



## A WOMAN'S PURITISM, AND THE POLITICS OF DOMINANCE IN JANE AUSTEN'S MANSFIELD PARK, PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, AND EMMA

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### ABSTRACT

*This essay demonstrates Austen's ability to combine two ironical ideologies in her simple romantic stories, using the basic ideological principles to promote her central concern. Austen recreates her cultural society realistically to the extent that it takes her readers into middle class Georgian England characterized by conflicts of dominance, and the question of the woman's puritism, her worth, and romantically, Austen embellishes her heroine(s) with a renewed mind against what is the norm; and clothes her with virtue, strength and steadiness of character(s) to resolve this conflict. This essay also studies Austen's pre-occupation with the woman's individual struggle against men and women, who try to subdue her will to all other interest but hers, and the escape route to the woman's conquest, which lies in her ability to re-define her identity, challenge the forces, the politics of undue influence, threat and intimidation that constantly seek to dominate her. Other historical perspectives and arguments on the roles of women will be highlighted to establish the socio-cultural and political catalyst that propelled the position of women and their vulnerability to abuse and fuelled the conflicts in Austen's works.*

**Keywords:** Woman, Puritism, Politics, Dominance.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Moments of crisis produce in men a heightening of life. In a society dissolving and reconstructing itself, the struggle of two spirits, the collision of past and future, the mixture of old and new ways of life, ... liberated passions and dispositions reveal themselves with an energy they do not have in a well- ordered polity, the infraction of laws, the freedom from duty, from custom

and propriety, ... duels and love affairs friendships born in prison and the fraternity of politics. (Rosen, 2006: 19-20)

## 2. THE WRITER'S WORLD

The England of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century was a society that was reconstructing itself after the experiences of wars and revolutions, and was rapidly changing from the old order and imbibing a new order of industrialization, conflicts, and resolutions. This new world just like the old embodied the order of class and gender difference which will be discussed alongside the concept of women puritism and the politics of dominance. Even though the focus of this essay is not on class or gender difference, the presence of both in this study demonstrates that they are the catalysts that generate the conflicts in Austen's society.

### A woman's puritism

The ideology that propels a woman's 'Puritism' differs in generation, culture, class and race, and is interpreted through the law; religion; education, socio- economic status and the political atmosphere, and it influences the constitutive interpretation of the woman in her society.

A woman's 'Puritism' in this study is the concept of a woman's 'virtue' that sustains her worth, although this 'virtue' is not completely dependent on the woman. There are varied substances that complement this imperative constitutive, consisting of socio-economic and political status which culturally construes the woman. Her behavior and physical appearance are more likely to compliment her, but to add to her worth, only minimally.

The word 'Puritism' is derived from the word 'pure' and means an expected standard of goodness or moral uprightness, a state of completeness to which a person is expected to attain. (Oxford Dictionary definition paraphrased). The virtue of the woman which should consist of her behavior and purity were not the only factors that constitute her 'puritism' in Austen's England. Her 'puritism' also lies in her situation in life which transcends into fortune inherited, her family connection, and 'her accomplishment' (enhanced by fortune). The factors that constitute a woman's puritism therefore are the woman's virtue and her situation in life. She is not expected to have one without the other but unfortunately, many English women can achieve only one- the former. The latter is beyond their reach since they cannot choose their situation in life; they are born into it, as Mary Shelley enumerates in *The Last Man* (1826) 'We are born; we choose neither our parents, nor our station...' <sup>12</sup> (Richardson, 2006: 304)

They are domesticated, with no education or opportunity to engage in any venture that can change their situation. A woman's accomplishment (education) prepares her only for entertainment and socializing duties in marriage and for the young ladies, an evidence of being properly equipped for a good marriage. Accomplishment also portrays class distinction. Janet Todd explains that a woman's accomplishment 'enables marriageable and married women to display the cultural distinction that demonstrated social distinction and advanced upper- and middle- class family interests...' Todd (2005:257), and it is the highest educational achievement open to the woman.

