



University of Peshawar

Available on Gale & affiliated international databases



Journal of
**Humanities &
Social Sciences**

JHSS XXI, No. 1, 2013 (April)

The Fear of Alienation in *Pride and Prejudice*

Samina Ashfaq, Nasir Jamal Khattak

College of Home Economics, University of Peshawar, Pakistan
Department of English & Applied Linguistics, University of Peshawar, Pakistan

Abstract

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* reflects the attitude of the nineteenth century society yet its implications are obvious to the present times as well. The desires, hopes, fears, and social psyche of a society are reflected in the socially acceptable or unacceptable principles and practices of a society, and the way the members of the society perceive these principles and practices. The confusion between the socially acceptable and individually desirable exists in all societies. Sometimes it comes into conflict with each other in the form of social issues that can be peacefully resolved only through tolerance and understanding. For this, one has to evaluate oneself and learn about the deeper realities of life by interacting with others and developing a sympathetic understanding of how the others approach life. Class differences have to be resolved, suffering of the others has to be shared and one must step down from their high pedestal so as to understand the others around them.

Keywords: Jane Austin, *Pride and Prejudice*, fear, alienation,

The insipidity, and yet the noise; the nothingness, and yet
the self-importance of all these people!¹

Darcy's interaction with the Bennets, especially Elizabeth, starts the process of self-realization which subsequently leads to broader understanding of life from the point of view of others. The interaction occurs at different levels and subsequently the improvement.² Those who achieve an insight become closer to others socially,

intellectually, emotionally, and they better prepare themselves for a change. For example, Darcy does not change radically. In the words of Elizabeth “he is very much what he ever was” (220). But he certainly has learnt to accept people as they are and respect them for what they are even though he may not agree with them. He has come to terms with the social norm of his society of not straightaway dismissing people if he does not agree with them. If at all he has to show his disapproval, he does that in their absence. This is why later “If he did shrug his shoulders, it was not till Sir William was out of sight” (363).

The society we meet in *P & P* is divided into classes but their boundaries are not clearly defined. In fact they are blurred and seem to merge with each other without distinction. The focus is apparently on the individuals as an integral part of the society to which they belong. Darcy, Lady Catherine, and Bingley are not financial equals. Bingley earns half the amount of Darcy’s yearly income and he is not even from the landed gentry but they still share social equality. Mr Bennet, who is from the landed gentry, on the other hand, is unworthy of becoming a relative through marriage due to the “connections” that he has. What exactly makes one worthy and another unworthy of a relationship is not very clear here. Mr Bennet is from the same class from which Darcy, Bingley, and Lady Catherine are, but he and his family are not good enough on some standards which are difficult to identify.

Mr Darcy is the owner of the Pemberley, “a kind of model” (34) estate. It is envied by the Bingleys because it belongs to an old family of aristocrats. Darcy represents the immaculate primness of the place to which he belongs. The reader is led to understand that comparing Pemberley to Meryton is like comparing “noble mien” (8, 9), to “playful disposition” (9). The ideas of self-importance and high social status, with which the new comers enter the lively, noisy, and yet harmonious atmosphere of Hertfordshire, come into clash with the residents; belonging to the higher class they have their own preformed notions of social behaviour. They are highly class-conscious as well as money-conscious. Both parties fail to become friendly with each other because they follow different ethos which do not coincide with each other; hence a reserve between them. Bingley turns out to be an exception, because his easy-going personality does not become confused by the complexities that come with consciousness.

Though Bennets are the wealthiest family of the community at Meryton, with an income of two thousand pounds a year, they are unable to save anything, to give dowry to their five daughters. The number of pounds a man earns a year decides his social status.³ The common men and women live in awe of the rich. However, Elizabeth is not daunted by the amount of wealth people possess. Lady Catherine de Bourgh at first, orders Elizabeth to refuse any marriage proposal of Mr Darcy

because he does not belong to their class. With her own preconceived notions of propriety Lady Catherine goes on to threaten Elizabeth by saying that

honour, decorum, prudence, nay, interest, forbid it...if you wilfully act against the inclination of all. You will be censured, slighted, and despised, by everyone connected with him. Your alliance will be a disgrace; your name will never even be mentioned by any of us (336).

To this, Elizabeth the new woman of England, dares stand up and announces the worth of her “self” and sphere. “In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter; so far we are equal” (336).⁴ Here we see Elizabeth at war with the conventions and traditions of her society. She indirectly becomes the spokesperson of the changing times redefining the boundaries of the strict compartments of class distinctions. Unlike Elizabeth Lady Catherine is obsessed with preserving “grades of dignity” (Bulwer.31) which results in a conflict between them.

