

**PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: The More I See of the World,
the More am I Dissatisfied with it**

The two decades from 1790-1810 witnessed a considerable change in the literary and ideological ethos of England. One might say that while the Romantics focused on the isolated and introspective individual, the eighteenth-century writers had by and large examined human beings in their social context. In some ways Jane Austen can be seen as bridging the gap between these two concerns. In her novels the individual is placed within a distinctive social setting but is also faced with choices that are primarily personal. Her recurrent theme can be seen as the interplay between the individual female character and the social role into which the community forces her.

Thus, Jane Austen's literary career, both chronologically and ideologically, straddles two different ages. Although, brought up within the values and tastes of the eighteenth century, her concern with the individual links her with the emerging values of the nineteenth century. Thus the features of transitionalism in Jane Austen can more reasonably be stressed in her two novels, one finished and the other unfinished. They are **Persuasion** and **Sanditon**.

Persuasion reflects the shift in the power axis of British class structure, with the new professional class taking its rightful place at the centre by pushing an old and decadent aristocracy towards the margin, Sanditon touches upon the new speculative enterprise that marks Britain's expanding economy in the early nineteenth century. This trend evinces itself more radically in her most celebrated book, *Pride and Prejudice*, published in 1813, at her 38th year of age. *Pride and Prejudice* carries Jane Austen's youthful high spirits. It was her second published work (1813) though perhaps the earliest novel to be started by the novelist. In *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth Bennet's behaviour goes against all norms set down by Conduct Books. She is independent, unaffected and intelligent and thinks nothing of walking three miles through muddy roads and muddied socks to see her sick sister. Her robust constitution and energy belie 'feminine' virtues of delicacy and frailty. Jane Austen's distaste for the fashionable affectation of frailty in women is also evident in an early fragment called *Love and Friendship* where, through the dying advice of Sophia to her daughter Laura, she mocks heroine of fiction given to frequent fainting fits. Again the same kind of contrast, though less emphatic is to be seen between Elizabeth Bennet and Miss Bingley; the one natural

and self-sufficient and the other constantly manoeuvring to draw Darcy's approval: 'Miss Bingley's eyes were instantly turned towards Darcy, and she had something to say to him' (48). She pretends to dislike dancing only because Darcy is known to dislike it: 'It would surely be much more rational if conversation instead of dancing made the order of the day' (49). Miss Bingley decides to walk up and down in front of Darcy to show her figure to advantage - 'Miss Bingley ... got up and walked about the room. Her figure was elegant, and she walked well' (49). Elizabeth on the other hand stands as an autonomous person who does not need a man's attention to prove her worth herself; she does not depend on other people to define her identity, a quality which her sister Jane and Lydia lack. Like Emma Woodhouse and Catherine Morland, two of Jane Austen's other lively heroines, Elizabeth is a complete person in herself who does not wait for a man to give her completion and identity. Also, all these heroines are women of remarkably robust health and vitality, fond of the open air and walks out of doors. The closed, overheated and sick room atmosphere of Rosings is repeatedly contrasted with Elizabeth's long walks in the open.

When Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth and she refuses, we witness a confrontation between two ideologies: the belief that all women are arch strategists because femininity implies archness and a direct rational approach to life. Collins cannot accept Elizabeth's refusal as rejection; he must interpret it as her 'wish of increasing my love by suspense', according to the usual practice of elegant females. Elizabeth's exasperated reply, 'Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth directly from her heart' (98), points to one of the essential dilemmas for Jane Austen's heroines. Anyway, Jane Austen lived in an age when thinkers and philosophers, following Locke, generally stressed the importance of reason in human behaviour. Like all intelligent people of her time, Jane Austen shared this Augustan heritage. In different novels she underlines like a radical the injustice of inheritance laws, the helpless position of women who are under social and economic pressure to marry in order to survive, and the foolishness of the women who have been deprived of formal education. In the present novel Mr. Collins is particularly taken aback at Elizabeth's refusal because he cannot conceive of a woman with so little money spurning the possibility of a secure and comfortable future. In all six of Jane Austen's

novels one sees the central character who is always a woman-resisting social pressure and making a choice that is entirely personal. None of these heroines makes merely practical choices, as do subsidiary characters like Charlotte Lucas. Jane Austen's heroines invariably choose the difficult path of believing in their own integrity and marrying men they can respect for their personal qualities.

In *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth emerges as a woman of will and spirit who thinks for herself. That she may not always be right in her judgment is another matter; in the society within which she lives there is very little space for the exercise of will. Here again, the novelist makes expression of her radical attitude to life and society--a society wherein the woman has only the power of refusal not of selection. Elizabeth has been shown more and more as an individual with a private world of thoughts and perceptions. The institution of marriage as depicted in most of the novels of the age by its very nature implied subservience on the part of the women and therefore the grain of the radical text sometimes seemed to go against the orthodox social demands. In the novel the author does her best to minimize the tension by showing that Elizabeth's acceptance of Darcy is not just a passive

acquiescence but a conscious choice, which also necessitates a spirited confrontation with the hostile lady Catherine. Darcy too has to perform specific acts to prove his humanity rather than his power, his value as an individual rather than his social superiority, before he can deserve Elizabeth as his wife.

