

# ***The Reflections of Mary Wollstonecraft's a Vindication of the Rights of Woman on Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice\****

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## **Abstract**

Feminism, the idea that supports the equality between men and women, occurred in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century, in other words the Victorian Period, is considered as the period of conflicts especially for women and their position, as it can be seen in the works of that era. On the one hand, there are women who are oppressed by patriarchy, but on the other hand there is a group of women who raise their voices against it. Without doubt Mary Wollstonecraft is one of the pioneers of those women who are against patriarchy and her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is considered as one of the first recorded books of feminism. In later years Jane Austen, who is one of the distinguished female writers of English Literature, joins in that group of women by mirroring the women's issues in her works. This writing evaluates the reflections of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* on *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen through giving information about the status of women in the Victorian Period.

***Keywords:*** *Women, the Victorian Period, Marriage, Education, Patriarchy, Women's Rights, Wollstonecraft, Austen*

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## **Mary Wollstonecraft'ın A vindication of the Rights of Woman adlı Eserinin Jane Austen'ın Pride and Prejudice Adlı Eserine Yansımaları**

### **Öz**

Kadınlar ve erkekler arasındaki eşitliği savunan Feminizm düşüncesi ondokuzuncu yüzyılın başlarında ortaya çıkmıştır. Ondokuzuncu yüzyıl, diğer bir deyişle Viktorya Dönemi, dönemin romanlarında da görüldüğü üzere, çatışmaların ve özellikle kadınlara karşı çatışmaların yılıdır. Bir yanda ataerkil toplum tarafından bastırılan kadınlar varken, diğer yanda ataerkil topluma karşı sesini yükselten bir grup kadın vardır. Hiç şüphesiz ki, Mary Wollstonecraft, ataerkil topluma karşı sesini yükselten kadınların öncülerinden biridir ve kitabı *Kadın Haklarının Gerekçeendirilmesi (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman)* feminizm'in kayda geçen ilk kitaplarından biri olarak bilinir. Sonraki yıllarda İngiliz Edebiyatı'nın seçkin kadın yazarlarından olan Jane Austen, eserlerinde kadınların sorunlarına ayna tutarak bu gruba dahil olmuştur. Bu makale *Kadın Haklarının Gerekçeendirilmesi*'nin *Gurur ve Önyargı (Pride and Prejudice)*'daki yansımalarını Viktorya Dönemi'ndeki kadının yeri hakkında bilgi vererek incelemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kadınlar, Viktorya Dönemi, Evlilik, Eğitim, Ataerkil Toplum, Kadın Hakları, Wollstonecraft, Austen

### **Introduction**

Feminism is defined as “the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes” in the dictionary of *Merriam-Webster*. It is quite understandable from its definition that since the ancient times women have not been given equal rights with respect to men. They were bound by patriarchal order which gives men the superior rights. Women were obliged to adhere domestic fields and, they were not allowed to get active in public life. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, especially after The French Revolution (1789) women began to speak loudly and they started to oppose the inequality between the sexes which has been maintaining itself since earliest times. In England, it can be said that with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, feminism was manifested historically from the political and cultural point of view. After Wollstonecraft, many

woman writers, especially Jane Austen, maintained the feminist movement in their works. For this reason, the nineteenth century very much concerned about the woman's position and value in the society.

### **The Victorian Period (1837-1901)**

The Victorian Period, due to Queen Victoria, is known as the period of womanhood, which is considered as the basis of family, maternity and prestige. A sincere field was created by Queen Victoria and her King Consort Albert through filling the Balmoral Castle with nine children. Queen Victoria became the icon of femininity and domesticity, furthermore she was described as "the mother of the nation" (Abrams, 1).

In the Victorian society, marriage was considered as an institution that should have been experienced, therefore it was assumed that everyone should marry. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft says that "How women are to exist in that state where there is to be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, we are not told" (Wollstonecraft, 1993: 100). Moreover every woman was seen as a mother, so women were also expected to bear children. A woman would reach a slightly better status than slaves, provided she married. Marriage was seen as a life assurance which would be necessary after their father's death. In *Pride and Prejudice* Mrs. Bennet warns her daughter, Elizabeth, that: "...you will never get a husband at all and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead" (Austen, 2003: 111). Was there any chance for women to maintain their lives without any help? If so, Mrs. Bennet does not talk with her daughter in such a discouragous manner. As Armstrong highlights, marry a man with whom you were emotionally compatible if you could, but marry a man of material means you must, such novels as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* seemed to say, or else face the degradation of impoverishment or, worse, the need to work for a living (Armstrong, 2001: 97). This quote and the Victorian patriarchal understanding justify, in a way, the marriages without love, like Charlotte's:

