

# **A Feminist Perspective on Jane Austen Through the Ideas of Virginia Woolf**

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*To my parents*

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# I. Introduction

This work analyses the work of Jane Austen from the perspective of Virginia Woolf, in particular Virginia Woolf's essays on women writers. More specifically, I focus on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and Virginia Woolf's essays *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Professions for Women* (1931).

Jane Austen is considered one of the greatest writers of all the time, one of the pioneers in the feminist movement in the English literature and one of the major English novelist. Jane Austen's novels are among the most famous ones of the English literature. The author of *Pride and Prejudice* is praised by Virginia Woolf as “*the most perfect artist among women*” (Woolf, 1984, p.149). Many critics have praised her style as extraordinary. Austen's writing is rich, she was a great writer and also an extraordinary observer. Austen works effectively describes women of the upper-middle class between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries in England. Through her novels she questions the issues affecting women in England during this period. She is particularly focused in analysing the role of women in society.

Virginia Woolf's works, and in particular her essay *A Room of One's Own*, are turning points in the feminist literature. Woolf's essays focus on women's position in society and their experiences. Woolf examines women's issues such as: the rights of women, the problems of the women writers, financial independence, women seeking intellectual freedom and identity, education and women's social and cultural roles. In *A room of One's Own*, she remarks that women need to have the same rights as men. She explores women's experiences in the patriarchal society in England. Woolf points out that in the English patriarchal society during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries males were the only ones allowed to have money, land and power. The objective of Virginia

Woolf's studies is to point out the lack on women's rights and financial independence under the patriarchal society.

In order to understand Jane Austen's works and Jane Austen from the point of view of Virginia Woolf, it is important to understand the conditions of women in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. In fact, in her novels Jane Austen focuses in a particular class: the English countryside upper-middle class. I devote the second chapter of my thesis to analyse some of the main issues affecting the life of women in this period: patriarchal society, marriage and class. These are indeed themes that are recurrent in Jane Austen's novels. In fact, Jane Austen portrays women in a twist of emotions in the search of love, marriage, happiness, identity and social status. I believe Jane Austen studies and writes about these issues to criticise women disadvantaged position in society during this era.

Patriarchal society is a social structure in which the system is organised by men. This society is dominated by men's power. The patriarchs dominate the moral and social roles. The patriarchal family structure rests on men possession of most or all family properties. We can describe patriarchy as a structure in which men have power over women, that is to say, a society where women are oppressed by men socially, legally, politically and economically. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen's female characters belong to the upper-middle class and confront the issues of gender identity in the patriarchal society. Austen depicts the issues of women in this world: women could not inherit land, widows and daughters had to be cared for by sons, money inherited from the parents becomes part of her husband's property.

Marriage is another important issue which often appears in Austen's novels. The patriarchal conception of marriage in England during the late eighteenth century was an economic agreement. As I said, during this period in England, women couldn't inherit land, therefore women were socially and economically dependent on men. Women only had one option to conserve their inheritance and to assure their future: marriage. These issues made marriage based on a material factor only: money. The money in Austen's

novels moves and conditions her stories. With this, Austen remarks the irony of the standard of marriage, that is to say, marriage as an economic structure and as the one of the few choices for women in this class. In particular in *Pride and Prejudice* this issue drives the development of the plot. Austen points out an ironical view on marriage. Under this issue, Austen constructs a social criticism. She remarks women's disadvantages in inheriting money and land, she questions the behaviour toward women in the patriarchal society. Austen portrays an ironic depiction of marriage, good conduct and good manners.

Finally in the second chapter, I focus in the social class. By social class I refer to the position an individual has in relation to others in society. During the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries England's society was organised under a hierarchical classification. The different groups in society have different status, different jobs and different manners. In the nineteenth-century the English upper-middle class and the aristocrats had more power, better education, economic status and prestige than others. The higher the rank of the family was, the more prestige and the more influence. Austen's novels focalise in particular in the country upper-middle class. Although they weren't the most powerful and rich in society, this class enjoys high authority and social status. As we can see in Austen's novels this stratum consist of: businessman, landowners, clergymen. Social status favours the daughters of the upper-middle class patriarchs, who could achieve a higher rank through marriage.

Patriarchal society, marriage, and social status are all strongly interrelated. Austen's society behaves according the social conventions and manners imposed for this particular class. Austen portrays a social class that is secure in its traditional order of values that defines itself in terms of land, class and money. Through this issues, Austen questions the conditions and circumstances of gender and class in England. Austen's novels, with a simple but exceptional technique, reflect the distinction between genders and illustrate the place of women of the upper-middle class in the period between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries.

In order to understand Jane Austen's ideas, it is important to understand Jane Austen's writing style. In the third chapter of my thesis I explain what are the main techniques that Jane Austen uses in her works. As Virginia Woolf remarks "*Jane Austen pervades every word that she wrote*" (Woolf, 1993, p.351). Jane Austen writes in a way every word and every sentence has its own meaning. Austen wrote with gentle irony and perspicacity. The main characteristics of Jane Austen's style are typically referred to as irony, observation and characterisation.

Irony is one of Jane Austen's most recurrent techniques. As I said, every word in her novels has its own meaning and implications. Irony is used to give an opposite meaning instead of the literary or actual meaning. In Jane Austen's style, irony has a significant role. Irony is the technique that she uses to criticise women's position in the patriarchal society. Austen's style brings out humorous and ironical effects avoiding exaggeration and excess.

Observation is another of Austen's techniques. Jane Austen is a gifted observer, she effectively and sharply describes women of her society. Through her observations of society as a microcosm, Austen describes something much larger, the whole structure of society. As Virginia Woolf points out "*All the literary training that a woman had in the early nineteenth century was training in the observation of character, in the analysis of emotion*" (Woolf, 1993, p.348). Jane Austen's sensibility had been educated by the "*influences of the common sitting room*" (Woolf, 1993, p.349). She observed the world where she was living in, the social relations where used to analyse the moral issues. Jane Austen observes and studies the behaviours and motivations of the human character in her society. In her novels Austen illustrates what is familiar to her. She not only had the gift to observe her environment but also to observe the different emotions of characters.

Finally, characterisation is the last important technique I identify in Austen's writing. Characterisation defines the personality, portrays a temperament and outlines the qualities and attributes of a character. Austen's characters are complex. She gives

different dimensions to a character, she illustrates her characters personalities but also their way of thinking. Austen's characters portray not only physical attributes, but a way of being. She shows the reader their motivations, emotions, reasons, impressions, reflexions, that is, she portrays their full psychological dimension. Moreover, her characterisation technique complements her purpose of irony. Within her characters we often find a contrast: reason versus passion, truth versus fiction, reality versus perception, tradition versus modern, knowledge versus experience or future versus past. In her novels we also find grotesque characters, comically and twisted personalities such as: Mr. Collins, Mrs. Bennet or Lady Catherine. As Virginia Woolf praises: "*The wit of Jane Austen has for partner the perfection of her taste. Her fool is a fool, her snob is a snob, because she departs from the model of sanity and sense which she has in mind, and conveys to us unmistakably even while she makes us laugh*" (Woolf, 1984, p. 80). Finally, I found Austen's female characters portrayal particularly significant. Austen gives priority in the construction of her female characters. The character Elizabeth of *Pride and Prejudice*, besides her physiological dimension, engenders a female voice. Elizabeth is portrayed by Austen as a women searching for her identity. Overall, I believe that Austen gives a great importance to the construction of her characters and their identities.