Jane Austen with regard to her handling the theme of marriage has also been progressive enough and in *Pride and Prejudice* she is at her best. Marriage is the central theme of all Jane Austen's novels. Respect, esteem and confidence are the three keywords signifying a happy marriage in her novels. The marriage of Darcy and Elizabeth is the ideal one fulfilling the conditions mentioned earlier. Their marriage is based on love and respect. But the two other marriages in the novel offer contrasts. We know that Charlotte and Mr. Collins have married not for love but for different and calculated considerations, Wickham and Lydia present the other extreme. Elizabeth reflects: 'How little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue' (62). An ideal marriage is beyond most women in Jane Austen's world because their choices are limited in any case. It is also beyond most men unless they

happen to be heirs and in a position to overlook the economic axis of matrimony.

Elizabeth in order to establish an objective detachment and minimize the hurt she must feel, deliberately ignores the difference between the economic parameters that operate for men and women. Women who do not inherit money are unable to marry and condemned to a life of destitution, whereas men can make a respectable living by individual endeavour. Elizabeth cannot be defending Wickham seriously because in her own case, in spite of having very little money of her own, she has the integrity to refuse first a man who offers her the security of a rectory and then a man with a magnificent estate and an income of 10,000 pound a year. By the time she agrees to marry Darcy, Darcy has been humanized and can see her (Elizabeth) as a person independent of the status of family. The novel thus finally affirms natural and genuine human values against the snobbery of class as well as purely economic determination. *Pride and Prejudice* embraces Austen's representation of the desperate situation of unportioned gentry womanhood, and the contradictory desires evidenced by her young women, to accommodate their life to what is practically necessary, or to rebel, run away or die. Lydia ignoring the social norm

and respecting her personal longings runs away with Wickham with the full disapproval of the family. In describing the situation in the novel Jane Austen gives expression to her radicalism.

Austen has little respect for bourgeois men such as Mr. Wickham and Mr. Collins. Her respect is not for the bourgeoisie but for the autonomous woman who has a power founded not in money or status but in her own intrinsic wit. According to Judith Newton, Jane Austen's representation of 'the autonomous woman is to some extent a compensatory fantasy and it is never the less valuable for suggesting that women do not need to submit to male ideological domination even if the economic and legal structures place most in male hands' (1981, 72).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet disregards economic self-interest. She anticipates and forestalls each move that Darcy makes towards her, perhaps to a point of excess, but in so doing she ensures that she maintains her own self-respect and independence of spirit. It is also recognized in the novel that Elizabeth's power is precarious and provisional, given her lack of financial

prospects. The novel is also seen as offering woman a basis for her own resistance to patriarchal domination.

In the study of Jane Austen in the modern context Gilbert and Guber's *The Mad Woman in the Attic* is worth mentioning. In their discussion of Austen, Gilbert and Guber assume that no woman would be stupid enough to enjoy submission to patriarchy. Jane Austen for them remains a novelist whose vigorous awareness of patriarchal power makes it possible for women to recognize strategies of resistance and understand the havoc done by submission. It is indeed worth admitting that the fascination of repulsion provides a valuable avenue into Austen's motivations and our own reasons for exploring the elements of radicalism and transitionalism in her novels. Marianne Dashwood and Elizabeth Bennet are attractive because of the unconventional and rebellious traits in their characters. The opening sentence in *Pride and Prejudice* 'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife'-- appears to make it clear that it is the mind of Mrs. Bennet, and the collective wisdom of the rural gentry, that is being ironized. Indeed Mr. Bennet conspicuously distances himself from the 'truth universally acknowledged' by his wife. The

evidence of the full context indicates that the undermining of authority is for Jane Austen an attack on socially sanctioned stupidity.

A radical as Jane Austen is, she very ably highlights the thematic problem in her *Pride and Prejudice*. She encourages a keen reader to recognize that something is wrong. The Problem here is that Elizabeth is unconsciously using Wickham to reinforce her prejudice against Darcy and is, as a consequence, allowing herself to be used by Wickham to reinforce his own false position. The action of *Pride and Prejudice* generally reveals that, despite what looks like a generous overflow of irresponsible energy, Elizabeth's 'liveliness' is primarily defensive. More specifically, her 'impertinence' is a psychological defence against the vulnerability to which her situation as a dependent woman exposes her. Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy is so quickly formed and so persistent as he (Darcy) unthinkingly confronts her with the very fact that it is most in her interest to deny. 'She is tolerable' Darcy concedes projecting Bingley's overtures on Elizabeth's behalf; 'but not handsome enough to tempt me; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who slighted by other men,' (12).