"I am not romantic...I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state" (Austen, 2003: 123)

However, Mary Wollstonecraft refused such marriages which were established without love or affection and she used Daniel Defoe's phrase "legal prostitution" (Todd, 1993: xxiv) while criticizing. In the novel from top to toe according to her mindset and actions, Charlotte represents the typical Victorian Woman.

Women, who had been the possessions of their fathers, became the possessions of their husbands once married. In the Victorian Period, husbands had great power over their wives. For example, they were allowed to beat, even to rape their wives without feeling unpressured by law since women had no right to sue. However, with "The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857", a civil court was established and it gave the right to abandoned wives to plead for an aegis. Men could divorce their wives for any reason and they were allowed to claim all properties and possessions, which the women had brought into the marriage, even custody of the children. But when women wanted a divorce the only acceptable reason was adultery. Even in such a situation women were obligated to prove it. As a result of the divorce, custody of the children was usually given to their father. "He's won, hasn't he? He's got my house, my money and my daughter. Now he wants to see me on the streets" (McBeath, 2017: 158). "The Custody Act of 1839" gave mothers the right to sue for access to their young children, the children up to the age of seven but later in 1878 the age was increased to sixteen. In matters of property, single women or widows were allowed to own properties and possessions on the condition that they remained single. Otherwise all their possessions and properties would be given to their husbands. On the other hand, if there was no heir in a family after the death of the father, all possessions and properties were given to a male relative of the father, such as a cousin or a nephew. Also in *Pride and Prejudice*, the Bennet family faces Mr. Collins, who is the cousin of Mr. Bennet and he refers to Mr. Collins as "...my cousin, Mr. Collins, who, when I am dead, may turn you all out of this house as soon as he pleases." (Austen, 2003: 60). This quotation shows the importance of either having a son or being an heir to someone in the Victorian Period. With "The Passage of the Married Women's Property Acts (1870-1908)", women both married and single had their own possessions and properties (All Acts are extracted from Greenblatt, 2006: 990-991).

Among the rights given to women, which were quite limited, the chance of education was the most limited one. It seems that people did not take their share from the book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. This inequity in education encouraged a feverish discussion about the woman's position known as the "Woman Question" (Greenblatt, 2006: 990). This was mostly conducted by middle-class women. In 1837, despite the fact that there were three universities in England, women were not allowed to enroll in any of them. However, in 1848 the first college for women was established in London. By the end of Queen Victoria's reign they still could not get a degree from Oxford and Cambridge. Besides education, the Victorian Period engaged with women's nature. Both men and women were categorized in separate fields and roles in this period. Men dominated the public field because they had freedom and were considered to have the capacity of thinking logically and reasonably. On the other hand women were limited to private fields where their womanlike qualities such as; obedience, nonresistance, sentimentality belong to. In *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill suggests that "What is now called the nature of women is eminently an artificial thing – the result of forced expression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others" (Mill, 1996: 44). In another example, Tennyson's *The Princess*, the king utters a quite traditional perspective of gender roles:

*Man for the field and woman for the hearth:*  
*Man for the sword and for the needle she:*  
*Man with the head and woman with the heart:*  
*Man to command and woman to obey;"* (Tennyson, 1917: 100-101)

The king's contemptuous words for women show the mindset, which laminates the domestic role considered as belonging to women's nature.

Since they could not have their own life or entertain own interests, they were not playing any single necessary part in terms of choosing their social class.

"Women's class status is traditionally determined by their father or husband. They exist in a liminal state neither inside nor outside class hierarchies, and gender can cut across and conflict with class or party politics." (Tanner, 2003: xvii)

In the Victorian Period, women had four different social classes in terms of their engagements, aims and livings. The women of the upper class had a life of luxury. They spent their time at tea parties and diverse events. They were educated so, they were expected to teach their children. Briefly, they were educated idles. On the other hand, the women of the middle class were trying to interact with the upper class. Some distinguished women such as Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and, Florence Nightingale entered in protest which criticized the fact that these women received foolish achievements to spend their times in which there was nothing crucial to do. However, the women of the upper and the middle working class were brought up to become a governess, housekeeper or a schoolmistress. For these women, marriage was essential both to keep a roof over their heads and to put food on the table. Lastly, the women of the lower class, lived in extreme poverty and their only means were occupations such as prostitution, laborer or any line of work which required physical endeavor. Also, these women mostly stayed single.

