself will much like.” However, she became one Austen’s most conceivable imperfect and outstanding heroines.

Northanger Abbey has been referred to as a parody of Gothic novels, which were greatly admired at the time and, specifically, a parody of Anne Radcliffe’s stories. It is also contemplated as a coming-of-age story, since it is focused on young characters (Catherine Morland) and their sentiments.

Austen’s last novel, Persuasion, is said to represent the sophistication of her works. The novelist’s caricature of the upper classes is even more noticeable in throughout this composition. It should be pointed out that it also deals with the issue of nationalistic pride. This can be observed in the way in which female characters refer to the deputies of the Navy. Austen’s criticism of the higher classes is directed at Sir Walter Elliot, who portrays one of the versions of the English gentleman. The other version is represented by two officers; Admiral Croft and Captain Wentworth.
4. PART THREE: ANALYSIS OF AUSTEN’S PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

4.1 SUMMARY AND CHARACTER ANALYSIS

*Pride and Prejudice* (first published in 1813) has become the most distinguished among Jane Austen’s novels. It begins with the news that the gentleman Charles Bingley will be the new resident at Netherfield Park. This prompts great agitation in the village and among the Bennet family. The Bennets have five unwed daughters and Mrs Bennet is fixated with getting them married, since their property will be only inherited by a male heir. For Mrs Bennet, Bingley’s arrival means a chance at marrying one of her daughters, namely her eldest daughter, Jane.

Even though it is mainly written from the point of view of Elizabeth Bennet, the female lead, the story also follows Elizabeth sisters’ lives. In this composition, Austen adopts the same writing techniques that can be observed in the majority of her novels; that is to say, she uses free style and indirect speech.

The novel depicts the story of two love affairs: one of them between Fitzwilliam Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, and the other between Charles Bingley and Jane Bennet. There are two other minor relationships: Charlotte Lucas and Mr Collins and George Wickham and Lydia Bennet. It is also focused on women reputation. While this theme appears in several occasions, the most prominent one is probably Lydia’s elopement with Wickham, which would have compromised the Bennet’s honour had Darcy not convinced Wickham to marry Lydia.

The topic of social class is dealt with in association with reputation. Society is strictly divided into classes and Austen focuses her criticism on middle and upper classes. Although those in the middle classes could interact with the ones in the upper classes, the differences among them were noticeable. The significance of this hierarchy is shared by characters as Caroline Bingley, George Wickham or Lady Catherine de Bourgh. The relationships amidst Elizabeth and Darcy and Jane and Bingley are questioned and challenged throughout the novel because of their rank within society, but Austen uses their marriages to vanquish the division within society.
Mr Bennet and Mrs Bennet are the heads of the household. Mr Bennet is married to Mrs Bennet and is the father of Jane, Lydia, Kitty, Mary and Elizabeth, to whom he is the closest. He is a sarcastic, witty, reasonable man, but is also aloof and detached from his family. Austen depicted him as “a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice”\(^2\) (Austen, 2001: 2). Since they do not have a male heir, Mrs Bennet’s aim is to marry her daughters in order to ensure their financial situation in case her husband dies. She is described as “a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper.” (Austen, 2001: 2).

Jane Bennet is the eldest sister of the family and it is said that she is the most beautiful of them. She is said to be sweet and innocent. Lizzie even pictures her as someone who sees the best in everybody: “Oh! you are a great deal too apt, you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in any body. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in your life.” (Austen, 2001: 10). Although she has a good affinity with her sisters, Jane has an intimate relationship with Elizabeth.

Charles Bingley is the wealthy gentleman who gets married to Jane. His character clashes with Darcy’s, but is similar to that of Jane; since he is pleasant, agreeable and cordial, and he also sees the best of people. Bingley lacks self-reliance, which makes him rely on others whenever he has to come to a conclusion.

Elizabeth Bennet is the female lead of the novel. She is the second daughter and is said to be the most intelligent one. She has a “lively, playful disposition” (Austen, 2001: 9), and is proud and sharp, which makes her quick to judge people’s intentions and demeanours. “There are few people whom I really love, and still fewer of whom I think well. The more I see of the world, the more am I dissatisfied with it.” (Austen, 2001: 90, 91).