Elizabeth, however with her natural arrogance born of youth, her high spirits and intellectual superiority, chooses to ignore the above comment made about her by Darcy. She directs her intelligence towards defending herself against emotional vulnerability; she bases her moral judgment at least partially on her defensiveness. As the novel unfolds, Darcy's proposal and her angry rejection have increased, not lessened her pride and sense of superiority. 'Vanity, not a love, has been my folly', Elizabeth exclaims initially but on second thought, she is deeply flattered by the great man's attentions, and she does not regret her decision. She is free to bask in the triumph Darcy's proposal gives her over his 'pride', over his 'prejudices', and over Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley as well. Elizabeth visits Pemberley with her vanity very much intact. She feels herself more superior than ever-not so much to Darcy as to love.

Just as Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy originally fed her admiration for Wickham, so also her attraction to the young soldier focuses her resentment against Darcy. Again, Wickham's decision to marry for money does, after all, leave Elizabeth's vanity in tact. Jane Austen has been

justified in establishing Elizabeth's eventual love for Darcy as legitimate because it springs not from the vanity we ordinarily associate with romantic expectations but precisely from the mortification of pride. In response to love, Darcy in his turn overcomes his prejudices against Elizabeth's connections, proposes to her, returns to her even after hope seems gone and eventually brings about the marriages of three of the Bennet daughters. In the conclusion to the novel, in awarding Elizabeth a handsome husband with 10,000 pounds a year, Austen is essentially gratifying her radical stand by the way that the heroine's outspoken liveliness is always successful in material terms.

Jane Austen quite artistically makes both Darcy and Elizabeth learn complimentary lessons: Darcy recognizes that individual feelings outweigh conventional social distinctions and Elizabeth realises the nature of society's power. Their marriage helps unite individual gratification with social responsibility, to overcome the class distinctions that elevated Lady Catherine over the worthy Gardiners, and to make of society one big happy family. Jane Austen's experience of a close and supportive family also provided models both for the way an individual's desires could be accommodated by social institutions and

for the context of shared values that an author could rely on to provide a basis for art from a radical's viewpoint. In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen however, tries to ensure that her readers will share a common ground by making them participate in constructing the value system that governs the novel. The famous first sentence of the novel once again points to the radical limitations of both 'truth' and 'universally'. This sentence actually tells us more about Mrs. Bennet than any one else.

By simultaneously dramatizing and rewarding individual desire and establishing a critical distance from individualism, Jane Austen endorses both the individualistic perspective inherent in the bourgeois value system and the authoritarian hierarchy retained from traditional, paternalistic society. Moreover, allowing her readers to exercise freedom of judgement in individual instances while controlling the final value system, through the action as a whole, Austen reproduces, at the level of reading experience, the marriage of romantic desire and realistic necessity that she believed was capable of containing individualism's challenge to traditional authority. In this novel Jane Austen introduces the spectres of spinsterhood. Elizabeth's mother is even more brutally

frank; 'If you take it into your head', she warns Elizabeth 'to go on refusing every offer of marriage in this way, you will never get a husband at all-and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your mother is dead' (113). Such an introduction is just to point to the gap between imaginative desire and social reality-a gap that still exists. In this period of social turmoil even the dominant system of values is characterized by internal tensions and contradictions. In this novel Austen separates the power to gratify and discipline desire from the conditions that generate and frustrate that desire.

For substantiating our views so far expressed in the present discussion, it would be wise to turn to Mary Poovey's reading of Jane Austen. She holds that Jane Austen intends to warn her readers about 'the dangers of uninhabited desire and emphasize the need for controlling individual conduct, specially the amorous conduct of young women' (1984, 194).

Elizabeth Bennet is the champion of outspoken desire. Her recognition of her own prejudicial misreading of the world allows her vital intelligence and wit to convince Darcy and find appropriate place in the social structure. At the same

time, Elizabeth's charming vitality is revealed as a defensive consequence of her financially vulnerable situation. From Austen's point of view, Elizabeth like Marianne overestimates her personal autonomy and power and radically misunderstands the power of social institutions. The novelist also invents the more subtle narrative strategy to show that individual desires and social responsibility can be reconciled and female passion and intelligence does not have always to be repressed from a better and healthy social set-up.

Jane Austen gives an emphasis to the economic contradiction of men and women's lives in her novel **Pride and Prejudice**. Elizabeth Bennet must marry with an eye to money. Men, in general are granted an economic privilege when on women an economic restriction is imposed. The details of that privilege and restriction are explicitly recorded throughout the novel. Of course, a critical study of the novel upholds Austen's radical viewpoint on the economic privileges and restrictions in the cases of the different male and female characters. Economic inequality shapes male and female power. It is evident even in the first line of the book. Some single men, it would appear, have independent access to good fortunes, but all single women

or daughters must marry for them. 'Daughters' and their families, therefore, must think a good 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' who are controlled, who are 'fixed' by their economic situation. Single men appear at liberty; they can enter a neighbourhood and presumably leave at will. Single men, in short have an autonomy that 'daughters' do not and at the base of this difference in autonomy is the fact that men have access to money.

