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FEMINISM AND ELIZABETH

A Comparison Between Elizabeth Bennet and Secondary Characters in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract

Title: *Feminism and Elizabeth: A Comparison Between Elizabeth Bennet to Secondary Characters in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract: While feminism in *Pride and Prejudice* has been a subject for discussion for many decades, in this essay I aim to show how Elizabeth Bennet's feminism is shown through the comparison with three secondary characters. This essay will examine the characters with the help of a narratological approach that shows what main trait the characters have and how this is used to explain them further concerning feminism and Elizabeth. The liberal feminist theory will explain how feminism was viewed in the nineteenth-century and how this reflects on the characters.

Keywords: feminism, Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, women in literature, England, nineteenth century, education, sexuality, finance, narrative

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1. Introduction

Pride and Prejudice (1813) is a classic novel written by Jane Austen. This novel takes place in the British countryside in the nineteenth century and centres around the protagonist Elizabeth Bennet. Elizabeth has four sisters, Jane, the eldest, and Mary, Catherine ('Kitty') and Lydia who are younger. Mrs Bennet, their mother, is very focused on getting her daughters married so as to gain financial stability for them, and luck has it when Mr Bingley, a wealthy gentleman arrives with his even wealthier friend Mr Darcy. Bingley falls in love with and marries Jane, and after some time Darcy and Elizabeth are married. Austen touches upon several important issues, however subtly, relating to feminism and how it connects to the protagonist of the novel, Elizabeth Bennet.

There has been an amplitude of research done on the novel (Newton, 1978; Cohen, 1994; Tauchert, 2003; Greenfield, 2006; Haydar, 2014), on Austen herself, and especially on the protagonist Elizabeth. However, articles that discuss secondary characters are few and far between (Sasso 13), especially studies on how the characters are built and used against each other as a way of showing feminist thinking. With the help of liberal feminism and with a narratological approach, I will show how they are built with different traits and how Austen uses this to create characters that either show feminist views or not. Since the focus of this essay is on secondary characters concerning the protagonist, I will use sources that have focused on the secondary characters that I have chosen to examine, such as Amber Naz Haydar (2016) who examines the relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and Charlotte Lucas, and Rita Hayati (2017) who examines Lydia Bennet closer.

My thesis is that Elizabeth is a character with feminist thoughts, and this is made even more clear with the comparison to secondary characters. My aim, therefore, is to search for feminist thoughts and action and the lack thereof and compare Elizabeth Bennet with three secondary characters to explain that feminism is a strong theme in the novel. For the theoretical approach for this essay, I will use feminist theory, with a liberal feminist approach. I have chosen to focus on liberal feminism since the goal for liberal feminists in the late 1800's and early 1900's was to ultimately gain individual liberty and gain the freedom to have opportunities.

Liberal feminism is an individualistic feminist theory which focuses on women being able to be equal to men through their actions and choices. Furthermore, it also argues that there is a false belief held by society that women are by nature less intelligent and less physically capable than men. A key text in this regard is Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Liberal feminism is often described as being founded in the late eighteenth century, and Amber Naz Haydar explains that Wollstonecraft was appointed the leading figure of the movement (4). Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication* can thus be described as the starting point of feminism, and she brings up issues like the lack of education which makes women remain childlike beings (6), not equal to men. Liberal feminism is rooted in the oppression of women, excluding women from competing in the public world, the different worlds of financial law, medicine, and politics (Tong 5484). Society traditionally held the belief that women are by nature weaker than men and therefore did not include women in the different aspects of life that men took part in. Liberal feminism is about having the freedom of living a life of one's own choosing and having the political autonomy of one's own life.

To better understand feminism, education, and the link between these two as well as the characters, I will use Mary Wollstonecraft as a source from the time and place the novel was written in. Since she was advocating equal rights in Regency England and especially in relation to education, I will use *A Vindication* to show how the lack of proper education might have made these characters turn out the way they did. I argue that feminism is linked with education and this will be seen in *Pride and Prejudice*. I will use Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1982) together with Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (2000), to give more context to education during this time.

The narratological approach is made by the help of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983), which explains that the character in a story is a construct that the reader puts together from "various indications dispersed throughout the text" (36). This means that the traits the characters have are shown in different places in the novel and can be put together to have a final construct of the characters. With the use of this narratological approach, I aim to show how the secondary characters are constructed and how their traits are different or similar to Elizabeth's own feminist thinking. Hui-Chun Chang (2019) states that the foils of secondary characters such as Charlotte Lucas, Jane Bennet and Caroline Bingley make Elizabeth's feminism and her "unconventional ambition of seeking gender equality" (76) much stronger, which is why a paper with more focus on secondary characters is needed.