Austen novels criticise the issues of women in England. Trough her style, Austen gives voice to her female characters. She succeeds in describing the place of women in this particular period. She uses her techniques to confront a criticism of the patriarchal society. Her style allows her to demonstrate the power of the female writer.

In chapter four, I analyse the main themes that Virginia Woolf elaborates in her essays, and I criticise Jane Austen's work through the eyes of Virginia Woolf. In her essay *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf explores women both as writers and as fictional characters. In particular Woolf focuses her analysis in the position and experience of some female authors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Jane Austen. Woolf focuses her attention on the difficulties female writers confront in a society dominated by patriarchy. Most of her arguments in this essay are concerned with the

importance of women's financial independence. Woolf's critiques the lack of legal and economic power of women in society. She also focuses her critique in women in education and society. Virginia Woolf defends the idea that, as the title of her essay, women should be able to be financially independent and have a proper space of their own to write fiction. Virginia Woolf believes that the creative power of women differs from men because of historical circumstances. According to Woolf, a writer is product of his or her circumstance and the material condition are particularly important. For this reason, education and financial independence have a significant role. Woolf believes that female authors have been limited because their financial and social issues. Woolf remarks that for centuries women haven't had financial freedom or a room of their own. Woolf hypothesises about what would have happened if these women writers hadn't had these limitations throughout history.

Virginia Woolf holds that women writers find themselves in a point of tension. Women's writing challenge the conventional views of what was appropriate for women. Woolf remarks the need for women to take possession of their rights. Through her fictional narrator in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf points out the issues and experiences of women under the patriarchal society in England. Mary, the fictional character of her essay, is put under situations where men look down on women and limit her actions.

In the essay *Professions for Women*, Virginia Woolf illustrates the stereotypical image of women within the Victorian patriarchal society: the Angel of the house. The name is borrowed from Coventry Patmore's poem celebrating domesticity and the ideal Victorian wife. This stereotypical idea grew and transformed into the ideal of womanhood in the nineteenth century. "Angel of the house" is, as Virginia Woolf describes: "*charming, utterly unselfish, excellent in the difficult art of family life, she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, she preferred to sympathise with the mind and wishes of others*" (Woolf, 1993, p.1191). The author uses the contradicting implications of being an angel of a house to convince us of how senseless this concept is. Woolf points out the place of women under a suppressive institution. With her essay she encourages women to kill this stereotypical image: "*part*

*of the occupation of a women writer; to kill the angel in the house*” (Woolf, 1993, p. 1195).

Woolf analyses gender inequality in the patriarchal society during this period in England. Woolf argues for women’s rights and for social, economic and political equality with men. She persuades women in speaking and writing about women’s independence and freedom. Virginia Woolf praises Austen’s genius, integrity and writing skills. Woolf praises Austen’s writing as wise and calm: *“I could not find any signs that her circumstances had harmed her work in the slightest. That perhaps was the chief miracle about it. Here was a woman about the year 1800 writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching. That was how Shakespeare wrote”* (Woolf, 1993, p.351). Austen is placed by Woolf at the same level of Shakespeare. Woolf hypothesises that if Austen had live more and had more experiences Jane Austen work would have been *“deeper and more suggestive”* (Woolf, 1984, p.82).

My main thesis is that we can identify Austen as a feminist from the perspective of Virginia Woolf and the main issues she examines in her essays. Woolf identifies Austen as one of those women who have helped raising women issues: *“Jane Austen ... and many more unknown and forgotten women, have been before me, making the path smooth, and regulating my steps”* (Woolf, 1993, p.1187). In one of the chapters of *A Room of One’s Own*, Austen is praised by Virginia Woolf because Austen according to Woolf remained true to her own voice, in her own words: *“What genius, what integrity it must have required in face of all that criticism, in the midst of that purely patriarchal society, to hold fast to the thing as [she] saw it, without shrinking”* (Woolf, 1993, p. 370).Woolf praised Jane Austen because she did not pay attention to the man’s judgment, the establishment and the standard protocol. Woolf points out that Austen instead had a unique style. Austen *“looked at it [the man’s sentence] and laughed at it and devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use, and never departed from it”* (Woolf, 1993, p.375). Jane Austen refuses to resign to her style, to her techniques, to her female voice. Woolf admires the courage of Austen as a women and

as a writer: *“I wondered, would Pride and Prejudice have been a better novel if Jane Austen had not thought it necessary to hide her manuscript? I read a page or two to see; but I could not find any signs that her circumstances had harmed her work in the slightest. That perhaps was the chief miracle about it” “Here was a woman about the 1800 writing without hate, without fear, without protest, without preaching. That was how Shakespeare wrote”* (Woolf, 1993, p.351). Finally, Woolf points out that: *“The whole structure, therefore, of the early nineteenth century novel ... one has only to skim those novels and listen to the tone of voice in which they are written to divine that the writer was meeting with criticism”* (Woolf, 1993, p.368). Because of this I argue that Jane Austen is an important author of the feminist literary tradition with her reaction to the stereotypical image of women in England during late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

I think that Jane Austen is one of the greatest writers who contributed to the emancipation of women. Austen opens the way for many other women writers, such as Virginia Woolf. Woolf remarks that Jane Austen style was *“perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use ...never departed from it”* (Woolf, 1993, p.376), Austen challenges the conventions of her time. Woolf states: *“since freedom and fullness of expression are of the essence of the art, such lack of tradition, such a scarcity and inadequacy of tools, must have told enormously upon the writing of women”* (Woolf, 1993, p.376). Jane Austen portrays her fiction closer to life itself, and thereby she illustrates the issues of women to achieve a female voice, financial liberation and full equality in society in England. She critiques the main issues affecting the life of women in England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Jane Austen analyses such themes as marriage, male dominance in education as well as social and economical disadvantages of women. Her style emphasises these issues provoked by the patriarchal society in England.

Overall, although many critics, have different critical approaches to read Jean Austen. I found significant connections between Virginia Woolf’s ideas attribute to Jane Austen. Woolf’s critiques the lack of legal and economic power of women in society. Austen’s

novels critique the issues of the female identity and the conventional role of women in England. I believe that Austen is a precursor of feminist literature. The reader can perceive that the author is conscious of the issues affecting women in patriarchal society. Without bitterness and anger toward men, Austen raises her voice to claim equality for women, to achieve financial independence and to be able to bring out a female voice. These principles are the essence of the feminist tradition within which Jane Austen writes.

In my opinion Jane Austen is a significant precursor of the feminist literature. She does not only open the way for female writers but her courage made her an example for women and women writers. Jane Austen I believe is one of the greatest writers to contribute in making the path for female independence and equality with men. I see her as a model for women and women writers to push women into raising their voices and contributing to the emancipation of women. I think that the issue of the female voice is well represented in her novels. I believe, that Austen constructs a female voice as a way to identify women's place in society. In the end, the female voice is the expression of women's identity. Jane Austen's novels illustrate these conventional roles of men and women in society. Austen succeeds in depicting the conditions of women during this particular period in England. Jane Austen critiques marriage, women dependent on men, economic disadvantages of women and inequality characters in society. Her style emphasises these issues provoked by the patriarchal society in England. Irony, observation and characterisation merge in a unit to question the stereotypical images of women and male definitions of women in England during her time. As Virginia Woolf remarks, Austen opens the way for many other women writers, such as Woolf. Austen not only challenges the literature that has been preserved by men for centuries but she challenges society's conventions itself.

