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THE WOLLSTONECRAFT-AUSTEN CONNECTION

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ABSTRACT

The present study looks at the works titled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), published by Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen respectively. Both works are analyzed and discussed from a feminist point of view considering the respective historical contexts in which they were written.

The first part of the dissertation, offers an overview of the personal situation and experiences of each author. As my dissertation shows, the socio-historical context in which they lived played a relevant role in the issues they discussed and denounced in their works. Then, the second section provides an analysis and discussion of the main feminist themes discussed in each work: namely, Wollstonecraft and Austen's critique of women's education, gender stereotypes and the view of marriage as a social imposition. Finally, the dissertation includes an in-depth comparative analysis of the strategies each author used to raise awareness of women's precarious situation to criticize the social norms that govern their society, being irony one of the Jane Austen's most efficient strategy.

By dint of conclusion, it may be argued that Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen were both pioneers in the feminist movement. They were two brave women who, despite the social restrictions, managed to successfully convey the message of freedom and gender equality supported by feminism in their literary production.

RESUMEN

El siguiente estudio abarca los trabajos de *Vindicación de los Derechos de la Mujer* (1792) y *Orgullo y Prejuicio* (1813), publicados por Mary Wollstonecraft y Jane Austen respectivamente. Ambos trabajos son analizados desde un punto de vista feminista considerando los respectivos contextos históricos en los que fueron escritos.

En la primera parte de este trabajo de fin de grado, se ofrece una introducción de la situación personal y experiencias de las autoras. Como se indica en los siguientes apartados, el contexto socio-político en el que vivieron juega un papel relevante en los temas que discuten y denuncian en sus obras. A continuación, se proporciona un análisis y discusión de los principales temas

feministas tratados en ambos trabajos: la crítica que ambas autoras hacen sobre la educación recibida por las mujeres, los estereotipos de género y el tratamiento del matrimonio como una imposición social. Finalmente, el trabajo incluye un profundo análisis comparativo de las estrategias que cada autora utilizó para incrementar la conciencia sobre la precaria situación de la mujer y cuestionar las normas sociales que gobernaban su sociedad, siendo la ironía una de las estrategias más eficientes utilizadas por Austen.

Teniendo en cuenta las ideas aquí presentadas, tanto Mary Wollstonecraft como Jane Austen pueden ser consideradas pioneras en el movimiento feminista. Fueron dos mujeres valientes que, a pesar de las restricciones sociales, consiguieron expandir en su producción literaria el mensaje de libertad e igualdad de género defendido por el feminismo.

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1. Introduction

Feminism is grounded in the advocacy of gender equality. Owen M. Fiss defines it as: “the set of beliefs and ideas that belong to the broad social and political movement to achieve greater equality for women” (413). Feminism has always been in a constant fight to achieve rights and better conditions in the life of women, not only in a private sphere but also in the public one. It is in this context where we can place the relevance of Mary Wollstonecraft, and specially, her work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792); and the following publication many years later of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen. As Martha Rampton ensures, the first wave of feminism is located in the late nineteenth century, far away from the authors we have in our hands. However, this fact does not mean that they were not feminist. Rampton makes a special mention of both of them as some critics have located the roots of feminism quite backwards than the 19th century. Along with Sappho (d.c. 570 BCE), or Christine de Pisan (d. 1434), she points out Mary Wollstonecraft (d. 1797) and Jane Austen (d.1817) (Rampton 1). Both of them are crucial in order to set the basis of feminism and their relevance expands up to the present. Mary Wollstonecraft can be considered to be the grandmother of feminism, as she started the path for the following generations to follow. She made a clear statement in her work, listing the main aspects to take into account in order to build up a better world for women, who would achieve more freedom. Jane Austen followed her steps, writing a romantic story that can be interpreted as a critique of the social constructions of the time. The clearest link between both authors can be said to be their focus on education. As will be further developed, both authors highlighted the key role that education played in women’s position in society. They criticized the type of education women received in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for being socially asphyxiating.

Taking all the previous ideas into account, the main aim of this dissertation is to offer a comparative analysis of the feminist ideas presented by Wollstonecraft in her work titled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and by Austen in her novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). For this purpose, my discussion of Wollstonecraft and Austen’s works will be divided into three main sections. I will first offer some details of each of the authors’ biographies and works. This overview of the author’s personal experiences will let us understand the personal and social context in which they wrote their works. The second section includes a discussion of the main feminist tenets presented in each of the works. Finally, the last section offers an in-depth comparative analysis of the main topics and similarities between the two works.