The purpose of this essay is to show that a feminist theme is carried out throughout this 19th-century novel, especially in relation to Austen's protagonist Elizabeth Bennet. The characters I will look at are Charlotte Lucas, Mary Bennet, and Lydia Bennet. Elizabeth's friend Charlotte Lucas will be looked at in relation to financial security, Mary in relation to education and Lydia in relation to sexuality. With the use of a narrative approach, the look at visual, written and spoken words about a character, the building of characters through their traits, and feminist theory, this essay will show that Austen was a feminist thinker and showed it in different ways. In the first chapter, I will talk about feminism, then a chapter on each of the secondary characters and the last chapter will conclude the essay.

2. Feminism and Wollstonecraft

To view feminism and better understand why there are signs of it in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, one must first understand what feminism is. In society today more and more people might have heard the word "feminism", but in the age of Austen the word was not invented. However, the lack of the word does not mean that the idea behind it was not there. Feminism is an umbrella term and is the theory of social, economic, and political equality between the sexes (Merriam-Webster). Feminism is a fairly new word, first used in 1890 and deriving from the French word 'feminisme'. It was coined by the utopian socialist Charles Fourier. Equality between the sexes means that women should have the right to the same opportunities and aspirations, in all aspects, not least in the same education system. Therefore, feminism and feminists can be widely discussed, especially when it comes to the eighteenth and nineteenth-century.

Haydar (2014) explains that feminism in the eighteenth century was a highly controversial issue. British Enlightenment thinkers were often credited with being early advocates of the movement (4). Even though access to education had "become more readily available" during the eighteenth century, "the ultimate goal for women's education was still to attain an ideal womanhood" in which domestic activities were supported and academic pursuits were disregarded (Haydar 4). Paula Marantz Cohen (1994) continues by arguing that "Austen responded to prevailing ideas concerning sexual stereotyping in a highly controlled and consistent fashion" (1) and that "all of Austen's heroines are neglectful of class barriers" (2), which does not necessarily exclude Austen's secondary characters such as Charlotte Lucas.

According to Judith Butler (2007), feminist theory has assumed that there is some existing identity, that initiates feminist interest and goals within discourse (39) and that "[f]or feminist theory, the development of a language that fully or adequately represents women has seemed necessary to foster the political visibility of women" (39). Feminist theory, in other words, makes women visible and paves the way for women, politically and otherwise. Mary Wollstonecraft (1775-1817) was a contemporary author to Jane Austen and a feminist of her time, often even regarded as the first feminist. In her *A Vindication for the Rights of Woman*, she argues that women are not innately inferior to men, but they appear so because of their lack of education. This deficiency of education keeps women as a child-like being instead of

being an equal to men (6). She argues that books men have written on education are to blame for the lack of education for women since in these books females are considered as women rather than human creatures, making it look as though women are not included in the human race and are therefore not entitled to the same education as men are. This also makes it appear as though women are, in most cases, only anxious to love when they should “cherish nobler ambitions” and with their abilities and virtues get respect (6). Texts from this era suggest that women are not equal to men, but rather “treated as subordinate beings, not part of the human species” (6). If women are not even being treated as human beings the same as men, it is no wonder that they have not been exposed to the same education either. While de Beauvoir (2011) claims that “woman has always been, if not man’s slave, at least his vassal; the two sexes have never divided the world up equally” (30), the world is still divided between the males and females. Even though the world is changing for women, her legal and financial status are not equal to men. They are rather from two different castes and this puts women to men’s advantage (de Beauvoir 30). Wollstonecraft claims that women are often “intoxicated by the adoration” they receive from men who see them as tempting objects for a moment, an “amusement” in their society (7). Women are treated as a ridiculous sex rather than rational beings (8) that could emerge and be welcomed into the world of men. Wollstonecraft states that in order for women, who are rational beings, to rise above “common wants and affections”, and who are not vain and weak beings, they need access to the right education. Whilst women spend time on acquiring accomplishments when they are young, their strength of mind and body are sacrificed to libertine concepts of beauty and the desire to establish themselves, for the only way they can rise in the world is by marriage (Wollstonecraft 9). In order to strengthen women’s minds, Wollstonecraft encourages females to get educated and put an end to the “blind obedience” that keeps women in the dark. With education and strengthening of the mind, women can get some power over themselves and get out from under the control of men (Wollstonecraft 24).