She was not expected to venture outside the scope of a woman's standard of education for example, that would make her 'unfit' for marriage as Todd further enumerates:

Both (the woman's achievements) were set against 'learned', or a 'blue stoking', supposed to unfit a woman for the marriage market, genteel society and even 'notability'. 'Learning'... (was) excluded from most females' education. 'Learning' meant knowledge proper to male education and restricted to male participation and included classical and Biblical languages, analytical and scientific discourses, controversial writing, theology and mathematics. Todd (2005: 258).

The woman's roles, duties and responsibilities have been clearly defined in Austen's cultural society, she is domesticated and dependent.

Mary Wollstonecraft argued that 'educating women to be "accomplished" or "notable" denied them the intellectual independence and moral self discipline conferred by a professional education, thus leaving them an obstacle to social progress and reform. (Todd, 2005:258).

This gender defined positions exist in a patriarchal society and Austen's society is patriarchal. A society can be said to be patriarchy if 'it is male dominated, male identified and male centered... of control and domination in almost every area of human existence.' Johnson (2009:29)

### **The writer's thematic concern**

Austen does not challenge the woman's role and duties in the society neither does she challenge the patriarchal hierarchy. She projects it out clearly in her works pushing her realistic identity. Her central concern is to provide a safe haven for 'the woman' in her ability to make choices that affect her life within her domesticity, in a society where the equation is not balanced and the politics of dominance is weighed heavily against 'the woman'. Susan Lanser says it is 'the question of who rules and who serves and who benefits from the arrangement.' Lanser (2005:495), Austen's society is characterized by abuse premised on the woman's vulnerability and the woman's struggle for identity in the world where she is limited by different interpretive paradigms measured by factors that are neither in her interest nor in her ability to alter. Therefore the politics of dominance perpetrated against the women is not constituted out of the mistreatment of women by men but out of the mistreatment of 'the woman' by the society according to individual peculiar circumstances.

Austen recreates the activities that surround the life of the 'the woman'; her journey from maidenhood through courtship to marriage, the roles, duties and responsibilities, rights and privileges, alongside inter-personal relationships, romance and conflicts which Henry Macarthur describes 'this simple rural life with its weary round of duties, its constant and monotonous toil.... The element of romance and tragedy are also here. And this is none other than the supreme triumph of the realist.' Macarthur (1879:12-13), but her central concern as pointed earlier, is the woman's ability to determine or to choose her path in life. This of course as we will see in the analysis is not the normal convention; it is not the norm for the woman to be allowed the absolute or otherwise

prerogative of choice. Other people, men and women who deliberately, culturally or family ties relationship, are situated in her life and are responsible or decide to be responsible for deciding what choices she should make in life. Whether she is happy or benefits from it means little to them as long as they benefit or are satisfied.

### 3. THE WRITER'S IDEOLOGICAL DRIVE

Austen's interpretation of her cultural society, exposing the cultural values that sustained the fabric of middle class English society of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and at the same time aiming to create an ideal society pushes forward her realistic and romantic ideals. Macarthur opines that 'the object of the realist is to present us with a faithful transcript of the facts of life; the romantic writer, on the other hand, gives a loose rein to his fancy and follows where it leads.' Macarthur (1879:4). He further opines that the realistic school '... aims at painting real men and women, not ideal men and women.' Macarthur (1879:12), Austen 'paints them as they are', a realistic writer, and also 'paints them as they should be' in her romantic ambition to be a reformer as well as an informer. Thus, while Austen projects the reality of the situation of the English woman, she creates romantically a consciousness that Hartman calls 'remedy' when talking of the romanticism and self consciousness

There is a remedy of great importance ... in the Romantic period. This remedy differs from certain traditional proposals linked to the religious control of the intellect-the wild, living intellect of man ... it is nonlimiting with respect to the mind. It seeks to draw the antidote to self- consciousness from consciousness itself. A way is to be found not to escape from or limit knowledge, but to convert it into energy finer than intellectual. Hartman Geoffrey (2006:137).

In Austen's romantic ambition to create an ideal woman and society, she reforms the minds of her heroine(s) to making difficult decisions that will promote their happiness and wellbeing; she clothes them with virtue, strength and steadiness of character are products of the mind which is the well where all waters are drawn in romanticism. Northrop Frye says: 'In Romanticism the main direction of the quest identity tends increasingly towards a basis or ground of identity. ...' (Bloom, 2006:109).