2. Biography

The time when both Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen developed their works, and the surroundings in which they lived, acquire such a big relevance. They both reflected their own thoughts and feelings about the traditions and kind of education imposed on them. As to make a complete understanding of what they wanted us to comprehend, we need to pay close attention to their daily lives and the events that made an impact on them.

At the time of reading both works, we can notice that many events are autobiographical. We can relate their works with their personal experiences, in addition to entering their world. To put it differently, they left us a door open to their world, so that we could enter their minds and also their life experiences.

2.1. Mary Wollstonecraft: Biography

Mary Wollstonecraft can be regarded as the mother of feminism due to the publication of works such as the one we have in our hands: *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). In this work, she defends women's rights, such as equality in education, by the enumeration of several vindications.

In addition to being a feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft fulfilled various roles among which we can include the ones of philosopher, historian, novelist, political thinker and educationist. She was born in Spitalfields (London) on the 27th of April in 1759. There are many aspects that have to be taken into account in order to understand her thinking. She was the second in a family of seven and was surrounded by an unsafe familiar environment. On the one hand, her father Edward John Wollstonecraft mistreated her mother, besides being an alcoholic. He was an abusive father who spent all his fortune on unsuccessful agricultural companies. On the other hand, her mother Elizabeth Dixon died in 1780 causing a severe trauma on her. The conjoint action of her father actions, and the early death of her mother forced Wollstonecraft to find the means to earn her own livelihood.

Along with her sister Eliza and Fanny Blood, she established a school. It was at this time when she had the inspiration to write two of her most famous writings: *Reflections on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and *Original Stories* (1788). It is in these works where she started discussing and defending one of her most relevant topics: education (Wardle 148). In addition, these works were also the base of her most famous work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* which is precisely the main object of analysis of this dissertation.

The decision of becoming an author was a radical fact in her life. Thus, she moved to London. There she attended the famous Johnson's dinner meetings where she could mingle with intellectual and relevant authors, such as Thomas Paine and William Godwin.

After the humiliation she suffered in a romantic relationship with a married man, she met Gilbert Imlay in Paris, with whom she had her daughter Fanny in an unmarried relationship. This fact caused many problems such as the fact that her daughter was illegitimate, although Imlay recognized Wollstonecraft as her wife to protect her daughter. Some years later, William Godwin read her work titled *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796), which led him to express his feelings for her (Flexner 48). Both of them started a friendship which slowly became love, and which continued until Wollstonecraft died while giving birth to their daughter Mary Shelley, the writer of *Frankenstein* (1818).

After Wollstonecraft's death, Godwin affirmed that he would never be happy again because there was nobody that could be compared to Mary Wollstonecraft. In 1798 Godwin published *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in which he revealed some details about Wollstonecraft's life, such as the illegitimacy of her first daughter, her love relationships and her suicidal attempts (Greenblatt 167-173). When Godwin died, both authors were buried in St Pancras Old Church, although their corpses were moved to Bournemouth later on.

2.1.1. Works

Mary Wollstonecraft was a prolific author; among her works we can highlight: *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787, this book provides some advice to young ladies about education); *Mary: A Fiction* (1788, a tragic story which is as well her first and only complete novel); *Original stories from Real Life* (1788, her only book of children's literature); *Of the Importance of Religious Opinions* (1788); *The Female Reader* (1789); *Young Grandison* (1790); *Elements of Morality* (1790); *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790, political pamphlet against aristocracy); and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). In these latter publications, she refutes the ideas made by some theorists of the 18th century about the fact that women could not be allowed to have access to education. Other books written by Wollstonecraft include: *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794); *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796); contributions to

Analytical Review (1788-1797, posthumous); *The Cave of Fancy* (1798, posthumous); *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798, posthumous and unfinished, it is the sequel of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*); *Letters to Imlay* (1798, posthumous); *Letters on the Management of Infants* (1798, posthumous and unfinished); *Lessons* (1798, posthumous and unfinished); and *On Poetry and our Relish for the Beauties of Nature* (1798, posthumous) (Bergès 1-16).