Both Darcy and Elizabeth are representatives of their social classes, and are proud of their own identity. Darcy appreciates the values of the aristocracy and considers himself justified; he strictly adheres to the traditional norms and values of his class with their belief in propriety and decorum of manners. On the other hand, Elizabeth with her free spirit and democratic ideals considers herself right because she dislikes reserve caused by false and pretentious manners of Darcy’s class. One learns to revere all those characters that believe in themselves and uphold moral values of their society. The Gardiners, who believe in common sense and a practical approach to life, combine the qualities of Elizabeth and Darcy. The Gardiners with their abundance of common sense manage to solve the complexities arising from the conflict arisen, due to lack of understanding between the two classes in P & P. Being intelligent they understand the stance of both social groups and sympathize with them. They are the first to detect Darcy’s feelings for Elizabeth while it is Mrs Gardiner who sees through the character of Wickham and duly warns Elizabeth of his designs. Even Darcy finally realizes their worth when he tries to understand them, hence they become “on the most intimate terms” (167).⁵

Unlike Darcy and Elizabeth, the Lucas family belongs to the undefined class. They sometimes reveal insensitivity, ignorance, and cowardice, and never come into the limelight. Sir Lucas is satisfied with his claim to knighthood. These harmless individuals enjoy their inconsequential moments of happiness. For them a visit to Rosings Park is an event to be remembered and the details carefully preserved. They are cruelly ignored by Mrs Bennet at Collins engagement yet they don’t mind and “listened to all [her] impertinence with the most forbearing courtesy” (121).

Such are the innocent commonalities of the society depicted in *P & P*. Charlotte Lucas' marriage to Collins is bliss and celebrated with much satisfaction. The father is "convinced of his daughter's being most comfortably settled and of her possessing such a husband and such a neighbour as were not often met with" (158). Characters like these provide a contrast to the likes of Darcy and Elizabeth, who think and believe in more than superficial appearances. Lady Catherine, we observe, totally disregards Maria Lucas whose conversation serves to accentuate Elizabeth's intellect and hence Elizabeth draws Lady Catherine's attention. In Elizabeth, Lady Catherine finds a potential conversationalist because "Elizabeth was ready to speak whenever there was an opening" while social inhibitions are so dominating in Maria Lucas that she "thought speaking out of the question" (154).

The likes of Lady Catherine and Darcy too in the beginning want to preserve their status struggle to retain the social qua, tradition, social norms and requirements. This is why Darcy tries to convince and persuade Mr Bingley not to marry a girl who is different from his social status. On the other hand, Darcy struggles hard to come to terms with himself before he finally decides to propose to Elizabeth though he is conscious of her low connections. He dislikes the behaviour of her family and states in his letter of explanation:

The situation of your mother's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison of that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father. — Pardon me — it pains me to offend you (187).

To his disappointment, he falls in love with Elizabeth, and to fulfil his desire to marry her he has to become associated with the "low connection" (32), from which he tries to save his friend.⁶ The beginning of his first confession of love is loaded with the effort with which he tries to stop himself from falling in love with Elizabeth. The reason is that he finds it difficult to come to terms with the behaviour and ethics of Elizabeth's family. The proposal is sudden and Darcy, mindful of his status, does not behave like a traditional lover. The effort with which he breaks all barriers of social restrictions destroys the peace of his mind creating chaos within him. "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (178).

Darcy's verbal expressions reveal that he wants to retain the status of his class as well as preserve his dignity. His confession of love carries the social supremacy of aristocracy of which he is painfully conscious. The reason is Elizabeth's social standing and the lack of propriety in the behaviour of her family. Austen's universal tone is very obvious here; even today rich men want to marry pretty girls for their

looks but if she falls short of their own social status they discredit her family. Elizabeth's reaction equals Darcy's self-revelatory expressions. She retorts with equal force without losing propriety for she is fully conscious of "the compliment of such a man's affection" (179), yet, she will not let down her family. Darcy is a product of his age⁷ and hence he suffers from preconceived notions of his society; he wants to retain his exclusivity. McMaster points out that "Class difference was of course a fact of life for Austen, and an acute observation of the fine distinctions between one social level and another was necessary part of her business as a writer of realistic fiction"(115). With class consciousness comes consciousness of power because of the wealth possessed by those who are socially superior.⁸

Darcy being class-conscious carries a different persona in Hertfordshire, which complies with the norms of his society and hence appears proud among his social inferiors, yet he is socially acceptable. Charlotte endorses his claim that a fine "young man, with family, fortune, everything in his favour, should think highly of himself. And that Mr Darcy has a "right to be proud" (16). The truth is that when such social compulsions are self-imposed one has to carry a dual character which causes complexities. We at times pity him for he is a slave to his traditions. He lives in fear of Elizabeth's dynamic personality. Darcy reveals his real feelings at Pemberley when Elizabeth visits his house with her "low connections"; Mr and Mrs Gardiner, and this surprises Elizabeth, who fails to comprehend the reason for this change of behaviour. She does not know that he has achieved a certain degree of self-realization.

