

*A Controversy over Jane Austen:
Was She a Feminist or Was She
Not?*



By Eleanor Moore

I hate to hear you talk about all women as if they were fine ladies instead of rational creatures.

None of us want to be in calm waters all our lives.

— Jane Austen, Persuasion

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1. Introduction

When I first thought about this topic I would never have expected that so many people were concerned about it and that it arose such controversy. That is why I decided it would be a good idea to gather all the views I could find on the Internet, analyze them and draw my own conclusion.

I wanted to work on something that could combine all those topics I was interested in. I wanted to investigate about feminism and its origins as it is something I have been very concerned for a while. I also wanted to relate to literature as it is a subject I have always been very keen on and it has always been very interesting for me to know about it. I wanted to go further than what I could learn looking over it on internet and doing my research work about it seemed to me the most suitable way to accomplish that goal.

Since I was little, I have always had the desire to know and learn about the English language. It has always been one of the subjects I am more interested in and luckily it has always been very easy for me to learn it. I want to study a degree in the United Kingdom and I want to live there after graduating. Thus, focusing on the English literature and specifically on an English writer was the best way to gain more knowledge about the topic.

The first book I ever read about Jane Austen was *Pride and Prejudice* and while I was reading it, I could notice all these interventions the different characters made throughout the story about what a woman should be like. In that time, some of the social rules were very strict and severe: women should be able to read, talk about political issues, those rules also told them how they had to show their feeling and emotions, even with whom they should fall in love. However, some others were more liberal, giving women the power to express their own interests, despite the fact of them being or not allowed by what the society believed was correct.

After reading the book, a question popped up in my mind: In which of those interventions was the author, Jane Austen, giving her opinion about women and their decisions? Was she portraying all those serious and old-minded characters to reflect what she thought about the subject? Or, on the contrary, was she creating the liberal, open-minded character to reflect her opinion and convince the readers of the new role of women?

I searched on the Internet about this controversy and I found as many articles in favour of Jane Austen being a feminist as many others against. Could that be my research work? To collect as many articles I could find, analyze them and draw my own conclusion based on what I had investigated? After talking with my tutor about it, this seemed to be the hypothesis that fit me and my interests the most.

This is what my research work is about: To research, read, analyze and prove as many articles, thesis and reports I can find. To try to gather all the information I find and reach my own conclusion. I am going to try to solve this controversy over Jane Austen: was she a feminist or was she not?

2. Theoretical part

In this section I am going to develop all of the questions previously mentioned to try and reach my own conclusion. I am going to investigate about each topic and each article I find.

2.1 - Feminism

To achieve my goal of discovering if Jane Austen was a feminist or not, I first need to investigate about feminism, its history and meaning.

2.1.1 -What is feminism?

Feminism is the term we use to refer to a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women, although feminism affects us all. It involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests.

2.1.2 - History of Feminism

Feminism started as a real movement in the 19th century, specifically in 1848 at the first Women's Conference in Seneca Falls, America. But, if we think about its definition and what it represents, we can talk about its beginnings in the 15th century, exactly as Simone de Beauvoir said; "*the first time we see a woman take up her pen in defense of her sex*" was Christine de Pizan who wrote *Epitre au Dieu d'Amour* (Epistle to the God of Love).

We can divide the history of feminism in three waves.

2.1.2.1 - First wave feminism

The first wave was extended during the nineteenth and twentieth century, mostly in the United Kingdom and in the United States. It was originally described as "a promotion for equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to



<http://wlt.typography.netdna-cdn.com/dat 1>

chattel marriage and ownership of married women and their children by their husbands”, although, at

the end of the nineteenth century, the objectives were to gain political power, the right of women’s suffrage and women’s sexual, reproductive and economic rights, a campaign carried specifically by Voltairine de Cleyre and Margaret Sagner, although Florence Nightingale established the female nurses adjuncts to military in 1848.

In 1918 the Representation of the People Act was passed granting the vote to women over the age of thirty who owned houses and ten years later this was extended to all women over twenty-one. Leaders of this movement included Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony, who each campaigned for the abolition of slavery prior to championing women's right to vote; all were strongly influenced by Quaker thought.

2.1.2.2 - Second wave feminism

The second-wave describes a newer feminist movement that focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as on political inequalities, extended during the 1960s until the 1980s. Second-wave feminists saw women's cultural and political inequalities as incomprehensible linked and encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and as reflecting sexist power structures.

The scholar Imelda Whelehan suggests that the second wave was a continuation of the earlier phase of feminism involving the suffragettes in the UK and in the US. It has continued to exist since that time and coexists with what is termed third-wave feminism. The scholar Estelle Freedman compares first and second-wave feminism saying that the first wave focused on rights such as suffrage, whereas the second wave was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as ending discrimination.

2.1.2.3 - Third wave feminism

Third-wave feminism began in the early 1990s, as a response to perceived failures of the second wave. Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity, which (according to them) over-emphasize the experiences of upper middle-class white women.

Third-wave feminists often focus on "micro-politics" and challenge the second wave's paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for females. The third wave has its

origins in the mid-1980s. Feminist leaders rooted in the second wave like Gloria Anzaldua, Bell Hooks, Chela Sandoval, Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, Maxine Hong Kingston, and many other black feminists, sought to negotiate a space within feminist thought for consideration of race-related subjectivities.

It also contains internal debates between difference feminists such as the psychologist Carol Gilligan (who believes that there are important differences between the sexes) and those who believe that there are no inherent differences between the sexes and contend that gender roles are due to social conditioning.

2.1.3 - Cultural Feminism

The culture of feminism involves the female nature and its essence as a way to promote women's femininity and reevaluate what has been considered as undervalued female attributes. Also, it has been described as a way to set down the differences between both sexes.

It discusses the way society has encouraged people to achieve a masculine behavior describing it as the most beneficial one. Cultural feminism aims to manifest how a feminine behavior can also be beneficial for the society in many ways, according that both behaviours should be adopted, without any distinction of sexes.

2.1.4 - Women's writing in Feminism

Women's writing has been made up as the best way for women to revindicate their fight for their rights and preoccupations, always showed up in their books and essays, creating stories of women whose roles in relation of marriage, wealth, power and the British aristocracy were important and relevant. They deleted the role of a weak women who needed a man to survive and substituted her for an empowered women. Due to this change of the women roles, they changed the way society saw the feminine sex and contributed in creating new generations with a newer view of what a women should or shouldn't be.

Feminist literature is fiction or non-fiction which supports the feminist goals of defining, establishing and defending equal civil, political, economic and social rights for women. Feminist literature presents female characters as agents. These stories present women as fully realized characters with faculties, desires, aggressions, ires, lusts and conflicts.

2.1.5 – Feminist Criticism

It still hasn't been defined what feminist criticism is although Annete Kolodny says *it is applied to the study of literature, it is used in a variety of context to cover a variety of activities, including any criticism written by a woman, any criticism written by a woman about a man's book which treats that book from a 'political' or 'feminist' perspective and any criticism written by a woman about a woman's book or about female authors in general.* But, she also points out the fact that there is a basic principle that unites feminist literary critics under one roof despite their plurality of methods: *What unites and repeatedly invigorates feminist literary criticism... is neither dogma nor method but an acute and impassioned attentiveness to the ways in which primarily male structures of power are inscribed (or encoded) within our literary inheritance: the consequences of that encoding for women - as characters, as readers, and as writers; and, with that, a shared analytic concern for the implications of that encoding not only for a better understanding of the past but also for an improved reordering of the present and future.*

Being awarded a Ford Foundation Fellowship for the study of women in society, she is known for her work and she comes from the minority that dares to define feminist literature and criticism.

She sets the edges of what a good and well stated feminist criticism should be: *"A good feminist criticism . . . must first acknowledge that men's and women's writing in our culture will inevitably share some common ground. Acknowledging that, the feminist critic may then go on to explore the ways in which this common ground is differently imaged in women's writing and also note the turf which they do not share. And, after appreciating the variety and variance of women's experience—as we have always done with men's—we must then begin exploring and analyzing the variety of literary devices through which different women are finding effective voices. As a consequence of this activity, we may even find ourselves better able to understand and to encourage women writers' continued experiments in language—in stylistic devices, genre forms, and image making—experiments which inevitably expand everyone's abilities to know and express themselves".*

out women's role in society

... (185), bravely contradicted society through her writing. Her novels speak volumes for the oppressed woman; thus establishing Charlotte Brontë as one of the first modern women of her time.

R.B.Martin wrote about her and her famous novel, *Jane Eyre*: “*The novel is frequently cited as the earliest major feminist novel, although there is not a hint in the book of any desire for political, legal, educational, or even intellectual equality between the sexes. Miss Bronte asks only for the simple — or is it the most complex? — recognition that the same heart and the same spirit animate both men and women, and that love is the pairing of equals in these spheres. . . . The famous plea that women ought not to be confined 'to making pudding and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags' [Chap. 12] is not propaganda for equal employment but for a*



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/c 1>

recognition of woman's emotional nature. The condemnation of women to a place apart results in the creation of empty, capricious women like Blanche Ingram, who tyrannize over men whenever possible, indulge in dreams of Corsair lovers, and can communicate only in the Byronic language of outdated romantic fiction. Only equals like Jane and Rochester dare to speak truth couched in language of unadorned directness. [pp. 93-94]’.

