Jane austen’s novels and the contemporary social and literary conventions. assign...

Art & Culture

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The social conventions, in particular those concerning life of a young woman, were presented in conduct manuals. Many of these conventions were supported by plenty literary authors, who made their protagonists basing on the ideal image of woman which was shown in the conduct books. Moreover, the authors created their own way of writing, which was supposed to focus, by and large, only on the positive aspects of the character, making he or she a role model to be emulated by the reader.

Jane Austen, being a highly regarded author at that time, created a specific style of writing, which was negotiating with the existing conventions in many

aspects. Her novels, which already had gained a considerable popularity among her contemporaries, are the attempts to present protagonists, which are neither the role models, nor they impose on the reader any particular solutions to the problems, proving that the most important aspect of the character is his or her ability to alter and overcome the vices.

The purpose of the paper is to make an attempt to present Austen’s negotiating with the contemporary conventions. In the first chapter the way conduct manuals perceived a woman is presented. The second chapter describes the trends in the novels written at that time. The third chapter is the beginning of the analysis of Austen’ writing in contrast to her contemporaries as well as in the way the author herself perceives her writing.

In the following chapters the novels Pride and Prejudice and Emma are used as the examples of Austen’s works in which the protagonists unusual at that time may be considered the exponents of Austen’s playing with the conventions. 1. Eighteenth-Century Conduct Literature 1. 1. The Introduction to Conduct Manuals Conduct literary books are believed by the critics of them to be exponents of male ideology pursuing to create an ideal image of womanhood which would fit the contemporary view of social relations, that is, woman being inferior to man in every aspect of life.

The main aim of this chapter is to present main assumptions of conduct manuals. In this examination I will use the perspective presented in Female relationships in Jane Austen’s novels. A critique of female ideal propagated in the 18th century conduct literature by Ilona Dobosiewicz as my theoretical

background. The author uses two books as her main examples of the genre of conduct manuals. She founds her research on James Fordyce’s Sermons to Young Women and Thomas Gisborne’s Enquiry into the Duties of Female Sex.

As further examples Dobosiewicz lists Dr. Gregory’s A Father’s Legacy To His Daughters (1774), Mrs. Griffith’s Essays Addressed to Young Women (1782) and the Reverend John Bennet’s Letters to a Young Lady (1791). From the above-mentioned books she draws the conclusion that: conduct manuals are quintessentially patriarchal in that they always define woman through her relationship to the male subject: first, as his daughter, and later, as his wife, and the mother of his children.

Conduct literature establishes what female qualities are deemed socially acceptable, and, in the process, reduces women to objects that passively conform to these dictates (39). 1. 2. Patriarchy in Conduct Literature It is important here what the author means by the word ‘ patriarchal’, because this expression is widely used throughout her research as a key word comprising men’s attitude towards women in the eighteenth century. Dobosiewicz presents the evolution of the very term, inclining mostly towards Sylvia Walby’s understanding of it in Theorizing Patriarchy (1990).

Walby states there that patriarchy is a “ system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. ” (quoted from Dobosiewicz, p. 38). Furthermore, Dobosiewicz claims that the power of patriarchy lies in the biological differences between sexes. The weaker sex, that is women, has to care for “ different social tasks, primarily those of

wife and mother”(Dobosiewicz 38). Such view gave males a pretext for assigning women to the private sphere.

In patriarchal discourse the meaning and role of women are perceived “ in relation to a norm which is male”(Dobosiewicz 38). That is why social tasks of women are defined as “ different”, different from that of men. Another important aspect of patriarchy, which finds reflection in conduct literature is the view that patriarchy differentiates between two social spheres: private and public (cf. Dobosiewicz 38). The private sphere is the one of household and family, whilst the public concerns social relations comprising everything except the aforementioned ones. As support,

Dobosiewicz quotes from Michelle Rosaldo’s Women, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview (1974), where the author sees the basis for women’s subordination in “ their confinement to the private sphere. ” 1. 3. The Private Sphere as Woman’s Domain. Having explained the notion of ‘ patriarchy’, the sphere that women were assigned to, that is the ‘ private sphere’ will be discussed. Conduct literature, having been a product of the writers who themselves lived in the eighteenth century, supported woman’s confinement to the private sphere, as the only suitable niche for the weaker sex.

Although in the 18th century women were no longer occupied with such tasks as spinning, weaving or making candles or bread (40), which made women’s lives easier and provided them with larger amount of free time, male authors of conduct literature did not cease to propagate a role model of a “ female confinement in the domestic domain”(Dobosiewicz 40). Moreover,

according to them, it became even more desirable in women to behave in this way because it shaped their character and personality well.