### **Mary WOLLSTONECRAFT (1759-1797)**

The egalitarian writer and fervent supporter of both social and educational equality for women, Mary Wollstonecraft, was the eldest daughter of a farmer. It is understood that she had lived the first part of her life in prosperity with respect to her confession to her husband, William Godwin. The confession was, that she used to throw herself in front of her mother to shield her from her father's physical abuse, furthermore sometimes she slept outside her parents bedroom in order to prevent her father's alcoholic rage towards her mother right away (Greenblatt, 2006: 167). She was fond of reading. Despite the fact that her education was completed, she learned German, French, Italian and Dutch on her own. In her youth, she was abandoned by a man whom she fell in love with after telling him about her pregnancy. During her life, she observed men's oppressive attitudes towards women and when she married, she did not share the same house with her husband William Godwin. However when she turned thirty-eighth, she died due to blood poisoning right after giving birth to a daughter, Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein* and the wife of Percy Shelley. In her last words, she mentoins her husband and whispered that "He is the kindest, best man in the world" (Greenblatt, 2006: 170). There

upon Godwin's announcement for his beloved upon her death was "I firmly believe that there does not exist her equal in the world. I know from experience we were formed to make each other happy" (Greenblatt, 2006: 170).

*A Vindication of the Right of Woman* is a response for Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Edmund Burke, in his book supports the traditional hierarchy, particularly sexual hierarchy the in family, according to which sexes are different in terms of their innateness. On the other hand, Mary Wollstonecraft strongly opposes his idea and adds that though men are better educated than women, they usually cannot achieve even an uneducated woman's capacity. And she puts the blame on culture or tradition rather than nature.

"...it is culture, not nature, which dictates that women behave like merely passive creatures of feeling, just as it is culture, not nature, which has allowed a self-perpetuating ruling class to reach a similar state of decadent self-indulgence." (Tanner, 2003: xix)

Unlike other middle-class women, who gave the bridles into their fathers' or their husbands' hands, Mary Wollstonecraft predicted the damage stemmed from inequality between men and women. Unfortunately, until the middle of the twentieth century, she was not given to the respect that she deserves due to her actions which caused her to be seen as immoral and licentious. In addition, the book *Memoirs of the Author of "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman"* (1798), by William Godwin, verifies her immoral actions, according to conservative Victorian society. However, today, people still commemorate her early advocacy of women's equality and her resistance against separatist actions, with the notion "the arbitrary power of beauty" (Leitch, 2010: 495).

As it mentioned earlier, one of the first books of feminism in English Literature, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, is one of the first treatises of modern feminism by Mary Wollstonecraft. The aim of the book is not only to criticise severe distinction of the sexes but also to attack "hereditary privilege of all sorts- birth, wealth, rank and gender" (Leitch, 2010: 493). In the process of writing her treatise, John Locke's liberalism, which remarks that everybody has her/his own life, freedom and

area, guides her. In the book, Mary Wollstonecraft is especially worried about the education of women in light of her discussions on women in general. Because in the Victorian period women only achieved domestic education, such as sewing, housekeeping or parenting, which was limited to fulfill their tasks as a women or mother rather than the education based on science or culture. People claimed that women were unable to think like men but in those conditions they had to, because they lacked option to educate themselves. Mary Wollstonecraft says that "...women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue" (Wollstonecraft, 1993: 84). Despite the fact that they were expected to be virtuous in every single moment of their lives. She argues that an educated woman equals to an educated society or a better society because women are the ones who will raise the children. Furthermore, she posits that women are more capable than men in terms of learning. Wollstonecraft says that:

"Make them free, and they will quickly become wise and virtuous, as men become more so; for the improvement must be mutual, or the injustice which one half of the human race are obliged to submit to, retorting on their oppressors, the virtue of man will be worm-eaten by the insect whom he keeps under his feet." (Wollstonecraft, 1993: 262)

Besides women's capability, Wollstonecraft foretells what will happen unless women are educated. She briefly tells that allowing women to better themselves will achieve better results than in men. If only one half of society is educated, whereby interestingly this half refers to men only, the other uneducated or illiterate half of society will decrease the number of the educated half of society.