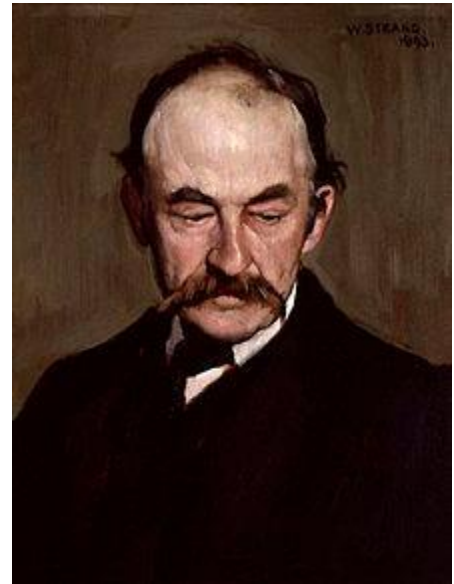


<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/c 2>

George Eliot (1819-1880), the pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans, one of the most recognized feminist writers. She was a feminist activist, who shared the feminist movement’s intolerance of the exclusion of women from educational and professional opportunities as well as its resentment at the inequalities between men and women inscribed in legal and political institutions. But, some feminist criticism alludes the fact that none of her heroines, specially *Dorothea* from *Middlemarch* were able to do what she did in her own life; translate, publish articles, edit a periodical, refuse

to marry until she was middle-aged and live openly with a man whom she could not marry. Some scholars have said that she might had shown how society forced her characters to live an oppressive life, ruled by men and their theories. Others, have stated that she should have given her heroines the freedom she had experienced and, that way, present how women could change their role.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), created female characters with no redeemable qualities. They never have a legitimate chance to succeed permanently at any level, although we must consider the genre he wrote in; naturalism, which shows reality as we see it, focusing on the most negative parts of it. A number of his female characters seek education or to break out of the narrow roles allocated middle class women in the late nineteenth century. However, he does attack social and moral conventions that condemn and victimise women and to that extent, he defends more liberal views which seek to redefine the idea of purity.



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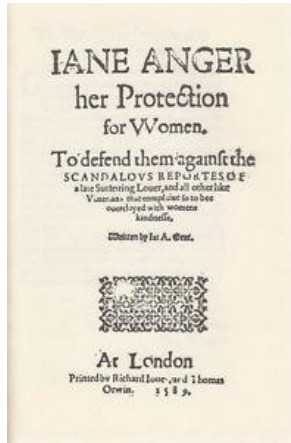
2.1.5.2 - Feminist authors

Margaret Tyler (1540-1590) was the first woman to publish a romance in England and she was also the first English woman to translate a Spanish romance. She is known for publishing a defense of the seriousness and importance of women's writing, proposing that both men and women should be treated as rational beings, arguing that "*it is all one for a woman to pen a story, as for a man to address his story to a woman.*"

She protested in her letter "to the reader" against restrictions imposed on the literary efforts of women, as it is shown on the epistle of the book she translated from the spanish Diego Ortuñez de Calahorra "The Mirroure of Princely Deedes and Knighthood", where we can find the first feminist argument published by a woman, where she explains that "*women have the same capacity to research and write as men do, and that they should, therefore, have the prerogative to do so and to choose their subject*".

Jane Anger (16th Century) was the first woman to publish a full-length defense of her gender in English: "*Jane Anger Protection For Women*", published in 1589, something very relevant as it was very rare for women to argue against male supremacy. As no one knows

nothing about her life, and it is known there were many women named as her in England, many have argued about if the name Jane Anger was a pseudonym of a woman, was her real name, or was a pseudonym of a male author. Some modern commentators argue that, “*Anger deliberately reworks her opponent’s misogynist ideas to establish a direct feminine perspective that goes beyond the querelle frameworks.*” Her pamphlet, “*Her Protection of*



<http://i.ebayimg.com/images/g/8moAAOSwYm1>

Women”, (1589) was a response to the male-authored text of Thomas Orwin’s *Boke His Surfeit in Love, with a farwel to the folies of his own phantasie* (1588). Pamela Joseph Benson argues that “Through defending her intervention in the debate, she constantly touches the reader’s awareness that women were not confident enough to express their own opinions or “masculine” emotions. Her pamphlet opens with a critique of masculine rhetorical practices, especially paying attention to their overemphasis on “manner” over “matter.” She immediately targets

a contradiction between the high value male writers, who place women as a stimulus to their creativity and the decline of women.

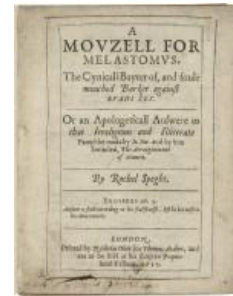
She touches the notion of the mythmaking that accompanies men’s claims to inspiration”.

Give me leave like a scoller to prove our wisdom more excellent then theirs, hough I never knew what sophistry ment. Ther is no wisdom but it comes by grace, this is a principles & Contra principium non est disputandum: but grace was first given to a woman, because to our lady: which premises conclude that women are wise. Now Primus est optimum, & therefore, women are wiser then men. That we are more witty which comes by nature, it cannot better be proved, then that by our answers, men are often driven to Non plus¹.

¹ Extract from Jane Anger’s book “*A Protection for Women*”

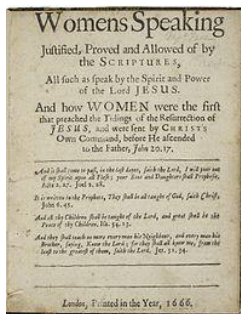
Ester Sowernam (17th Century), whose name comes from the “*Book of Esther*” in the bible against “*Haman*”, and whose surname is the antithesis to Joseph Swetnam’s surname, as she was one of the three women who responded to Swetnam’s “*The Arraignment of Women*” in her pamphlet, “*Ester Hath Hanged Haman*”; or also known as “*An Answer to a Lewd Pamphlet, Entitled The Arraignment of Women*” in response to *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Men, and Husbands* (1617).

In her pamphlet we can see a clear feminist consciousness as she stated that she wrote “*in defence of our sex*” and she described herself as “*neither Maide, Wife or Widdowe, yet really all, and therefore experienced to defend all*”.²



<http://www.artsrn.ca/alberta.ca/orlando/wp1>

Margaret Askey (17th century), expressed her support for women’s education and was imprisoned for allowing illegal meetings at her house and refusing the oath of allegiance in 1663. Whilst her first imprisonment she wrote “*Women’s Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures, all such as speak by the spirit and power of the Lord Jesus*”, in 1667. She offered examples of women worthiness and claimed women’s capacity for divine inspiration and their divine connection. Her work is a largely feminist revision of conventional Biblical interpretations.



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/c4>

Aprha Behn (1640-1689), known as the first lady of the English Literature, was the first woman to earn a living by her pen and the pioneer of the female voice in literature. Behn was a major contributor to Restoration literature; she was a playwright, novelist, and poet. Her career began with the publishing of her first play, *The Forced Marriage*. Her place in history extends far beyond her title as the first professional woman writer; her fame was marked by her libertine and revealing writing style during a time period when women did not have a place nor a voice, in the patriarchal society of seventeenth century England.



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/a/c5>

² Extract from Esther Sowernam’s pamphlet.

Her written work affected people of her time period, especially women, and is still effective today, the reason why she has been catalogued as a feminist writer.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), known as the mother of feminism, questioned why particular virtues should be regarded as specifically 'manly' and not — 'more properly speaking' — virtues that ennoble all humans. "*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" (1792) is widely viewed as the first great feminist treatise. She wrote in the classical liberal tradition, which promoted individual rights, especially against the restrictions of political power. Wollstonecraft's primary concern was the rights and status of women against the claims of society and law.

Over and over, she stressed the right and need of women to be educated in the same manner as a man in order to become emancipated. In the Introduction, she stated her "*profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow-creatures [women] is the*

grand source of the misery I deplore". The equal education of girls and boys, she believed, would dissolve the destructive ideal of woman as a docile and decorative companion to man.

In this vein, Wollstonecraft penned what may well be her most famous sentiment; "*To marry for a support is legal prostitution*". Wollstonecraft pleaded for intellectual companionship to be the ideal of marriage.



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/c/6>

One of Wollstonecraft's main objectives in publishing her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was that women should be viewed as human first and foremost rather than as a separate and irreconcilably different species to men, as she declared: "*I shall first consider women in the grand light of*

human creatures, who, in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties", and she railed against those male conduct book writers who instead considered "*females rather as women than human creatures*".

She was convinced that gendered behaviour was learned through education and experience, rather than being something with which one was born. This perhaps partly explains why her work, after initially being well received, was neglected until the feminist movement of the 1970s found in it a very modern sense of gender identity.

3. Jane Austen (1775-1816)

Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775, in England. Her family was close and the children grew up in an environment that stressed learning and creative thinking. When Jane was young, she and her siblings were encouraged to read from their father's extensive library. The children



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/c/7>

also authored and put on plays and charades. In order to acquire a more formal education, Jane was sent to boarding schools during her pre-adolescence. During this time, Jane caught typhus, nearly succumbing to the illness. After a short period of formal education cut short by financial constraints, she returned home and lived with the family from that time forward.