Jane Austen experienced in her lifetime the effects of the industrial capitalism. This experience did she gather out of her belonging to a period of transition. This industrial take off under discussion belonged to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and incidentally Austen belonged to the period. The effect of industrial capitalism was to make consciousness of money in general more universal and more respectable as well. One could hardly ignore money after all, for money was being made and made rapidly in industry and exchange. Money was also lending status and power to men. The acquisition of industrial and trading fortunes must also have sharpened money

consciousness and consciousness of the relation between money, status and power by increasing the number of men who could actually acquire estates and merge with the gentry. In *Pride and Prejudice* the merging of money and trade is endorsed. Bingley, whose fortune comes from trade, is on the verge of finally consolidating his genteel status by purchasing a country estate. Sir William, who has actually retired from trade, has established his family in a country 'lodge', Elizabeth, the daughter of a gentleman and having connections in business, marries a man of upper gentry.

Pride and Prejudice evokes the fact that money was being made. Money also lent new status and power to men of the middle class. It accelerated the merging of the gentry with the middle classes. In this context it is not surprising that Austen's vision of the power and status of women is persistently linked to their economic situation. Of course the lot of the middle-class women was also more contradictory for genteel women continued to lose and recognize economic value while genteel men were finding new access to work and new opportunities for rising. Jane Austen's personal relation to this larger context certainly increased her consciousness of money in general and of the contradiction between the economic lots of genteel men and

women in particular. The novelist no doubt, felt the pinch of economic stringency when writing *Pride and Prejudice*. Her father had died in 1805 and in 1813 the novel was published. Jane, her mother and her sister Cassandra were dependent for their living on three sources—a small income of Mrs. Austen's, a small legacy of Cassandra's and an amount of pounds 250 provided annually by four of the Austen brothers. The sum, however, was enhanced to some degree by the money Jane earned through writing.

Austen's family situation moreover imposed upon her a heightened awareness of the economic contradiction between the lots of genteel women and genteel men. Austen had five brothers and they all had what she did not; access to work that paid, access to inheritance and privilege, and access to the status that belong to being prosperous and male. In 1813 all but one brother was rising in a career. The difference which money made in the relative autonomy of Austen women and Austen men was also striking. Her letters also manifest her desire for money and the attainment of it, about her dependence in traveling, about the pressure she felt to marry and side by side the freedom of the brothers to marry or not to marry as they chose. Here and there, of course, we find some humorous consciousness of

inequity and there is more than one joke about the economic pressure to marry: 'Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor-which is one very strong argument in favour of Matrimony' (Letters, 194).

Austen's fiction is obviously a means of coming to terms with a discomfiting experience and this experience is, no doubt an outcome of her radicalism. Her letters also reflect a relation between money and autonomy. Indeed for all its references to money and money matters, for all its consciousness of economic fact and economic influence, *Pride and Prejudice* is devoted not to establishing but to denying the force of economics in human life. Despite the first two sentences, despite the implication that access to money in some way determines autonomy, the difference between men's economic privilege and that of women is not something we are invited to experience as a cause of power and powerlessness in the novel. Men, for all their money and privilege, are not permitted to seem powerful but are rather bungling and absurd. Women, for all their impotence, are not seen as victims of economic restriction. What the novel finally defines as power has little to do with money, and the most authentically powerful figure in the novel is an unmarried middle-class woman without a fortune--a woman

we may note, who bears a striking resemblance to Jane Austen. She is most essentially the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet.

Pride and Prejudice supports female autonomy, Mrs. Bennet and Lady Catherine object to the entail Mrs. Bennet continues 'to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five daughters, in favour of a man whom nobody cared anything about' (58). Jane Austen breaks away with the female convention of confinement. She tries to rid them of this. Lady Catherine's rude excursion to Meryton, Jane's visit to London, and Elizabeth's to Hunsford and Derbyshire are seen as deviations from the more usual pattern of women activities, which they most willingly undertake. In the novel again, male privilege then, and access to money in particular, makes men feel autonomous. It also makes them feel empowered to control others, specially the women to whom they make advances. Indeed, with the possible exceptions of Bingley and of Mr. Gardiner, virtually every man in the novel reacts in the same fashion to his economic privilege and social status as a male. All enjoy a mobility, which women do not have. And yet, in spite of their mobility, their sense of autonomy and their desire to

master and control, we do not feel that men are powerful in this novel. Austen, through her radical outlook makes us feel so. Their sense of power and their real pomposity are at base a set-up, a preparation for poetic justice, a license to enjoy the spectacle of men witlessly betraying their legacy of power, of men demonstrating impressive capacities for turning potential control into ineffective action and submission to the control of others.

It is also significant that the only proposals of marriage recorded in the novel are unsuccessful and that both suitors are so immersed in their sense of control that they blindly offend the women whose affections they mean to attach and, in the process provoke what must be two of the most vigorous rejections in all literature. Here is Elizabeth to Mr. Collins: 'You could not make me happy and I am convinced that I am the least woman in the world who would make you so' (103). There is Elizabeth to Mr. Darcy: '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' (182).

It is also significant that two of the men in the novel who have risen through preference-another benefit of male

privilege- enjoy little more than an inflated sense of control. They succeed mainly in annoying those whom they propose to act upon. Sir William, who has 'risen to the honour of Knighthood' and retired to Meryton, 'where he could think with pleasure of his own importance', does no more than provoke Darcy when he attempts to claim his society. Mr. Collins may enjoy 'the consequential feelings of early and unexpected prosperity' and he may persuade Charlotte Lucas to marry him but he is thwarted in his attempts to act upon Elizabeth, Darcy, and Mr. Bennet and even Lydia and Kitty' (66).