The “ Female Sphere”, as they call it, concerned also certain features of character, which every woman ideally should aspire to possess. Among them there are “ meekness, modesty and virtuous love”(Dobosiewicz 43). Gisbourne, to confirm woman’s place in society, puts the emphasis on the considerable role of womanhood for the happiness of all mankind. He states that it is woman, who, thanks to her gentlesness, understanding and confinement, is able to care for the well-being of the whole world around her.

By the “ whole world” he means this order “ husbands, parents, brothers and sisters”, then “ manners and conduct of men” and finally “ educating their children” (quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 41). What is worth mentioning is that he also claims that a woman should be preoccupied with the others , particularly men, to such an extent that her “ own needs are completely neglected to the point of appearing non-existent”. (quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 41). Like Gisborne, Fordyce also tends to elevate women as the catalysts of mankind’s development and guarantee of men’s felicity. His main concern is hat the role of women is so significant because of their total devotion to men and the private sphere. [t]hey were manifestly intended to be the mothers and formers of rational and immortal offspring; to be a kind of softer companions, who, by nameless delightful sympathies and endearments, might improve our pleasures and soothe our pains; to lighten the load of domestic cares, and thereby leave us more at leisure for rougher labours, or severer studies; and finally, to spread a certain grace and embellishment

over human life (Volume I, 272, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 2) On the other hand, both authors, aware of the fact that their own words could not be sufficient to maintain the existing status quo in male-female relations, resort to higher laws which are meant to confirm their teachings. That is why not only Gisborne and Fordyce, but also other conduct books authors define the concept of female inferiority as “ divinely ordained”. Gisborne uses various points from the Bible and Judeo-Christian history to exemplify his point of view (cf. Dobosiewicz 42).

Moreover, he claims that: The science of legislation, of jurisprudence, of political economy; the conduct of government in all its executive functions; the abstruse researches of erudition; the inexhaustible depths of philosophy; the acquirements subordinate to navigation; the knowledge indispensable in the wide field of commercial enterprise; the arts of defence; and of attack by land and by sea, which the violence or the fraud of unprincipled assailants render needful; these and other studies, pursuits and occupations, assigned chiefly or entirely to men, demand the efforts of a mind endued with the powers of close and comprehensive reasoning, and of intense and continued application, in a degree in which they are not requisite for the customary offices of female duty. It would therefore seem natural to expect... that the Giver of all good, after bestowing those powers on men with a liberality proportioned to the subsisting necessity, would impart them to the female mind with a more sparing hand (quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 44) According to him women lack certain features which are given to men to act in the public sphere.

However, as Dobosiewicz claims, it could as well have been due to the fact that women were restricted to the private sphere only, that they did not have a chance to gain such features of character (44). The direct conclusion drawn by Ilona Dobosiewicz from conduct manuals is that they prescribe that woman’s life should be determined by and devoted to man only. What is more, “ man” is a general notion, meaning every male person who at the moment is in charge of a woman. Regardless of whether it is a father, brother, uncle or husband, woman’s life is never independent, because her task is to comfort a man (or men if need be) in various aspects.

It means that women are deprived of free will and individuality, bearing in mind the simple aim: attracting a suitable man who would be the one to “ govern her” (Dobosiewicz 45). 1. 4. Characteristics of ideal female features The reason of inventing the universal ideal of womanhood is for Dobosiewicz, clearly visible. Using Fordyce’s own words that the purpose of his work is to establish ” what a woman should be”, she confirms the fact that a great deal of males pursue to achieve a unified image because they in general perceive women as a “ homogeneous group”. They disapprove individuality as far as women’s features of character are concerned (45) Fordyce and Gisborne list modesty and meekness as features of an ideal woman.

Dobosiewicz states that it is because meek females are unlikely to show any attempts of crossing the boarder of the private sphere, which, for men, was a highly desirable situation, because they could be certain their domain would be free from the influence of the weaker sex(Dobosiewicz 52). Therefore meekness as well as modesty is the basis of a good marriage, a goal every

young woman should aspire to. Given that in the eighteen century marriage was a very, if not the most, important aspect of woman’s life as for most females it was the only possible way to live their lives, it is not very surprising that conduct literature writers highly regard modesty and meekness.

And again, mutual relationship between conduct books and society can be noticed. On one hand it is the people who write the books and give the inspiration to write, but on the other hand it is the books that have the power of spreading certain points of view. Further features of woman’s character, which are, according to Gisborne, indispensable to maintain welfare in the marriage, are: being” submissive, delicate, gentle and affectionate” (cf. Dobosiewicz 53-54). These features, as the author claims, should be extremely well developed in neglected wives, because they are the ones who, regardless of a man’s faults in spoiling a marriage’s happiness, should continuously see to improving the situation.