2.2. Jane Austen: Biography

Jane Austen was born on December 16th, 1775, sixteen years after Mary Wollstonecraft's birth. Her father, George Austen, was so delighted with her daughter that he described her as a "present" and "future companion". He was quite an expert in parenthood, he was in his mid-forties when Austen was born (Myer 32).

The fact of being a big family was not usual because at that time delivering a child was dangerous and it usually resulted in the death of the mother. In addition, infant mortality was also high. Jane Austen had six brothers and a sister, so her family had an important role in her life: James Austen (1765-1819), Austen's elder brother, published a monthly magazine called *The Loiterer*, whose editor (Egerton) was the same who started publishing Jane Austen's works. In contrast, George Austen (1766-1838) is usually ignored in Jane's comments. Although he suffered from a mental illness, Austen never made any reference to this. On his part, Edward Austen (1768-1852), managed to get a house for his mother and sisters: the house located in Chawton. Similarly, Henry Austen (1771-1850) studied in Oxford and he took care of her sisters's issues. Francis (1774-1865) and Charles Austen (1779-1852) were sent to the Real Army Academy in Portsmouth. Surprisingly, Cassandra Austen (1773-1845) was the only sister Jane had. She was only two years older than Jane (Myer 56-61). Although they were quite different, they were always very united and shared their secrets with each other. Cassandra's fiancé died in the Antilles so she could not get married. Although Cassandra destroyed the majority of letters the two sisters interchanged, it is thanks to them that we have got to know more about the author and about her way of thinking and living.

Both Jane and Casandra attended a house in Southampton in 1783 in order to be educated. This education, and the one Austen received at home constituted her whole instruction. The many books that she had at home turned her into an avid reader.

After the death of her father in 1805, the family was left in a poor economic condition. The family moved to Southampton in 1806 and to Chawton in 1809, where her brother Edward could afford a house inside his properties. Once settled in that house, Jane returned to the

literary path. First, she managed to publish *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). Then, she published *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and started working on *Emma*. She published *Emma* in 1815 and she started *Persuasion* (1818) in August of the same year. However, one year later she started feeling sick and she moved to Winchester where she started a health treatment in 1817. As a result, she had to abandon the writing of her writing entitled *Sanditon* (1818). On the 18th of July, 1817 she died at Winchester at the age of 41. At that time the cause of the death was unknown, but nowadays it is thought that it was Addison's illness. In her will she left everything to her sister Cassandra. She was buried in Winchester Cathedral (Greenblatt 514-515).

2.2.1. Works

Jane Austen has many works of literature, which may be classified into three groups according to chronology. Austen wrote many stories at an early age, between 1787 and 1793. Due to her youth and lack of experience, they were regarded as infantile compositions. Nevertheless, she would revise many of them once she became a mature author. These writings were not published until 1922 and they were grouped in three volumes.

Secondly, she also managed to write short narrative fiction: *Lady Susan* (written between 1793 and 1794), *The Watsons* (1804, not finished), and *Sanditon* (1818, not finished because of Austen's death).

Finally, and most importantly, she wrote several novels: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), which narrates the life of two sisters and their ways to face both difficulties and happiness. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), which embraces the usual mistakes that people tend to make in relationships), *Mansfield Park* (1814), which has been regarded as her most complex novel, and *Emma* (1815) which relates the entrance to maturity of the main character. In addition, two of her novels were published posthumously: *Northanger Abbey* (1818), which tells the story of a young reader of gothic novels who does not distinguish fiction from reality; and *Persuasion* (1818), which is about second chances and society's expectations (Todd 12-22).

3. Works within the Context of Feminism

Feminism is very much present in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) but it is shown in different ways. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was the first to be written and it has been taken as the starting point of the feminist movement. Evoking the ideas defended by Wollstonecraft's work, Jane Austen's novel *Pride*

and Prejudice makes us reflect on the precarious situation lived by women at an early age in Austen's times. As this dissertation intends to demonstrate, both works hide a powerful meaning and hope for a change in women's rights and opportunities.

3.1. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman can be said to be one of the earliest feminist texts. In addition, it is treated as one of the most influential works of the 18th century. Its author, Mary Wollstonecraft, is considered one of the first feminist writers because of the influence and importance she achieved for women's rights (Todd and Butler). Although the term "feminism" was not used in the epoch in which she lived, we can classify her as a feminist writer and a pioneer of this movement.