Jane Austen's view also on many occasions presents the things in the novel in such a way as to make our sense of male control undercut by the radical readings with which some men submit to the control of others. Mr. Collins and Sir William both manifest such slavish admiration of those who stand above them in rank and their own imagined power is constantly and ironically placed side by side with images of self-abasement: Sir William 'stationed in the doorway, in earnest contemplation of the greatness before him' (151). Collins carving, eating and praising 'as if he felt that life could furnish nothing greater' (154). Collins, moreover, qualifies his potential autonomy by

submitting virtually every decision to the 'particular advice and recommendation' of Lady Catherine. Bingley also surrenders Jane because he depends on Darcy's opinion more strongly than on his own. Men are also prone to misusing their autonomy by making bad investments. Mr. Bennet's own imprudence must account for his unhappy domestic life and Wickham's failure of resolution binds him with Lydia, a giddy woman without a fortune. Thus access to money and male privilege in general do grant men the potential for control of their lives and for control over women, but, against the background of their real physical mobility the men in *Pride and Prejudice* are essentially set up to surrender to misuse, to fail to realize the power that is their cultural legacy.

In obvious contrast to men, women, in their economic dependence, have far less potential to do, as they like. Most women in the novel must marry. Women, even with money feel pressured to get a man (the rich Miss Bingley pursues Darcy, as does Lady Catherine on behalf of the wealthy Anne). Women, for the most part, do not dwell on their power to choose, do not debate over getting a husband, and seldom give thought to the value of one husband over another. The degree of female obsession with men, the

degree to which they lack autonomy or self-control, may also be measured by the degree to which they helplessly and unthinkingly discount their ties to one another when a man's attention is at stake. Caroline Bingley, of course, is the most extreme example. Her abuse of Elizabeth is unrelenting.

All young women in the novel are caught to some degree in the same current and this enforces our sense of universal female condition. Jane Austen shows that women appear to be determined almost uniformly by economic and social conditions. But, just as we are not permitted to feel that men's economic privilege necessitates power, so are we not permitted to feel that women's lack of privilege necessitates powerlessness. The first two sentences of the novel again may emphasise the idea that women's compulsive husband hunting has an economic base but we are never allowed to feel that base as a determining force in their experience. There is consciousness of economics, to be sure but that consciousness is raised and then subverted. One effect of undermining the force of economic realities is to make most women, in their helpless fixation on men and marriage, look perverse or merely silly and to lay the blame on women themselves, not on their economic and social

lot. Another effect, however, is to suggest, rather wishfully, that there is some way out. Men may go about acting more powerful than women, their lot in life may give them the potential for befuddled critical vision, they are not really powerful at all. Conversely women may seem powerless as men are not, but because we are finally not to feel that they are victims of social and economic forces, they do not have to be powerless after all. What we have in *Pride and Prejudice*, it seems, is a novel that recognizes the shaping influence of economics but denies its force. The novel, in fact, all but levels what in life we know to have been the material base of power and powerlessness and defines real power as something separate from the economic.

In *Pride and Prejudice* the real power lies in the radical attitude of Jane Austen. Elizabeth Bennet is essentially an Austen fantasy, a fantasy of power. Elizabeth's world, as created by Jane Austen affords her a freedom, which Austen's world evidently lacks in. It affords her scope not only to entertain radical attitudes but also to express them with energy and to put them into effective action. Elizabeth can do more than quietly scorn Miss Bingley's eagerness to please Darcy. She can also reject outright Charlotte's schemes for securing a husband. She can put

herself at some distance from gratefulness, scheming, and over-eagerness to please men and in the process she can also be rather direct and effective in challenging Darcy's traditional assumption of control as a ruling-class man.

Elizabeth's world, in contrast to Austen's permits her something more than spiritual victories, permits her more than that sense of autonomy, which comes with wittily observing the confinements of one's situation, with standing apart from them in spirit while having bend to them in daily behaviour. It permits her not only the energetic expression but also the forceful use of those critical energies which Austen herself diverted into her novels. Austen's fantasy of female autonomy is far more rebellious for Elizabeth's autonomy. In *Pride and Prejudice* the most prominent form of power is that of female autonomy and in Austen there is an expression of the changing social context. Austen, in allowing female autonomy to work effectively against a ruling--class male, evokes a more general sense that the authority of landed males had been challenged. In her endorsement of an autonomy not tied to class or fortune, Austen also reveals some affinity with an individualism that had ties to the French and the Industrial Revolutions. This individualism is usually

identified as middle-class or anti-gentry, for it is tied less to Austen's class sympathies than to her partially articulated feelings as a woman- the energy of Elizabeth's critical opinions, for example, is directed against these very men of the middle class, those men rising in careers, who conventionally define for us what individualism means. Austen's adaptation of individualism is thus more feminist than middle class, for it is a disguised expression of discontent with the growing division in money, status, and power between middle-class men and women.