Her works

Always fascinated by the world of stories, Jane began to write in bound notebooks. In the 1790s, during her adolescence, she wrote *Love and Freindship*, a parody of romantic fiction organized as a series of love letters. The next year she wrote *The History of England...*, a 34-page parody of historical writing that included illustrations drawn by her sister

Cassandra.

She continued to write, developing her style in more ambitious works such as *Lady Susan*, another epistolary story about a manipulative woman who uses her sexuality, intelligence and charm to have her way with others. Jane also started to write some of her future major works, the first called *Elinor and Marianne*, another story told as a series of letters, which would eventually be published as *Sense and Sensibility*. She began drafts of *First Impressions*, which would later be published as *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Susan* later published as *Northanger Abbey* by Jane's brother, Henry, following Jane's death.

In 1816, at the age of 41, Jane started became ill with what some say might have been Addison's disease. She made impressive efforts to keep editing older works as well as starting a new novel called *The Brothers*, which would be published after her death as *Sanditon*. Another novel, *Persuasion*, would also be published posthumously. At some point, Jane's condition deteriorated to such a degree that she ceased writing. She died on July 18, 1817 in England.

After her death, her brother stated she was an author.

Austen's works criticise the sentimental novels of the second half of the 18th century and are part of the transition to 19th-century literary realism. The earliest English novelists, Richardson, Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett, were followed by the school of sentimentalists and romantics such as

Walter Scott, Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, Laurence Sterne, and Oliver Goldsmith, whose style and genre Austen rejected, returning the novel on a "slender thread" to the tradition of Richardson and Fielding for a "realistic study of manners".¹ In the mid-20 century, literary critics F. R. Leavis and Ian Watt placed her in the tradition of Richardson and Fielding; both believe that she used their tradition of "irony, realism and satire to form an author superior to both".

4. Practical Part

In this part, I am going to analyse many articles I have found written by scholars, which are in favour or against Jane Austen being a feminist. I am going to take notes on each reason they give to firm up their statement. Once I have read them all, I will collect my notes and try to reach a conclusion.

4.1. Opinions for

In the article "*Was Jane Austen a feminist Author?*"³ by Paul Gallagher, the scholar Leila Cruickshank gives us many reasons to believe Austen was indeed a feminist author:

Reasons
First of all, Jane Austen is the author of one of her most known quotes which states the responsibility men have had on writing weak female characters, mostly helped by men and in need of a financial and romantic support stated by the patriarchal society that ruled women and men's roles in England, always found in marriage. <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"Men have had every advantage of us in telling their story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything".</i></p>
She was not as radical as Mary Wollstonecraft was, but she repeatedly demonstrated that women who are slaves to emotions or follow the dictates of social expectations over their own intelligence cannot thrive.
She projects the idea that women's decisions are equally important to men's. She shows the sense that women's right to self determination is more important than the desires of a man, which is the idea of feminism we have nowadays.
She constantly comments the inherent weaknesses in women's education and their need to be well-read. She also states that women who are financially independent have no need on marrying a man. She sees marriage as the only option for a non-financially independent woman, it is true, but this was very much a practical consideration of the time. " <i>Emma!</i> " states that there is no need for her to marry, because she is financially stable.

³ See annex page 44.

She also states that women and men should be companions to each other as well as spouses.

She also wants women to make their decisions based on love and financial reasons which asserts their ability to make rational choices and their right to pursue happiness, which is another of the ideals feminism has today.

Regina Jeffers, the author of the article "*Was Jane Austen a feminist?*"⁴ introduces the topic reflecting her emotions about feminism and its most important authors and she also gives many reasons as why Jane Austen should be considered a feminist author.

Reasons

Austen defied the never ending patriarchal society in which she lived.

It is true that is difficult to call her a feminist because her point of view is very subtle. Yet, her message has been read by millions of women around the world and it has influenced them.

She was influenced by the *mother of feminism*, Mary Wollstonecraft, who published "*A Vindication Of The Rights Of Woman*" in which she stated that both women and men have the potential to conduct themselves as rational and reasonable human beings and that one sex should not have dominance over the other, when Jane Austen was only sixteen years old, which makes it likely that it inspired her on her writings.

Also, its pointed out the fact that Jane Austen created strong and dominate female characters with spotless reputations. As G. K. Chesterton said: "Jane Austen could do one thing neither Charlotte Brönte or George Eliot could do: she could cooly and sensibly describe a man".

She also wrote: "*But let me observe that all histories are against you, all stories, prose and verse. If I had such a memory as Benwick, I could bring you fifty quotations in a moment on my side the argument, and I do not think I ever opened a book in my life, which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk*

⁴ See annex page 46.

of woman's fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men."

In the article *A Feminist Connection: Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft*⁵, Miriam Ascarelli gives us many reasons to believe Austen was in fact a feminist.

Reasons

She states Jane Austen was critical about feminism and wrote about women's role in society in a gentler way than Mary Wollstonecraft did. She softened her vindication by giving a marriage to her strong women characters.

It is true that the fact that every of her novels ends with a wedding is the main reason as of why feminist literary critics are so ambivalent about her, but as Mary Poovey defends, Austen was a defender of the status quo, *she saw marriage as the ideal paradigm for the most perfect fusion between the individual and society.*

Claudia Johnson in her book *Jane Austen: Women, politics and the Novel* states that when it comes to women and family, Austen agrees on key points with Wollstonecraft. She was a realist, she knew life was tough, especially for women, and she showed it on her novels. She focuses on the reasoning skills women need to survive, which is a very feminist statement.

Many people argue that Austen didn't show her feminist ideals clearly, but Ascarelli gives us an answer. In the 1790, England was suffering a hyper-politicized time in its history. The French Revolution had put a massive social change. It was illegal to criticize the English Government and the *Anti-Jacobin Review* was written. Wollstonecraft's husband wrote *Memoirs of the author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman* where he explained her affair, her attempt of suicide and her bastard child with her lover. Because of this, Wollstonecraft's name was written under the P letter for prostitute. Any woman who claimed to be a rational creature or free agent was seen as that, a prostitute. The society prejudged every women who claimed to be independent and outspoken as a prostitute feminist. This is one of the reasons of why Jane Austen kept her thoughts to herself about Wollstonecraft's works, and kept her feminist message hidden under a lovely wedding at the end of each of her books.

⁵ See annex page 29.

4.2 - Opinions against

Brianne Moore states in the article cited above "Was Jane Austen a Feminist?"⁶ by Paul Gallagher that in fact, she wasn't, and she gives many reasons to believe her.

Reasons
Jane Austen never did declare herself as a feminist and she lived a conventional life, following the rules that a woman of her time and position was supposed to follow.
Although she creates female characters who made their own decisions in life rather than doing what society expected them to do, they inevitably end up fitting in what the patriarchal society expected them to be: women who marre wealthy man of position and take their places as good wives.
Women who are outspoken and don't behave in the way proper ladies are meant to are often punished. The ones that follow up the stereotye are always rewarded.
In her novels, whether or not the female characters get their wedding is highly based on how well behaved they are following what a patriarchal society expects them to be.

4.3 - Feminist authors vs. Authors who talk about women's role in society

I want to remark the difference between feminist authors and authors who talk about women's role in society: Those who focus on women's role show women as oppressed creatures but none of them makes a statement on the need of a change or modifications of the patriarchal society in which these women belong to. Charlotte Bronte shows reality as it was, women were oppressed and humiliated, but she never stated the need to change that situation. George Eliot was a feminist activist herself but she never showed her personality through her female characters nor she gave them the freedom she experienced on her personal life. Thomas Hardy belonged to Naturalism, he wrote about his present as it was. His female characters are described with no redeemable qualities. They seed education but are attacked by social and moral conventions.

On the contrary, feminist authors show the oppression and humiliation of these women, as well as making a clear statement about the malfunction of the system, asking for a change. They aim to change people's conservative and patriarchal thoughts to open up their minds

⁶ See annex page 44.

and see the need of a progress. Austen is clearly asking and demanding a change, she states the lack of women education and how that should be changed, she shows women who are strong, independent, rational and with no need of any man to conduct their own lives.

5. Conclusion

I aimed to be able to answer the controversy over Jane Austen: was she a feminist or was she not? I have read many articles, webpages, books and blogs trying to gather all these informations to reach to a conclusion.

Looking back at what I believed before starting the project, I truly did not have a strong opinion. There were many contradictions which encouraged me to do the project about her.

Now, I can say I am ready to answer the big question: was she a feminist or was she not?

Yes, I do believe she was indeed a feminist.

Down below I am including all the reasons which led me to think and believe she truly was a feminist.