Her individualistic pursuit is also an ingredient of the Romantic Movement. She deals with 'the woman' not women in general because every individual mind is different and every mind must stand in isolation, look inward and identify one's worth. Her heroines have different challenges and conflicts but one and same solution. The need to look inward, deal with oneself; identify one's fears and strengths, one's desire and the things that can make one happy and pursue it. Everything starts and ends in the mind. The actions that accompany our decisions or choices are products of the mind and unless 'the woman' is ready to refine her mind and create her own consciousness that will energize her to stand against what is the norm, she will constantly be dominated.

Austen, believes that every battle for resistance against domination starts in the mind what McGann Jerome (1983) in his *Rethinking Romanticism* calls 'civil wars of the mind' where all the battles are fought, where fear, uncertainty, insecurities and other forms of pressure are tackled and virtue, strength and steadiness of character is build. Having done that, the evidence of a romantic consciousness is the ability of the woman to be able to resist all forms of intimidation, threat or influence that will stand against her happiness.

#### **4. THE HEROINE(S)'S WORLD**

##### **Fanny Price in Mansfield Park**

'Fanny Price ...was small of her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty; exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice; but her air, though awkward, was not vulgar, her voice was sweet, and when she spoke, her countenance was pretty' (478). This is Fanny on her entrance to Mansfield Park, and this is the beginning of her many experiences and challenges as she left her parents to be in the care of her aunt, Lady Bertram of Mansfield Park, the wife of Sir. Thomas Bertram.

nobody meant to be unkind, but nobody put themselves out of their way to secure her comfort...she was disheartened by Lady Bertram's silence, awed by Sir Thomas's grave looks, and quite overcome by Mrs. Norris's admonitions. Her elder cousins mortified her by reflections on her size, and abashed her by noticing her shyness; Miss Lee wondered at her ignorance, and the maidservants sneered at her clothes; and when these sorrows was added ... the despondence that sunk her little heart was severe. (479-480).

Fanny is faced with a new life that is difficult, her cousins the Miss Bertrams, are more beautiful and accomplished and their situation in life was far more advantageous. She is to live her life in constant fear and gratitude for the kindness bestowed on her and she is to be in the background, without notice for all her teen years. This is Fanny's condition of life and is enough to subdue any mind to submission at all times, which is slightly different from that of Elizabeth. The second heroine to be introduced to us:

Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine introduced in *Pride and Prejudice* is the second daughter of a family of five girls with beauty, great sense and little income, and is almost forced by her mother into a loveless marriage to secure her fortune. Elizabeth encounters a lot of challenges because of her situation in life. She refuses to marry Mr. Collins who is heir apparent to her father's fortune: 'I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than decline them.' (300).

Mr. Collins quickly reminds her of her situation in life despite her beauty:

it does not appear to me that my hand is unworthy of your acceptance,... my situation in life... are circumstances highly in my favour;... in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain

that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications. (303).

Elizabeth refuses Mr. Collins proposal even though at the time seems the most prudent offer to accept because she believes they cannot be happy with each other. Elizabeth's strength of character is revealed from the beginning of the novel. She is unlike Fanny who is naïve and struggling when we encounter her.

In Emma, Jane Fairfax is very accomplished but an orphan without family connections or economic support. 'Jane Fairfax was an orphan ... the plan was that she should be brought up for educating others; the very few hundred pounds which she inherited from her father making independence impossible.' (868). we are further enlightened about her person through Emma's description.

Jane Fairfax was very elegant, remarkably elegant...when she [Emma] took in her history, indeed, her situation, as well as her beauty; when she considered what all this elegance was destined to, what she was going to sink from, how she is going to live, it seemed impossible to feel anything but compassion and respect... (870-871).

Emma is a young lady of the same age with Jane but with a different and superior condition of life. Emma's elder sister, Mrs. John Knightly, speaks of Jane '... only Jane Fairfax one knows to be so very accomplished and superior, and exactly Emma's age.' (834).