Elizabeth's autonomy, again, expresses an individualism adopted to female use. The most potent qualification of her autonomy lies in the nature of the fictional world that Austen has created on her behalf. Austen's version of Elizabeth's universe is one, which mitigates the punishing potential of her critical views and challenging behaviour. It is, of course, Austen's subversion of economic realities and of male power that permits us to enjoy Elizabeth's rebellious exuberance and we feel that Elizabeth is in conflict with the forces of her world.

To allow a nineteenth century heroine to get away with being critical and challenging especially about male

control and feminine submission is still to rebel against ideology and dominant social relations, no matter how charmingly that heroine may be represented, no matter how safe her rebellion is made to appear. When Austen allows Elizabeth to express critical attitudes and to act upon them without penalty, she is moving against early nineteenth century ideologies about feminine behaviour and feminine fate. This is more so because by any traditional standards Elizabeth's departures from convention ought to earn her a life of spinsterhood, not a man, a carriage and 10,000 pound a year. Elizabeth's universe is real enough- its economic and social forces are kept close enough to the surface. We believe in it and do not dismiss it as fantasy. Elizabeth herself is so convincing that we cannot dismiss her either. For all its charm and relative safety, Elizabeth's rebellion invites us to take it seriously, and it is for this reason, it is assumed that the rebelliousness of *Pride and Prejudice* is further qualified.

Elizabeth's resistance to male control, to men's assumption of control, and women's submissive behaviour is that, like Austen she is not ready to accept the traditional basic division in men's and women's economic lot. Men have a right to money that women do not. Men have a right to

greater autonomy, to greater power of choice. To this end Elizabeth's real aim is self-defence; she wants to resist intimidation and to deny Darcy's particular assumption of control over her. She, of course, in defending herself against the controlling power of Darcy's negative judgements, suggests that she is also defending herself against a desire to please Darcy. The remarkable thing, perhaps, is that her rebelliousness maintains a quality of force, still strikes as power. In fact, her rebellious 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 privileges, and change something basic to the power relation between him and Elizabeth.

In *Pride and Prejudice* the very theme works as a compensatory fantasy for women's role in a society. Mary Poovey in her *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* observes 'as the fantasy represents women as important, competent, intelligent and well aware of their social position, the fantasy subverts patriarchal ideas of women as passive, emotional and incompetent' (1984, 196).

The triumph of Elizabeth Bennet redefines power in term of intellectual ability-precisely the area where Austen and other women could compete as equals. Jane Austen with her radical view has been successful in projecting her heroine in this novel as bright and sparkling one who is more than a match for any man around and who compels a man with money and power to set aside her prejudices and offer her all. Such a fantasy may be compensatory to women readers whose life experience is probably in total contradiction, but the fantasy invites women to be like Elizabeth and not feel abashed before patriarchal oppression. *Pride and Prejudice*, the most loving to its author in particular and to the common readers in general has relevance even in this twenty first century.

Elements of change play a predominant role in the novel. Towards the end it is seen that Elizabeth has changed, so Darcy. The horizons of each partner have altered- a new harmony has been fixed. Both 'pride' in one and 'prejudice' in the other seem to wither away. Elizabeth is ready to modify her independence and to be absorbed into Darcy's world. She has yet to meet the 'real' Darcy and to go out into his grounds, and when she does, the settlement throughout almost destabilizes. Elizabeth and the Gardiners

are taken through landscape that is virtually a paradigm of the picturesque. The river winds, the irregular openings among the wooded high ground 'gave the eye power to wander' (223). It is also fascinating that Elizabeth is associated not simply with a disruptive and transgressive category but with an aesthetic classification which disrupted other categories in the eighteenth century. It was the most disputed aesthetic category of the time. Elizabeth, however, associated herself so powerfully with the intrinsically unaccountable picturesque, crossing Darcy's stream by a bridge which spans a defile and conducts her to a path only wide enough for one person, bringing with her that 'liveliness of mind' for which Darcy loves her. Elizabeth is essentially the representative of nonconformity and she is the harbinger of change. Her very presence, her intervention in Pemberley, produces radical alteration. The objects seen through the Pemberley windows 'opening to ground' (235) took 'different positions' (p 216) according to the laws of perspective though that change is reciprocally governed by the changing position of the person who relates to the objects.

Pride and Prejudice, from its thematic point of view raises some radical questions. The text asks these questions not

only through Charlotte's deconstruction of marriage as a financial settlement but more transgressively through Lydia's subversion of sexual convention. Indeed it is through Lydia, who jokes about the excitement of dressing an officer in drag, that the novel unsettles rigid gender distinctions. Mr. Bennet complains, with sceptical irony that his son-in-law Wickham 'simpers' (292) effeminately. To say this of an army officer, normally associated with masculinity, radically questions the artificial construction of gender society. Interestingly, Mary Wollstonecraft had challenged conventional gender distinctions by pointing to the effeminacy of pampered army officers in her *Vindication of the Right of Woman*. Again, all women in the novel are caught by the despotism of convention; whether they transgress the limits of decorum or they repress the flow of feeling, they are likely to be the victims of oppression or misunderstanding. The novel was written, as we know, in a period when government repression was fierce.