According to Elaine Showalter, the dividing line between men and women was classical education (42). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point to the fact that in the eighteenth-century, the education that women had access to was that of teaching young ladies how to be modest, submissive and angelic (23). Wollstonecraft explains that even though education has been attended to more formally than before, woman is still considered a frivolous sex and a desire to better this condition was met with ridicule (8). Wollstonecraft also states that until society is constituted differently, much cannot be expected from education; however, she

believes that every being may become virtuous if they are able to exercise their own reason (21), hence the need for education.

In Regency England, the feminine values were “domestic duty, familial loyalty, and personal affection” (Showalter 84) These are not subjects that Austen writes about, even though she writes about the daily lives of women. Austen has with her novels accomplished a new way of writing, where the novel is all about females within family and community, and even though the literary stereotypes adapted slowly (Showalter 91), it was a first, and an important, step towards all-inclusivity of female realism (Showalter 84).

Female authors often wrote about themes related to power, mobility and money (Showalter 28), or the lack thereof, as is seen in *Pride & Prejudice*. In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen talks about finance in terms of the entail of houses, marrying for security, not having the ability to travel without a chaperone and the lack of power over one’s own life. Austen lifts these certain issues and shows in a small capacity how society is unjust towards women. The disregard Regency society had on women and their lives, was of little concern for men. Austen make some of her female characters wonder about this, and in some small ways, the characters act against it. This essay’s focus on financial security, education and sexuality and the character’s association towards it and their specific traits will lead the reader to conclude that Austen did write this novel with a feminist theme in mind, with special attention to the lack of education and how that impacts the characters.

3. The Importance of Financial Security

Charlotte Lucas is the best friend of Elizabeth Bennet and can be seen as her opposite when it comes to feminism. The character of Charlotte Lucas is built up by the personality trait of intelligence; “[t]he eldest [of the Lucas children] a sensible, intelligent young woman, about twenty-seven, was Elizabeth’s intimate friend” (Austen 18; Sasso 47). In Charlotte’s case this is shown by the fact that she is aware of what she is doing. While Austen penned Charlotte as a thinking person, her actions are not those of a feminist. Instead of choosing a man who is her equal, as her intelligent, feminist-thinking friend Elizabeth does, she marries a man who happens to be her equal regarding social standing. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983) explains, a character trait can be explicitly mentioned in the text, but this is not necessarily always done (38). The story character is a construct which the reader puts together by “various indications dispersed throughout the text” (36). There are hints to the character’s traits in the whole of a text, and these indications and repetitions of the same behaviour “invites” into “labelling it as a character-trait” (39), meaning that through repetition and contrast the reader can thus construct the story character and understand his or her traits. Seymour Chatman (1980), explains that the traits definition is an adjective and this, in turn, is defined as a personal quality (125). This, however, is distinguished from thoughts, feelings, temporary motives and so on (126). According to Chatman, “a character’s personality is a somewhat stable personality trait” (qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan 39). Furthermore, Barthes says that “[c]haracter is an adjective, an attribute, a predicate” (qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan 38). In the case of Charlotte, the adjective is “intelligence”.

Charlotte’s intelligence is different from Elizabeth’s. Elizabeth is intelligent and clever when it comes to dialogue. Her response to different difficult situations is not always what would have been expected from a young woman of a certain class, or any class (Austen 168), which is also where her feminism shines through. Elizabeth uses her intelligence to become a feminist, without backing away from her values that a woman and a man should be equal and have respect for one another, whilst Charlotte’s intelligence leads her to marry Mr Collins for financial reasons. Charlotte’s intelligence can be seen throughout the novel, as when she talks about Jane and Mr Bingley and how Jane needs to push herself towards Bingley so that he knows what she feels; “Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly, but he may never do more than like her; if she does not do more to help him on” (Austen 22). Charlotte tells Elizabeth that Bingley does indeed like Jane and it would be good for her to show more affection for him

and even says that “[i]n nine cases out of ten, a woman had better shew [sic.] *more* affection than she feels” (Austen 22). To secure the man the woman likes it would be safer to show too much affection even if it goes further than the actual feelings do. Austen shows how Charlotte uses her intelligence for her own gain later on but does not allow Charlotte more room as a feminist, even though she has established that Charlotte has the potential for it.