1. She was a realist writer, she showed reality as it was. She knew life was tough, especially for women, and she chose to manifest that in her works, but in a mostly subtle way. Most of her main female characters end up getting a wedding. Many scholars have an ambivalent reaction to her novels for that reason. But, if you live in a society where it is not acceptable to declare yourself as a rational and independent human being, where it is not accepted to declare yourself and your actions equal to men, where you are not allowed to portray reality as it is, wouldn't you try to soften a little the way you explain the present, to make sure it is read by society? Many other feminist literary critics believe she belongs to proto-feminism, which is basically the anticipation of the movement, and the name itself. We must remember the term feminism wasn't created until 1848, much later than her and her works. It is true her works end up with marriage, but many believe the reason behind is that she saw marriage as the only way to create a perfect fusion between the individual and society. Actually, wouldn't be all of us thinking the same if we lived in the 18th century? Nowadays it is common for us, women, and also men, to talk about how unnecessary marriage is, but, in that moment, it was what people and mostly women, aimed in life. The patriarchal society did a very good job convincing people it was the only way to be accepted. Austen's opinion, after all, is not such conservative.
2. In one of her most important works, *Emma*, Austen makes some remarks about women and their lives. In *Emma's* time, women were always taken care of through marriage or some other arrangement, such as being made a governess. As a general rule, women were not independent beings. Emma Woodhouse would have broken this rule. In the beginning of the novel, she is a single woman living with her father on his estate called Hartfield. Her childhood governess, Miss Taylor, has recently left Hartfield to marry Mr. Weston. It would have been quite acceptable for Emma to live with her father under the expectation that she would eventually marry. In this case though, Austen makes Mr. Woodhouse a rather

helpless invalid whom Emma has to take care of. Since her father isn't taking care of her, Emma is essentially independent. Her character is actually dependent of her female strength, activity and good judgement. She sees herself as a complete person, with no need of a man.

3. Austen talks about education in her novels. Anyone who denies that is totally blind. Not only does she speak about education, but also about how bad women have been taught and how that should change. Actually, one of her best known quotes is about education: *Give a girl an education and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without further expense to anybody.*⁷
4. She was actually educated through the reading and studying of old books. Many, including myself, believe that she was inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft, the mother of feminism and author of *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*. James Leigh-Perrot, Austen's uncle, who had an extensive collection of Wollstonecraft's works, was a friend and also neighbour of Sir William East, who happened to be a benefactor of Wollstonecraft. The odds are in favour of Austen knowing about her and her works. After all, she was a teenager when *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* was published, which makes it very likely that she had been inspired by it. Actually, in *Pride and Prejudice*, we can see the similarities with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She, too, wanted marriages to be based on companionship, not wealth or a woman's need to find a wealthy husband. An important aspect of Elizabeth is that she comes off as being well-educated. She is witty and can carry on a dialogue with Mr. Darcy as well as other men in the book. It seems that she outshines Mr. Darcy a few times, as far as education is concerned. During those times, women were only educated if their families could afford to or if their families could educate the girls themselves. Many believe Elizabeth Bennet was actually Mary Wollstonecraft's ideal of a woman. After thinking about it for a while, the character itself could have been a tribute to the known author.
5. In the prior reason we talk about her possible inspirator, Mary Wollstonecraft. There's a possibility she did know about Wollstonecraft and her works, and obviously, there's a chance she agreed with her ideals as well. Wollstonecraft's husband, after discovering she had cheated on him and conceived a bastard son, wrote *The memoirs of the author of the Vindication of the Rights of Women* where he explained what his wife had done. After that, she tried to commit suicide. In the 1790, after the French Revolution, in the United Kingdom

⁷ Quoted in her book "Mansfield Park" published in 1814.

the Anti-Jacobin Review was published. After the “p” for prostitute, it was written: Mary Wollstonecraft. We all know how fast society works when it comes to prejudgement. I assume, if nowadays it is so easy to prejudge feminists, no wonder how easily they were prejudged in those times and classify any work written under the women empowerment point of view as a book that aimed to divulge prostitution. Austen could have been wise enough to write in a soft and subtle way to make sure her works were read, including her message.

6. Many believe she was a feminist writer, clever enough to create characters both men and women would love to read about. Even nowadays some men feel immediately attacked when they hear about feminism or women’s power. If now it causes this reaction, how it could have been the reaction if she displayed her opinion a little more radically? As it is shown in her works, her female characters love their men, but not within the male dominant or female submissive pattern followed before.
7. Actually, in her personal letters, it has been found she wrote to her closest friends, advising them to marry only if love was the reason, and not money. In some of them, it has been found that she comes from two cultures: the male-dominated gentry, and women’s culture. Her rebellious spirit that aimed to show society’s inequities could have been her own way of combining her cultures and showing which one she chose to focus on.
8. Now, my point is: if Charlotte Brönte⁸, who bravely contradicted society through her writing, speaking volumes for the oppressed woman; whose best known novel *Jane Eyre* has been cited as the earliest major feminist novel although there is not a hint in the book of any desire for political, legal or even intellectual equality between both sexes, it is known as a feminist work, why shouldn’t Jane Austen’s novels be catalogued as feminists as well?

I would also like to take advantage of this conclusion to explain my feelings now that I have almost finished the project. I didn’t expect it to be that exciting. Don’t get me wrong, I am very happy with the result and the way it has turned out, but I didn’t think I would have enjoyed it as I finally did. We always assume the only thing the project has to offer to us, pupils, is stress and a lot of work. It has been a lot of work, which is true, but I enjoyed every minute of it. I have been able to learn more than I thought about literature, English writers, and about feminist literature, something it is not that easy to learn. If I had to compare what I knew at the very beginning and what I know now, I realize I knew nothing back then. I have had the opportunity to learn in depth about something I want to do as a future career.

⁸ See page 8.

6. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family for supporting me in any moment, letting me stay up late at night, even when they didn't want to, and offering their help at any moment if there was the need. They have always asked how I was doing with the project and I have felt very supported.

I would also like to thank my friends, who have read the project and have always been very interested, supporting and caring. They have helped me organize my time to find the best moments in which I have invested my time to work on the project.

Needless to say how thankful I am to my tutor, who has answered every question and doubt I have had, as well as guiding my idea, into the one I have ended up developing. Thanks to her I have known the way I wanted to lead that idea and thanks to her advice and tips it has turned out as it finally has. She has never pushed me into something I didn't want to work in but encouraged me to keep looking for more information to gain more knowledge about the topic.

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Annex

Articles read for the practical part

A feminist connection: Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft
<http://www.iasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol25no1/ascarelli.html>

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What does Jane Austen, the unmarried daughter of a clergyman who penned six novels about young girls on a trajectory toward marriage, have in common with Mary Wollstonecraft, the grandmother of modern feminism?

The two would appear to come from very different places. Wollstonecraft is famous for her contempt for marriage, even though she did break down and marry the eighteenth-century radical William Godwin when she discovered she was pregnant with their child, the future writer, Mary Shelley. And Wollstonecraft's most cited book, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, is a strident and indignant analysis of how the education system of her day kept women in a state of slavish dependence, turning them into weak-minded, vain coquettes.

Anger is not the word that comes to mind when one thinks about Jane Austen. But, as I hope to show, Austen is also a formidable feminist critic. Austen's voice is, to be sure, a gentler one, softened by end-of-the-book marriages and a wonderful irony and sense of humor. Nonetheless, a staunch feminist stance is there, suggesting Austen, like Wollstonecraft, was tuned into one of the hottest issues of her time: women's role in society. Such a conclusion would also suggest that Austen was familiar with Wollstonecraft's work, even though Austen never mentions Wollstonecraft in any of her novels or in the letters that have survived.

What makes the Austen-Wollstonecraft connection so fascinating is it helps situate Austen in the context of early feminism, or to use the proper scholarly term, proto-feminism. Literary critics have been debating this question since 1975 when Marilyn Butler published the first book that looked at Austen in the context of her times, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*. Butler concluded that Austen was a conservative propagandist because all of her heroines got married; thus, Butler argued, Austen was implicitly endorsing the established social order.

As Julia Prewitt Brown points out, it is precisely because Austen's heroines marry that feminist literary critics have had such an ambivalent relationship to Austen. Her analysis, which includes Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's feminist classic *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1975), notes Gilbert and Gubar gave Austen credit for educating readers about "grace under pressure," but found Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to be far more perceptive about the depths of the female psyche. Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984) acknowledges that Austen is aware of the limitations society imposes on women, but Poovey ultimately casts Austen as a defender of the status quo—a novelist who sees marriage "as the ideal paradigm for the most perfect fusion between the individual and society" (Poovey 203).

Claudia Johnson's influential book *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* moves Austen further to the left. Johnson concludes:

During a time when all social criticism, particularly that which aimed at the institution of the family in general and the place of women in particular, came to be associated with the radical cause, Austen defended and enlarged a progressive middle ground that had been eaten away by the polarizing polemics born of the 1790s. (Johnson 166)

Who is right in this debate about the woman question? To analyze this point it is useful to pay close attention to the Wollstonecraft-Austen connection. Wollstonecraft, by all accounts, helped set the standard for what it meant to be a radical in the 1700s. If it can be shown that Austen was in accord with Wollstonecraft on key points regarding women and the family, then we will have a better idea of where to situate her within her historical context. I believe that, placed in her historical context, Austen comes across as a realist, someone who knows that life is tough, especially for women. But rather than focus on how society's restrictions could cause someone to have a nervous breakdown, Austen focuses on the reasoning skills women need to survive, which, to me, is the ultimate feminist statement.