## **II. Women in the Late 18th and the Early 19th Centuries**

In order to understand the significance of Jane Austen's work from a feminist perspective, it is important to understand the condition of the women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To this extent, in this chapter I am going to present the society depicted in Jane Austen's novels. My objective is to explain how Austen introduces women in relation to society during this period. In particular, I am going to present the main social and historical references of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, focusing in the high-middle class women's role. Specifically, I will address the issues of patriarchal society, the marriage and the class in relation to the conditions of women. These are indeed themes that are recurrent in Jane Austen's novels.

### **I. Patriarchal Society**

Equality and right for women had been the subject of discussion among women for several decades. Women have been excluded from power for a long time. Women's public voices had been suppressed within the patriarchal world. My purpose is to analyse how this rural patriarchal society was structured. Let me start by pointing out that the organisation of this society is based on sexual differences. Every aspect of this society is filtered by gender. Masculinity and femininity are modelled as a system, unit of ideas. In this structure women had a well established role. Women weren't supposed to do something out of that role. Women are defined simply as women while men are defined by more characteristics. The patriarchal society is a social structure organised and governed by men. Patriarchalism can be described as an institution in which men hold all positions of power and authority over women. Patriarchy is a society where women are oppressed by men in all aspects of society: legally, politically and

economically. It is a structure in which women are excluded. The patriarchal family structure rests on men possession of most or all properties. Inheritance and property are a key feature in this society, the major sources of capital.

*Pride and Prejudice*, for example, illustrates society as a patriarchal society with a land based economy. In this novel Jane Austen depicts an upper-middle class country society where the landowners have a significant function. In general, Jane Austen's own society is mirrored with her novels settings, as a matter of fact the issue of property and the male-dominate society are present in Austen's life. During this period in England, women couldn't inherit land. In fact, this is the main issue in *Pride and Prejudice*, this is the reason that desperately drives Mrs. Bennet to go seeking for a husband to her daughters, for the reason that none of her daughters could inherit. Within this patriarchal society only men could inherit land. In particular, the oldest son of a gentleman could inherit the land. The family lands or properties could not be broken up because no matter how many children a gentleman had, all the land, were inherited by the oldest son. Younger sons had to make their own living in a profession such as clergyman, as a military officer or other professions acceptable for gentleman's sons. If the family had no sons, the estate heritage was for the next closest male in the family. This man was in his right to turn both the widow and the daughters out of the house that had been their home for years. Daughters or widows did not inherit land from their fathers or husbands. Although daughters in this world could have a "fortune," money inherited from parents, this fortune will only go with a woman on her marriage, commonly in her early twenties, and become part of her husband's property.

## **II. Marriage**

Marriage is the institution, recognised by law, under which a man and a women live together as husband and wife. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, men and women's roles became more sharply defined than at any time in history. Women were expected to attend the domestic duties and men were placed at work. Father and brothers were uncharged of the family business while women's role was identify with the household. Men and women were identified in different spheres,

the outside and active one and the inside and passive one. These were identified as the natural characteristics of males and females. Women were educated to be “The Angel of the house,” women were educated to be obedient and beautiful wives. Women in this world were expected to get married and have children as a main objective in life. In the upper-middle class men had to show that they earned enough money to be able to marry a wife. Women have no choice but to get married. Marriage in this world works as a financial transaction. Women in these world were not allowed to raise their voices. They would marry for the convenience of the family.

Women could not legally own a property and only men, fathers, sons or brothers were able to provide women. As a consequence, women were forced to get married. It is obvious that as a part from of the criticism to her society, Austen remarks the legal problems of women such as inheritance, money and land. These laws did not give importance to women, instead this laws considered women as a property. Austen portrays the disadvantages of women within the patriarchal society in her novels, especially as the lack of economical options for single women than marriage.

The issue of marriage is well depicted in *Pride and Prejudice*. The Bennet family had no son to legally inherit land after Mr. Bennet death. Instead, Mrs. Bennet has only five unmarried girl. This pushes Mrs. Bennet obsession to find a wealthy and prestigious husband for each of her daughters. This situation then becomes more desperate. Austen remarks the women’s social and economic dependence on men in this patriarchal society. Trough the Bennet women, Austen portrays the issues of property and women and the disparity in law for women. As a result, women were forced to get married to conserve the inheritance and assure their future. Womanhood was questionable, including women’s rights over her body or political issues. According to Davidoff, in this period “*it was marriage which structured the meaning of property for men as well as women and is was marriage which lay at the heart of notions of masculinity and femininity. English legal definition of marriage were harsher to wives than elsewhere ... on marriage the husband came to bear his wife’s property*” (Davidoff, 1987, p.28).

### III. Class

Class refers to the social hierarchical level of an individual in relation to others. Class is organised according to difference factors, in which wealth has a significant role. Although the highest power, wealth, status and social authority is held by the Aristocrats, the English upper-middle class distinguishes people by wealth and prestige status in society. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* depicted society focused in particular, in the country English upper-middle class England.

Upper-middle class families were wealthier than lower classes. This social stratum supported the hierarchical organisation of the patriarchal society, as well as the traditional values of patriarchal society. The middle class in England is devoted to the traditional conventions of society. The father is the patriarch of the family. Men in the middle class families are associated with business and work. Women, on the other hand, are associated with domesticity, family and home. The wife and daughters were associated to the inside work of the house. Women in this class do not help economically to the family finances. Mothers instead stay home to nurse the children. According to the conventions of this class, daughters in the family are educated in home, where they are taught piano, drawing and languages. The young proper lady is expected to be married by twenty and have children as soon as she is married. In relation to this, the traditional convention of marriage is seen as the single option for women in this class. In fact, Virginia Woolf criticises this concept in her essay *Professions for Women* as, the "Angel of the house". This stereotypical image of "the perfect wife" does not only have to sacrifice herself for other but elevate her husband's morality. Also, as Woolf remarks in her essay *A Room of One's Own*: "women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice in natural size" (Woolf, 1993, p.263). The upper-middle class depicted in Austen's novel is devoted to the domestic ideology of women. In this class, unmarried ladies are marked as unconventional to society. The women in this class have to sacrifice themselves for the wealth of their families and to secure their futures.

### **III. Jane Austen and Her Style**

Jane Austen lived in between the Georgian and the Victorian era. Most of what we know of her, as Virginia Woolf states, is through her novels and through the letters she wrote to her sister Cassandra, whom which she had a very close relationship. *“To her elder sister alone did she write freely... our knowledge of Jane Austen is derived from a few letters and her books”* (Woolf, 1984, p.76).

In order to understand Jane Austen’s ideas, it is important to understand Jane Austen’s life and writing style. In this chapter of my thesis I briefly summarise Austen’s life and explain what are the main techniques that Jane Austen uses in her works.

#### **I. A Short Biography**

In 1775, Jane Austen was born in Hampshire as the seventh child of a country clergyman and his wife, a middle-class family of the Southwest England. She was raised and educated at home, according to the social conventions and principles of the middle-class ladies during this period in England.