In Regency England, men openly expressed their low opinion of women. That women possessed intelligence was for some men unthinkable, as seen in a scene between Mr Collins and Elizabeth; “I have the highest opinion in the world of your excellence judgement in all matters *within the scope of your understanding* (Austen 98; emphasis added). Austen shows Mr Collins as a man who thinks of women as weak, with an unhealthy mind (Wollstonecraft 6), not intelligent enough to understand as well as men do, simply because of their sex. With this scene, Austen also makes it clear that Mr Collins will never think himself equal to whomever he marries. In this regard, Charlotte as his future wife marries a man who stands far from feminism and the values that feminism stands for. However, in terms of feminism, Charlotte, unlike Elizabeth, is not concerned with being equal to her husband, even though it is fortunate that things turn out well for her. Charlotte has a higher social rank than Mr Collins since her father is knighted to become Sir William Lucas (Austen 18). Mr Collins is a clergyman which gives him a higher status in society than most vocations in Regency England. Thus, without her looking for equality, she ended up married to someone within the same social class. Charlotte becomes married to a “conceited, pompous, narrowminded, silly man” (Austen 137), but she has kept a good position in the social hierarchy. This can be seen as part of feminist thinking, that even though Charlotte does not show signs of feminism any other way she is at least married to an equal in social standing in the end.

The lack of an education, that could lead to a vocation outside of pleasing the husband, which in Regency England was still considered a woman’s job (Gilbert and Gubar 24), is what drives Charlotte into the arms of a man she does not even care for. Her reason for marriage is solely financial reasons. As Charlotte admits to Elizabeth, “I ask only a comfortable home” (Austen 126). The fact that she is not a romantic like Elizabeth makes it easier for her to accept a man like Mr Collins. Charlotte’s marriage “represents past norms” (Moe 1076). With her not “thinking highly of either men or of matrimony, marriage has 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 preservation of want” (Austen 123), she gained her objective of getting married since she

cannot work and get an income by herself, and thus, the only way of supporting herself and not being a burden to her family is to marry.

Elizabeth has a hard time coming to terms with Charlotte's impending matrimony to Mr Collins since she feels that Charlotte "sacrifice[d] every better feeling to worldly advantage" (Austen 126). Elizabeth cannot believe that anyone would settle for a man who is not her equal. Her sister Jane reminds her that Charlotte is from a large family and "that as to fortune, [...] is a most eligible match" (Austen 137). Elizabeth needs reminding that it is a respectable thing to marry, and especially if the woman comes from a large family with a modest income. While Elizabeth does not conform to society's norm, the other women of this time believe that they must gratify men and land a husband (Chang 76). Further, Austen shows that Charlotte knows that to attract the attention of a man, a woman must scheme. Instead of being deceptive, though, she chooses to sacrifice her own good judgement and enters into the marriage with open eyes. Charlotte knows that Mr Collins has good connections and a good situation in life, but that he is "neither sensible or agreeable; his society irksome" (Austen 123). Predicting that she might not be truly happy with him, she believes the chance of happiness will be fair (Austen 126), which is truly something to consider in her position. Her scheme for financial security goes even further. As St John K. Damstra (2000) explains, Charlotte actively interferes with Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship in pushing Elizabeth towards him, which might result in Charlotte and Mr Collins gaining even more financial security (165). Damstra continues to explain that "[a]s a parson's wife, she plans to get her hands on more money by marrying her best friend to one of England's richest landowners, a landowner who also happens to provide significant patronage to the Church" (165). Charlotte might not think highly either of men or matrimony, but, she is very observant and intelligent and uses this to make herself financially secure.

Charlotte's intelligence and her ability to interpret situations correctly (Damstra 167) give her the chance to make a situation go her way. As Kendal Sasso (2013) points out, Charlotte makes the homelife with Mr Collins work in her favour. Elizabeth notices these methods which Charlotte has incorporated to subtly show that her husband appears to have no idea (45). Thus, without ever being fond of men and not seeking a man of equality for her matrimony, Charlotte did as well as a woman in Regency England could be expected considering her situation; she married because she wanted to be protected financially and did not fight for any equality between herself and her husband.