So what about Mary Wollstonecraft? In an era marked by the then-revolutionary idea that humans were rational beings capable of making good choices, Wollstonecraft was an indefatigable advocate of what was then an even more radical idea: the idea that women, like men, were rational creatures. The book that lays out that position is *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Written in 1792, when confidence in the French Revolution was still high, the book was an appeal for women's rights after the new French constitution of 1791 gave men the rights of citizenship. It was also a critique of the French government's plans for a national system of education for boys and

girls, which, while radical for its time, did not, in Wollstonecraft's view, go far enough because girls were to be educated for a subservient role.

Vindication of the Rights of Woman is a rambling, indignant, and forceful indictment of how the education system of Wollstonecraft's day conspired to keep women in a state of slavish dependency:

The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove their minds are not in a healthy state; for like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season they ought to have arrived at maturity. (Wollstonecraft 7)

For this state of affairs, Wollstonecraft blames men, who in her day were responsible for shaping female education:

I may be accused of arrogance; still I must declare firmly what I believe that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters than they would have otherwise been; and consequently more useless members of society. I might have expressed this conviction in a lower key; but I am afraid it would have been the whine of affectation, and not the faithful expression of my feelings, of the clear result, which experience and reflection have led me to draw. (Wollstonecraft 22)

Indeed, Wollstonecraft's message drips with sarcasm as she sums up the accepted Rousseauian view that women should be educated to become alluring mistresses and sweet companions for men. "What nonsense!" (Wollstonecraft 25), she sneers.

As forceful as the book is on the question of female education, it is also important to keep in mind what the book is not. Despite the fact that Wollstonecraft was personally against marriage, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* does not advocate a complete transformation of the family. Perhaps because Wollstonecraft was simply being realistic and knew that most women would end up becoming wives and mothers, she gears her book toward imagining a system of education that enables women to become more self-reliant and, thus, become better daughters, wives, mothers and citizens. She writes:

Do passive indolent women make the best wives? Confining our discussion to the present moment of existence, let us see how such weak creatures perform their part? Do the women who, by the attainment of a few superficial accomplishments, have strengthened the prevailing prejudice, merely contribute to the happiness of their husbands? Do they display their charms merely to amuse them? And have women, who have early imbibed notions of passive obedience, sufficient character to manage a family or educate children? So far from it, that, after surveying the history of woman, I cannot help agreeing with the severest satirist, considering the sex as the weakest as well as the most oppressed half of the species. (Wollstonecraft 34-35)

Furthermore, despite the fact that Wollstonecraft was vilified as a prostitute after her death and her husband's publication of his memoirs, she was, by modern standards, a conservative on matters of human sexuality: "I have contended, that to render the human body and mind more perfect, chastity must more universally prevail, and that chastity will never be respected in the male world till the person of a woman is not, as it were, idolized . . ." (Wollstonecraft 4). I point out Wollstonecraft's ideas about chastity and sexuality because they help define what constituted a feminist (or perhaps more accurately, a proto-feminist) worldview in the 1700s. As Wollstonecraft's example clearly indicates, proto-feminism at the end of the eighteenth century does not always coincide with the precepts of today's feminism, which puts a high premium on female autonomy and sexual freedom.

So how do Austen's ideas compare with Wollstonecraft's? A close reading of Austen's work reveals that she, like Wollstonecraft, was very aware of marriage as an economic institution. She also cared passionately about the two issues at the core of Wollstonecraft's work: the concept that women are rational creatures and the belief that, in order for women to fulfill their potential as human beings, they must learn how to think for themselves.

Austen's stories are about the reality of women's lives, which, for women in the eighteenth century, meant living in a straightjacket of propriety. Women's education consisted of a smattering of "accomplishments," a variety of ultimately useless skills that Wollstonecraft said only served to "sacrifice women's strength of mind and body in exchange for "libertine notions of beauty" (10). Austen, too, was interested in how the education of her day shaped both men and women's personalities, and, while her tone is comic—not strident like Wollstonecraft's—the picture she presents is not a pretty one. Austen's books are filled with small-minded people like Fanny and John Dashwood, whom Austen describes in less-than-flattering terms:

He was not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold hearted and rather selfish, is to be ill-disposed: but he was in general, well-respected; for he conducted himself with propriety in the discharge of his ordinary duties. Had he married a more amiable woman, he might have been made still more respectable than he was: — he might even have been made amiable himself; for he was very young when he married, and very fond of his wife. But Mrs. John Dashwood was a strong caricature of himself more narrow-minded and selfish. (5)

The scenario in which the pair justify catapulting the recently widowed Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters into poverty on the grounds that the money is needed for their four-year-old son, could be exhibit A in Wollstonecraft's analysis of how insidious a false education can be because it turns women into jealous, ungenerous wives and men into weak-minded, pompous fools.

Austen's antidote to Fanny Dashwood's narrow-mindedness is independent thought. Austen's heroines navigate through the minefields of their lives by using their heads. Thus, Catherine Morland, the naïve country girl, develops critical thinking skills as she fumbles her way through Bath and Northanger Abbey; Emma Woodhouse, the clever heiress, learns to use her mind responsibly by reflecting on the lessons learned from her botched attempts at match-making and her misbehavior at Box Hill; Anne Elliot, the invisible member of her own family, comes into her own after her abilities are tested at Lyme.

Austen's interest in women's ability to reason is also evident in what has been deemed her greatest technical achievement: free indirect discourse. The technique enabled Austen to portray her heroines maintaining the public appearance of propriety while privately evaluating the true nature of a situation, a clear mark of a thinking person. Thus, through free indirect discourse that we learn that Fanny Price is no dummy; she pegs Henry Crawford as a selfish cad long before he shows his true colors and has an affair with Maria Bertram as this conversation between Sir Thomas and Fanny reveals:

"Have you any reason, child, to think ill of Mr. Crawford's temper?"

"No, Sir."

She longed to add, "but of his principles I have;" but her heart sunk under the appalling prospect of discussion, explanation, and probably non-conviction. Her ill opinion of him was founded chiefly on observations, which, for her cousins' sake, she could scarcely dare mention to their father. (*Mansfield Park* 317)

Sir Thomas's eagerness to see Fanny married reveals another reality of Austen's day. Middle- and upper-class women could not work, so marriage was truly a meal ticket for women—economic security is one reason why Mrs. Bennet was anxious to see her five daughters married. Austen chose to make women's economic anxiety a dominant theme in her work, be it through cautionary tales of fallen women who have gone down a slippery slope into abject poverty (e.g., the two Elizas), Jane Fairfax's fear of becoming a governess, or the careful economy of Mrs. Smith, left penniless because of the profligacy of her late husband.

While all of Austen's heroines marry, not all of Austen's marriages are good ones. Granted, Elizabeth Bennet got lucky and ended up with a rich and honorable husband, but her friend, Charlotte Lucas, did not. Charlotte, who had neither Elizabeth's good looks nor her charm to trade on, knew an economic life raft when she saw one. Her marriage to Mr. Collins reveals Austen's clear-eyed assessment of the economic underpinnings of marriage:

[Charlotte's] reflections were in general satisfactory. Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. – Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honorable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want (*P&P* 122-23).

Perhaps weddings seem to get such short shrift in Austen's work because, as Charlotte reminds the reader, happiness is a matter of chance and marriage provides a state of security. One would think that a writer intent on celebrating the institution of marriage would lavish a tremendous amount of ink on the actual ceremony, but that is not the case with Austen. All of the weddings take place in the last chapter and action is dispatched with quickly, often in as little as a paragraph, as we see in the last paragraph of *Emma*:

The wedding was very much like other weddings, where the parties have no taste for finery or parade; and Mrs. Elton, from the particulars detailed by her husband, thought it all extremely shabby, and very inferior to her own. – “Very little white satin, very few white lace veils; a most pitiful business! – Selina would stare when she heard of it.” – But in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union. (484)

Clearly, then, the wedding, while it signals the end of the story, is not that important to Austen. Instead, what matters is the reality of women's lives, which is very much in sync with Wollstonecraft's ideas about how a false system of education denies women the skills they need to make good choices for themselves and their families.

Why, then, does Austen fail to give Wollstonecraft any credit for contributing to her thinking?

I think it was simply too dangerous.

Let us consider the facts. The 1790s were critical years for Austen. Austen began working on *Elinor and Marianne* (the first draft of *Sense and Sensibility* and the first of the novels) in 1794 and began writing Susan (later *Northanger Abbey*) in 1798. All of her other novels were written after the turn of the century; the last (and unfinished) book, *Sanditon*, was written in 1817, the same year she died.

The 1790s were also a hyper-politicized time in English history. The French Revolution had put social change on the agenda, and the British lived in fear of a French-style revolution in England. That climate of hysteria was reflected in the passage of the Treasonable Practices and Seditious Meetings Act of 1775, which made it illegal for anyone to criticize the English government, and in the publication of the highly partisan *Anti-Jacobin Review*, which helped turn the pursuit of the jacobinical into "a national pastime" (Butler 89). Conservatives demonized reformers by casting them as revolutionaries intent on destabilizing the nation by putting individual rights to happiness ahead of the common good and casting them as dangerous characters out to ruin English families by seducing their daughters. As a result, female modesty—and other issues traditionally relegated to the domestic sphere—suddenly became a question of national security (Johnson).