All the heroines introduced have things in common even though their family situations are different; they have no fortune and have no ability to alter that. They have neither education nor job opportunities available to give them the resources to alter or change their fortune. This is what Tim Stretton explains when he says 'Women found themselves excluded from most areas of government and administration...in the history of women's work... existing definitions of work to include the unpaid, informal and sporadic employment preferred by, or forced upon women...' Stretton (1998:82). Fanny's gentility, Elizabeth's beauty and Jane's accomplishment can only compliment them and win sympathy but can it add to their worth? Austen takes us into the politics of dominance in the society as it affects the woman.

## 5. THE HEROINES' STRUGGLES

Jane Austen, through the conflicts emanating from the love lives of her heroine(s) is able paint a realistic picture of the daily struggles faced by the middle class English 'woman'. She is able to depict the conflicts, pains, and fears faced they face, and then the strength of 'the woman' in the face of societal domination. Austen's heroines do not have money but they have virtue, strength and steadiness of character.

At moments of crises in the lives of the heroines, Austen energizes them with romantic spirit and pushes their inner strength against what is the norm; they stand alone and take very difficult decisions to break away from oppressive dominance which has become a norm, generally accepted

by the society. Austen clothes her heroine(s) with independence of spirit to re- construe her identity in her cultural society where her will is constantly challenged and her worth in constant violation.

Fanny refuses to marry the man chosen by her uncle for her, even though he is kind to her and she is living in his house and in his care. He is very disappointed and lashes out on fanny but she remains steadfast in her decision to not to marry the man she does not love.

That you have disappointed every expectation I had formed, and proved yourself of a character the very reverse of what I had supposed .... I had thought you peculiarly free from willfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit ... But you have now shown me that you can be wilful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself ...The advantage or disadvantage of your family... never seems to have had a moment's share in your thoughts on this occasion. How they might be benefited, how they must rejoice in such establishment for you – is nothing to you. You think only of yourself... (668-669).

Sir Thomas thinks of the financial benefit to Fanny's family. He thinks of everything except the most important thing which is the happiness and of his ward, Fanny.

Fanny is terrified, sad and frustrated that she had disappointed her uncle but determined to be happy and so willfully dominated her situation. 'I am very sorry... if it were possible for me to do otherwise ... but I am perfectly convinced that I could never make him happy, and that I should be miserable myself.' (669).

She receives further attack from her Aunt, Mrs. Norris but she remained steadfast. She receives love and admonition from everyone around her but she remains steadfast to the believe that a woman can and should marry who she wants void of family influence, interest or benefit as is the expected norm. Her decision promotes her independence of spirit.

Elizabeth refuses to marry Mr. Collins against her mother's wish as earlier stated, challenges her lover, Mr. Darcy's arrogance and rejects his Aunt, Lady Catherine's treats and intimidation; all of these people have strong holds directly or indirectly over her. She refuses to be defined by her lack of fortune and family connection; she also refuses to marry or not to marry to please them.

Mr. Darcy proposes to marry Elizabeth but does not see her as his equal because of her family connection and fortune. He confesses his love for Elizabeth in a condescending manner, Mr. Darcy addresses her: 'In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.' (350). He continued to speak of 'feelings besides those of the heart ... His sense of her inferiority-of its being a degradation- of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination... (350).

Elizabeth, though flattered by his love, does not relinquish her self esteem or dignity. Elizabeth went on to accuse him of many things, among which is hurting her sister by severing her sister's love relationship. Mr. Darcy responds accordingly, stating facts of her family connections: 'Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope

of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?' (352). Elizabeth challenges his arrogance and refuses to marry him. 'I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry.' (353)

Elizabeth also confronts Lady Catherine, who opposes the marriage between her nephew, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth because of her personal interest and family ties.

Lady Catherine tells Elizabeth she cannot marry Mr. Darcy 'because honour, decorum, prudence, nay, interest, forbids it. Yes, Miss Bennet, interest' (451) and 'the upstart pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or fortune' (452), cannot sever her nephew from the wife intended for him by his family. Elizabeth responds to the insult on her person 'In marrying your nephew I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal.' (452), she continues to challenge Lady Catherine and points out clearly that she cannot be intimidated into doing anything she does not want to do.