As Bergès argues (9), the concept of "sensibility" was very much spread in the eighteenth century. Women were expected to have this feature, to be sophisticated and delicate, which at the same time was used to confirm their weakness. Ladies were encouraged to keep their feelings and emotions on the surface; that is to say, they were required to have the ability to be moved to tears by simple things such as contemplating a flower or reading a poem. In short, women were expected to be feminine and weak. In contrast, men always had to show themselves as being strong and hide their feelings. Contrary to such dualistic vision of gender, Wollstonecraft encouraged her readers to completely ignore the stereotypes commonly attributed to each gender. In her works, she ensures that they are absurd and they lack any relevance. What is more, she insists on the negative effect they can have on us.

This binary understanding of gender the concept can be closely connected to the type of education men and women received, which is precisely the main target of denunciation that Mary Wollstonecraft addresses in her work. As Wollstonecraft was not afraid to give her opinion about this unfair situation, she has always been considered to be an outspoken woman (Bergès 10). Although she was aware of her personal situation, being both a woman and a writer, she decided to make a clear statement about her opinion. In addition, she was deeply influenced by Catherine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* (1790). Wollstonecraft took this work as the base for her own. She makes an open statement about what is reality to her. According to Wollstonecraft, there is more truth than the one we know, that is, reality can be changed and we do not have to conform to what we have. Here she makes a direct allusion to

Plato's Cavern (Butler and Todd 4). Although it seems difficult or impossible to escape from a reality governed by strict norms, there is always a way out.

As Wollstonecraft was interested in women's education, she started writing the first *Vindication*. Her works were published in the form of pamphlets. This first pamphlet was a success, and because of this fact and the support she received from Joseph Johnson (1738-1809), she kept on writing the second vindication (Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication* 13). She succeeded in spreading this thought among the conservative population, to the point that they became convinced that women's education needed to be reformed.

It is in this context where we can also place Mary Astell (1666-1731), who can be considered a conservative feminist. On this same century, she published a book titled *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700), in which she states that although women should obey their husbands in all things, they have to be educated. Thus, Mary Astell can be taken as the one who first introduced the topic of women's education and, Wollstonecraft the one who resumed it and ended what Astell had already started (Bergès 12).

However, as Bergès (13) points out, this first success ended six years later when Wollstonecraft was no longer seen as a respectable woman. Reading her works (more specifically the second *Vindication*) stopped being adequate or proper. This led her to suffer a breakdown in the 19th century, when her contemporary society started to ignore her. As we can see in Bergès's work (13), all her previously mentioned sentimental adventures were discovered. After this fact, instead of being a revolutionary writer, Wollstonecraft became the example of what happens to a woman who gives up to the temptations of passion.

3.2. *Pride and Prejudice*

Jane Austen followed the path of the feminist ideas and the feminist writer who embodied Mary Wollstonecraft. These early ideas were extended through fiction as it is the case of her novel *Pride and Prejudice*. As previously said, according to eighteenth and nineteenth century English society, women were supposed to have tenderness, compassion, sympathy, intuition and a feeling heart, rather than being rational characters. However, *Pride and Prejudice* includes women characters who are rational beings, capable of having intellectual thoughts and independent action.

Pride and Prejudice is about the particular position of the Bennet family. They are a family of five daughters who desperately need to get married in order to survive. If they do not get married they will not have a place where to live as properties are going to be taken by a male cousin of the family. Thus, each one of them has to face different decisions in order to get a place in society. The story focuses on the relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, the ones who embody both the qualities of pride and the prejudice against each other. They have to face their differences to reach the final and happy ending.

In keeping with Wollstonecraft ideas, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet is portrayed as an active heroine. She breaks all the established standards and stereotypes that were considered to be correct and proper for a Lady. However, these characteristics are the ones that are emphasized in the novel and the ones that will give her the deserved reward, that is, the attention of Mr. Darcy.