Jane Austen’s father was an intellectual man. Thanks to his particular interest in writing and reading, his family grew up in an intellectual atmosphere. Jane took advantage and raised interest in her father’s library. Although the Austen girls were educated at home, through their father and brother, whom were educated abroad, they gain access to the world.

In 1806, after Mr. Austen’s death, Jane moved to Southampton with her mother, her sister and a close friend of them. Some years after, all women moved again to Chawton, where Jane Austen wrote most of her novels. After her father’s death, her brothers took

care of the Austen women providing the property in Chawton and comforts. Jane never married although this was unusual considering the social conventions for women during this period.

The Austen family had a good position in the English society. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England, the social position was of great significance to the members of the family, especially for women in the interest of marriage. Her social status could give her a good chance for marriage. Gentlewomen in Jane Austen world depend on their family or extended family to live with comfort. As Harding remarks, "*Economically the daughter of a gentleman was entirely dependent on her family, unless she was so poor that she was reduced to supporting herself*" (Harding, 1998, p. 27).

Austen spent her time observing and writing. Through her life experiences Austen's novels question the conditions and circumstances of gender and class during the early nineteenth century England. Austen succeeded in describing the place of women of the middle classes. Her work reflects the distinction between genders in England. With a simple, but exceptional technique, her novels identify and describe the social role of women in this period. The author of *Pride and Prejudice* and plenty other significant works, describes her society through her characters and stories. Her novels portray the critical point of view that Austen has on her society. As Virginia Woolf argues, Austen themes are more profound than what the superficial reader might think.

Although Jane Austen lived long before the discovery of feminist approach in literary criticism, it is clear that she, through her novels and with gently irony and perspicacity, critiques the complexities of gender and society of her period. Also, she remarks the issues of inequality in different fields of society during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Austen's novels examine the involving situation of gender and class during the early nineteenth century England. In her novel *Pride and Prejudice* Austen reflects her thoughts about the place and outlook of women that are unlike the

daily conventions of her era. Besides, Austen emphasises that there should be balance between genders in society. She encourages women to gain a female voice in society.

Overall, I believe Austen portrays her fiction close to life itself. Austen's novels illustrate what was familiar to her. She portrays the environment she observes, behaviours and emotions of her society. She focuses in the everyday of her society. Through her own experiences she depicted the issues affecting women under the patriarchal society in England. In particular, Jane Austen experienced herself some of the gender inequalities in society. Austen challenges not only the writing as male activity but also society's conventions.

## II. Jane Austen's Style

Austen succeeds in depicting the conditions of women during this particular period in England. Jane Austen critiques marriage, women dependent on men, economic disadvantages of women and inequality characters in society. Her style emphasises these issues provoked by the patriarchal society in England. Irony, observation and characterisation merge in a unit to question the stereotypical images of women and male definitions of women in England during her time.

In this part of my work I focus in describing Austen's techniques. Woolf discusses Austen's style and she suggest that there is a "*much deeper emotion than appears upon the surface*" (Woolf, 1984, p.78). Austen for Woolf wrote as woman writer, not as male writer. Virginia Woolf admired her because she was capable of writing her own sentences. Jane Austen's style and technique are innovative. Austen's techniques, in particularly her irony, are the main tools through she delivers her messages.

Austen gives importance to construct her novels with the proper techniques to criticise the issues of women in England. Austen through her gifted observation technique sharply describes the place of women in the upper-middle class country England. Her techniques, irony and characterisation, permit Austen to portray the ridiculousness of

some clichés characters. Austen uses her techniques to criticise the patriarchal society. The authoress demonstrates and criticises through her characters the limit and passive image of women. Also she compares it with the active and power image of men. Her style allows her to demonstrate the power of the female writer. Through her style, Austen gives voice to her female characters. She succeeds in describing the place of women in this particular period. She succeeds in pointing out the main issues that affect women with gently irony and perspicacity: having sharp ability to understand something.

## II.1 Irony

Irony is one of Jane Austen's most recurrent techniques. Irony is used to give an opposite meaning of their literary or actual meaning. Irony is, according to the *Oxford Dictionary of literary Terms*: "A subtly humorous perception of inconsistency, in which an apparently straightforward statement or event is undermined by its context so as to give it a very different significance" (Baldick, 2008, p.174).

Irony in her novels is often related to the issues of the upper-middle class women in society. She also uses irony in the description of the behaviours and manners of society and of her characters. Irony is the technique that she uses to criticise women's position in the patriarchal society. Austen's style has no satirical purpose. Austen's style brings out humorous and ironical effects avoiding exaggeration and excess. Irony and parody are used in her novels as a tool to point out women issues in society.

Jane Austen's narrator is the key of irony in *Pride and Prejudice*. Through the focalisation of her narrator we can read Jane Austen's ideas and we can see that she is saying many truths about different emotions of her characters. In fact, Woolf gets particularly interested in this aspect of her technique. The narrator in *Pride and Prejudice* is a third person narrator. Austen's narrator not only gives an account of the events and experiences of the story but also transmits what the characters are thinking. According to Professor Nardin, in Austen's novel the narrator has a specific function: "one of the main functions of the narrator ... is to present one side, rather than the whole, of the ironic picture when the more complex ironies of viewpoint are at issue... is

to direct our attention to relevant bits of evidence” (Nardin, 1973, p.9). Irony is the main tool used by Austen to criticise society: “*simple, resolvable, rhetorical ironies blend by degrees into delayed rhetorical ironies, which merge into clearly defined, but basically irresolvable ironies of viewpoint, and these ... merge into ironies of viewpoint so subtle and complex that Jane Austen is content merely to hint at them and attempts neither to resolve them, nor to define them precisely*” (Nardin, 1973, p.9). Nardin points out that the different levels of ironies are what characterises Austen’s work. I believe that Austen employs irony to point out the main issues of women in society and as a tool to reveal the voice of women.

In particular, in *Pride and Prejudice* irony has a significant role. I identify this style since the beginning of the novel. The first sentence of her novel is full of irony: “*It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife*” (Austen, 1813, p.5). The first paragraph of the novel already reveals many clues of the society and its moral rules. Moreover, Austen sets marriage motif of the novel. It turns out that rather than the man being in want of a wife, the woman is in want of a husband who is “*in possession of good fortune*”. This is an imperative sentence, Austen stresses the purpose of her words with a “*must,*” something expressing necessity. This is in fact, one of the most ironic sentence of the novel. The intention of the statement is telling the opposite of what it means. She is talking ironically about that because she found that there is something deeply wrong about this. Morris remarks that the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* is ironic because through the tone of the narrator Austen parodies the social conventions of the era (Morris, 1995). I agree with Morris, the narrator voice is a part of the artistic construction of Austen's technique. Austen portrays an ironic language through different ways: construction of dialogues, narrator’s voice, description of characters or focusing in ideas. In Jane Austen’s choice of words and sentences we can see ironic and humorous effects.