In her work, in which she engendered a history of feminist reasoning to answer patriarchy's painful questions, she challenges long-established claims about women's position in the society. Since the very early times, women were kinds of slaves that were given only private areas, in other words they were not allowed to intervene in public events. They were locked in the house underlining the concept of 'angel in the house', who takes care of her babies and at the same time deals with the household businesses and then, in the evening she has to make her husband happy by serving herself. During those times, men have tried to fit women into



certain patterns. Mary Wollstonecraft saw those patterns which are based on their existentialist ideas about women's nature. The existentialist ideas such as maternity, sentimentality, weakness of women's nature that Mary Wollstonecraft vehemently opposes. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she mentions that:

“Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness or temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, every thing else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives.” (Wollstonecraft, 84)

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft draws a picture of a conservative woman, meaning a woman who supports not only the education but also the marriage. Furthermore, “Virtue must be “nursed by liberty” both positive freedom of intellectual inquiry and negative freedom from undue restraint [VRW 5:264]. The proper mother is not an amiable, fashionable house-slave but a reasonable, liberated intellectual” (Richardson, 2002: 33). In that sense, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet acts in light of Wollstonecraft, because at the end of the novel Jane Austen creates a domestic Elizabeth Bennet character by marrying her with Mr. Darcy, like the character Jane Eyre. Thus, the first wave of feminism, leading by Mary Wollstonecraft, cannot go beyond the equality of women unlike the others. Still they regard the concept of a woman without a husband to be an oddity.

The Victorian Period, as earlier mentioned, is a period of womanhood meaning every woman was expected to behave in a feminine manner such as being kind, presentable whereby society attributed those manners only to women. Furthermore, most of the women behaved according to those manners. Mary Wollstonecraft does not reject it. She says that it is due to men who do not give any opportunity to women in relation to their own interests. Therefore she says:

“Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison.” (Wollstonecraft, 1993: 112)

According to Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas, it is a kind of intellectual slavery because they were taught, but in the domestic field not in the scientific fields as men were. They were kept childlike, they were for marrying, procreating, taking care of the household, bringing up children and being proficient in the finer arts of sewing, playing the pianoforte, singing, speaking French and being able to shop for themselves. They were not treated like normal citizens, as if they were incapable of making their own decisions, they could not vote or could not work in public areas except for teaching or governing which is also reflected in the works of the Victorian Period. However, Mary Wollstonecraft criticises those attitudes towards women which are attributed to their childish nature, according to men. She admits that women feel their inferiority, or the childish nature and they let men treat themselves with respect to this nature. Then she apologizes to women stating that she, herself does not or rather will not treat them so as men do, in general. She completely rejects to flatter them because she predicts that the more women are flattered the more women are oppressed. According to Mary Wollstonecraft, men arrest women in their state of "...perpetual childhood..." (Wollstonecraft, 1993: 73) by flattering their charming delicacies which shows that they are irrational beings in a doll's house. Thus, Mary Wollstonecraft advises women to stop acting charmingly and not to let men flatter themselves which later on will oblige men to accept women as irrational creatures.

In essence, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the manifesto of feminism by Mary Wollstonecraft, tells the reader about women's inferiority which is created by men, from the perspective of a woman's eyes. This contribution of Mary Wollstonecraft also helps the reader to find many resolutions for such oppressiveness towards women. Also, Anne K. Mellor says that "In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft threw down the gauntlet, not only to her male readers, but equally important, to the other women writers of her day, as she called for a "revolution in female manners." and these women took up Wollstonecraft's challenge" (Mellor, 2002: 141). Without doubt, one of the women who accepts Wollstonecraft's challenge is Jane Austen who may be considered as her representative (Mellor, 2002: 141).