As it has been previously stated, women were supposed to be modest, shy, retiring, domestic and private according to the standards of society. The act of publishing their writings would signify publicity and consequently, the decline of the woman's reputation (Copeland 13). This fact explains why women published their novels anonymously (Copeland 14). However, Jane Austen was very confident of the possibilities not only of the novel genre, but also of her own possibilities as an author of this genre. Consequently, she never apologized for her works although she was always restricted by the norms of decorum of the social spheres among others. As Virginia Woolf states:

If a woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting-room [...]. She was always interrupted [...]. Jane Austen wrote like that to the end of her days. "How she was able to effect all this," her nephew writes in his Memoir, "is surprising, for she had no separate study to repair to, and most of the work must have been done in the general sitting-room subject to all kinds of casual interruptions. She was careful that her occupation should not be suspected by servants or visitors or any persons beyond her own family party." Jane Austen hid her manuscripts or covered them with a piece of blotting-paper [...]. [She] was glad that a hinge creaked, so that she might hide her manuscript before any one came in. (56)

As expressed above, Virginia Woolf suggested (56-57) that Austen's writing place must also be considered a symbol of the confinement to which the writer was exposed to. This makes us realize that the conditions in which Jane Austen wrote were also significant and played a key role in the construction of her ideas.

Pride and Prejudice also explores women's happiness and pleasure. In the socio-historical context in which Austen wrote, women were controlled by men in many ways; they completely lacked independence and autonomy in their lives. In addition, when women married, their role at that moment was one of providing pleasure for the men. They lost all their family properties and became their husband's servants (LeGates 23-24). However, in *Pride and Prejudice* there is an open defense of pleasure for both men and women. We can state the fact that there are many different types of marriage. As examples we can highlight the following ones: on the one hand the one formed by Elizabeth and Darcy, and the couple made by Charlotte and Collins on the other hand. Elizabeth and Darcy have a marriage built on the basis of love and respect. They have had to walk a long way in order to achieve the union they have. Elizabeth makes it clear from the very beginning that she wants a husband who makes her happy, just as she wants to make her husband happy. When Elizabeth accepts Darcy's second proposal, she does so as a way out of her parents' house or as a way of having a privileged social position. However, Charlotte and Collins are not exactly the same. Charlotte is a good friend of the Bennet family, but she is a little bit older. Therefore, her decision to marry Mr. Collins may be taken as her only option to move away from her childhood house. When Collins arrives, she is very clear since the very beginning about her intentions. She wants to get married in order to escape the house of her parents.

"You must be surprised, very much surprised- so lately as Mr. Collins was wishing to marry you. But when you have had time to think it over, I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done, I am not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connection, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state" (Austen 71).

We can say that Charlotte's view about marriage opposes Elizabeth's, as she herself states: "She had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she had not supposed it to be possible that, when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage" (Austen 71).

On the other hand, the novel also suggests that women have to be clever enough to choose the correct husband in order to achieve such state of happiness. It is women's responsibility to be patient and fight for what they want, as Elizabeth does in the story, instead of conforming themselves with the first option. This can be considered as a lesson of self-love

and value by Austen for the female readers. Elizabeth embodies the idea that it is possible to be happy in your married life if you choose the correct husband. A love-based marriage cannot be a marriage imposed by social norms. However, this option was not available for all the women and Austen is aware of this fact. Charlotte and Elizabeth have a conversation that reinforces this statement. Charlotte gives clues of which are the main reasons why she marries Collins, she is a practical woman (Austen 71). Austen shows that choosing your husband was a privilege in the societies in which their characters (and Austen herself) lived. She makes a critique of her society by showing not only the example of a happy marriage, but also examples of less idyllic yet more realistic ones (Charlotte's marriage), as marrying for love is something that not everybody could freely enjoy..

Bearing in mind all of the ideas mentioned above, we can ensure that *Pride and Prejudice* constitutes another key work in the beginning of feminism (Kelly 33). Austen provides support to the early opinions defended by Wollstonecraft in the form of a narration that has constituted a turning point in the feminist debate of the coming years until reaching the present time. In addition, we can highlight the similarities between *Pride and Prejudice* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The following section will explore how the two works may be taken as examples of early feminism.

4. Comparison of Both Works and Their Feminist View

The texts we have in our hands are related in many ways. We can say that they mirror each other by using the same contents and issues. However, they were written in different times so the topics are developed in a different way. Feminism is hidden in every word in these texts, but additionally, thanks to these authors we can pull out first-hand information about their respective situations and their thoughts and feelings towards it. For the sake of clarification, we can make a list of the most relevant feminist points that appear in both *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *Pride and Prejudice* and provide some examples whereby the two works reinforce such statements.