## **II.II Observation**

Observation is another of Austen’s techniques. As Virginia Woolf points out “*All the literary training that a woman had in the early nineteenth century was training in*

*the observation of character, in the analysis of emotion*” (Woolf, 1993, p.348). The author observes the society she has before her, and writes everything she observes. Jane Austen’s sensibility had been educated by the *“influences of the common sitting room. People’s feelings were impressed on her; personal relations were always before her eye”* (Woolf, 1993, p.349). She observed the world where she was living in, the social relations were used to analyse the moral issues. Jane Austen observes and studies the behaviours and motivations of the human characters in her society. This is one of the main reasons Jane Austen’s novels are also known as: novels of manners. Through her observations of society as a microcosm, Austen describes something much larger, the whole structure of society. In her novels Austen illustrates what is familiar to her. She not only had a gift to observe her environment but also to observe the emotions. In fact, in the letters Austen sent to her sister, whom she was very close, she underlines the social behaviours in her everyday, she talks about people around her, dances, finances, and marriage.

Within her writing the readers can get a picture of her own society. Since she has a gift in observing she starts depicting everything that surrounds her in her novels, from gender roles to social behaviours and relationships between classes. Manners, social behaviours, every conventional norm that surrounded her. Behaviours were depicted according to conventions of the time.

### **II.III Characterisation**

Characterisation is the last important technique I identify in Austen’s writing. Characterisation defines the personality, portrays a temperament and outlines the qualities and attributes of a character. Austen’s characters are complex, she gives different dimensions to a character, she illustrates her characters’ personalities but also their way of thinking. Austen’s characters portray not only physical attributes, but a way of being. She shows the reader their motivations, emotions, reasons, impressions, reflexions, that is, she portrays their full psychological dimension. According to Rosenberg *“Woolf sees that Austen is always concerned with character and that her narrative tries to convey the internal, the psychological dimension of*

*character*” (Rosenberg, 2000, p.14). Moreover, her characterisation technique complements her irony. In her novels I also find grotesque characters, comically and twisted personalities such as: Mr. Collins, Mrs. Bennet: *“One after other she creates her fools, her pigs, her Mr. Collinses, her Mrs. Bennets. She encircles them with the lash of a whip-like phrase which, as it runs round them, cuts out their silhouettes for ever”* (Woolf, 1984, p.79).

I find Austen’s female characters portrayal particularly significant. I focus on Elizabeth Bennet character. Austen gives priority in the construction of her female characters. Elizabeth character, besides her physiological dimension, engenders a female voice. Elizabeth is portrayed by Austen as a women searching for her identity. Austen depicts a different personality comparing with her sister Jane. Elizabeth’s personality is less traditional: she is determined, brave, ironic, curious and sharp. Her father pushes her intellect while on the contrary her mother constantly constrains her. *“Elizabeth Bennet is her father’s favourite daughter because she has inherited his wit. She is talkative, satirical, quick at interpreting appearances and articulating her judgements, and so she too is contrasted to a sensible sister, Jane, who is quiet, unwilling to express her needs or desires, supportive of all and critical of none ... Jane’s docility, gentles, and benevolence are remarkable”* (Gilbert, 2000, p.157). Elizabeth challenges the conventions establish in England at that period and the opinions of others. She observes and make reflexions of the behaviours of other. She freely reflects her ideas in society. She is conscious of the issues of women in society.

Debora Kaplan remarks Elizabeth Bennet character is illustrated as unconventional and that Elizabeth is a revolutionary character that has a different point of view regarding marriage and financial issues (Kaplan, 1994). She is conscious of the issues affecting women in England upper-middle class patriarchal society. Austen portrays Elizabeth’s thoughts and emotions, she depicts the intelligence of Elizabeth. Kaplan remarks that Austen wrote to her sister: *“She spoke triumphantly to Cassandra about Elizabeth Bennet and the novel in which she figures, declaring her own superiority over those who either would not like or would not understand Pride and Prejudice”* (Kaplan, 1994, p.

106). Elizabeth stands up and argues for individual freedom, Elizabeth believes in her free mind and different way of seen things. Overall, the depth of the character of Elizabeth shows the ability of Jane Austen of being able to create compelling and interesting characters.

Some of Austen's female characters are portrayed as intelligent women, with character and strong personalities but they are economic vulnerable as Elizabeth Bennet. Most of these women are dependent on marriage. Some of the female characters in Austen's novel are portrayed as the stereotypical image of women in that period. Through the female characters Austen illustrates different female identities. With the contrast between each other Austen wants to remark how senseless the stereotypical image of woman is. Through her characters, Austen depicts the issues about female's identity in society. Elizabeth Bennet is one example of a strong female character, she is depicted by Austen fearless, dynamic, smart; as a women with independent and "modern" ideas. Her sister on the other hand, is depicted as the stereotypical image of women during the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. This idea of "the perfect woman" grew and transformed into the ideal of womanhood in the nineteenth century. Virginia Woolf contributes to destroy such a stereotype. "Angel of the house" is, as Virginia Woolf describes it in her essay *Professions for Women*: "*Intensely sympathetic...charming, utterly unselfish, excellent in the difficult art of family life, she sacrificed herself daily... she was so constitute that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, she preferred to sympathise with the mind and wishes of others...every hose has its angel...they must charm, they must conciliate*" (Woolf, 1993, p.1190). During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the domesticity defined women. Women in this period are characterised as fragile and delicate. Jane Bennet illustrates this delicate beauty. Her character represents the angelic women. Jane is charming, passive and tender, she devotes herself for others. Jane is reasonable regarding in what is appropriate. On the other hand, Elizabeth Bennet has a stronger personality, she is more rebellious, she is ironic. Elizabeth does not sacrifice for others, she stays strong with her ideas and personality.

Another relevant character is Lydia Bennet, one of the youngest sisters in the family. She represents the traditional women of the patriarchal society in England. Lydia Bennet believes that marriage is the most successful purpose in a woman's life. Lydia, Mrs. Bennet and Lady Catherine believe in marriage as an economically agreement. These characters are well defined by Austen, these women are the stereotypical traditional cliché of what a women are supposed to be. Furthermore, Lady Catherine is a rich women that has power over others because her position, she is a classist. Lady Catherine is more educated in a much more traditional way. Her character is snobbish and exaggerated. Austen's construction of her characters and the interaction between those characters reveals that she is conscious of the issues of her time.

Later on, I found a dialogue with "Mr. Bennet and his lady" (Austen, 1813). The narrator is introducing us a character: she, his wife, his lady. She is his wife and he is Mr. Bennet: she doesn't have an identity. This dialogue portrays Mrs. Bennet first impressions. She is depicted as a ridiculous character, as a fool. The narrator is leading us to see Mrs. Bennet as a ridiculous character. Austen is playing with voices to make us take the part of Mr. Bennet. Mr. Bennet is portrayed as a reasonable man. After the first two sentences which not only determine the tone of the novel but also subtly criticise the view of marriage as a business, a conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet follows: "*Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve... her wife was a women of mean understanding, little informations and uncertain temper*" (Austen, 1813, p.7). Their characters are presented as opposites with a description that comes later. Mrs. Bennet is presented as impatient in opposition to Mr. Bennet rationality. Impatient women against men's rationality. This elements can be also emphasized in the technique use to presents Mrs. Bennet's opinions in a direct speech, she is being impulsive and impatiently, while Mr. Bennet thoughts are present in indirect. On one hand, Mr. Bennet pretends not to know what her wife is saying, he pretends to ignore the social conventions. On the other hand, Mrs. Bennet insists in obeying the social conception of marriage. Mrs. Bennet is obsessed with the intrigues of marriage. His sarcasm contracts with the indignation and irritation of his wife. Furthermore, this dialogue depicts the attitudes of the English society towards marriage.