I am not to be intimidated into anything so wholly unreasonable... Allow me to say, Lady Catherine, that the arguments with which you have supported this extraordinary application, have been as frivolous as the application was ill-judged... [Therefore] I am resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to you, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me. Neither duty, nor honour, nor gratitude ... have any possible claim on me, in the present instance. No principle of either would be violated by my marriage with Mr. Darcy. (453).

Mr. Darcy and his aunt, to borrow from Elizabeth Deeds 1998, 'reflect the attention to social hierarchy' (144), exposing the oppressive dominance and segregation based on class in their speech and actions. Elizabeth challenges and subdues their intimidation and arrogance.

The challenges the heroine, Jane, faces are a little different from that of Fanny and Elizabeth. She does not face the challenge of being forced into a loveless marriage, but for fear of opposition, she enters into a secret engagement with Mr. Frank Churchill, the son of Mr. Weston, a native of Highbury which is where Jane hails from. He is legally the heir to the fortune of Enscombe. His aunt will never approve of his choice of a wife if he ever mentions her situation in life, hence the secret engagement. While in the secret relationship, she faces so many mortifying experiences which force her to accept the position of a governess. The first is the fact that she has to witness her fiancée flirting with the rich Miss Emma Woodhouse in her presence. At the dinner organized by the Coles, it was obvious as he flirts with Emma,

They were soon joined by some of the gentlemen; and the very first of the early was Frank Churchill. In he walked, the first and the handsomest; and after paying his compliments en passant to Miss Bates and her niece, made his way directly to the other side of the circle, where sat Miss Woodhouse; and till he could find a seat by her would

not sit at all. Emma divined what everybody present must be thinking. She was his object, and everybody must perceive it. (904)

Later that evening when the dance was introduced 'Frank Churchill, coming up with most becoming gallantry to Emma, had secured her hand, and led her up to the top. (910).

Picking Emma to dance is traditionally indicating that she is preferred to all other ladies, all this is done in the presence of Jane Fairfax.

She also understands that the society, including his father, Mr. Weston and the wife, love and encourage the union between the two. The rich Emma Woodhouse thinks to herself '...the honour, in short, of being marked out for her by all their joint acquaintance. Mr. Weston, on his side, added a virtue to the account which must have some weight. He gave her the understanding that Frank admired her extremely- thought her very beautiful and very charming...' (895).

These humiliating experiences made Jane constantly sick, and force her to think of herself, decide what is in her best interest. She finally decides to sever the relationship and engages in the mortifying work of a governess which is what is available for women without fortune.

## 6. CONQUEST

Austen ushers her heroines into conquests of both dominance and balance in her romantic, symbolic weddings. The heroines' assent into their matrimonies exult the satisfaction of the heroines, asserting the ideal society Austen pursues.

Fanny in Mansfield Park conquers her fears and dominates her situation. Edmond, the cousin she later marries acknowledges that 'even in the midst of his late infatuation, he had acknowledged Fanny's mental superiority... she was of course too good for him;'766. Thus the dependant Fanny, full of insecurities is now adorned with respect. Sir Thomas was happy and content with the marriage. 'It was a match which Sir Thomas's wishes had even forestalled. Sick of ambitious and mercenary connections, prizing more and more the sterling good of principle and temper, and chiefly anxious to bind by the strongest securities all that remained to him of domestic felicity.' (766).

Austen forces Sir Thomas to acknowledge the superiority of Fanny's strength of character and to appreciate her discipline. He 'acknowledge the advantages of early hardship and discipline...' (767). He accepts the need to shun all forms of oppressive thoughts and actions. Fanny was thus saved from a marriage that she did not want. He allows Fanny to marry her love, Edmond, who is also his son.

Jane Austen admonishes the strength and steadiness of character built from discipline and hard work to be considered as the highest estimable 'Puritism' in a woman. Fortune, accomplishment and family connections should not constitute a woman's puritism or determine her worth.

Elizabeth's strength of character and her ability to challenge the insinuations to her family connection and wealth as a tool for segregation against her, and her determination to decline marriage to Mr. Darcy on his first approach to her despite his wealth promotes her virtue (worth) and gives her complete dominance. She may not be able to control what people think of her but she

compels them to act respectfully towards her, thereby enforcing respect from both her family and the society within which she dwells.

The discussion between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth in the event of his proposing to marry her exposes not only how much he loves her but how her family connection disadvantages her in his opinion.