### **Jane AUSTEN (1775-1817)**

One of the most distinguished woman writers of English Literature, Jane Austen was the daughter of a vicar. Like Mary Wollstonecraft, she was taken away from school and she became her own teacher. As Virginia Woolf, another prominent name of English literature, says in her *A Room One's Own*, Jane Austen had neither a room nor a silent corner. She wrote her novel on the table which stood in the center of Austen's living room. For that reason, when guests came, she had to pick up all her stuff quickly. She was fond of her sister Cassandra, so she used her name in her story, *The Beautifull Cassandra*. She did not marry by her own will, because she devoted herself to her works and referred to them as "my children" (Urgan, 2018: 881). At the very beginning of her career she sold her novels for quite low prices. Afterwards she became a famous novelist in her time. Also, Dr. Johnson, whom she called "master" refers to Jane and a group of women writers as "Amazons of the pen" although Urgan, in her book argues Jane Austen not to be one of them:

"In former times, the pen like the sword was considered as consigned by nature to the hands of men... The revolution of years has produced a new generation of Amazons of the pen." (Urgan, 2018: 890)

At forty-two, she died of an unknown disease. According to the letter of Cassandra, few days before Austen's death, when Cassandra asked her whether she wanted anything, the reply was "Nothing but death" (Urgan, 2018: 881).

Jane Austen, in her novels, gave dominancy into the hands of women characters. For that reason, a conversation between two male characters cannot be found. At the same time, she did not include the lower class in her novels, in other words actions were framed around the middle and upper class people. Therefore, some critics and authors such as Madame Germaine de Staël blame her for being "vulgar, too close to the English provincial life she detested for its narrowness and dullness" (Transcribed by Sentiment, 1). Despite the fact that she had not married, all of her six novels have happy marriages. In this sense it is possible to say that her endings resemble - in terms of resolving the problems - *A Midsummer*

*Night's Dream*. On the other hand, with those marriages, she criticises women's notion which are obviously the only improvement they may achieve is their fortunate and happy marriage. This shows that Jane Austen, like Mary Wollstonecraft, was brave enough to allude women's issues in that era. Jane Austen, in terms of her novels as well as the issues she addresses in them, is one of the most appreciated women writers in English literature.

*Pride and Prejudice* is the book closest to Jane Austen's heart, even if it is not the most important book, she calls it "my own darling child"<sup>3</sup> (Urgan, 2018: 917). The novel starts with a kind of facetious phrase that establishes the importance of an advantageous marriage:

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen, 2003: 5)

In the very first page, the readers are introduced with the mocking tone of the intelligent author that a truth universally acknowledged is not that single men are seeking a wife, but rather, and probably ironically in want of a wife, this emphasizes the lack of wife. But poor maidens need husbands, "their pleasentest preservative from want" (Brownstein, 1997: 50). As it is previously mentioned, in the nineteenth century England everyone was expected to get married. Jane Austen implies the inevitable reality of the nineteenth century England in a superficially breezy and straightforward manner that most of the marriages could not go beyond becoming an object or an obligation. This phrase seems to shed light on the entire novel. Because the whole plot of *Pride and Prejudice* is, about the arrival of two wealthy gentleman, belonging to the upper class, and coming into the life of a family, The Bennets with five unmarried daughters. After many challenging events, the novel ends with the marriage of three Bennet sisters, Jane, Elizabeth and Lydia, whose marriage is of questionable status as Mary says: "...loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable...that one false step involves her in endless ruin...that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful..." (Austen, 2003: 275) since it is thought to be patched up.

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<sup>3</sup> "My own darling child" is written also in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*

The Bennet family, though they are members of the middle class, the information of how they earn their livelihood is not given. Mr. Bennet, in terms of his ironical speeches, makes the reader laugh. He does not interact with the family members except for his beloved Elizabeth. He is very passive in the role of being a father, generally he does not pay attention to anyone. He is annoyed by his wife and chooses seclusion in his study. Whereby, it is possible to pinpoint Mrs. Bennet as his foil character. Mrs. Bennet is a simpleminded woman because her only aim is to marry off her daughters and one can say that she believes the idea that “rich men exist for people to marry” (Brownstein, 1997: 50). Jane Austen correctly sums up Mrs. Bennet’s disposition as: “She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper...The business of her life was to get her daughters married” (Austen, 2003: 7). To reach her goal, she makes many mistakes such as letting her daughter get ill, for the sake of finding her an appropriate husband. She represents the uneducated nineteenth century’s English woman who was formed by society’s rules and thoughts. But on the other hand, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet’s relationship does not seem for the era. In the daily life of the Bennet family, it attracts attention that no patriarchal dominancy can be detected. Mr. Bennet sits in his library and does not intervene with their business.