Lady Catherine never comes to intimate terms with the Collins, rather her invitations to Mr Collins and his 'connections' are more a show of condescension than social interaction based on equality. She makes sure that Collins realizes this, which is why he never trespasses the limits of intimacy for she fears loss of respect which she endeavours to preserve. Later Lady Catherine tries to intimidate Elizabeth by applying the same tactics when she visits her at Longbourn. However, Elizabeth cannot be cornered for she has no social inhibitions. Elizabeth's answers regarding the enquiries made about her family shock Lady Catherine who is in the habit of "delivering her opinion on every subject in so decisive a manner, as proved that she was not used to have her judgment controverted" (154-155). Elizabeth's arguments with the Lady at Rosings, though a simple discussion on common affairs, turn out to be a verbal conflict between conservative opinions and liberal ideals as well as consciousness of class distinction. Elizabeth seems to be bent upon proving her own identity as a person than a mere representative of her class. For Elizabeth no class boundaries exist and that is why she remains confident and relaxed while the others around her appear subdued and quiet. The aristocrats, on

the other hand, as in the case of Lady Catherine de Bourgh want to keep a distance between themselves and all those who are their social inferiors.

The same class consciousness we see in *The Watson*. Lord Osborne, an aristocrat, wants Tom Musgrove to dance with the beautiful Emma Watson, a social inferior. He is attracted by her but wants to preserve his superiority and does not approach her directly. He desires his friend to make sure that if “she does not want much talking to, you may introduce me by and by” (98). His obsession to preserve his status makes him behave ridiculously. This consciousness in them is further intensified by the likes of Tom Musgrove who feed their vanity through flattery.⁹ Like Elizabeth, Emma overhears by chance; she refuses to be overpowered by his wealth and snobbish self-importance. She sensibly guesses that he is “vain, very conceited, absurdly anxious for distinction, and absolutely contemptible in some of the measure he takes for becoming so” (108). Hence she refuses to dance with the gentleman. The ridiculous behaviour of Lord Osborne reminds one strongly of Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *P & P* and Sir Elliot in *Persuasion*.

Through the above mentioned characters we move among the circle of the so called civilized who are obsessed with the idea of following certain norms and sometimes they behave in a pretentious manner. Those who retain graces of manners and speech even during extreme emotional turmoil become more effective. We see how Elizabeth controls her anger at times though it borders disgust, e.g., with Bingley sisters, Lady Catherine and even Darcy. Her “had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner” (182) cuts deep into Darcy and he goes so far in his explanation as to reveal a family secret. The “I” of Darcy and the “you” of Elizabeth make a contract the moment this process of synthesis begins. However those who insist on preserving their traditional views regarding social status never achieve this degree of contentment.

We note that even among the so-called social superiors the views; regarding social status and behaviour, differ a great deal, and are not clearly defined. For Miss Bingley with “such a father and mother, and such low connections” Jane and her sisters have no chance of marrying well but for Bingley “If they had uncles enough to fill all Cheapside ... it would not make them one jot less agreeable”. It is the worldly Darcy who pronounces that it will “lessen their chance of marrying men of any consideration in the world” (32, 33). To this, Bingley remains silent for he seems to be confused and this reflects the uncertainty of the members of that society and the class to which they belong.