Fitzwilliam Darcy is pictured at the first assembly as a “fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien” and people believe him to be “a fine figure of a man” and “much handsomer than Mr Bingley” (Austen, 2001: 7, 8). However, this general esteem changes once his pride and cold manners are discovered. Darcy shares Caroline Bingley’s and her sister’s faults, but his egotism is deflated after Elizabeth’s rejection, as he himself states:

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“I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. As a child I was taught what was right (...) I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. (...) I was spoilt by my parents, who (...) almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing; to care for none beyond my own family circle; to think meanly of all the rest of the world; (...) Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! (...) You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled.” (Austen, 2001: 241).

Lydia Bennet is the youngest and Mrs Bennet’s favourite daughter. She is described as silly, careless, nosy and spoilt. Lizzie sees her as “Vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrouled!” (Austen, 2001: 152) and believes that her behaviour could threaten her family’s respect: “Our importance, our respectability in the world, must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character.” (Austen, 2001: 151).

George Wickham is the godson of the late Mr Darcy. He is a charming, grandiloquent and handsome man who “had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address.”(Austen, 2001: 49). Yet he is a sly individual who manipulates people in order to achieve his goals.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh is Darcy’s aunt and Mr Collin’s patroness. She is disdainful, wealthy and condescending with those below her. Lizzie’s impression of her is that “Lady Catherine was a tall, large woman, with strongly-marked features, which might once have been handsome. Her air was not conciliating, nor was her manner of receiving them such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank.” (Austen, 2001: 108).
4.2 CRITICISM

"I flatter myself, however, that you can understand very little of it from this description. Heaven forbid that I should ever offer such encouragement to Explanations as to give a clear one on any occasion myself!" (Austen, 1799)³

Jane Austen was not considered one of the most acclaimed nor beloved authors of her time. In fact, she was not deemed an eminent writer until the second part of the nineteenth century. Moreover, her works did not even have reprinted publications while she was alive. There are no accounts of Austen’s own commentaries regarding her writing style. There are, however, several remarks in some of her letters, but since these were addressed to her relatives with informal and sarcastic undertones, they are not held as serious assumptions.

The Romantic novelist Walter Scott made two entries regarding Austen as well as a review on Austen’s work Emma. In his first entry, he praises both the authoress’ ability when describing the characters’ mundane lives, and her composition Pride and Prejudice:

“Read again, and for the third time at least, Miss Austen’s very finely written novel of “Pride and Prejudice.” That young lady has a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The big bow-wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch, which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me.” (Scott, 1826)⁴

In the next entry in connection with Austen, Scott expressed his appreciation of her style, but also stated that her characters “do not, it is true, get above the middle classes of society, but there she is inimitable” (Scott, 1827).

Austen’s response to Walter Scott is to be found in one of her letters; in which she asserted that “Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones. It is not fair. He has fame and profit enough as a poet, and should not be taking the bread out of other

³ Austen, J. Letter addressed to Cassandra on June 2nd, 1799
⁴ Scott, W. The Journal of Sir Walter Scott, March 1826
people’s mouths. I do not like him, and do not mean to like Waverley if I can help it but fear I must.” (Austen, 1814)

In his review of Emma, the author continued to proclaim his esteem towards Austen’s novels, defining it as a “a class of fictions which has arisen almost in our own times, and which draws the characters and incidents introduced more immediately from the current of ordinary life than was permitted by the former rules of the novel”, and that “she has produced sketches of such spirit and originality that we never miss the excitation which depends upon a narrative of uncommon events, arising from the consideration of minds, manners, and sentiments, greatly above our own.” (Scott, 1815)

Among her detractors, we can find Charlotte Brontë. Brontë did not read Pride and Prejudice until her friend and critic George H. Lewes recommended her to. When she did, she expressed her inability to comprehend the admiration surrounding Austen. Her aversion towards Austen was occasioned by those critics who placed both authors within the same category, even though their narratives were unidentical, and by several critiques which advised her to follow Austen’s writing style. Brontë wrote a letter to Lewes as a rejoinder to his recommendation and his advice to write with less melodramatic and emotional undertones in which she said:

“Why do you like Miss Austen so very much? I am puzzled on that point. What induced you to say that you would rather have written Pride and Prejudice or Tom Jones, than any of the Waverley novels?