Pride and Prejudice, indeed, opens up questions of great complexity. The text asks radical questions perhaps the more radical. The luckies' character in the novel, Elizabeth, crosses a narrow bridge to security, fulfillment

and virtually another class. But bridges declare that there are gaps and rifts to be crossed and there may even be chasms, which are impassable. The novel leaves these implications unexplored. Jane Austen's self critical a remark about the novel's 'lightness' is also a pointer to her radical insight. Certainly it seems that *Pride and Prejudice* made the next novel *Mansfield Park* almost inevitable. *Mansfield Park* picks up the questions of class privilege and power and how these are sustained. It explores the problems of social mobility in the poignant difficulties of Fanny Price. *Pride and Prejudice* leaves these problems before they become acute.

Jane Austen is by common consent an author remarkably sure of her values. It is by virtue of her certainties that Jane Austen is called Augustan. She finds her ideal within a world she deliberately makes resemble the actual. The essence of her certainty is that the reforms she perceives to be necessary are within the attitudes of individuals; she calls for no general changes in the world of the established lesser landed gentry. Like her Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen, the novelist, has experienced social rebuffs at first hand. The class she deals with, has local and not national importance in

Eighteenth century terms. She is a Tory rather than a Whig. She believes that the gentleman--as her words 'consequence' and 'usefulness' imply, derives his personal dignity from the contribution he makes at the head of an organic, hierarchical, small community. It is for such a community, ideally perceived, that her novels speak. The novel of her time was not just didactic. It was also seen as relevant to contemporary issues. These issues are unusually deep and clear-cut and inevitably partisan. Jane Austen's novels belong decisively to one class of partisan novels. The novelist shows no love for the great aristocracy (as represented in Darcy's family). Her attitude to social distinctions in the upper reaches of society has been radical one testifying to her Tory Radicalism. Many modern critics have suggested that *Pride and Prejudice* appears deliberately to run counter to the conservative tendency. In appearing before her readers in the guise of Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Austen reveals herself as the critic of various forms of orthodoxy.

Mr. Lionel Trilling rates *Pride and Prejudice* as 'radical' one thematically (1955,89). The novel, in the movement of its plot, represents a great change that was overtaking society. It also shows the movement of a formerly depressed class into

a position of power, and of a formerly powerful class into a position of compromise. Elizabeth and her family (The Bennets) represent a rising middle class, with its money made in trade, and its characteristic virtues of independence and value for the individual rather than for his status in society. On the other hand, Darcy represents the old aristocracy, whose family must learn to respect merit, whatever its origin. In fact, the novel moves towards a social synthesis as Elizabeth and Jane marry into higher ranks rather than their own. Elizabeth attracts critics of diverse tendencies as well and they are predisposed to like the heroine as she champions individualism against the old social order. Elizabeth, independent and informal can be contrasted with Darcy, who is socially established and formal. Initially, Darcy and Elizabeth are introduced as polar opposites. Jane Austen has been radical enough to take to task the individual follies and foibles of the characters. At the first assembly Darcy is 'discovered to be proud; to be above his company having a disagreeable countenance (10). But Elizabeth 'had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous' (12). Elizabeth certainly continues in the notion that she and Darcy are so different as to be totally incompatible. Her teasing of him while they dance reveals the extent of the contrast:

Are you consulting your own feelings in the present case, or do you imagine that you are gratifying mine?' asks Darcy. 'Both' replied Elizabeth archly; 'for I have always seen a great similarity in the turn of our minds. We are each of an unsocial, taciturn disposition, unwilling to speak, unless we expect to say something that will amaze the whole room, and be handed down to posterity with all the éclat of a proverb. (91)

This, no doubt, conveys Elizabeth's so also of Austen's view that there is no similarity in the turn of their minds: a hasty conclusion based on her hostile first impression of Darcy. Darcy's view of Elizabeth is also coloured by his sense of difference between them. Of course, for him it is not a difference of personality but of social status.

Jane Austen, a product of a period of transition, quite reasonably in her novels, makes an exposure of her traits of transitionalism as well. *Pride and Prejudice* is, no doubt, a novel of reconciliation. The confrontation between the two central characters--Elizabeth and Darcy--brings about mutual illumination, not because one has opposite

qualities but because each discovers the other to be worthy of respect. The very admission of the value of an opponent forces both Elizabeth and Darcy to be more humble about themselves. Jane Austen, of course, allows time to Elizabeth to change her emotional antipathy for Darcy into a predisposition to love him and she also needs time to bring Elizabeth to a full sense of reasoning. Again, it is to be remembered that it is from her father Mr. Bennet that Elizabeth derives the tendency that is in her to misanthropy, before her reformation begins: 'The more I see of the world, the more am I dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistency of all human characters, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of either merit or sense' (135).