Individuals belonging to the higher class further exhibit the quality of being secretive in the expression of their private feelings; this makes them hypocritical towards

others as well as themselves. Darcy hides his feelings from Elizabeth for a long time yet the reader does not find Darcy despicable even though he refuses to dance with Elizabeth because he gives his reasons. However, in *The Watsons* one immediately falls into a dislike for Lord Osborne, for he behaves ridiculously in his effort to hide his fascination for Emma Watson. Darcy's open dislike of the vulgarity of Bennet family is based on his preference of good manners, decency, and grace which he exhibits in a greater degree. When extremely angry, he becomes silent. What he needs to learn is that these qualities do not depend on social status alone; hence his views change when he sees the graces of Elizabeth in contrast to the Bingley sisters and his own aunt Lady Catherine de Bourgh at Rosings.¹⁰

Elizabeth and Darcy's aunt Lady Catherine are the two important females, who represent two different ideologies, mentalities, and mind set, and adhere to their own ideas with determination. They can be seen as representing a collision between class and individual, tradition and innovation, rules and exceptions, and compromises and rigidity. Lady Catherine may wonder at someone who gives her "opinion very decidedly"(157), and Elizabeth's apparent disregard to the Lady's command in a confident manner shows her belief in her own self, when she states that "in marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere"(336). We hear a new woman who is not ready to make any promises to show submission. Lady Catherine has to "recede" and without getting any 'assurance' (337) that she required. She needs to be shown a mirror to make her realize that times have changed. Elizabeth decidedly makes clear that she is resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to *you*, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me...it would not give me one moment's concern (338).

Elizabeth has arrived at that stage of self-assurance where class differences do not matter and so when charged with schemes of enticement she readily retorts. She becomes the spokesperson of the new generation who refuses to conform to the old social order. The society has to accept the change and make allowances.

The conservatives or the landed gentry like Lady de Bourgh, Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* and the Darlymples in *Persuasion* are mere representations of the elite. Their vanity is fed by hypocrites who are their social inferiors, yet they desired to be considered their equal. For Anne, in *Persuasion*, the whole exercise is disgusting for she would rather be among humans than mere illusions while Elizabeth feels "vexed" (93). The Elliots never become intimate with those whom they follow, i.e., the Darlymples, whose acquaintance makes them boast of their connections. Their shallowness becomes obvious to the reader for they are satisfied with the mere reference of calling them their relatives. Finally Anne Elliot

decides to disregard all class differences and marries Wentworth to the satisfaction of the readers and her relatives because

When any two young people take it into their heads to marry, they are pretty sure by perseverance to carry their point, be they ever so poor, or ever so imprudent, or ever so little likely to be necessary to each other's ultimate comfort. This may be bad morality to conclude with, but I believe it to be truth; and if such parties succeed, how should a Captain Wentworth and an Anne Elliot, with the advantage of maturity of mind, consciousness of right, and one independent fortune between them, fall of bearing down any opposition (245).¹¹

The desire of being connected to people of consequences appears recurrently in Miss Austen's novels and especially among those who are or consider themselves in an unstable financial state. We see this in Misses Bingley and in the persons of Sir Elliot and Elizabeth Elliot in *Persuasion*.

In *P & P* the characters are constantly on the move and do not seem to fix or limit themselves to their own classes. They mix with each other and learn from each other. The balls at Meryton cater to all types of people and even those who come in hired carriages are equally welcomed. The social discourse is easy and frequent and there is no cruel criticism. The members of the society might have reservations against each other but it never instigates them to behave in an imprudent manner; hence their social interaction is always on cordial terms. Nobody would openly chide Mrs Bennet for her faulty behaviour towards her two youngest daughters though they are aware of it. It is only through Collins letter that we learn what Charlotte Lucas thought on the subject: "my dear Charlotte informs me, that this licentiousness of behaviour in your daughter has proceeded from a faulty degree of indulgence" (178). The static state of affairs of this locality may have made it morally stagnant, had not an outside element in the form of Darcy or Collins come to chide and criticize them. Even Elizabeth realizes "the mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence" (261) after becoming aware of her family's weaknesses. Both try to retain their stance; Elizabeth tries to hide her feelings at Pemberley, and Darcy with his "silent indignation" (22), acts indifferent to the people of Hertfordshire because both take pride in the class to which they belong.

Miss Austen introduces her characters in a particular social setting; her "coteries"¹² and we recognize and accept them in their environment. The "inhabitants are constantly on the move, entering new coteries" (Hardy.107). In the settled and seemingly regulated¹³ atmosphere of Meryton, the reader encounters an outside element in the form of people from different social groups: Bingley and his family,

Mr Darcy and the officers of the militia. The Meryton society grows with this contact and start learning unaware of the recuperation.

In P & P, the peaceful environment of Longbourn is activated by the news that “Netherfield Park is let at last” and “a young man of large fortune from the north of England”, an eligible bachelor, who came in “a chaise and four” has decided to settle in the neighbourhood and the grand house will soon be occupied (1). The key points of interest for the inhabitants of this area are the bachelor, his chaise and large fortune signifying the amount of wealth and status so far unknown to the residents of this locality. They are awed, and greedy for the acquaintance.