I had not seen Pride and Prejudice till I had read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And what did I find? An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses.” (Brontë, 1848)

The English writer of the Victorian period, Anthony Trollope manifested his thoughts on Austen’s novels in a lecture in 1870, in which he proclaimed that:

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5 Austen, J. Letter addressed to Anna Austen on September 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1814
6 Scott, W. The Quarterly Review, 1815
7 Brontë, C. Letter addressed to George H. Lewes on January 12\textsuperscript{th}, 1848
“Miss Austen was surely a great novelist. What she did, she did perfectly. Her work, as far as it goes, is faultless. She wrote of the times in which she lived, of the class of people with which she associated, and in the language which was usual to her as an educated lady (...) But she places us in a circle of gentlemen and ladies, and charms us while she tells us with an unconscious accuracy how men should act to women, and women act to men.”

The American writer Mark Twain is considered to be one of Austen’s most outspoken critics. In his travel book Following the Equator (1897), Twain said that “Jane Austen's books, too, are absent from this library. Just that one omission alone would make a fairly good library out of a library that had'n a book in it.” About Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, he stated: “I often want to criticize Jane Austen, but her books madden me so that I can’t conceal my frenzy from the reader (...) Every time I read Pride and Prejudice I want to dig her up and beat her over the skull with her own shin bone!”

In the essay A Room of One’s Own (1929), Virginia Woolf explored literature and both male and female writers while, at the same time, she criticized the situation of inequality women had to endure in the existing patriarchal society. Woolf highlighted the importance of having a room of one’s own when wishing to write. Austen, as many other women, did not have an accommodation of her own; she wrote in the drawing room and even when she was sitting with her family. In the drawing room, there was a door which creaked, letting her know whenever someone was approaching her, which gave her the time to hide or cover her writings. Woolf found it remarkable that being in this situation, Austen was able to write “without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching” (Woolf, 1929: 94).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the literary movement that prevailed was Romanticism. Nevertheless, Austen was not a Romantic; some critics even define her as “Anti-Romantic”. The authoress’ style was rationalist and she advocated for reason on behalf of instinct and sentiment. This might have been the reason why the first books containing a critical analysis of her novels were not issued until the last decades of the nineteenth century.

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8 Twain, M. Letter addressed to Joseph Twichell on September 13th, 1898
The Scottish novelist Margaret Oliphant was one of the first to portray Austen in terminology that approached proto-feminism in her work *Miss Austen and Miss Mitford* (1870: 294, 296, 304). She states that Austen had a “fine vein of feminine cynicism”, that her mind was “essentially feminine” and that her novels were “so calm and cold and keen.” Notwithstanding, critics would not delve into the feminism related to Austen’s novels until the 1970s.

Feminist literary criticism dates back to the Middle Ages according to several scholars, but its ascension did not occur until the second-wave of feminism. A great amount of feminist critics have since then studied Austen’s context and the gender relations she depicted. It has been established that her techniques and contents appear as retorts to the patriarchal society of the time. Moreover, the focus has been placed in “the artistic strategies which enabled Austen to criticize or subvert the patriarchy without offending or incurring reprisals” (Marshall, 1992: 40).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar provided a feminist reading of Austen’s compositions in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). Gilbert and Susan stated that Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* “continues to associate the perils of the imagination with the pitfalls of selfhood, sexuality, and assertion” (1979: 157). They also defined Lady Catherine as a “more resilient and energetic female characters who enact her rebellious dissent from her culture” (1979: 169). It has been argued that Gilbert and Susan might have treated the text incorrectly so that it was of assistance to their theory (Marshall, 1992: 41).

Nevertheless, Gilbert and Gubar’s feminist interpretations have been a part of succeeding feminist investigations, as it is the case of Susan Fraiman, who examined the relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and her father and how Mr Bennet renounces to his paternal role once his daughter and Mr Darcy get married: “In my reading, the psychological drama of a heroine ‘awakening’ to her true identity is brought into conflict with the social drama of an outspoken girl entering a world whose voices drown out her own” (Fraiman, 1993: 364).

Other scholars as Edna Steeves (1973: 227) denounced that Jane Austen placed the focus of attention on marriage, and that it was the only occupation related to her characters (Marshall, 1992: 39). It has been stated that Austen criticised that marriage was the only way to escape for women. It should be taken into account that in Austen’s context, marriage was
not only women’s main objective, but also their only solution. They were not allowed to work, and their education was not enough to let them become independent by themselves. As a consequence, their way to evade the situation was by means of favourable marriages (Herrera Sánchez: 2012: 242, 243).