4.1. Topics

Mary Wollstonecraft made a list of several topics which she denounced. Wollstonecraft opened the discussion and gave an open opinion about how she thought things could improve for women and, consequently, for the whole society. Jane Austen took several of those topics and used them to create a fictional story under which her indirect denunciation of women's

social situation lies. Consequently, both works have almost the same topics and aims, as if Wollstonecraft had served as a guide for Jane Austen.

Firstly, we can introduce the most relevant one: education. Wollstonecraft defended the idea of educating women equally. Although she defended equality in general terms, she especially highlighted the topic of education. She brought to the fore the educational inequality that women were suffering. As she argued, while men received a proper education, women were educated according to what men needed them to be, in such a way that women could never fully develop their mental and moral faculties. In other words, women were subjugated to men's needs and wishes. Wollstonecraft defended the idea that women were not weak, it was just that they were instructed according to an inadequate educational system. She tackles this issue especially in Chapter 12 ("On National Education"). In this chapter she proposes the foundation of a new education system, in conjunction with the regulation of mixed sex schools. If we apply this idea to *Pride and Prejudice*, the character that comes to our mind is Lady Catherine. Her main aim is to find a proper wife for Darcy. She criticizes Elizabeth several times about her education. According to her, she is not a proper lady as she did not receive a good education and she does not possess a fortune for the possible future husband. As she declares in chapter 31:

'Miss Bennet would not play at all amiss if she practiced more, and could have the advantage of a London master. She has a very good notion of fingering, though her taste is not equal to Anne's. Anne would have been a delightful performer, had her health allowed her to learn'. [...] "Lady Catherine continued her remarks on Elizabeth's performance, mixing with them many instructions on execution and taste. (Austen 98).

Another relevant topic is the difference between biological sex and gender. According to Wollstonecraft, gender is a cultural construction. The construction of women has been built-up by men. This is why Mary Wollstonecraft asks for the same advantages for both girls and boys, so that women would also be capable of being professional workers. Wollstonecraft only asks for the same possibilities for both men and women, trying to avoid the situation that many women faced at that time: being able only to remain at home. Jane Austen gives some examples of this fact in *Pride and Prejudice*. On the one hand, characters in her story are not able to introduce themselves as we currently know. Male characters are the ones who have to introduce themselves, and not women. Mrs. Bennet asks her husband to go introduce to Bingley: "But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr. Bingley when he comes into the neighborhood"

(Austen 2). She asks this to her husband as she cannot do it by herself. In addition, Darcy gives his opinion as a shy man about how he feels about it: “Perhaps (...) I should have judged better, had I sought an introduction; but I am ill-qualified to recommend myself to strangers” (Austen 97). There are many tasks that women are not supposed to do, as they are considered fragile, and they need a husband. Here irony plays a key role, as the ones that are allowed to introduce themselves are unable to do it. Jane wants to highlight this fact and make laugh of it as it is a contradiction that reinforces the idea of the absurdity of the social norms.

This leads to the topic of marriage. Mary Wollstonecraft ensured that relationships must be based on reason and understanding rather than on passion: “some women govern their husbands without degrading themselves, because intellect will always govern” (Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication* 6). This fact is also very relevant in *Pride and Prejudice*. Women are taught from an early age that they must acquire knowledge for their future husbands. As Bergès argues, being able to please is not useful for a long time, beauty will fade at any time and people get unamused by a person's physical attractions (147). This fact is such that even mothers are worried about the future of their daughters. A marriage based just on physical attraction is unbalanced, and as Wollstonecraft defends, understanding is needed in order to acquire an enduring connection. This issue positions women in a vulnerable position, reducing them into objects who need the support of a husband. In connection with this, we can exemplify it by Mrs. Bennet's obsession with having her daughters married: “If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield (...) and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for” (Austen 4).

In connection with marriage, we can introduce the topic of female autonomy. Wollstonecraft defended equality and education but always focused on women's independence. Her main aim was that women could have a plentiful life without the dependence on men. She was convinced that women were meant for big things and not only for being caring mothers and servants of their husband. As she says in her work: “The education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavor by satire or instruction to improve them” (Wollstonecraft *A Vindication* 32). This is also what Elizabeth wants to achieve for herself. She fights for her rights and wants to acquire independence from both her mother and the power of a possible future husband. As Wollstonecraft argues, autonomy and equality must come not only from society, but also in the family unit. Women will not be able to have autonomy as it is the

husband who holds all the properties. Once women marry, they lose all their properties to the husbands, so the only thing wives can offer is their affection, loving and caring attitude towards them. Women have to acquire this attitude towards men (their husbands) even though they are totally subjugated to them, and moreover in most cases the husband has been imposed on them (Bergès 150).