The entrance of a foreign element in the form of Bingley family contains personalities whose disposition varies in degrees from each other yet they manage to endure each other’s company because more or less they agree with the prevailing social norms of their society, i.e., the regulated behaviour. We, as readers, are able to discern that though they are friends, their preferences and attitudes differ as we see in the form of reactions they show after meeting the people of this locality.

The general reaction of the new comers is rather negative, bordering on dislike. Mr Bingley, who is the only good-humoured among them, claims that he “had never met with pleasanter people or prettier girls in his life; everybody had been most kind and attentive to him, there had been no formality, no stiffness, he had soon felt acquainted with all the people in the room” (14). He seems to reveal signs of unregulated behaviour according to the regulations of the environment in which he has been brought up; for the others turn out to be quite unanimous in their disapproval.

For Darcy “there was little beauty and no fashion” in Meryton and for “none of whom he felt the slightest interest, and from none received either attention or pleasure.” (14) He is paid back in his own coin by the Hertfordshire community who dislikes him as much as he disapproves of them. A barrier in the form of reserve is created between him and the people instinctively which hampers the understanding of each for the other.

The two Bingley sisters “proud and conceited” (12), find the locality not much to their taste, lacking “people of rank” (13), and high social status.¹⁴ Their aspirations, like the residents of the Hertfordshire community, are also based on the desire for higher aspirations in the form of more wealth and a higher status. Married to Mr Hurst, an indolent man, “of more fashion than fortune” (13), the elder sister seems to be pleased with her life. These three are as cold in

temperament as the cold North winds from where they have come, and lack sympathy for the people of Hertfordshire. Nurturing a desire to achieve a high social status, the sisters ardently wish their brother to buy an estate realizing the superiority of landed gentry.¹⁵ Their regulated behaviour lacks a natural ease and carries signs of Victorian hypocrisy.

The other new comers are the officers of a militia regiment: the red coats, like the colour of their uniform become the danger signals foretelling the tragedy that is to fall on these seemingly harmless people. These defenders of the country's honour ironically turn out to be the cause of bringing dishonour to the respectable Bennet family.

Brighton is the next city mentioned in the novel, where the militia gets posted from Meryton. It is the place where Bennet's reputation is threatened, and, keeping in accordance with her habit of avoiding all that is evil and gross, Miss Austen does not take the reader there, but indirectly relates Lydia's tragedy. The muddle and confusion caused by these outsiders is solved by the people in London, the Gardiners and Mr Darcy. Thus the novel becomes something of more significance than "[tale]s of courtship and marriage" (Marsh, 136). It seems to unfold the aspirations of the society revealing the pettiness behind apparent grandeur.

London is the next city mentioned, where people live in socially defined areas. From traditional, regulated manner of life at Hertfordshire the reader enters a new world i.e. London, where the tragedy of elopement is resolved in a business-like manner. The problem is solved in a professional manner, the financial terms are negotiated and finally the deal is settled. Wickham is paid ten thousand pounds to marry Lydia and save the Bennet reputation from further deterioration; bringing some sort of credit to them in the form of a decent marriage. It changes a social and moral stigma of elopement, into a practical day to day affair.

The irregularities of the society and its problems are regulated through negotiations, understanding, and sacrifice by the members themselves but they are to pay the cost, sometimes in the form of money and at times through personal sacrifices. The characters make blunders and learn to adjust themselves with the changing social order. The people like Gardiners, Phillips and Lucas represent the newly emerging middle class who are able to look after their own advantages through acquisition of money. In their effort to become socially acceptable such individuals even today debate "the respective worth of liberal and conservative values; individuals still struggle to define their place in society, to find personal fulfilment within the bounds of the socially acceptable' (Eagleton 20).

In P & P we come across characters that possess a lot of true potential that lies in them, though living in a pretentious age. What they need is a direction towards understanding and awareness which the religious and educational institutions of society fail to provide. The common man has to make blunders before learning how to adjust themselves to the new social vision. Society is a dynamic whole and never stays static; with passage of time transformations occur in values and norms. People learn through contact with the others. In the society of P & P, like today, money has to be spent with great consideration especially by the landed gentry because the artisans and traders want to multiply their wealth. The novae riche give a shock to the values of the aristocrats who find their behaviour absurd and consider them “low connections”. The wealth is there but they lack grandeur, confidence, and nobility. They also lack legacy of values; these traits are especially obvious in the behaviour of the Lucas family and Mrs Elton in *Emma*. The social barriers¹⁶ created by class and money have to be crossed to achieve harmony.