The Bennet family has five daughters each with their own distinct character traits. Jane is the eldest one and the most beautiful one. She is pretty optimistic; she cannot think ill of anyone even though they may have mistreated to her. She is very naive, childish and innocent therefore one may think that she is the representative of angel in the house. As oppose to Jane, Elizabeth is witty and intelligent which is why she is the favourite of her father. She is independent, in other words she stands on her own two feet. She is not as beautiful as her elder sister Jane. Due to these features, she does not seem to be suited for the woman image of the Victorian period in general. Lydia is the one most prone to animalistic nature. For example, she does not know how to speak or how to act in formal places, she laughs loudly and harshly humiliates people. She is very impulsive and her desire is to get married as soon as possible. Therefore, she is the favourite of Mrs. Bennet. She does nothing but flirt with officers and she says that she is very excited to be referred to as Mrs. Wickham when she is about to get married to Mr. Wickham. In this respect it can be said that “England regarded

such women as simply lacking the education, social acumen, emotional delicacy, and refined taste it took to attract and select the right man” thus Jane Austen depicted Lydia Bennet as lacking of cultural equipment which provided a woman’s womanhood (Armstrong, 2001: 108). Catherine and Mary are not as prominent as their elder sisters. Catherine is like Lydia; she loves to engage officers as a typical nineteenth century woman whose lifelong happiness depends on her marriage. Finally, Mary, the youngest one, is a book worm. She either reads a book or she gives a quotation from a book.

In the Victorian period, there was a big dilemma as to whether women should be virtuous or not. Though women were expected to be virtuous, there was the matter of getting a husband which entailed being noticed by a potential suitor. This is mirrored in Charlotte’s ideas: “If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him...” (Austen, 2003: 22). This perspective, which obligates women to show love or affection, turns a woman into an object, rather than a human being. Another thought of Charlotte is: “Happiness in a marriage is entirely a matter of chance.” (Austen, 2003: 24). This is all compatible with the Victorian understanding of marriage, because the marriages must be prudent, in other words love is not necessary in choosing a husband. Unfortunately, Charlotte, who is twenty-seven years old, and therefore considered a spinster or a burden to her family, accepts Mr. Collins’ marriage proposal out of fear for her future. In the Victorian period, if a woman had neither a father nor a husband, people would think ill or would look down on her. Thus, when Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins’ proposal her mother becomes angry because “...society recommends that all women accept the marriage proposal they receive” (Golemac, 6). Charlotte, with all her actions, represents the traditional Victorian women who are focused on prudent marriage which should ensure the rest of their lives and she says that:

“Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object: it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty- seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it.” (Austen, 2003: 120)

In contrast to Charlotte, Elizabeth is “a reflection of an active feminine in response to the power of the patriarchal ideologies” (Tanrıvermiş, 2005: 5). Elizabeth, before seeing Pemberley, turns down two marriage proposals. One of them is sanctimonious Mr. Collins’, she kindly rejects it as saying that she is not an “elegant female” in this sense she echoes Mary Wollstonecraft as “a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart” (Brownstein, 1997: 53). Her negative thought about marriage remains consistent till the end of the novel, except for a very brief moment when she is faced with the beauty of Pemberley, other than that “her opinions are the product of common sense, not of social conventions” (Golemac, 6). She has state of mind, expostulates Charlotte’s mindset towards marriage as an insurance. When Elizabeth learns about the union of Mr. Collins and Charlotte, she thinks that becoming Mrs. Collins must be the most humiliating title in the world. She rather chooses to be “a penniless spinster” (Golemac, 6) than to become the wife of someone whom she detests. In that sense “Elizabeth chooses to act autonomously as a reaction against the patriarchy” (Tanrıvermiş, 2005: 50). Elizabeth rejects women being domesticated after marriage which obligates them to spend their time focusing only on appearances. As it is mentioned in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*:

“It is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments: meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to desire of establishing themselves—the only way women can rise in the world—by marriage.” (Wollstonecraft, 1993: 74)

Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft can both be considered as belonging with in the scope of the Feminist discourse although they did not live in the same century, they share the same themes. Both of these feminists call for equality between men and women in different areas such as in education, marriage, and matters of inheritance (Abdulhaq, 18). At the beginning of the novel, Mr. Bennet receives a letter from Mr. Collins, the heir of the Bennets’ property. The Bennet family, especially Mrs. Bennet, strictly opposes this situation. But they are not able to do anything due to the constitution. If a father has no heir, all his properties will be inherited by his closest male relative upon his death. Yet, Jane Austen mentions this situation, as “...the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five daughters, in favour of a man whom nobody cared anything about”