At the moment that *Pride and Prejudice* was written, the general belief revolving around female education was that of Rousseau’s *Emile*. In that treatise it was defended that women had to be taught how to take care of their husband and their family, and to be obedient and beautiful. Rousseau also stated that women should not learn through reason, since they were unable to argue as men. On the contrary, Austen distances herself from these utterances when she creates Elizabeth Bennet. Elizabeth is quick-witted, independent, and she is not afraid to make herself heard, even when facing the upper classes and their ideals of the knowledge an accomplished woman must possess (Herrera Sánchez, 2012: 239).
4.3 PROTO-FEMINISM IN PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

In this section, we will proceed to note the possibility of the manifestation of proto-feminist tendencies and attitudes within Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Romanticism, patriarchy and the emergence of Capitalism are dealt with by means of irony. Domesticity, the position of women and differences among classes are questioned by the authoress.

It has been said that at Austen’s time, the ideal concerning female instruction and knowledge was to be found in Rousseau’s treatise (Herrera Sánchez, 2012: 239). The novelist makes no reference to accomplishment in relation to men, as men were already deemed cultivated due to their sex, since they did receive a proper education. However, Austen’s heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, is said to contradict these standards of conduct. Elizabeth’s sharp and satiric wit already differentiates her from both middle class and upper class women. She expresses her opinion with ease and without apprehension, which leaves characters as Caroline Bingley and Lady Catherine de Bourgh shocked. This artfulness when speaking her mind can be perceived in two main scenes.

“‘No one can be really esteemed accomplished, who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. 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, or the word will be but half deserved.’

‘All this she must possess,’ added Darcy, ‘and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.’

‘I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing any.’” (Austen, 2001: 27).

This is a scene in which Charles Bingley, Caroline Bingley, Mr Darcy and Elizabeth debate about the qualities women must possess to be deemed cultivated. Charles Bingley states that he believes all young women to be accomplished, while his sister and his friend state the expectations that upper class females had to meet. It is evident by Elizabeth’s reaction that she is surprised and opposed to these high standards on the accomplished woman. An accomplished woman was known as a perfect lady. Austen uses Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst (both of them are examples of perfect ladies) to ridicule this idea, while at the same time, she shows that being the perfect lady was not a reality in her novels or in society, as these standards were conditioned by wealth and upper classes. Austen, although contrary to
the accomplishment of women, was concerned with the education of young women. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the writer emphasizes the importance of reading by means of Elizabeth, though it is also present in the rest of her novels. It should be mentioned that reading was not an essential trait that cultivated women had to acquire. At the time, libraries had been associated with being a male space. However, Austen places not only Mr Bennet, but also Elizabeth (and to a certain extent Jane) within the library, as the author herself deemed books indispensable.

Women education is discussed once again at Rosings Park. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, an upper class woman, is astounded and impressed by Elizabeth’s behaviour and attitude, and the way she speaks up and resolutely: “‘Upon my word,’ said her ladyship, ‘you give your opinion very decidedly for so young a person.’” (Austen, 2001: 110). In this same passage, Lady Catherine asks Elizabeth about her and her sisters’ accomplishments and then expresses her astonishment when she realises that they did not have a governess, and thinks that their education was insufficient. Miss Bingley’s and Mr Darcy’s previous statements are now further supported and reproduced by this upper class woman. Furthermore, she will also associate refinement with being aware of one’s social standing and behaving subsequently.

“ ‘Do you play and sing, Miss Bennet?’
‘A little.’
‘Oh! then – some time or other we shall be happy to hear you. Our instrument is a capital one, probably superior to – You shall try it some day.– Do your sisters play and sing?’
‘One of them does.’
‘Why did not you all learn? – You ought all to have learned. The Miss Webbs all play, and their father has not so good an income as your's. – Do you draw?’
‘No, not at all.’
‘What, none of you?’
‘Not one.’
‘That is very strange. But I suppose you had no opportunity. Your mother should have taken you to town every spring for the benefit of masters.’
‘My mother would have had no objection, but my father hates London.’
‘Has your governess left you?’
‘We never had any governess.’
‘No governess! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without a
governess! – I never heard of such a thing. Your mother must have been quite a slave
to your education.’ ” (Austen, 2001: 109, 110).