Conclusion

In earlier times, religion decided social supremacy, while in Austen’s society it was money in the form of “pounds” that decided a person’s worth. Class distinctions are made on the basis of land ownership, and because of this new mind-set, the aristocrats feel embarrassed, and the affluent middle class debate “liberal and conservative values; individuals still struggle to define their place in society, to find personal fulfilment within the bounds of the socially acceptable” (Eagleton and Pierce. 20). There are some exceptions though. We find people of lower social ranks, not financially sound, yet well mannered, e.g., Mr Martin, a farmer. Then there are those who display confused morals, ill manners and a confused life style; for example, Mrs Smith in *Persuasion*, and the Price family in *Mansfield Park*. Interestingly, Austen never dwells long on them, and so we learn very little about their relationships with others. Their family life lacks unity and understanding but the main characters of Austen’s novels are people she knew well. Her own strong family tie with her family, which is the basic unit of every society, reflects the importance she gives to the relationships of her characters. The rest she supplements in directing the story ahead. The Bennet family is constantly in touch with the Phillips’ and the Gardiners; the Bingley family is often seen together. Lady Catherine is regularly visited by her nephews; Mr Lucas visits his daughter while Mr Collins takes refuge with his in-laws when Lady Catherine’s anger becomes unbearable.¹⁷

In P & P solidarity, trust, brotherhood and general sympathy of the Meryton society presents a social cohesion where people are sympathetically related to each other and spirit of relatedness prevails. In comparison to it, Rosings reveals reserve, distance, and condescension. Though Austen restricts herself to a particular class yet

the characters in both these places increase our knowledge of humanity. Elizabeth states in P & P, that she likes to study characters and “intricate characters are the *most* amusing” (39) while Darcy believes that the country does not provide a varying society. He wants to stress that one cannot consider oneself as good observer when there is so little to observe to which she answers as if voicing Miss Austen’s own explanation of her self-imposed limitation , that “people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be observed in them forever”(39).¹⁸

The social philosophy as developed in P & P is not abstract rather it is practical; all that we learn from this issue through her novels is derived from her society: living among them she observed their dealings and interaction. The characters are true social representatives of their society. They are all human beings. Austen knows them, portrays them as she finds them. She did not need any philosophical system to explain their behaviour through analyses or judge their actions. Their intricacies are self-developed rising out of petty issues. It is the superficiality of their behaviour and morals that she subtly criticizes through irony. Her characters are not black and white; the only matter of concern is that they are oblivious of their weaknesses. We are all social creatures abiding by the values, laws, rules and even moral codes of the society in which we live. We still dread deviation from the prescribed norms fearing excommunication or alienation and this we cannot endure. Like Austen, instead of waging a war against undesirable norms, we have to show their ridiculousness by showing a mirror to those who still adhere to it.

Notes

- ¹ These lines are taken from Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice* (London: David Campbell Ltd, 1991), p. 24. All subsequent references in the text of this chapter are to this novel and are represented by the letters, P & P, followed by page number.
- ² This issue is further elaborated by a critic who says that Austen writes about a society that is hierarchical but is also a meritocracy. In all her novels there is a high degree of movement between the classes she describes and, because there is a method and a logic for that movement, even a powerful character who represents the Establishment, such as Lady Catherine de Bourgh, cannot impede it. It is here that *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on human agency within neoclassicisms enlightened and reasonable belief in social and economic and moral progress (Giffin 92).
- ³ Austen’s attitude towards the financial problems of common people of her society as well as the cruelties of the aristocracy and her sympathy for the gentry makes her, according to Daiches, in a sense a Marxist before Marx³. While Woolf believes that in applying the Marxian dialectic to Jane Austen, one must, of course, always

remember that she is one of the greatest and subtlest of satirists (50); one cannot restrict Austens views to any particular theory. I agree with Mrs Woolf but would like to add that Jane Austens concern and her approach to the prevailing problems is multifaceted and Mr Daiches assessment can be one of the many interpretations of her work.