(Austen, 2003: 61). In that period as mentioned previously, according to the Victorian patriarchal mindset, women had very limited rights. Because women were seen as irrational beings, they were thought to be limited in fulfilling their daily responsibilities as normal citizens. Thus, they were not given opportunity to own property so that they had to rely on men's economical power. In this sense, Mrs. Bennet warns her daughter, Elizabeth, of her reckless attitudes towards marriage and she implies that if she goes her own way, she will have no one to protect her after her father's death (Austen, 2003: 111). Mrs. Bennet's speech also highlights the physical superiority of men. However, Mary Wollstonecraft even prior to Austen, points out that the issue should not be physical strength and meanwhile she implies that the focus should be on strength of mind.

"I will allow that bodily strength seems to give man a natural superiority over woman; and this is the only solid basis on which the superiority of the sex can be built." (Wollstonecraft, 1993: 106)

Education is the primary concern of both Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft. In the Victorian period, girls were either home-taught or attended schools where they were sufficiently prepared to attract a suitable husband. It shows how marriage is a primary goal for the Victorian women, in general. Since they mostly received domestic education, women were expected to act accordingly which meant being courtly. In the novel, Miss Bingley describes a woman's qualities as:

"A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the world; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the world will be but half deserved." (Austen, 2003: 39)

In this quotation, some skills are not mentioned. For example; economy, literature or philosophy. These skills have a potential to degrade women intellectually day by day. At the same time, as Mary Wollstonecraft remarks, women are narrow because the required skills were determined by the patriarchal society in accordance with the supposed nature of women. In the conversation between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth, Lady Catherine asks questions about Elizabeth's life and education as well as her sisters'. But when Lady Catherine hears the response, she is shocked:



“No governess! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without a governess! I never heard of such thing. Your mother must have been quite slave to your education... Without a governess you must have been neglected.” (Austen, 2003: 161)

Judging by Lady Catherine’s reaction, which mirrors her opinion on social norms, Elizabeth and her sisters have been neglected. She thinks that all five daughters are unimaginably deprived from the imperative skills such as drawing and playing an instrument. In this scene, “Austen expands an anecdote from *Vindication* about a rich, idle woman” (Harris, 2009: 100) who insults relentlessly a young woman. However she is astonished by Elizabeth’s response which openly opposes social norms regarding female behavior.

“Compared with some families, I believe we were; but such of us as wished to learn, never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly might.” (Austen, 2003: 161)

In this context, she implies that skills such as reading, feeds people’s minds but the other skills which women are obligated to learn are unnecessary. In the novel it can be said that Jane Austen makes Elizabeth speak whenever she, herself wishes to criticise subjects such as the limited education of women. This underlines the fact that Elizabeth, as a fictional character mirrors Austen’s own attitude towards social norms of her era.

Throughout the study, it is also intended to provide a basic historical, social cultural background of the Victorian Period, when there was a great increase in the female voices against the austere mindset of patriarchal system. Apparently, the feminist movement, in that era, was largely influenced by the patriarchal system which reflected itself in the literary works as if it is the biggest situation of the period. Hence, it can be said that the literary works have a key role in the understanding of eras. In this sense, Mary Wollstonecraft, who speaks of “the improvement and emancipation of the whole sex” (Wollstonecraft, 1993: 262), reflects bravely her ideal female figure idea which stands to oppose the understanding of the society. Thus she creates, as Anne K. Moller says, the essentials of what people use today “equality” or “liberal feminism” (Mellor, 2002: 141). Later on she argues that the education of the patriarchal system convicts women to

“perpetual childhood” (Wollstonecraft, 1993: 73) in the same way as the angel figure who is actually locked into the house. As a result of her work, she argues the disposal of the false education system. Jane Austen, took part in the women’s rebellious approach towards the platonic Christian ideal of woman and the wrong education system. In her book, *Pride and Prejudice*, she creates Elizabeth’s character to mirror her own ideas. In a way Elizabeth not only represents Austen but also represents Wollstonecraft in terms of rationality and reasoning. Although Jane Austen could not convey the political issues of moral conduct, Mary Wollstonecraft did, says Terry Eagleton (Eagleton, 2005: 119). The World Literature appreciates their bravery in creating such challenging works in a period when, the only thing that women could do, was to act the role of the angel in the house.

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