In the midst of all this, Wollstonecraft's husband, William Godwin, published his memoir about Wollstonecraft's life. *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) detailed, among other things, Wollstonecraft's affair with the American businessman Gilbert Imlay, Wollstonecraft's suicide attempts, and the fact that Godwin and Wollstonecraft conceived their child before marriage. Suddenly Wollstonecraft, who until then was not seen as particularly radical (Johnson 14), was listed in the *Anti-Jacobin Review's* index under "p" for prostitute and her defenders slandered. Claudia Johnson points out that

as Wollstonecraft's unconventional sexual conduct became public knowledge, conservative audiences were shocked to realize that if women were indeed educated and permitted to act like "rational creatures," they might consider themselves entitled, as free agents, to frame their own desires and pursue happiness on their own terms, rather than to be content as dutiful daughters or submissive wives. (15)

How could a young Jane Austen not take notice? Austen biographer Claire Tomalin offers some convincing biographical evidence that Austen is likely to have known of Mary Wollstonecraft and her work. She notes that Sir William East, the father of one of George Austen's former pupils, was a benefactor of Wollstonecraft. Furthermore, Sir William was a neighbor and friend to Austen's uncle, James Leigh-Perrot. After Wollstonecraft attempted suicide in 1796, Sir William was credited with being particularly kind to her during her recovery. While this does not specifically link Austen and Wollstonecraft, it makes it plausible that the Austen family knew of Wollstonecraft and her ideas (Tomalin 158).

Jane Austen probably made a mental note to stay away from partisan politics and to keep her thoughts about Wollstonecraft to herself. Thanks to her skills as a writer, her balancing act worked. She managed to infuse her books with a Wollstonecraft-like feminist critique that is less politically charged but just as potent.

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"Dull Elves" and Feminists: A Summary of Feminist Criticism of Jane Austen

<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/printed/number14/marshall.pdf>

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Marriage is still the one career. Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen can see or imagine no other. In their novels they create personalities in a traditional social situation, but never examine the situation itself closely. Burney, Edgeworth, and Austen were not bold women; they are not critical of institutions, nor even of men in their character as men. (Steeves, 227)

The year was 1973 when Edna Steeves wrote that Jane Austen was not a bold woman, that she never closely examined the social situation. The year was also 1973 when Lloyd Brown found Jane Austen's themes "comparable with the eighteenth-century feminism of Mary Wollstonecraft" because they question "certain masculine assumptions in society" (324).

While Steeves concluded that Austen's time had not been "ripe for rational and meaningful discussion of women's rights," Brown gave more than a dozen examples of Wollstonecraft arguments dramatized by Austen females. Elizabeth Bennet, for example, is "Mary Wollstonecraft's ideal woman," with what Wollstonecraft calls "precisely the kind of 'wildness that indicates a healthy and independent mind'" (332). On the other hand, "to borrow Mary Wollstonecraft's remark about this 'ornamental' approach to education, the Bertram sisters have been rendered 'pleasing at the expense of any solid virtue'" (331). The Steeves and Brown articles, published in the same year, illustrate that a fissure had opened between readers of Jane Austen; a shift in perception had occurred, and the way Jane Austen was to be read had been changed permanently.

Prior to the shift, Jane Austen was widely considered to be a master writer of witty domestic comedies, but her lack of consideration of the larger social issues of her time was a major, if not the major critical concern. By her own admission she saw her work as only a tiny painting on a bit of ivory. But in the past twenty years, a dramatically different view has emerged, for some readers are perceiving an Austen subtext characterized by and disguised behind the irony and laughter which have long been Austen's trademark. Was the little bit of ivory, too, ironic? Margaret Kirkham suggests that "Jane Austen learned to tell the truth through a middling irony which 'dull elves' might misread, but which she hoped readers of sense and ingenuity would not" (162). This new perception, which has led to what is arguably the richest vein of Austen criticism ever, is a feminist one. And perhaps more than any other author in the English language, Jane Austen is a beneficiary of feminist rereading. A number of excellent and well-known feminist critics have found

it fruitful to study, historically and politically, the structure and influence of gender relations that were part of the environment in which Austen wrote.

These critics have found that both Austen's style and her subject matter are responses, both overt and covert, to the patriarchal English gentry society in which women's lives were constricted in ways that men's 39 40 *Persuasions* No' 14 lives were not. The feminist critics have been particularly interested in the artistic strategies which enabled Austen to criticize or subvert the patriarchy without offending or incurring reprisals. This article intends to provide a summary of the highlights of the feminist rereading of Jane Austen, with some attempt to relate these to each other. The initial work, as might be expected, focussed on proving that Jane Austen was aware of the larger political and social issues of her time, and that her opinions on these issues are expressed through an ironic subtext. Interestingly, the cornerstone of subsequent feminist inquiry, Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, concludes that while Jane Austen's works do, indeed, express opinions about current controversies, these opinions were not liberal, but reactionary, and Austen was not a feminist. Jane Austen's novels belong decisively to one class of partisan novels, the conservative. Intellectually, she is orthodox. . . .

Her important innovations are technical and stylistic modifications within a clearly defined and accepted genre. (3) Published in 1975, two years after the Brown and Steeves articles, Butler's work places Austen in her historical milieu midst the philosophical controversies that raged in England during and after the French Revolution. Ideas of individual liberty and independent thought, labelled "Jacobin," were espoused by many of the disenfranchised, including feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. Members of England's gentry and landed aristocracy generally opposed and feared the Jacobin philosophy as they observed that across the Channel, the Revolution had turned into the chaos of the Reign of Terror. Butler reads the pairing of the sensible sister, Elinor, with the emotional sister, Marianne, in *Sense and Sensibility*, and the pairing of meek Fanny Price with self-confident Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park* as examples of the Anti-Jacobin tradition which refer human conduct to a morality based on settled principles of right and wrong rather than to an individual's internal judgment. Austen "never allows the inward life of a character . . . seriously to challenge the doctrinaire preconceptions on which all her fiction is based" (293-94). Elizabeth Bennet may be, as Lloyd Brown suggested, Mary Wollstonecraft's ideal, but Marilyn Butler does not find her among Jane Austen's exemplary heroines, for these are "meek, self-disciplined, and self-effacing." Furthermore, "the heroine who is fallible and learns [Elizabeth, Marianne, Catherine, Emmal, and the heroine who is Christian and exemplary [Elinor, Fanny, Anne], are the standard heroine-types of reactionary novels of the 1790s" (294).

Therefore, while Jane Austen and the War of Ideas made it possible to assume Austen's partisan role in the larger issues of her day, subsequent feminist critics unanimously declined to concur in Butler's portrayal of Austen as a reactionary. Four years later, in 1979, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar published *The Madwoman in the Attic*, devoting two chapters to an imaginative and groundbreaking feminist rereading of Jane Austen. They conclude, in direct opposition to the views of Margaret Butler, that "For all her ladylike discretion . . .

Austen is rigorous in her revolt against the conventions she inherited" (120). Jane Austen is subversive, they find, covering her "discom- Marshall: "Dull Elves" and Feminists 41 fort", her "dissatisfaction," and her "rebellious dissent" with conservative, conventional plot strategies, thereby attaining "a woman's language that is magnificently duplicitous" (169). The strength of the Gilbert and Gubar analysis is a rigorous insistence on the intentionality of an Austen subtext of dissent. Their examples open a whole new reading of Austen, and give new insight and purpose to Austen's famous irony. The weakness of the study is the authors' attempt to relate every Austen theme back to their thesis of patriarchal exploitation, female powerlessness, and camouflaged dissent. "[B]ecoming a woman," for example, "means relinquishing achievement and accommodating oneself to men and the spaces they provide" (154).

The marriages at the close of each novel indicate the heroine's "submission" to her "subordinate position in patriarchal culture" (154). Emma, Elizabeth, and Marianne "stutter and putter and lapse into silence" (169) as the novels close. On the other hand, Mary Crawford is read as a subtextual heroine, whose "refusal to submit to the categories of her culture gains her the freedom to become whatever she likes" (168). Similarly, Gilbert and Gubar maintain that Austen identifies with characters such as *Pride and Prejudice's* Lady Catherine and *Mansfield Park's* Aunt Norris as "more resilient and energetic female characters who enact her rebellious dissent from her culture" (169). Here, Gilbert and Gubar may be misreading the text, distorting the overall effect in order to support their thesis. A further problem is that their approach does not place Austen in a historical context other than as a closet rebel in an oppressive male-dominated society. At times, it seems Austen is being analyzed as though she were writing in the 1970s, not the 1790s.

Yet despite these occasionally overreaching interpretations, Gilbert and Gubar's radical readings must be seen as important groundbreaking work. Their concepts, with modifications and balance, have figured in all subsequent feminist analysis of Austen. An excellent example of this legacy is Susan Fraiman's essay, "The Humiliation of Elizabeth Bennet" published in 1989. While Butler

explored the historical background at the expense of the feminist milieu, and Gilbert and Gubar explored the feminist milieu and ignored the historical background, subsequent feminist readers were quick to synthesize and profit from both perspectives.

Judith Newton's *Women, Power, and Subversion* published in 1981, includes a long chapter on *Pride and Prejudice* which argues that Austen saved women's lives as Gilbert and Gubar did, as restricted and lacking in autonomy. But Newton finds economic inequality, rather than the political patriarchy to be the cause. "It is the right of Austen's men to have work that pays and to rise through preference and education" (55), but women must marry for their fortune, or inherit it! And unlike Gilbert and Gubar's gloomy reading of "Austen's cover story of the necessity for silence and submission" (G & G 154), Newton finds, instead, an optimism: for all its consciousness of economic fact and economic influence, *Pride and Prejudice* is devoted not to establishing but to denying the force of economics in human life. . . .