- ⁴ In *Pride and Prejudice* we come across certain terms that carry different meaning for different people. For Mrs Bennet Mr Lucas is a gentleman because he is man of fashion , genteel and easy . Furthermore, he has always something to say to everybody (40). For Lady Catherine Elizabeths uncles dont come up to her version of a gentleman.(336).
- ⁵ There are those who are vain and shallow in their attitudes are satirized. In spite of her caricatures of Mr Collins and Lady Catherine, Austen portrays life in Kent as a model of decency and good order when compared to life in Hertfordshire; although a better model awaits the heroine and the reader in Derbyshire. However, that better model cannot become an ideal model until Elizabeth is able to make her necessary contribution to it (106) and later he states that Mr Collins and Lady Catherine may be objects of satire, but even Austen suggests that both of them are functioning quite well in their respective clerical and secular roles. Neither of them could be called progressive, but in spite of this they are achieving a degree of social cohesion that the British thought necessary to prevent social instability and revolution (107). Giffin, Michael. *Jane Austen and Religion: Salvation and Society in Georgian England*. (Gordonsville, VA, USA Palgrave Macmillan 2002). <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/peshawar>. Hardy believes that in Austens novels the aristocrats are heavily satirized, the people in trade treated sympathetically, harsh satire being reserved for their snobbish or hypocritical connections, like Mrs Elton and Miss Bingley (106). But we never forget that both these women are humans. Their tragedy is their fear of being ignored in the mainstream so they overact their part. Miss Bingley craving for Darcys attention tries to remain persevered in her motives though Darcy persistently ignores her. Mrs Elton, conscious of her money, suffers from the same fear of being a nobody before Emma, who, being rich, is an icon of social status. Both women are victims of vanity and so like Sir Elliot in *Persuasion* prone to irregular behaviour.
- ⁶ It is interesting to note that Darcy and Bingley disregard all class differences, when they fall in love. Their decision is not hastily made but in vain do they struggle to realize that it will not do for their feelings will not be repressed (178). They go through a process of self-analysis and decide only when completely convinced. In Miss Austens other novels too, the protagonists marry women below their social status or wealth for they aim at love and happiness. Behaving in an unregulated way they become the tools for the ongoing transformation. Those who marry for money get unworthy life partners e.g. Willoughby and Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility*, Mr Elton in *Emma* and Wickham in *P & P*, who literally bargain for a wife in financial terms. Their desires revolve around money and a desire to belong to the rich.

- ⁷ For information of this age see *Jane Austen: New Perspectives* ed. Janet Todd (New York and London: Holmes and Meir) 1983. R. S. Neale *1860-1850: A Social History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1981). Gary Kelly *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* (London and New York: Longman Pub.1989).
- ⁸ Money is of great consequence and easily available to those who would seriously strive for it using fair or foul means. In his article titled *Money* ⁸ Edward Copeland recounts the different social markers that decide the worth of the individual by the people of that time e.g. how many thousand pounds an individual earns, owns an estate, keeps a carriage and horses, number of servants, mode of travel etc. Austen seems to be conscious of the value of frugality that was gathering momentum. Edward Copeland's essay on *Money Class* printed in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* Edited by Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster Cambridge University Press. Cambridge 1997. Giffen confirms to it, In an Austen novel, even families that appear wealthy to the reader still need to be careful with their capital because they live in a society dominated by unregulated capitalism where there are so many claims on their private capital. Few of Austen's parents have enough capital to provide their offspring with an independence or a competency, which is why Charlotte has much to teach Elizabeth about the role of necessity and pragmatism, and the function of good management, in Georgian marriages (Giffen. 98). This created confusion which is apparent in all Austen's novels. The landed gentry were moving towards impoverishment because of their lack of proper interest in their estates. Mr Bennet in *P & P*, spends every penny that he earns from his land; Mr Elliot in *Persuasion* has to leave Kellynch Hall because of the heavy bills of his trades-people and his inability to devise any means of lessening their expenses without compromising their dignity, or relinquishing their comforts in a way not to be borne (10). The traders, and those who earned through their participation in navel adventures, were becoming financially strong. The strict social boundaries are being redefined and one is led to question the social equality of Admiral Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* with that of Admiral Croft in *Persuasion*; for one belonged to the family of landed gentry and the other had gathered wealth through navel exploits. The former, acts with arrogance, conscious of his status while the other reveals good manners and concern for snug in the knowledge of his wealth he has established his new identity.
- ⁹ There are the likes of Collins in *P & P* , who degrade themselves by feeding the vanities of the aristocrats in order to profit materially but, in Miss Austen's novels they end up in becoming pathetic figures. Mrs Clay in *Persuasion* and Tom Musgrove in *The Watsons* lose their own identity and respect while trailing after Elliots and Osbornes.
- ¹⁰ Those with family wealth passed to them from earlier generations consider it their privilege to be exclusively regarded and respected. They hurt the feelings of the others as does Lady Catherine and even Darcy, while those who were acquiring wealth emphatically claimed to be their equals. The bourgeois, in their effort of trying to improve their social status end up in social mimicking.¹⁰ Even Miss Bingley behaves

with lack of propriety when she reveals her greed in *P & P* as does Mrs Elton in *Emma*. They avoid those who are inferior in status and hence the reader notes that the Bingley sisters never become friendly with the Lucas family.