Another topic closely related to refinement and behaviour is that of reputation. In the
novel, the community views women’s reputation as something of a great significance.
Women were estimated to follow certain social roles and norms, and whenever these were put
aside or disregarded, their reputation would become compromised and they would be in
danger of social exclusion. Austen deals with this theme in a gentler and ironical manner
when referring to Miss Bingley and Mrs Bennet, but she then tackles the subject solemnly
when it comes to Lydia’s elopement. Mrs Bennet’s character appears as the middle class
equivalent of Miss Bingley and Lady Catherine. Elizabeth feels embarrassed by her family’s
behaviour many a time, but especially by her mother’s. Mrs Bennet does not always conduct
herself accordingly to the way she is supposed to, considering her genre and social status, due
to her sensational, meddlesome and foolish nature; which leaves her daughter ashamed and
humiliated.

“ ‘She has nothing, in short, to recommend her, but being an excellent walker. I shall
never forget her appearance this morning. She really looked almost wild.’
‘She did indeed, Louisa. I could hardly keep my countenance. Very nonsensical to
come at all! (...) Her hair, so untidy, so blowsy!’
‘Yes, and her petticoat; I hope you saw her petticoat, six inches deep in mud, I am
absolutely certain; and the gown which had been let down to hide it, not doing its
office.’
(...) ‘To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles in
dirt, and alone, quite alone! (...) It seems to me an abominable sort of conceited
independence, a most country town indifference to decorum.’ ” (Austen, 2001: 24, 25).

Miss Bingley and her sister Louisa Hurst are dismayed and horrified when Elizabeth
walks to Netherfield to see her sister. Their reactions indicate that actions of the sort were
improper among noblewomen. As a consequence, both sisters relish in criticizing not only
Elizabeth’s family, but also her conduct and muddy clothes. The scholar Margalit (2002: 23.1) declares that Miss Bingley’s and Mrs Hurst’s remarks go even further. The academic believes that their commentaries regarding Elizabeth’s dirty petticoat might be addressed to her feminine honour. She concludes that once the socio-cultural importance of that garment back then is detected and analyzed, then the connotations of impropriety will be discerned as well.

Austen deals with the topic seriously when reporting Lydia’s elopement, since she depicts how one’s actions could affect an entire family’s reputation. Lydia’s childishness and impulsiveness are the consequence of a lack of parental guidance. By fleeing with Wickham, Lydia dismisses social conventions and endangers the Bennet’s respect and future. That is to say, Lydia’s sisters could have been punished to remain single their entire lives due to her decision had Wickham not married her. Elizabeth was aware of what could happen if Mr Bennet let her youngest daughter go to Brighton with the Fosters: “Our importance, our respectability in the world, must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character.” (Austen, 2001: 151). This plot reflects the alienation women would suffer in case they decided against following social conventions, for only Lydia’s and her family’s reputation and future are questioned, and not Wickham’s.

Wickham’s standing is doubted due to the debts he owed. This is unveiled in one of Mr Gardiner’s letters: “He [Wickham] owed s good deal in the town, but his debts of honour⁹ were still more formidable. (...) Jane heard them with horror. ‘A gamester!’ she cried. ‘This is wholly unexpected. I had not an idea of it.’” (Austen, 2001: 193). Thus, it could be stated that Wickham’s honour is only threatened as a result of his gambling nature and not because of his elopement with Lydia.

Lydia’s spontaneous behaviour leaves the Bennets alarmed, and specially Elizabeth, who is reluctant to believe the officer would want to marry her sister, since they do not possess much wealth. Nevertheless, Wickham accepts to marry her in exchange for an income, and Mr Bennet consents to it, determining that marrying that deceitful person is better than ruining their honour. However, before coming to this decision, other personalities,

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⁹ The editor Donald Gray (2001) stated that the term “debts of honour” were debts owed to officers and other gentlemen. He also annotated that “the honour of a gentleman requires that these debts be paid, unlike those to tradespeople and other less socially elevated citizens of the town”. Consequently, it could be said that although Wickham owed debts to many citizens, people only cared about being in debt to gentlemen.
as Mr Collins, voices his view with respect to that matter. Mr Collins is a conceited, narrow-minded clergyman who obtained Lady Catherine’s protection. He is the heir to Longbourn and Mr Bennet’s distant relative. Upon discovering the Bennet’s dilemma, he sends his cousin a letter to “condole with you in this grievous affliction you are now suffering”, and proceeds to assure Mr Bennet that “the death of his daughter would have been a blessing in comparison with this.” Mr Collins then blames Lydia’s misconduct on her neglecting parents: “that this licentiousness of behaviour in your daughter, has proceeded from a faulty degree of indulgence, though, at the same time, for the consolation of yourself and Mrs Bennet.” Mr Collins’ response goes further than telling the family they would rather her daughter died and condemning their carelessness, as he concludes thus: “Let me advice you then (...) to throw off your unworthy child from your affection for ever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offence.” (Austen, 2001: 192, 193).