Men, for all their money and privilege, are not permitted to 42 *Persuasions* No. 14 seem powerful . . . and women, for all their impotence, are not seen as victims of economic restriction. (61) Newton reads *Pride and Prejudice* as decoupling economics from power, and Elizabeth, "an unmarried middle-class woman without a fortune" as "the most authentically powerful figure in the novel" (62). Elizabeth's intelligence mitigates her economic and social deficiencies, evidence that Austen supported "an individualism that had ties to the French and the Industrial Revolutions" (74). Thus Marilyn Butler's thesis that Jane Austen was an Anti-Jacobin reactionary is reversed, and remains so for most subsequent readers. By 1983 a more balanced scholarship began to assimilate, probe, and refine the groundbreaking works.

Margaret Kirkham's *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, for example, explores the historical milieu described by Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, but in adding a feminist perspective, she comes to a very different conclusion: If we miss Austen's engagement with fiction and words as a distinctly feminist engagement, we find it difficult to give a coherent account of the development of her art. (xvii) In addition to providing a chapter on each novel and a useful summary of the critical tradition, Kirkham makes two conceptual contributions to the feminist project. First, she places Austen as an Enlightenment feminist, which means that because Austen believed that reason is a better guide than feeling, it was imperative that she "show that women were no less capable of rational judgement than men" (xiii).

The essential claim of Enlightenment feminism was that women, not having been denied powers of reason, must have the moral status appropriate to 'rational beings,' formed in the image of a rational God. (4) Heroines such as Elizabeth and Emma demonstrate that they are "capable of learning morals through experience and the exercise of their own judgement" (83), while rational Elinor assists emotional Marianne in her moral education. Kirkham's second contribution is her historical explanation of Austen's ironic subtext.

She points out that Austen's novels appeared belatedly, in the aftermath of the anti-feminist reaction which followed Mary Wollstonecraft's death, a time when open discussion of feminist ideas, however unexceptionable they might seem to modern readers, was almost impossible. (161) Wollstonecraft's companion and lover, Godwin, had published her memoirs, revealing her sexual improprieties and her suicide attempts, with the result that feminist ideas "were liable to provoke violent hostility and abusive personal attack" (xv-xvi). Kirkham also points out the obvious that had been overlooked: Austen's experience in attempting to publish her first novel. In *Northanger Abbey*, she had openly criticized sexist bias in literary works and in reviewers, and the novel had been suppressed by the publishing house to which she had sold it.

The avoidance thereafter of any open statement of a similar kind is not surprising. (162) Marshall: "Dull Elves" and Feminists 43 Austen's irony, therefore, was a way to "say what was unsayable in public otherwise" (162). For the reader who would like one single work that typifies the current state of feminist Austen studies, Claudia Johnson's *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, published in 1988, is the ticket. While each Austen novel has its own chapter, the Introduction and the first chapter, "The Novel of Crisis," provide an overview that clarifies and expands previous criticism. Johnson first establishes that Austen's limited subject matter reflects neither a limited political understanding nor an acquiescence to a male-dominated culture, but rather, "a consciousness of how the private is political" (xx).

She mentions Godwin's publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's memoirs and the French Revolution as creating a "pressure of intense reaction" (xxi) which force Austen and other progressive writers to smuggle in the social criticism, as well as the mildest of reform projects, through various means of indirection-irony, antithetical pairing, doubleplotting, the testing or subverting of overt, typically doctrinaire statement with contrasting dramatic incident. (xxii-xxiv) Austen uses "apparently conservative material in order to question rather than confirm" (21) and "politically charged material in an exploratory and interrogative, rather than hortatory and prescriptive, manner" (xxi)' For example, meek, obedient, and dispossessed heroines such as Anne Elliot and Fanny Price

demonstrate that beneath the nominally conventional surfaces of [Austen's] novels, truths about the absence or arbitrariness of fathers, the self-importance of brothers, and the bad faith of mentors which, if not daring or sweeping, are still as disturbing as any of the indictments made by radical novelists. (26) Like Kirkham, Johnson finds that central to Austen's point is that women are capable of reason and thereby responsible for their choices. While unapologetic heroines such as Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet defy every "dictum about female propriety and deference" (xxiii), their rationality and responsibility for their mistakes is the truly radical concept. Susan Morgan's *Slaves in Time*, published in 1989, and Deborah Kaplan's *Jane Austen among Women*, published in 1992, are more focussed than the previous feminist studies. Susan Morgan's chapter, "Why There's No Sex in Jane Austen's Fiction," brilliantly argues that the absence of sex in Austen's work represents not a conservatism or limitation but a literary and a political innovation (50). Morgan examines Austen's "literary inheritance" and finds "a landscape littered with endangered virgins" (28), for "eighteenth-century novels constantly invoke the dynamic of male sexual aggression and female sexual powerlessness" (29).

A heroine's identity in these novels has only two forms: virgin and whore, so that sexuality and identity are one and the same (28). Furthermore, the passage from virgin to whore is the metaphor for the passage from innocence to experience, from ignorance to knowledge. Austen's innovation is to sever the connection between virgin and ignorance, whore and knowledge by introducing "an entire canon of brilliantly visible, imaginatively influential women characters for all of whom it is effectively insignificant that they have never been laid" (40).

Because Austen's heroine *Persuasions* No. 14 is not defined in biological terms, she is "not excused on account of those terms" (50); instead, she is to be responsible for herself and her growth, "an active participant in, an active creator of, her own education, her own changing self" (27). Failure to do so is treated virtually as a crime (50). As for sex, Austen's heroines do love their men, but not within the male dominant/ female submissive pattern that had passed as "truth of nature" (38). That archetype Austen revealed "as a cultural convenience and a literary cliché" (52). In the most recent addition to our growing canon, *Jane Austen among Women*, Deborah Kaplan borrows the concepts of "cultural duality" and "women's culture" from the social sciences and used them to examine what, in the face of difficulty and discouragement, enabled Jane Austen to write.

What made it possible for [her] to take up writing at all and to transcend imaginatively, in [her] representations of women in particular, the narrow range of feeling and experience assigned to [her]? (2-3) Kaplan's approach was to examine as many letters as could be found that had been

written by Austen, her family, her friends, and her neighbors in order to establish that Austen was a member of two cultures, the male-dominated gentry to which she was born, and a women's culture that existed within it. Kaplan finds that the ideology of genteel domesticity "virtually defined the female" (19) within the gentry.

Marriage was the center of this ideology, along with childbearing and childcare. With little hope of independent financial support in the form of inheritance or work, it was a universal assumption that women would and should marry. The average wife raised seven children, and it was not highly unusual for a woman to bear twenty children. In these circumstances, "the domestic wife cannot participate in the public sphere, in part because her family circle needs her constantly" (29). Kaplan then examines, in the same manner, the circles of support within the women's culture. She finds women sometimes support the ideal of domesticity, and other times oppose it, but always cherish and support their close female friends. Kaplan focuses especially on letters supporting Austen's writing, showing that her closest friends shared intimately in the novels as they progressed. Most interesting is Kaplan's hypothesis that in 1802 Austen turned down the marriage proposal of Harris Bigg-Wither, "the brother of two of Austen's closest friends and the eldest surviving son of a much respected, wealthy landowner" (109) in order that she could preserve her freedom to write.

By 1802 Austen had already written three novels and had tried to publish one. In 1803, less than a year after she had turned Bigg-Wither down, she had Henry Austen send another offer works to the publishing firm of Crosby. She wanted to write. Wouldn't she have thought about her writing and about her chances of being able to continue it when considering Bigg-Wither's marriage proposal? (116) The woman Bigg-Wither did marry, Anne Howe Frith, bore ten children in the next eighteen years. Perhaps, Kaplan argues persuasively, Austen chose to put on spinsterhood as an identity which allowed her to write.

And the enabling factor that made it possible for Austen could turn down a financially desirable marriage proposal in order to write in genteel poverty was the emotional support of her women's culture. In conclusion, it is clear that Austen fanciers, feminists and non-feminists alike, benefit from this watershed of Austen feminist criticism. It is remarkable, and a tribute to the author's intelligence and originality, that after nearly two hundred years, rereading Jane Austen generates so many ideas relevant and fresh today.

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Was Jane Austen a Feminist Writer? Paul Gallagher
<http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/blog/reading/2013/11/was-jane-austen-a-feminist-writer>

Jane Austen has been back in the news this week - or her face has - as the Bank of England revealed the image of the *Pride and Prejudice* author that will be used on the new £10 banknote. The chosen image (the one on the right) has been criticised for offering a Victorian 'airbrushed' take on Austen's image. Paula Byrne, author of *The Real Jane Austen*, took exception to the image, claiming on Radio 4's Today programme that it "perpetuates this ridiculous myth of the safe Jane Austen" and stating that Austen was in fact "a subversive writer, she's a feminist, she writes about social class".