Furthermore, we need to comment on the different attitudes towards marriage by four characters in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and what marriage means for them. Firstly, attention should be drawn to Mrs. Bennet. As a mother of five daughters, she needs to find a husband for all of them or they will be poor. With the coming of a new male neighbor who has a fortune, she begs her husband to organize a meeting. She desperately tries to marry one of her daughters with the newcomer: "If I can but to see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield [...] and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for" (Austen 4). On the other hand, her daughter Elizabeth does not want to marry just to survive and depend on a man. She wants to achieve happiness and experience what a successful marriage means. That is why she refuses the first proposal made by Darcy. She would have achieved a fruitful marriage for her, but she refuses as she thinks they are not going to satisfy each other's desires:

You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who could make you so. Nay, were your friend Lady Catherine to know me, I am persuaded she would find me in every respect ill qualified for the situation. (Austen 61; emphasis in original).

This issue leads us to the third character, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. She is obsessed with good education and the relation it has with marriage. She wants to find the perfect lady for Darcy and she considers that Elizabeth is not the one. For Lady Catherine, a perfect lady must have an education focused on the enjoyment of the husband. She advocates for a proper education and highlights the fact that Elizabeth does not have it:

Miss Bennet would not play at all amiss if she practiced more, and could have the advantage of a London master. She has a very good notion of fingering, though her taste is not equal to Anne's. Anne would have been a delightful performer, had her

health allowed her to learn. [...] Lady Catherine continued her remarks on Elizabeth's performance, mixing with them many instructions on execution and taste. (Austen 98).

Finally, we can go back to the character of Charlotte. As previously mentioned, she needs to marry Mr. Collins as a way out of her family concerns and economic restrictions. Her view of marriage is just practical. Her marriage with Collins helps her to move out of her parents' house and stop being pejoratively seen as a spinster. She is older than the Bennet sisters so the age for her to marry has already passed (she is 27 in the story).

Jane Austen distances herself from both the characters and the fictional world in which they live. She mimics the world she creates bringing to the surface the peculiarities that distinguish the characters. Having said that, we can say that her narrative tone is full of irony (Sørnbø 156). Consequently, irony plays a key role in *Pride and Prejudice*. We can highlight several examples in order to support such statement. Her humorous tone serves her to distance herself from the world she mimics. This way, Austen uses irony to make fun of the peculiarities of the characters she creates. As the characters are a reflection of the society in which she lives, it is correct to say that irony is used to show the absurdity of social norms that rule such society.

The first sentence that opens the novel is the clearest one: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen 1). However, the new neighbor (Bingley) does not know this "universal" truth (Sørnbø 156). Another relevant example can be found in chapter three, when Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley are having a conversation and their attention moves to Elizabeth: "Which do you mean?" and turning round he looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said: "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*" (Austen 6, emphasis on original). Darcy shows that he has no interest at all in Elizabeth, he shows his dislike for her. Nevertheless, later in the novel, he falls in love with her. The character of Collins is also deeply satirized and ironized. Mr. Bennet will give account of this fact in chapter 14 when he says the following: "You judge very properly," (Austen 38) said Mr. Bennet, "and it is happy for you that you possess the talent of flattering with delicacy. May I ask whether these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse of the moment or are the result of previous study?" (Austen 38). The Bennet family is mocking him at the dinner table because of his obsession to place

Lady Catherine. Elizabeth is also satirized in a way as she ensures in chapter 19 the impossibility of her changing her opinion about marriage with Darcy:

Upon my word, sir," cried Elizabeth, "your hope is a rather extra- ordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal (Austen 61).

At the end of the novel, her attitude is completely different. She does exactly what she ensured she will never do. She confirms that it is impossible for her to change her mind. However, when she is asked a second time, she accepts and she ends up married with Darcy. Austen uses irony to criticise her in this way, presenting Elizabeth as a hypocritical character.