“I am no stranger to the particulars of your youngest sister's infamous elopement. I know it all; that the young man's marrying her was a patched-up business, at the expense of your father and uncle. And is such a girl to be my nephew's sister? Is her husband, is the son of his late father's steward, to be his brother? Heaven and earth! — of what are you thinking? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?” (Austen, 2001: 233).

It can be observed that Lady Catherine de Bourgh coincides with Mr Collins’ perception of the situation. She believes Elizabeth does not deserve to marry her nephew, Mr Darcy, not only due to the fact that she is not an upper class gentlewoman, but also because she considers that the Bennet’s reputation has already been damaged in spite of Lydia marrying Wickham. She states that an association with her nephew “must disgrace him in the eyes of everybody.” (Austen, 2001: 233). These passages include some conventional ideas touching the subject of women reputation that many of the Bennet’s acquaintances and neighbours would have shared at the time. Strictly speaking, as Mr Collins and Lady Catherine, a great number of citizens would consider it preferable that women died rather than damaging their reputation in such a way. Mary Bennet echoes as well their words regarding reputation:

“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, 2001: 187, 188).

As Johnson (1989: 80) puts it: “In all Austen’s novels, but especially in *Pride and Prejudice*, pursuing happiness is the business of life.” The scholar states that the characters who shape the novel consider that they have the right to happiness. That is to say, throughout the story, they will try to achieve happiness in one way or another. Marriage is one of the methods that will be exercised. It has a great significance as there are up to four consolidations of matrimony, within the novel. From Mr Collins’ proposition to Elizabeth, to Charles Bingley’s marriage, Austen will develop different types of courtships and relationships.

Marriage is treated as one of the highest concerns. As mentioned before, although men could ascend socially by performing jobs in the military or in the church, women were quite limited, as their only chance at improving their situations through favourable marriages. This is discernible in Austen’s novel by means of the Bennet’s family. The Bennets have five single daughters who will have to marry successfully in order to survive, since all their current possessions will be inherited by Mr Collins. Nonetheless, whereas the authoress depicts its importance, she also approaches the subject ironically. This can be perceived since the beginning, as the novel starts thus: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” (Austen, 2001: 3). This proposition introduces both Charles Bingley’s arrival and the story line of Austen’s work. However, due to the writer’s ironical language, when we read this sentence, we realise that the reversed idea is also possible: that a single woman must be in want of a man in possession of a good fortune (Van Ghent, 1953: 301).

“However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of someone or other of their daughters.” (Austen, 2001: 3).

Van Ghent places Austen’s language as the focus of attention, and specially, the use of words such as “possession” and “property”, which highlight the economic value concerning marriage. The scholar states then that “Here a high valuation of property is so dominant a
culture trait that the word ‘property’ becomes a metaphor for the young man himself” (1953: 301, 302).

Austen then proceeds to speak ironically of marriage by means of Mrs Bennet. Mrs Bennet is used as a comic relief to some extent due to her exaggerated behaviour. Her actions and schemes best represent the desperation to get her daughters married so as to secure them economically. “‘If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield,’ said Mrs Bennet to her husband, ‘and all the others equally married, I shall have nothing to wish for.’” (Austen, 2001: 7). Her witty and sly plans, as getting Jane sick when she is on her way to visit Netherfield so that she will stay there, leave some of her relatives shocked.

“‘Well, my dear,’ said Mr. Bennet, when Elizabeth had read the note aloud, ‘if your daughter should have a dangerous fit of illness, if she should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders.’
‘Oh! I am not at all afraid of her dying. People do not die of little trifling colds. She will be taken good care of. As long as she stays there, it is all very well’” (Austen, 2001: 22).