4. Discrimination in Education

Mary Bennet is a character who Austen builds up as having the potential to be a feminist, since Mary studies and educates herself as much as she can. Mary, though, cannot go further with her studying since the world is not equal for men and women in Regency England. As previously mentioned, Wollstonecraft was a driving force for feminist thinking and equality and while access to education, and more equality in it, were already becoming more readily available to women, the goal was, ultimately, to attain the ideal “womanhood”...[as] a ‘proper education’ was viewed as one that supported domestic and social activities but disregarded more academic pursuits” (Bomarito and Hunter qtd. in Haydar 4). Caroline Bingley speaks of an extensive list of accomplishments that women should know; drawing, dancing, singing, the modern languages and knowledge of music (Austen 39) – none of which would help women in life other than to please men. Even though education was not thought highly of (Wollstonecraft 9), at least not in the way of attaining a vocation afterwards, but rather, the form of education women had access to was that of drawing and playing music, all to please their husbands if or when they found such (Gilbert and Gubar 23) because it was the woman’s job to please their man.

While Mary and Elizabeth are both avid readers, having little else in common, Austen portrays them as equals in the sense that they want more from the world than they are getting. They had the opportunity for some kind of education with masters, but their father never took them to town, and they had no governess to teach them (Austen 166). Despite them not receiving more education at home, they have both chosen not to be idle as their little sisters appear to have chosen. Even though Mary tries to be socially accepted with her accomplishment of piano playing and being well-read (Bolton 2), her greatest joy is hearing herself being talked about by Caroline, as “the most accomplished girl in the neighbourhood” (Austen 12). Mary’s excitement over this shows her lack of education as well as lack of feminist-thinking since these accomplishments in Regency England were a way of oppressing women (Bolton 6). Despite her lack of formal education Mary wants to be an intellectual (Bolton 6) and therefore often stays home and reads when her sisters walk to Meryton. However, even though she reads a great deal, the need to present herself as an intellectual woman (Bolton 2) only makes her a parrot who repeats the information she has received from books (Duckworth qtd in Bolton 7). Had she been able to receive a proper education, she

might have been able to form intelligent thoughts of her own instead of mimicking others, which is what makes her “silly and ignorant” in her father’s eyes (Bolton 7). Elizabeth is a feminist-thinking woman and Mary is not, even though they both read and want to educate themselves; Mary is not portrayed as a feminist since she cannot make her own opinions. Since there are no books on feminism or the search for equality, Mary is stuck in the old ways of thinking.

Mary is a secondary character whose primary trait is plainness. Mr Bennet asks, “What say you Mary? For you are a young lady of deep reflection I know, and read great books, and make extracts.” Mary wished to say something sensible, but knew not how. “While Mary is adjusting her ideas” he continued, “let us return to Mr Bingley” (Austen 7). Mr Bennet shows the reader that the middle girl is not as clever as she wished to be, instead her plainness is shining through. Mary is a secondary character that we do not see a lot of, but, when we do see her, she is portrayed as plain (Austen 25; Bolton 1). Her plainness describes both her body and soul. She is plain-looking while her four sisters have some kind of beauty to them. Furthermore, she has a conceited manner, which would have injured any outstanding quality if she had any (Austen 25). Her lack of proper education but longing for learning makes her a foolish subject (Bolton 8) and her choices in books are perhaps not the right ones to expand her mind or intellect (Austen 60) or to produce intelligent, feminist-thinking thoughts and values. She has a great desire to learn but did not receive formal education in the way of either governess or being taken to town for lessons (Austen 166; Bolton 6). Elizabeth says to Lady Catherine that “[those] of us as wished to learn never wanted for means. We were always encouraged to read and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly might” (Austen 167), in which she explains that if they wanted to learn, they had the opportunity to learn the accomplishments that were thought necessary for young women to learn.

Mary’s younger sisters, Kitty and Lydia, favoured the adoration of men to learning and chose to be idle (Austen 167). Mary, as Bolton explains, works hard for accomplishments and knowledge “because she is the plainest sister” in the family (1). Because her “defining feature is the lack of defining features” (2), she is more invested in learning and wants to be an accomplished woman who is well-read. But, since society is not in favour of intelligent women, Mary falls short (Bolton 2). By the end of the novel, with her sisters having all left home (Austen 387), Mary’s desire to learn has been extinguished because she realises that she does not have to compete with her four sisters anymore. This results in a hopeless

circumstance which is Austen's way of saying that without money, beauty or talent, there is no hope for women to find happiness (Bolton 3) in Regency England.