Lydia's marriage can also be considered an example of irony as she speaks of the union of marriage as something to be celebrated. She wants to get married in order to boast herself about having achieved a man and the union that all young ladies are desperately looking for:

Oh! mamma, do the people hereabouts know I am married to-day? I was afraid they might not; and we overtook William Goulding in his curricule, so I was determined he should know it, and so I let down the side-glass next to him, and took off my glove, and let my hand just rest upon the window frame, so that he might see the ring, and then I bowed and smiled like anything (Austen 173).

Lydia's happiness and urgency to get married is reversed at the end of the novel. Her cheerful attitude subverts into sadness. The main purpose of marrying was to get a good economic situation, but she acquires completely the opposite. She is trapped in an unhappy union that does not provide any kind of security or material profit to her.

As well as the beginning of the book, the ending also contributes to supporting the narrative ironic tone that Jane Austen employs in her novel. The happy ending offered by the fact that Elizabeth and Darcy ends up getting married in spite of the difficulties that the couple has overcome appears to be quite ironic. The couple did not like each other at the beginning of the story. Furthermore, as the title explicitly suggests both of them have had pride and prejudice against each other, which almost ruins their relationship. Class differences have been also left

aside and consequently the fact that Lydia nearly ruins Elizabeth's reputation is also ignored. Moreover, Elizabeth's refusal of the first proposal is over-passed by the coming of a second and final one. Having said that, the ending can be treated as ironic. Elizabeth is rejecting all her previous statements.

To sum up, looking at the comparison of both texts Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, we can clearly see that they develop the same topics but with a different point of view. Jane Austen's work serves as an exemplification of the denunciation that Mary Wollstonecraft makes against patriarchal education and the power that men have over women. Elizabeth here embodies Jane Austen's feminist ideas, as a way of explaining to the reader women's precarious position and the dependence on men, and their necessity of getting married as a way of survival. Irony is used in order to criticize the society in which she lives.

5. Conclusion and Relevance

Judging from the ideas presented in this dissertation, we can ensure that there is a direct connection between Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen, in addition to their respective works: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *Pride and Prejudice*. They are deeply linked by the topics they develop and the relevance they have acquired with the passing of time.

Both authors had to face a difficult situation and oppose the society in which they lived to be able to give their opinion freely, directly (Wollstonecraft) or indirectly (Austen) according to their personal situation. Their objective was to get more rights for women so they could be more independent. They did not intend to place women in a superior position over men, but to get the same rights and advantages as men had at that time. Due to this fact, both Wollstonecraft and Austen may be categorized as radical women (Kelly 33), each one in her respective period of time. Their main goal was to reverse women's situation in order to make the world a fairer place for both genders. Mary Wollstonecraft lists a series of features that she would change in her society: education, gender stereotypes, etc. On the other hand, Jane Austen deals with those same topics in a more indirect way: through a fictional story in which the main character, Elizabeth, has to face and overcome all these injustices imposed over women (losing of properties, imposition of marriage, etc.) until she acquires the social position she deserves.

Taking into account the difficult tasks of writing at the age of Wollstonecraft and Austen, we can categorize them as brave feminist authors who were independent and courageous (as well as Elizabeth) by not taking into account the opinion of society about them. They managed to introduce this 'radical' reasoning on gender equality in the minds of everybody, so this produced a change in the way of seeing acceptable practices. Thanks to them more women acquired this encouragement to open their minds and start fighting for their own rights, just as the Brönte sisters who hide under male names in order to fight against patriarchy from the inside. Wollstonecraft and Austen defended gender equality, which contributed to increasing women's desires to achieve equal rights. Many women did not conform with what they had anymore, and they wanted to turn fiction into their reality.

As *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* influenced *Pride and Prejudice*, we can say that both texts made a lasting impact on many works and on literature itself. Many writers (and most importantly, many feminist writers), such as the previously mentioned Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's own*) or Sandrine Bergès (*The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's*), have used these works either as an inspiration or directly commenting on them. This fact serves as an exemplification of how relevant they were in their time and the significance they acquired and the importance they have gained many centuries later.

In my opinion, both Wollstonecraft and Austen developed their opinions about a new concept (feminism) in a time when it was difficult to contradict the mainstream. It is true that the feminism they presented is not as developed as the one we have in our present time, but we need to see the texts in the period when they were written and the conditions to which the authors were subjected. They can be considered the first women to explore feminist issues, so it is needed to award the courage and intelligence they both had in order to develop works about new concepts that are relevant in our present day.

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