The business of marriage is something that is handled by women. The economic, universally acknowledged truth that Austen does not agree with is that men are not desperately looking for a wife, but women for husbands.

Overall, I believe that Austen's characters are often contrasted: reason versus passion, truth versus fiction, reality versus perception, tradition versus modern, knowledge versus experience or future versus past. I think that Austen uses these contrasts to make the reader understand the different identities and voices in society. I think Austen contrasts her characters to make a point. I think this antithesis emphasises Austen's purpose of irony and to make the reader understand how absurd is one stereotype by contrasting another. For example, Austen juxtaposes tradition versus modern between Elizabeth Bennet and Lady Catherine. As Virginia Woolf argues: "*The wit of Jane Austen has for partner the perfection of her taste. Her fool is a fool, her snob is a snob ... Never did any novelist make more use of an impeccable sense of human values...an unfailing good taste, an almost stern morality, that she shows up those deviations from kindness, truth, and sincerity which are among the most delightful things in English literature*" (Woolf, 1984, p.80).

## **IV. Jane Austen Through the Ideas of Virginia Woolf**

In this chapter I first analyse the main themes that Virginia Woolf elaborates in her essays on women writers, and then I criticise Jane Austen's work through the eyes of Virginia Woolf. Virginia Woolf, born in 1882, was a major novelist and essayist during the twentieth-century. She is a key figure in the history of the feminist movement. She strongly supported feminism and women's literature. Some of her recurrent themes focused on the lack of education, the lack of money as well as the lack of social experiences. Virginia Woolf was particularly concerned about the representation of women in literature. In particular Woolf focuses her analysis on the position and experience of several female authors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Jane Austen. Austen is indeed a central figure in Woolf's essay *A room of one's own*. Woolf is concerned with the difficulties female writers confront in a society dominated by the patriarchy. Her most famous essay on these issues (*A room of one's own*) is a metaphor of independence.

### **I. Virginia Woolf's Essays on Women's Literature**

In this work I focus on two essays of Virginia Woolf on feminism and women's literature: *A Room of One's Own* and *Professions for Women* which were written in between 1929 and 1931.

In her essay *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf explores women both as writers and as fictional characters. In this essay Woolf focuses her attention on the difficulties female writers confront in a society dominated by patriarchy. Most of her arguments in this essay focus on the importance of women's financial independence. I identify

financial independence, exclusion of women from education as the main themes of her essay.

*Professions for Women* is based on a lecture read by Woolf at the National Society for Women's Service on January 1931. In this essay, Virginia Woolf illustrates the stereotypical image of women within the Victorian patriarchal society: the "Angel of the house". Furthermore, another theme that often arises in this essay is that women should be able to earn an independent income. Woolf persuades women writers in speaking of women's independence and of women's freedom. According to Virginia Woolf's essay *Professions for women* was "part of the occupation of a women writer, to kill the angel in the house" (Woolf, 1993, p.1195).

Overall, Virginia Woolf believes that the creative power of women differs from men because of historical circumstances. According to Woolf, a writer is a product of his or her circumstances and material conditions are particularly important. In what follows I focus on some of the main themes that Woolf puts forward in these two essays.

## **I.1 Financial Independence**

In *A Room of One's Own* most of her arguments focus on the importance of women's financial independence. Virginia Woolf is concerned about women's lack of economic independence. Woolf starts thinking in the past to look for solutions. She starts questioning herself: "Why are women poor? What had our mothers been doing then that they had no wealth to leave us? Why didn't women have money?" (Woolf, 1993).

Woolf's critiques the lack of legal and economic power of women in society. She also focuses her critique in women in education and society. Virginia Woolf defends the idea that, as the title of her essay, women should be able to be financially independent and have a proper space of their own to write fiction. Virginia Woolf believes that the creative power of women differs from men because of historical circumstances. According to Woolf, a writer is product of his or her circumstances and the material

condition are particularly important. For this reason, education and financial independence have a significant role. Woolf states that to be a woman and writer women have to deal with many issues, the most important was money. She declares “*a woman must have money and a room of her money*” (Woolf, 1993). Woolf believes that female authors have been limited because of their financial and social issues. According to Woolf, literary creativity goes hand in hand with material dependence. Woolf remarks that for centuries women haven't had financial freedom or a room of their own. Woolf thinks about what it would have been if these women writers hadn't had these limitations. In particular, Woolf critiques the patriarchal culture, because under patriarchy women couldn't have financial independence. She goes through history and criticises that for a long time in England women could not earn their own money, and as a result they are dependent on men's wealth. She remarks that women's income legally belongs to their husbands: no right to earn a living from their own. She remarks that women are poorer than men because of historical circumstances. Woolf criticises the condition in which women had to live under the patriarchal society.

Virginia Woolf goes back to history in England and observes women and marriage in relation to the economic dependence on men for centuries: “*Marriage was not an affair of personal affection, but of family avarice, particularly in the upper classes*” (Woolf, 1993). Woolf remarks the economic issues and women and concludes: “*If only...her mother and her mother before her had learnt the great art of making money and had left their money, like their fathers and their grandfathers before them ... [but] in the first place, to earn money was impossible for them, and in the second, had it been possible, the law denied them the right to possess what money they earned ... it would have been her husband's property*” (Woolf, 1993, pp.281-285).

Furthermore, I identify that in relation to the financial issues she remarks the issues of motherhood regarding the female identity. According to the conventions of patriarchal society in England women's established role was to get married and have children. In other words, Woolf points out that if a woman had to have and raise children “... *how can she*

*make a fortune?” “Making a fortune and bearing thirteen children — no human being could stand it” (Woolf, 1993, p. 283).*

Woolf argues that the writer was the product of his or her historical circumstances, that is why she remarks that both, financial independence and education are so important. The issue of material conditions is crucially significant for Woolf. In fact, she talks about it again in her essay *Professions for Woman*.

## **I.II Education and Experiences**

In *A Room of One's Own*, through her fictional narrator, Woolf points out the issues and experiences of women under the patriarchal society in England. Mary, the fictional character of her essay, is put under situations where men look down on women. Through Mary's experiences, Woolf illustrates the oppression of men over women in society. Mary is asked to get out from the Oxbridge library because she has not a library permission from a male colleague at the university. Mary's experience in the library recalls the concept of the "Angel of the house" illustrated by Woolf in her essay *Profession for Women*: "I was actually at the door which leads into the library itself. I must have opened it, for instantly there issued, like a guardian angel barring the way with a flutter of black gown ... I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in; and, thinking" (Woolf, 1993, p.188). Woolf remarks women's conventional image of domesticity locked inside the household. She also remarks the idea of women pushed out of a society ruled by men in order to men's advantages. With this passage Woolf also recalls the disadvantages of women in education.

Related to this, Woolf remarks that women through time had been educated inside the home. Woolf suggests that women had sacrificed because men in the family needed education abroad, needed to travel and to have independent lives. Woolf remarks that women had been educated at home while boys out in society. Woolf invokes the male advantages in education on her essay *Three Guineas* as the 'Arthur's Education Fund': "Where there were many sons to educate it required a great effort on the part of the

*family to keep it full... education [for men] was not merely in book-learning ... games, friends, travel*" (Woolf, 1993, p.519). Woolf remarks that in the nineteenth-century the boy in a family "*won the right to some paid-for education for themselves ... for themselves travel, pleasure, liberty*" (Woolf, 1993, p.783). Men have had every advantage in education and it has been theirs for a long time.