The build-up for Mary's character is thus a woman with no opinions or thoughts of her own. She is a plain female who wants to be a well-read intelligent woman with accomplishments such as piano playing, but, she falls short. In the end, she has given up on building her accomplishments and instead is out more in the world with her mother, Mrs Bennet. She is the only one of the Bennet girls who is left at Longbourn house (Austen 387). Where Elizabeth's intelligence made her an avid reader with her strong values of equality, Mary's lack of her own opinions makes her a good contrast to her older sister since she cannot produce her own thoughts and therefore cannot advocate for equality in any regard.

5. The Expression of Sexuality Through Laughter

Feminism is not a word that would describe the character of Lydia Bennet. With this character, there is no sign of striving for equality, either in education or marriage. Lydia's character trait is, through various indications dispersed through the text (Rimmon-Kenan 36), ignorance, which is made stronger by her being vain and idle (Austen 215). This trait of Lydia's is built up through repetition and logical sense (Rimmon-Kenan 39) that has been displayed throughout the text in different forms (Austen 29; 215; 223; 232; 233; 292) but is not explicitly mentioned (Rimmon-Kenan 38) in the whole text. Lydia is a minor character who does not develop (Rimmon-Kenan 42) but stays the same ignorant and vain person who loves nothing more than to flirt and laugh (Austen 318), and her laughter is closely linked to her sexuality, since in Regency England laughter was linked to being sexual, vulgar, and lacking self-control. Elvira Casal (2001) claims that Lydia's laughter is a sign of rampant sexuality as well as being foolish. The lack of ability for reflection makes her an ignorant being who does not care or strive for equality.

Rita Hayati (2017) states that "Lydia's only concern is the militia life. She would like to attract the soldier's attention" (60; 215). Lydia's goal in life is to obtain an officer to marry; she thinks it will be fun if she gets married before all her four older sisters so that she can chaperone them to balls (Austen 223). Lydia is a stranger to feminism, equality between the sexes, by the fact that she seemingly only wants to marry a man who is in uniform and to do so before her sisters, as in a competition. Lydia has the character of a woman described by Wollstonecraft as "often intoxicated by the adoration they receive from men who have no interest in becoming their friend, but merely tempting objects for a moment, women are an amusement in their society (7), a ridiculous sex rather than rational beings" (8). Women like Lydia love attention from men and do not comprehend that men might only enjoy her company for their own amusement and might not see her as a rational being since she lacks every form of education. This lack of education also plays a role in her being ignorant, as she chooses to be idle and not take advantage of the masters that her parents provided for their daughters (Austen 167). Wollstonecraft stresses that "[a]n immoderate fondness for dress, for pleasure, [...] are the passions of savages; the passions that occupy those uncivilized beings

who have not yet extended the dominion of the mind, or even learned to think with the energy necessary to concatenate that abstract train of thought which produces principles“ (200).

The contrast between Lydia and Elizabeth only enhances the feminist in Elizabeth, where Elizabeth strives for equality between herself and whomever she marries, Lydia happily marries whichever man comes her way and shows her enough affection. Lydia's idea of running off with a man is a big joke. She has no thought about what she is doing or how this might affect her family when she elopes with Wickham, even though, to her knowledge, they are off to get married. She does it because here she found an officer who could easily persuade her to run away with him and might fulfil her hope of being married first. Yet, in Regency England running off with someone who was not the legal husband disgraces the family (Hayati 62) and could be so severe that no other men would want to marry the remaining sisters, or as Mr Collins says in a letter to the Bennet's, "this false step in one daughter, will be injurious to the fortunes of the others, as Lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family" (298). This means that no one wants to be familiar with a family whose daughter has done such a shameful thing. However, this "false step" is not something Lydia considers. She is pursuing her own happiness, which means being married before her sisters (Hayati 63), with little concern for anything else.

According to Simone de Beauvoir (2011), a "true woman" was thought to be a "frivolous, irresponsible woman", which the character of Lydia falls into. The view on sexuality in Regency England is not unlike societies today, that the man can do whatever he chooses, and it is the woman who is left being thought ill of and causing pain and suffering to her family. Here Austen gives the reader the context of the era, that women who run away with men they are not married to will cause grievance to her relations and could have a negative effect on the women connected to her, even to the point that no man may want to marry them, and since in this era women depend on marriage for financial stability, Lydia's idea of fun could have had dire consequences for all her sisters. Lydia takes no responsibility for her actions. She simply does what she wants, even though this proves to be "wholly inattentive" (Austen 232) towards her own sisters, her own family (Austen 292).