No wonder then, that she is brought to a proper view of Darcy's pride and prejudice, which, although excessive, was still in its way more reasonable, more based on objective evidence, than her own. Like Darcy, she emerges from a period of introspection concluding that, partly through a wrong upbringing, she has consistently overvalued herself. In their ultimate state of enlightenment, Jane Austen's hero and heroine illustrate a view of human nature that derives from pessimism and not from optimism. The theme of

the moral education of Elizabeth which is paralleled by that of Darcy does not sanction but rebukes the contemporary doctrine of faith in the individual. It is possible that Jane Austen meant to ridicule the hackneyed theme by standing it on its head; what she offers is hate at first sight. In any case, as she develops her plot in the final version, it is clear that to her love at first sight and hate at first sight are essentially the same. Both are emotional responses built on insufficient or wrong evidence and fostered by pride and complacency towards the unreliable subjective consciousness.

Indeed, *Pride and Prejudice* takes a lead in its author's presentation of the relation not only between the individuals but also between the individual and society. In her doing this, she is all the more radical and transitional. The novel under discussion is a special case in respect of the society it presents. The style of social life is that of the end of the eighteenth century with the different forms of behaviour and social interaction that began to become the norm in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Lady Catherine de Bourgh arrives at Longbourn. She demands a walk in the garden with Elizabeth, and during the walk, demands a promise from Elizabeth that she will not

attempt to marry Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth refuses and her ladyship is highly 'incensed'. The dialogue between them provides an insight into Austen's nature of social criticism:

Whatever my connections may be, said Elizabeth, if your nephew does not object to them, they can be nothing to you. Tell me, once for all, are you engaged to him? I am not. Lady Catherine seemed pleased. And will you promise me never to enter into such an engagement? I will make no promise of the kind (286).

The dialogue offers an argument between a bigoted, snobbish woman and a more rational and liberal-minded girl. Whereas Elizabeth is accurate in dismissing unreasoning class prejudice, Lady Catherine appeals to a system that has endured unchanged for a long time. This system seems to be a fixed constant in Lady Catherine's mind. The suggestion is that her fixed idea of social hierarchy has become a belief in destiny. The superstitions of this belief are reinforced by her reference to 'the shades of Pemberley'. It seems that in her mind meeting another person is an 'attention' and confers an obligation. This suggests that Lady Catherine's fixed idea of her station in society

interferes in her relationship with others. Thus, relationships between human beings are fixed, conditioned by the social structure in which Lady Catherine believes. Hence her particular point is about Elizabeth's lack of 'gratitude'. When Elizabeth begins to defy her, she claims to feel 'ashamed'. We can now understand that shame, disgrace and a deep discomfort is associated with any threat to her rigid belief system, almost as if it is an unspeakable sin that 'dishonours' the doer, Lady Catherine herself, and the whole of society. Money is an important factor that sits uneasily in the middle of Lady Catherine's social concept, so far as *Pride and Prejudice* shows. Darcy's and Miss de Bourgh's fortunes are 'splendid' while Elizabeth is 'without...fortune!' Thus far money seems to appear as the natural adjunct of those with 'family' and 'connections'. However, her disgust at the sordidness of money—that Lydia's marriage was 'at the expense of your father and uncle,' complicates her attitude. It seems that in Lady Catherine's mind, as long as money joins money it is 'splendid', disgusts her. It is to be noted here that Jane Austen is precise in defining this hypocrisy: the connection occurs to us, but not to Lady Catherine. The idea that she might depend on money to preserve her position, is too sordid for her ideas of social class.

There are actually two crucial points in Elizabeth's view of society, which are radically modern for her time. The view is essentially that of Jane Austen as well. Elizabeth broadens and softens Lady Catherine's rigid ideas of social distinction. Elizabeth implicitly acknowledges that there could be such a disparity of education and manners as to make marriage impossible between two people. Her argument seems to be that belonging to a 'gentleman's' family provides her with a sufficient background and education. In this way, she regards all of a broad sector of society to be 'equal'. Again, more challengingly, Elizabeth repeatedly emphasizes her own and Darcy's rights, as individuals, to make free decisions for themselves. She boldly says that she will decide what 'will in my opinion, constitute my happiness', and she points out that Darcy will marry a woman, he is attached to, not who Lady Catherine wants him to marry. This argument goes to the heart of the question about society and this also very poignantly upholds Jane Austen's radical view of the then society as well. It is to be remembered that Lady Catherine's idea of society entails fixed relationships between social ranks, not between individual human beings. Elizabeth stands in opposition to this and argues the more modern and 'democratic' view of

individual freedom of choice of which Jane Austen as back as early nineteenth century was a strong and uncompromising advocate.

The 'place of woman' in the world of Jane Austen's novels is an enormous subject and this subject has been dealt with radically. The eighth chapter in the novel substantiates the aspect. The context is: Jane Bennet is ill at Netherfield, Elizabeth stays there to nurse her. In the evening, Miss Bingley begins to talk of Darcy's sister Georgiana. Here through the conversations between the characters Jane Austen has projected her view about the position and function of 'young ladies'. Jane Austen has been quite radical in her putting absurdities into her characters' views on female role and position in the society as represented by her novels.