Austen’s most severe criticism is addressed to two of her male characters; namely George Wickham and Mr Collins. Wickham is criticised due to his carelessness regarding both Georgina’s and Lydia’s reputations. Mr Collins’ critique appears as a result of the clergyman’s disregard of her cousins’ future once he inherits their possessions (Herrera Sánchez, 2012: 245). Nevertheless, Mr Collins also attempts to marry one of his cousins at first. He arrives to Longbourn with the intention of proposing to one of his relatives; not even considering that he might be rejected. Mr Collins’ proposal to Elizabeth on the one hand, enumerates his reasons to get married (which revolve around himself) and, on the other hand, states his indifference to her little income.

“My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish. Secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly -- which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. (...) To fortune I am perfectly indifferent, and shall make no demand of that nature on your father (...) I shall be uniformly silent; and you may assure yourself that no
ungenerous reproach shall ever pass my lips when we are married.” (Austen, 2001: 72, 73).

Mr Collins assumes that Elizabeth will accept his proposal even before he offers her marriage, which is why her dismissal startles him. Regardless, he does not take Elizabeth’s rejection with great earnestness and continues with his arrogant and patronising attitude, for it is his belief that ladies should reject a man on their first proposal, which he asserts in several occasions.

“That it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour (...) I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said, and shall hope to lead you to the altar ere long.” (Austen, 2001: 73).

Once more, Mr Collins presupposes that his cousin is interested in him and considers her response as the conventional attitude of young ladies, and expects her to accept his next proposal.

“When I do myself the honour of speaking to you next on this subject I shall hope to receive a more favourable answer than you have now given me; (...) I know it to be the established custom of your sex to reject a man on the first application.” (Austen, 2001: 74).

It is not until Elizabeth’s final intervention, in which she asks not to be considered as “an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart” (Austen, 2001: 74), that the clergyman seems to understand that his cousin has no intention to become his wife, even if that meant she would be able to regain her family’s inheritance.

Whereas the heroine changes her views and opinion of other along the story, her beliefs on marriage are not altered. Even though she is aware of the pragmatic side of marriage and its financial security, she desires something else besides wealth and possessions. Consequently, her wish to pursue happiness is one of the reasons that stop her from marrying her cousin, as she herself declares thus: “You could not make me happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make you so.” (Austen, 2001: 73) Elizabeth’s subsequent rejection of Mr Darcy’s first proposal is further confirmation of this,
since marrying Mr Darcy would offer her and her family greater security. By rejecting both proposals, she asserts her sense of freedom and independence.

Elizabeth’s refusal of Mr Darcy’s offer is done more vehemently than that of Collins’. Moreover, her language and attitude is harsher and more passionate, since the gentleman prioritizes his high social standing and her lower status over his affection towards Austen’s heroine. However, it is said that, as Mr Collins had previously believed, Mr Darcy “had no doubt of a favourable answer.” The narrator states that “His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit.” (Austen, 2001: 125). In order to face the humiliation of the gentleman’s remarks, Elizabeth tries to “compose herself to answer him with patience” (Austen, 2001: 125), and concludes her speech in such a way:

“From the very beginning, (...) your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation, (...) and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry.” (Austen, 2001: 129).

As opposed to Elizabeth, Charlotte Lucas’ perception of matrimony is businesslike. Her major concern is being able to support herself and her family financially. Charlotte seeks survival, not love, and she is aware that the only way to achieve this is through a practical marriage. “Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune.” (Austen, 2001: 83). She exemplifies the sense of pragmatism and security that could be provided by marriage at the time. As regards to Elizabeth, she had always thought that her friend’s opinion of marriage was different to hers, but “she could not have supposed it possible that, when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage.” (Austen, 2001: 85).
4.4 ADAPTATIONS: FROM PRIDE AND PREJUDICE (BBC) TO THE LIZZIE BENNET DIARIES

Almost 200 years after Jane Austen’s decease, she is still a canonical writer, and thus her novels are extensively read and studied. Resembling William Shakespeare or Charlotte Brontë, Austen’s compositions have been adapted into movies, television series and book sequels. Specifically, there have been countless adaptations of Pride and Prejudice, proving Austen’s fiction to be timeless. From 1940 (Pride and Prejudice, written by Aldous Huxley) until 2016 (Pride and Prejudice and Zombies), there have been, on the one hand, faithful adaptations and, on the other hand, modern adaptations that have taken certain liberties, but have maintained Austen’s essence.