### **I.III The Image of the Angel of the House**

Finally, regarding to the main themes in Woolf's essays, I identify as a main theme the figure of the "Angel of the house" in Virginia Woolf's *Profession for Women*. The name is borrowed from Coventry Patmore's poem celebrating domesticity and the ideal Victorian wife. This stereotypical idea grew and transformed into the ideal of womanhood in the nineteenth century. "Angel of the house" is, as Virginia Woolf describes: "*charming, utterly unselfish, excellent in the difficult art of family life, she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, she preferred to sympathise with the mind and wishes of others*" (Woolf, 1993, p.1191).

As Woolf works to understand this powerful image of "The Angel in the House," she remarks a tension between the nineteenth-century descriptions of femininity that inspired this image and the images of women entering the professions at her time. With this essay Woolf encourages women to kill this stereotypical image: "*part of the occupation of a women writer, to kill the angel in the house*" (Woolf, 1993, p.1195).

## **II. Jane Austen Through the Ideas of Virginia Woolf**

In this section I will analyse Jane Austen and, in particular, *Pride and Prejudice* through the main ideas expressed by Virginia Woolf in her essay *A Room of One's Own* and *Professions for Women*. Of course, we know that Virginia Woolf thought and praised Jane Austen. In particular, through Woolf's ideas I identify Jane Austen as a feminist writer, or better said, as a precursor of the feminist tradition. According to Rosenberg's studies, "*In Woolf's essay on Austen... Austen is one of the few canonized*

women writers, and so any discussion of Woolf's connection to her might imply the privileging of a female literary tradition" (Rosenberg, 2000, p.13).

Woolf focuses her analysis in the experiences of women. I think that when Virginia Woolf hypothesizes about Jane Austen's writing career and future, she believed that if Jane Austen could had have more experiences and travel more she could have achieved more success within the feminist movement. Woolf said on Austen that "*she already had a lot said,*" (Woolf, 1993) although she was in the middle of the climax of the patriarchal society she had the courage and stays stronger to her writing. Woolf identifies Austen as one of the women that helped raising her voice on woman's issues and opened the way for women writers: "*Jane Austen ... and many more unknown and forgotten women, have been before me, making the path smooth, and regulating my steps*" (Woolf, 1993, p.1187).

In my opinion, Jane Austen did not kill Woolf's concept of the "Angel of the house," although I believe Austen did everything she could at her time. Austen points out that this issue exists. Austen was conscious of these issues affecting woman's identity and life. Austen challenges this angel and point it out sharply and with irony. In particular, I think Jane Austen's irony advocates social, political and economic rights for women equal to those of men. Woolf points out regarding to women writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that in: "*The whole structure, of the early nineteenth century novel ... one has only to skim those novels and listen to the tone of voice in which they are written to divine that the writer was meeting with criticism*" (Woolf, 1993, p.368). As I said, through this idea of Virginia Woolf I believe that Jane Austen meets in criticism through her irony. Jane Austen observes and acts in response and in opposition to the stereotypical image of women in the patriarchal society and to male's definition of women. Austen's ironical remarks point out the issues affecting women in this period in England. Furthermore, Virginia Woolf states that Austen challenges the male literature that had been there for centuries. Austen writes courageously in her own style and bravely provokes the conventions and limitations of her sex. Austen stays true to her own voice instead of accepting what it has been

preserved by centuries by male writers. This challenge, I believe is one of strongest achievement of Austen in the feminist tradition. The courage of Austen and her integrity is praised by Virginia Woolf: “*What genius, what integrity it must have required in face of all that criticism, in the midst of that purely patriarchal society, to hold fast to the thing as [she] saw it, without shrinking*” (Woolf, 1993, p.370). Austen remained true to her own voice and her own style. Austen stands up strongly to confront a society ruled by men and for men. She confronted the values preserved by men, she engendered a female voice and find her own style. Austen challenges what was imposed as traditional, as conventional, as proper and respectable and the male structure: “Jane Austen ... *looked at it [man’s sentence] and laughed at it and devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use, and never departed from it*” (Woolf, 1993, p. 375). Jane Austen refuses to resign to her style, to her techniques, to her female voice. I believe that although Austen could not, because of the period she lived in, kill the “Angel of the house,” she as a women writer liberates her writing from what it was preserved by the male's culture. Woolf said that women must liberate themselves economically and conventionally from the patriarchal society. Jane Austen liberates her thoughts and her voice. Jane Austen challenges the conventional views of what was appropriate for women in society and breaks the idea that writing is something only man could do.

Austen has courage as a woman and as a writer. On this, Woolf remarks that her style is not naive and that we have to read her between the lines. Austen's novels have a deep significance. The main themes in Austen's work are not superficial, her language and writing techniques echoes the financial issues and the inequality between gender in the English society of her period.

Virginia Woolf focuses her attention, in particular, on *Pride and Prejudice*. Woolf compares Charlotte Bronte’s work with Austen’s. Woolf remarks that Austen writes: “*without hate, without fear, without protest, without preaching*” (Woolf, 1993, p.351). Woolf claims that this was what differentiated Austen from Charlotte Bronte. Austen did not write with bitterness and anger toward men. Jane Austen, according to Woolf , had

much more said than Bronte because of the nature of her writing. Austen was conscious of the issues affecting women during this period in England, the author observes and writes about them without anger and exaggeration. In fact, Austen is praised by Woolf because her genius, integrity and writing skills. According to Woolf Austen writes: “wise and clam” (Woolf, 1993).

Furthermore, Woolf essay *A Room of One's Own*, criticizes woman's disadvantages in society trough different periods in England. Woolf protest for woman's rights and independence of women on society. Woolf remarks that until Jane Austen's time everything that was written on women was written by men and in relation to men. Woolf points out that women in literature, written by the male preserved culture, does not match with women in reality. In fact, in her essay *Professions for Women*, Woolf persuades women writers in writing about women. She persuades women to write about women through women experiences, through a female voice.

Some of the main arguments in *A Room of One's Own* are, that women must have money and a proper space of her own to write fiction, and that women are a product of their different circumstances and experiences, such as freedom, equal access to education, political and economic power, or a place in history. That is, to completely achieve the women writer position women first have to achieve active intellectual and financial freedom. Despite all of this, Woolf notes that Jane Austen's “*Perhaps ... chief miracle,*” is that despite the freedom denied in her period to women and her own circumstances, she managed to “*find a room of her own*”. Woolf commented: “*I wondered, would Pride and Prejudice have been a better novel if Jane Austen had not thought it necessary to hide her manuscript? I read a page or two to see; but I could not find any signs that her circumstances had harmed her work in the slightly. That perhaps was the chief miracle about it*” (Woolf, 1993, p.350). Woolf praises Jane Austen's achievements. Although Jane Austen's circumstances make her write in a common sitting-room, hide her writing and being always interrupted states that: “*her gift and her circumstances matched*”....“*If Jane Austen suffered in any way from her circumstances*

*it was in the narrowness of life that was imposed upon her. It was impossible for a woman to go about alone” (Woolf, 1993).*