But is it accurate to say Jane Austen is a feminist writer? We put the question to two of Scottish Book Trust's most well-read Austenites, and got two very different answers:

No, she wasn't a feminist - Brianne Moore, Web Editor

Was Jane Austen a feminist? Personally, I don't think so. I highly doubt she'd have considered herself a feminist, even if you travelled back in time and explained to her what feminism was: Jane did, after all, live a very conventional life, following the rules that a woman of her time and position was supposed to follow, to the letter. She did create some very spirited and strong female characters who many argue made their own decisions in life, rather than adhering simply to what society expected of them—after all, didn't Lizzy Bennet turn down Mr Collins? But the thing is, those characters inevitably wound up fitting into exactly the mould their patriarchal society expected them to: they all married wealthy men of position, and took their places as good wives.

Women in Austen's stories who are particularly outspoken or don't behave in the way proper young ladies are meant to (polite and decorous, not too flirtatious, not too wildly imaginative) are frequently punished: overly emotional Marianne Dashwood gets her heart broken, Lydia Bennet winds up married to a rogue, and the list goes on. Those ladies who realise the folly of their ways and fall in line, however, reap their reward. Marianne becomes more sensible (less prone to wandering about the countryside and more likely to sit quietly indoors) and marries the upright Brandon; Catherine Morland gets her imagination under control and marries Henry Tilney; Emma leaves off matchmaking and controls her tongue and lands Knightley.

In Austen, whether or not you get your wedding in the end (the expected, conventional ending for a young woman) is highly based on how well behaved you are, in the eyes of a highly patriarchal society, which doesn't read as terribly feminist to me.

Yes she was - Leila Cruickshank, Print & Marketing Co-ordinator

'Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story' – Jane Austen

There are many potentially anti-feminist messages in Jane Austen, including the requirement for women to marry, the depiction of some women as highly silly, and the fact that the men sometimes save the day. Yet to read Austen as anti-feminist is to lose sight of the purpose of feminism. Feminism gets bogged down today in debates about bra-wearing, misandry or 'sisterhood', but the key message of feminism is simple: equality between the sexes. Austen lived in a time when the very notion that women could hold rational opinions and manage their own affairs was highly controversial, and while Austen is certainly not a radical in the sense that Mary Wollstonecraft is, she repeatedly demonstrates that women who are slaves to emotion or who follow the dictates of social expectations over their own intelligence, cannot thrive.

Mansfield Park's Fanny is accused of ingratitude for refusing to marry her guardian's son, yet her decision is shown to be correct, and her guardian eventually recognises her superior judgement. Austen promotes the idea that women's decisions and choices are equally important to men's. Both Mr Collins' and Mr Darcy's proposals to Elizabeth fail due to their misunderstanding of her feelings of self-respect. Elizabeth could not respect herself if she married Mr Collins (indeed, although she is able to understand Charlotte's decision, she is unable to respect it and finds the marriage comical and, frankly, embarrassing). Likewise, her sense of herself, her views of her family, is strong enough to refuse a socially-enticing marriage with Darcy, while Darcy is stunned to be turned down. This sense that women's right to self-determination is more important than the desires of a man, is right up there with feminist mores.

Austen herself was well-read and educated for a woman, and her novels repeatedly comment on the inherent weaknesses in women's education and the need for them to be well-read. Her interest in how women should support themselves is also clear – she sees marriage as the only option for a non-financially independent woman, it is true, but this was very much a practical consideration of the time. Emma states that there is no need for her to marry, because she is financially stable. Austen does wholeheartedly believe that men and women should be companions to each other as well as spouses – consider her depiction of Mr and Mrs Bennet. The fact that she wants women to make choices based on love as well as financial reasons asserts both their ability to make rational choices, and their right to pursue happiness. And that was pretty feminist for the time.

Was Jane Austen a Feminist? <http://austenauthors.net/was-jane-austen-a-feminist/>

Posted on February 4, 2015 by Regina Jeffers

(Editors Note: Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement was the first national women's liberation newsletter. The first issue appeared in March of 1968 and the final issue in June of 1969. Several future CWLU members worked on it during its 7 issue lifetime. Edited by Jo Freeman aka "Joreen", out of Chicago, Illinois, it provided a way for many small groups across the country to communicate.)

In 1968, the Women's Liberation Movement staged a demonstration at the annual Miss America Beauty pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey. They protested the idea that the most important thing about a woman is how she looks. Women's liberation attacked "male chauvinism, commercialization of beauty, racism and oppression symbolized by the Pageant."(JoFreeman.com)

I am a product of that particular generation. I was a teen in the 1960s and a young woman in 1970s. Generally, I was raised in the Southern states, and I thoroughly understand the "good ole boys" system. Recently, at my retirement recognition gathering at the high school where I taught for many years, instead of praising me for my dedication to my academic area or to my students, my principal stood up and said, "If you have ever served on a committee with Regina, you know that she has no problem in speaking her mind." Well, that is something, but, obviously, not how one would like to be remembered after 40 years in the classroom. In other words, I had "ruffled his feathers" on more than one occasion by not always conforming to how he thought a woman should act. I have never been subservient to a male. That was my mother. I am a daughter of the women's movement. So, like Jane Austen, while I write about romance and tradition and virtue, I still place my female characters in roles where they "defy" the never ending patriarchal society in which they live.

If all Men are born free, how is it that all Women are born Slaves?

– Mary Astell, Some Reflections upon Marriage

In 18th Century England, certain educated women began to question why men did not see women as rational creatures. Among those were Mary Astell (whose advocacy for equal educational opportunities for women earned her the title “the first English feminist”) and Catherine Macaulay, who discussed such issues as the lack of a female educational system and the absolute authority of males in the family unit. One must wonder if these ideas influenced a young Jane Austen or perhaps it was the forward thinking males within her family. In each of Austen’s six main novels, the concept of marriage is told from a female perspective. Is Jane telling us that the male view is obsolete?

It would be difficult to call Austen a feminist because her point of view is very subtle. Yet, her message has been read by millions of women around the world, and I openly admit that it influenced me. But who influenced Jane? We shall never know for certain, but it is likely that one of those could have been Mary Wollstonecraft.

In 1792 (when Jane was but an impressionable 16-year-old), Wollstonecraft released *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. As an English teacher, this was one of my favorite pieces to bring to my students for it has strong parallels to modern times. Wollstonecraft openly stated that both men and women have the potential to conduct themselves as reasonable and rational human beings. One sex did not have dominance over the other. Wollstonecraft also attacked earlier writers, especially John Milton and Rosseau, for advocating the subordinate position of women in a man’s life. The author’s idea that the 18th Century English educated their women only in how to attract (or “trap”) a man into marriage, but did nothing to equip them with the skills to be good wives and mothers was quite controversial. With *Vindication’s* release, new doors opened for women writers.

However, Wollstonecraft soon lost her life to childbirth. (BTW, her daughter was Mary Godwin, who eventually became the wife of Percy Shelley and the author of *Frankenstein*.) Afterwards, Wollstonecraft’s husband, William Godwin, wrote a sometimes embellished *Memoir* of his wife’s life. He told the world of the love affair that produced an illegitimate child and of her suicide attempts and of her rejection of Christianity. Wollstonecraft was labeled an atheist and a “whore.” Critics held a new weapon in discrediting her work, and indirectly, the writings of all women.

Unfortunately, Mary’s downfall brought close scrutiny on those who followed. A female writer could not be seen as advocating the overthrow of marriage rituals. In 1798, the Reverend Richard

Polwhele published an anti-feminist satirical poem entitled "The Unsex'd Females." In it, Polwhele argued that the "sparkle of confident intelligence" was proof that female writers were immodest and that it was a sign of the "corrupt" times that anyone would go so far to consider a woman's work on the same level as a man's. Please remember that it was that same year (1798) when the publisher Cadell refused Rev. Austen's offer of his daughter Jane's *First Impressions* (later to be retitled *Pride and Prejudice*) manuscript.

Jane Austen does one thing better than any other female writer. She writes dominate female characters with spotless reputations. In each novel, one finds the seduced-and-abandoned plot embedded in the main story line, but Austen's subject is not courtship. Kathryn B. Stockton of the University of Utah says, "Austen's works are about 'marriageship: the cautious investigation of a field of eligible males, the delicate maneuvering to meet them, the refined outpacing of rivals, the subtle circumventing of parental power and the careful management, which turns the idle flirtation into a firm offer of marriage with a good settlement for life. All this must be carried on in a way that the heroine maintains her self-respect, her moral dignity, and her character as daughter, sister, friend, and neighbor.'" For myself, I am more inclined to agree with G. K. Chesterton, who said, "Jane Austen could do one thing neither Charlotte Bronte or George Eliot could do: She could coolly and sensibly describe a man."

In *Persuasion*, Austen wrote, "But let me observe that all histories are against you, all stories, prose and verse. If I had such a memory as Benwick, I could bring you fifty quotations in a moment on my side the argument, and I do not think I ever opened a book in my life, which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men."

"...Men have had every advantage of us in telling their story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing."

After Wollstonecraft's "downfall," women writers, even those who did not express views of "female philosophers," had difficulty finding a market for their writing and gaining respect for their talents in a male-dominated occupation. They had to stress the virtue of ladylike qualities and respectable lives. Rights for women could not be their focus.