- 11 This quotation has been taken from Jane Austens novel *Persuasion*.
- 12 Barbra Hardy. *A Reading of Jane Austen* (London and Atlantic Highlands, N.J: The Athlone Press1997).
- 13 The general environment of Hertfordshire is peaceful and even if there are jealousies between Mrs Bennet and Lady Lucas, they are of a very petty nature, hence of no consequence.
- 14 Commenting on the attitude of Bingleys sisters Giffin writes, The sisters of Charles Bingley may be wealthy in their own right, but they are just as opportunistic, and wanting the advantage of Darcys company, as anyone else at the Meryton assembly. They are handsome and well-educated fine ladies from a respectable family in the north of England who are proud and conceited; in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank; and they think well of themselves, and meanly of others. Their attitude is tempered, however, by an awareness that their brothers fortune and their own had been acquired by trade, and by the knowledge that the Bingley fortune will not lose its taint of trade until their family purchases a substantial landed estate and marries into the Establishment. That is why Miss Bingley would prefer that her brother bought an estate such as Pemberley, with a similarly high aspect, rather than rented an estate such as Netherfield, which probably has a low aspect (nether-field). That is also why she hopes to marry Darcy, and why she does not want to become a relative of the Bennets. Austen conveys a heavy irony when the Bingley sisters laugh at the Bennets low connections, and note that they have an uncle in law living in Meryton and another uncle in trade living near Cheapside, because for all their pretensions their own connections are not much higher than those of the Bennets (Giffen100). Giffin, Michael. *Jane Austen and Religion: Salvation and Society in Georgian England.*, (Gordonville, VA, Palgrave Macmillan 2002). <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/peshawar/Doc?id=10044866&ppg=115>
- 15 Austen suggests this in all her novels and according to McMaster the long-established but untitled landowning family does seem to gather Austens deep respect, especially if its income comes from land and a rent-roll; and her two most eligible heroes Mr Darcy of Pemberley and Mr Knightly of Donwell Abbey, come from this class, the landed gentry.¹¹⁷ Juliet McMasters essay *Class* printed in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* Edited by Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997)
- 16 See *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* edited by Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997)
- 17 Through *Jane Austens Letters* ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 1995) we learn that she regularly visited her relatives. In her novels people are interested in each others affairs; they not only gossip but also enjoy each

others company. Visiting friends and neighbours was a regular feature of their society. She had very strong familial ties as revealed in her letters. Her keen interest is apparent the way she kept track of the activities of her family and this we see in the relationship of Elizabeth and Jane. The trust between them helps them go through the trails of life and the changing circumstances.

- ¹⁸ The same restraint we observe in the depiction of the social evils of her society. There are no references of Napoleonic Wars but indirect reference through the mention of men who are on sea or have recently come back from it. The militia regiment we hear posted near Meryton shows no urgency of action or alarm but merely moved to Brighton a bathing place where officers have time to dance and flirt. She does not mention war, perhaps because wars are depressing; they increase hatred and create a void among the individuals as well as nations. In her depiction of the society she seems to be more worried about the wars between the individuals of her society through their attitudes, views etc. and she would rather show a way to resolve the internal conflicts than relate the external issues. She must let the army of hatred and misunderstanding succumb so that individuals are at peace. Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* takes relish in relating the action at sea in which he took part and won laurels yet it is his war with the society that refused to allow him to marry the woman he desired, that makes him bitter towards Anne for he cannot win easily.

References

- Austen, Jane, *Pride and Prejudice*. London: David Campbell Publishers 1991.
- Copeland, Edward, and McMaster, Juliet, Editors. *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* edited by Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997.
- Daiches, David, *A Critical History of English Literature. Vol.11*. London: Secker & Warburg. 1960.
- Faye Deirdre Le, Ed. *Jane Austen's Letters* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 1995.
- Giffin, Michael. *Jane Austen and Religion: Salvation and Society in Georgian England*. Gordonsville, VA, USA Palgrave Macmillan 2002.
- Hardy, Barbra *A Reading of Jane Austen* London and Atlantic Highlands, N.J: The Athlone Press 1997.
- Kelly, Gary, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* London and New York: Longman Pub. 1989.
- Neale, R. S. *1860-1850: A Social History* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.
- Todd, Janet, Editor *Jane Austen: New Perspectives* Ed. New York and London: Holmes and Meir 1983.