Woolf, *A room of One's Own* is mainly concerned about financial independence and marriage. As Virginia Woolf, Austen is pushed by the oppression of the patriarchal society to raise her female voice to seek for a change of balance and equality of rights in every aspect of society. In particular, *Pride and Prejudice* embraces most of the issues women confront under patriarchal society in England during the early nineteenth century. In my opinion Jane Austen understood very clearly that money was an issues for women. Women in her period, including her own experience, were dependent on men economically. In particular after her father's death she and her mother were taken care by the Austen's brothers. Although Jane Austen never married, during this time this was unusual according to the convention in her society. Marriage in fact, is one of the main issues affecting women independence in different aspects that the author depicts in her novels. Nicholas Marsh remarks that: “*Jane Austen takes the disadvantages positions of women as a major themes in all of her novels” (Marsh, 1998, p.158).* Marriage plays an important function in Jane Austen's novels, in particularly *Pride and Prejudice*. Marriage becomes an economic rather than social activity. With this portrayal of marriage as a key figure in her novel, Austen remarks that she is aware of the issues that involve marriage and women in her society, such as financial dependence of men. Marriage is based on a material factor: money. Money in Austen's novel is what moves and conditions the story. Regarding the issue of marriage Austen constructs a social criticism. In Austen's writing marriage is depicted as a transaction involving money and status. Likewise, Gillier remarks, “*A ‘good’ marriage, in the society Jane Austen depicts, is always one which enhances status, and status is primarily a matter of wealth” (Gillier, 1985, p.122).* Austen remarks the irony of the standard of marriage, that is to say, marriage as an economic structure and the one of the few choices for women, particularly in the upper classes. Incidentally, we must not forget that patriarchal society, marriage, money and class are all correlated. Her novel suggests that marriage is best understood as an institution. Likewise, Bromberg, “*Pride and Prejudice establishes the central novelistic marriage tradition...furnishes a critique of the*

*prevailing socioeconomic basis of marriage*” (Bromberg, 1993, p.126). Bromberg also remarks that *Pride and Prejudice* we look at concept of the “marriage market” in which “female beauty, breeding and accomplishments” are exchange for financial security and social status (Bromberg, 1993). I think Jane Austen through the issues of marriage criticises the conventions that involve the dependence of women on men. Austen portrays the stereotypical image of the patriarchal society, who sacrifices to secure her economy and family. Charlotte’s marriage with Mr. Collins is a good example of this. Charlotte illustrates the limited options of women in society. Their marriage portrays that marriage is based in a material factor, and that this factor is affecting women’s voice and identities. As Gillier remarks, the Austen’s novels society is set “*as a system of manners and behaviours to which the individual is expected to conform*” (Gillier, 1985, p.128). In particular, I find interesting that in Charlotte’s conventional marriage, Austen succeeds in transmitting us an opinion through the female voice of her character, Elizabeth. Elizabeth reaction to Charlotte’s marriage: “*I am not certain that I consider her marrying Mr. Collins as the wisest thing she ever did*” (Austen, 1813, p.174).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen’s description of the stereotypical image of women in society are depicted in a conversation of *Pride and Prejudice* between Mr. Darcy, Mr. Bingley, Miss Bingley and Miss Elizabeth. These characters discuss the idea of what an accomplished young lady is supposed to be. First, Charles Bingley expresses what he believes were the characteristics of an accomplished woman: “*It is amazing to me, how young ladies can have patience to be so accomplished as they all are ... they all paint tables and net purses,*” then, Miss Bingley complete the proper qualities of what ladies must learn: “*music, singing, drawing*”. Later Mr. Darcy replays: “*All this she must possess...and to all this she must...improving her mind by extensive reading*”. Finally, Elizabeth Bennet replays to this idea of an accomplished lady: “*I never saw such a woman. I never saw such capacity, and taste, and implication, and elegance, as you describe united*” (Austen, 1813). According to what I said before, I believe this is a good example of Austen’s attempt to construct a female voice. Through Elizabeth’s voice, Austen remarks the senselessness of these stereotypical images and definitions of female personalities and gender identities imposed by society in early nineteenth

century society in England. This expression of her female voice is an expression of Austen's feminist view. I believe that through writing women self-conscious emerges. Austen constructs a feminist voice in Elizabeth. Her character is conscious of some of the issues affecting women in patriarchal society in England. Although her character does not act with anger, bitterness or preach, instead Elizabeth points out issues of women in patriarchal society and refuses to the established values and convention of her time.

Overall, in my opinion Jane Austen is a significant precursor of the feminist literature. She does not only open the way for female writers but her courage made her an example for women and women writers. Jane Austen, I believe, is one of the greatest writers to contribute in the making of the path for female independence and equality for men. I see her as a model for women and women writers to push women into raising their voices and contributing to the emancipation of women. As we know, in the beginning of her career, Jane Austen had to publish her novels anonymously because the convention of society. But I believe that besides this issue, she did not use a male name as most of other women writers and instead she published under the expression "by a lady," because she wished to identify her female voice. Jane Austen wished to let readers know she was a woman and a writer. I think that the issue of the female voice is well represented in her novels. I believe, that Austen constructs a female voice as a way to identify women's place in society. In the end, the female voice is the expression of women's identity.

## V. Conclusions

During the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries in England, women's role was considered in opposition to men. While men were associated with active, progressive, defender, conquer, traveller, creator and rational, women were associated with passive, kindness, sensitive, domesticity and irrationality. Jane Austen's novels illustrate these conventional roles of men and women in society. Austen succeeds in depicting the conditions of women during this particular period in England. The author portrays the commonplace of a small village in the countryside England. Jane Austen portrays her fiction closer to life itself. Through this portrayal she points out the issues affecting women under patriarchal society in England. Jane Austen critiques marriage, women dependent on men, economic disadvantages of women and inequality characters in society. Her style she emphasises these issues provoked by the patriarchal society in England. Irony, observation and characterisation merge in a unit to question the stereotypical images of women and male definitions of women in England during her time.

I believe that Jane Austen is one of the greatest writers who contributed to the emancipation of women. As Virginia Woolf remarks, Austen opens the way for many other women writers, such as Woolf. Jane Austen stays strong with her unique style, Virginia Woolf remarks that Austen style was "*perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use ...never departed from it*" (Woolf, 1993, p.376). Austen not only challenges the literature preserved by men for centuries but she challenges society's conventions itself. Woolf sates: "*since freedom and fullness of expression are of the essence of the art, such lack of tradition, such a scarcity and inadequacy of tools, must have told enormously upon the writing of women*" (Woolf, 1993, p.377).

Besides facing the issues of being a women writer in her time, Jane Austen deals with the main issues affecting the life of women in England. Jane Austen questions the convictions of marriage as a material institution, she point out the dependence of women in men for financial survival.

Although many critics had different critical approaches to read Jean Austen in different ways, I found significant connections between Virginia Woolf's ideas attribute to Jane Austen. Woolf's critiques the lack of legal and economic power of women in society. Austen's novels critique the issues of the female identity and the conventional role of women in England. These principles are the essence of the feminist tradition within which Jane Austen writes.

I believe that Austen is a feminist writer and a precursor of feminist literature. I believe that Jane Austen writes for their female audience thinking of maybe how their story might empower another woman. Through her characters Austen raises a feminist voice. The reader can perceive that the author is conscious of the issues affecting women in patriarchal society. Without bitterness and anger toward men, Austen raises her voice to claim equality for women, to achieve financial independence and to be able to bring out a female voice.

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