While equality in marriage is something the protagonist Elizabeth strives for and is one of the main themes of the novel, Lydia differs from her older sister in that way as well as being the opposite in the way she laughs and behaves. Lydia shows no interest in being equal

to Wickham before marrying him. They were brought together “because their passions were stronger than their virtue” (Austen 313). This passion Lydia has is shown through her laughter, and her laughter is a connotation of her sexuality (Casal) and the freedom she takes with it. With a character such as Lydia, Elizabeth’s feminist value of equality becomes even more obvious, and with the contrast between how the characters use laughter, Elizabeth’s laughter is still used as a way of showing that laughter does not always come with the connotations of vulgarity or lack of respect. Elizabeth uses laughter as a way of being close to someone; for her it is an invitation to friendship and a way of reaching out to those around her (Casal). Elizabeth uses her laughter as a way of protecting herself as well, as seen when she tells her friends of the snide remark Mr Darcy made at the first ball. Elizabeth has found different ways of using her laughter which is not connected to the sense of lack of respect or vulgarity that her society tells her it is.

Hence, laughter in *Pride & Prejudice* can be linked with sexuality but is not used that way by the protagonist. Where Elizabeth’s laughter is closely linked with wit and familiarity, Lydia’s is linked with foolishness and rampant sexuality (Casal). Lydia’s laughter is wilder than Elizabeth’s since Elizabeth is a thinking woman who can discriminate. According to Casal, both love to laugh, however, they use it differently; Elizabeth can handle her sexuality with thought and discrimination whereas Lydia cannot (Casal). Lydia and Elizabeth both laugh in a time where women should not, and thus both are breaking the social norms of the time and breaking the conventional behaviours that social pressure usually uses to make women adhere to the norms of society that men have decided (Sullivan 27). Lydia’s ignorance makes her sexuality shine brighter than it might have done if she had had any interest in education and being taught to behave differently. Although her father often states that she is foolish and silly, he has done nothing to change her ways, and has in that way let his youngest daughter become the ignorant, vain girl whose only hobby is looking for a husband. This in effect makes the character of Elizabeth stand out more as a feminist-thinking woman who uses her laughter with wit and playfulness, while Lydia’s laughter is connected with vulgarity.

6. Conclusion

In this essay, I have explored the theme of feminism in form of liberal feminism and education, and with a narratological approach explained how the secondary characters have been built up with different traits that are important in understanding the characters in relation to the protagonist Elizabeth. In the introduction, I presented this theory as well as the narratological approach I have used. In the first chapter I then explained feminism closer and how it might have been viewed during Jane Austen's time in Regency England. In the next three chapters, I have then tried to give a build-up of the three secondary characters of Charlotte Lucas, Mary Bennet and Lydia Bennet and strived to give a picture of feminism and education in relation to their own questions of financial security, education and sexuality, and put them in contrast with the protagonist Elizabeth Bennet.

I have shown that Austen has used feminism throughout the text in various ways concerning Elizabeth and her expressions, her thoughts on matrimony, her ability to think critically and even though she expresses sexuality through laughter, she has the intelligence to play on it in a witty way. In contrast to Elizabeth, I have shown that Charlotte Lucas is a thinking woman and aware of the world she lives in and makes the best of the situation even if she cannot be a feminist the way Elizabeth is. Where Elizabeth strongly hold on to her belief of being equal to her potential husband, Charlotte has realised that being financially secured is a good choice. Mary Bennet wants to be an educated woman; however, she falls short due to her plainness and lack of proper education, as well as not being able to produce a thought of her own makes it difficult for her to become a feminist since she is only saying the information she has read in books. In the case of Lydia Bennet, her sexuality is shown through her laughter and constant chase after officers, and in contrast to her sister Elizabeth, her laughter is wild whereas Elizabeth's is linked with wit and playfulness.

With a feminist theory and narratological approach, I have shown that close reading of these secondary characters and their traits is lacking and there is more research to be done on all characters to get a better picture of their potential feminism and lack of education, regarding Elizabeth Bennet, as well as the other characters.

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