Elizabeth, standing firm on her belief of not marrying a man who can neither make her happy nor respect her and her family, a man who is proud or selfish enough to hurt others without any feelings, gains the advantage of dominance. With this steady belief she subdues the rich, proud Mr. Darcy, who fell helplessly in love with her and she is also able to change him to become a better man who accepts everyone on the grounds of equality.

When she encounters Mr. Darcy again in his house, he is a new person in character. He requests she introduce her relations to him. These same people he would never have condescended to establishing any form of relations: 'this was a stroke of civility for which she was quite unprepared; and she could hardly suppress a smile, at his now seeking the acquaintance of some of those very people, against whom his pride had revolted, in his offer to herself.' (388). Elizabeth was sure 'the compliment must all be to herself' (388), when he started discussing with them even after knowing their situation in life. She cannot but keep asking the question 'why is he so altered?' She is so surprised, after what has transpired between them, he is so changed towards her and her family: 'From what can it proceed? It cannot be for me, cannot be for my sake that his manners are thus softened. My reproofs at Hunsford could not work such a change as this.' (389).

Elizabeth's relationship with Mr. Darcy changed (from that of superior to subordinate) to that of equals as Austen summarizes. In all these, 'Elizabeth could not help but be pleased, could not but triumph' Elizabeth and her sister Jane were finally married to the men of their choice because of Elizabeth's strength and steadiness of character and her refusal to accept the position of being dominated. Her ability to challenge all the forces that seek to attribute her worth to fortune and family connections and subdue her will to their interest, benefitted not only herself but her family especially her two sisters, Jane and Lydia.

The heroine, Jane, was under constant humiliation because of the secret engagement between herself and Mr. Frank Churchill until she decided to end it by taking responsibility for her wellbeing and letting go of that oppressive connection. Frank Churchill's constant flirting with Emma and deliberate humiliating of Jane pushes her to make a drastic decision.

Jane's decision to sever the oppressive attachment to Mr. Churchill promotes her strength of character and places her in a place of dominance as it forces him to take immediate action of repentance and publicly declares their relationship and subsequently marries her.

Mrs. Weston confirms to Emma that 'It was the discovery of what she was doing ... which determined him to come forward at once, own it all to his uncle ... put an end to the miserable state of concealment that had been carrying on so long.' (1015).

Jane's excellence of character is further exposed in Mr. Knightley's praise of her character and the superiority of her person; he thus congratulates Mr. Churchill for such luck in choosing a

woman of higher virtue than himself in everything except fortune. He tells Emma 'He is a most fortunate man... to have drawn such a prize...what years of felicity that man in all human calculation has before him! ... had he and all his family sought round the world for a perfect wife for him, they could not have found her superior.' (1033).

Jane Austen thus crowns the virtue, strength and steadiness of character her heroines' Fanny, Elizabeth and Jane from their maiden days to a romantic fulfilled marriage of which they desire and deserve, thus displaying the one opportunity a woman has to promote her wellbeing within their domesticity through her own decision to control the situation available to her to ascend to a place of dominance and respect. Austen is able in the words of Anne Lawrence 'explore what women were able to do, not (just) what they were prevented from doing.' (2002:237).

Thus, this work has exhaustively placed Austen's three novels as both realistic and romantic works asserting that Austen does not only engage in informing as a realist, but also of reforming her society as a romanticism writer attempts. Austen creates a society she believes, a salient romantic ideal of freedom from the usual norm, an elevation of the mind as a supreme in shaping the destiny of 'the woman', an ideal society., where a woman's choice is her absolute prerogative, drown out of the well of her heart, void of manipulation, threat and influential dominance. A society where class and fortune are not relevant, neither do they determine a woman's happiness and self fulfillment, nor construe her worth. Talking of romanticism works MacGann opines: 'such works transcend their age and speak to alien cultures because they are so completely true to themselves.' (109) Austen spoke to 'the woman' of her generation and still speaks to 'the woman' of many generations after hers to this present day. Her words transcend time, class and culture and give courage and hope to the many women who live in a society that construe their worth in fortune, accomplishments and family connections, relegating their most estimable 'puritism' to the background.

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