Undoubtedly, the most acclaimed one is the 1995 BBC’s version, as it is considered that it remains loyal to the original story. The 2005 movie adaptation acquired a widespread acceptance, but it has been criticised for its Romantic insight. Although the authoress is believed to have rejected Romanticism and its components, Joe Wright’s version outlines Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy as Romantic characters. Furthermore, Wright resorts to Romantic sceneries and landscape to strengthen this idea (Ailwood, 2007: 27. 2).

Pride and Prejudice has inspired an amount of innovative and modern movies and literary adaptations that have adapted the original story more freely. To cite an instance, an Indian version was made in 2004 which explored racial prejudice and social caste. Seth Grahame-Smith’s literary adaptation would serve as an example of a modern retelling of the story within popular culture. Grahame-Smith’s novel Pride and Prejudice and Zombies (2009) and its subsequent movie adaptation (2016) have been disdained by numerous scholars, who have deemed them as absurd. Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that this modern retelling can be viewed from a feminist perspective, as it advocates for female empowerment. Thence, the novel depicts a society in which all young ladies are armed and able to protect themselves. Elizabeth Bennet is described as opposed to marriage and in favour of being able to support herself financially.
Additionally, they are recognised as equals to men on the combat zone (Chretien, 2011: 3, 34, 37).

One of the most recent modern adaptations is that of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012-2013). It is a YouTube version told in vlog-style form from Elizabeth Bennet’s perspective. The interest concerning this series has been stressed in the way in which Austen’s feminist ideas can be expressed when an adaptation is made. Its format allows the female lead to address the audience directly. At the same time, although other second characters appear throughout the web series, Lizzie will disguise herself to imitate other characters, maintaining the story from her point of view.

The overall story line of Austen’s original work can be observed, but there will be certain divergences in terms of ideas and characters. One of the most prominent modifications is that there are only three Bennet sisters (Lizzie, Jane and Lydia). Each character’s struggle is rearranged due to this modernized setting: Charlotte is still concerned with the ability to support herself and her family. Instead of accepting a proposal, she is now offered a job by Ricky Collins. Moreover, both Jane and Lizzie prioritize their careers over relationships: “I’ve got other things to worry about. It’s not like we’re all going to put our lives on hold because some rich, single guy dropped from the sky.” (Episode 1: “My Name is Lizzie Bennet”) Another significant change is to be found in Lydia’s plot. Lydia finds herself in a dysfunctional relationship with Wickham, who becomes controlling and abusive, and tries to alienate her from her family. Unlike the original story, Lydia escapes from such an abusive relationship and is able to recover due to her sisters’ support (Haydar, 2014: 39, 50).
5. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Throughout time, Jane Austen has been accused of being classist, romantic and even anti-feminist. Her novels are still dismissed as simple love stories. Notwithstanding this, Austen’s stories go beyond this apparent simplicity, and have further implicit significances. Austen’s supposed classicism derives from her avoidance of the lower classes. The authoress did not include those in lower classes, due to the fact that she only wrote about what she was acquainted with; as a consequence, she just incorporated the middle and upper classes. She was interested in people and their concerns, and her success is to be found in the precise way in which she depicted human interaction. It should be mentioned that the feminism that can be discerned in the beginning of the nineteenth-century was still in an early stage. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that Austen’s novel questions the patriarchal society of the time, such as being obedient and compliant towards men, and inheritance laws. She particularly criticizes the prevailing attitude of attaining favourable marriages for financial purposes. Austen stresses the importance of education for young women, while she states the unfairness of judging all women by the standards of the era, since they were conditioned upon wealth and upper classes. Additionally, Austen’s female characters are not one-dimensional; all of her heroines and women in general are three-dimensional characters who undergo development through the story; and they are neither stereotypes nor perfect. Every woman is different, and each one has a distinct personality and beliefs. In doing so, the novelist asserts that women are not flat characters whose only purpose in life is being perfect ladies. Although Austen left no testimonies on her relationship with feminism, it is clear that she used her novels and her heroines to show her disapproval of the patriarchal system and its limitations.
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY


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- Figure 2: Pride and Prejudice (1995) URL: http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/02463/PD40730919_BKB2DC__2463381d.jpg (accessed 12 June 2017)
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