That is how he presents the essence of an ideal marriage: passing by little instances of unevenness, caprice, or passion, giving soft answers to hasty words, complaining as seldom as possible, and making it [their] daily care to relieve their anxieties, and prevent their wishes, to enliven the hour of dullness and call up the ideas of felicity. (Volume II, 265, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 53). Moving on to the next aspect, a feature which was regarded valuable was physical frailty. Men tended to praise it as something that confirmed woman’s submission to a physically stronger partner. As Fordyce states: a woman should have “ soft features, and a flowing voice, a

form not robust, and a demeanour delicate and gentle” (Volume II, 225, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 50).

Gisborne confirms the validity of this feature in words that women, as opposed to men, are “ cast in smaller mold, and bound together in a looser texture” (19-20, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 43). What contributes significantly to the development of desirable female’s virtues is, according to Gisborne and Fordyce, a special kind of education, different from that of men. They put the emphasis on the fact that the only appropriate place for educating women is at home, under mother’s supervision. Private education assigned women to the domestic sphere, as they did not have an opportunity to lose “ their morals” (Fordyce I, 25, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 45) at boarding schools, so despised by the authors (cf. Dobosiewicz 45).

One of the arguments in favour of private education is its focus on religious education. Given that the women’s submission to the domestic sphere was meant to be divinely ordained, the authors expected that an appropriate religious education will take part in assigning women to this domain. Another reason for the religious education is the fact that, as the authors claim, it contributes to the “ development and sustenance of piety” (Dobosiewicz 50). Fordyce claims that piety was one of the biggest virtues of a woman due to the fact that it promotes other positive features. Moreover, he argues that pious women can change men’s undesirable behaviours.

He writes: How often have I seen a company of men who were disposed to be riotous, checked all at once into decency by the accidental entrance of an amiable woman; while her good sense and obliging deportment charmed

them into at least a temporary conviction, that there is nothing so beautiful as female excellence, nothing so delightful as female conversation in its best form! ” (Volume I, 21, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 50) Piety, as considered by Fordyce, is a quality that could withhold women from doubting religious principles. For this reason also he advises women to read only exclusively selected passages from the Bible, the ones that will help them preserve a “ child-like simplicity” (Volume II, 153-54, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 51). As far as piety is concerned, Fordyce states that women are better at showing and feeling it than men.

That is because religious devotion develops better owing to “ sentiment, rather than ratiocination”; on “ gratitude and wonder, joy and sorrow, triumph and contrition, hope and fear, rather than on theological disquisition, however profound, or pious speculation however exalted”(Volume II, 11-12, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 51) . Another way of creating an ideal woman is advising them to read books that would not imply the use of reason, because such books do not bring improvement in female’s conduct, destroying “ female sweetness” (Fordyce, Volume II, 158, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 51). The authors apart from defining the good features of female’s nature, provide also the list of qualities which are clearly undesirable.

The first feature which is strongly despised is a sense of humour as it destroys feminine weakness and “ affectionate sorrow”(Fordyce I, 185, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 54), as desired in the 18th century. Irony, satire and wit are the qualities which should be consistently eliminated, because they do not contribute to a marriage’s well-being. Moreover, Fordyce states ”

men of the best sense have been usually averse at the thought of marrying a witty female”(I, 192, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 54), which was supposed to warn females willing to find a husband. Gisborne contributes to such thinking, claiming that wit destroys meekness and modesty (cf. Dobosiewicz 54).

The next aspect the authors of conduct manuals are strongly against in women is their willigness to go beyond the field of interest of the private sphere. Thus they advise strongly to restrict the amount of time devoted to studying, so that women would not become too “ masculine”. Fordyce also points out that there are fields of study women should avoid. He gives the instances of becoming “ metaphysicians, historians, special philosophers, or Learned Ladies of any kind” (Volume I, 288, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 51), as the ones that could destroy female’s distinctive features, bringing women’s interests dangerously close to men, the results of which are “ horrible” and “ monstrous” (Volume I, 104-105, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 1). Gisborne warns young women that the desire of possessing knowledge belonging to the male’s domain would prevent them from being attractive to men. Therefore both authors recommend strongly those fields that take part in women’s confinement to the private sphere. Obviously, the main aspect of education which is promoted by them is religious, as said before. They also give permission for restricted study of geography, history, and English grammar. Restricted study is advised, because it should be only for utilitarian purposes that is being eligible companions for conversation with men (Dobosiewicz 51-52). Gisborne strongly criticizes women who

Declare their opinion, that the sphere in which women are defined to move is so humble and so limited, as neither to require nor to reward assiduity; and under this impression, either do not discern, or will not be persuaded to consider, the real and deeply interesting effect which the conduct of their sex will always have on the happiness of society (11, quoted from Dobosiewicz 41) He claims that women who question their role in society, neglecting their duties as far as the private sphere is concerned, lose meekness and modesty. This, in turn, may lead to the situation when they are not attractive for men any longer. To sum up the features of an ideal female given by both Gisborne and Fordyce, a following list is presented : “ patience, emotion and self sacrifice” (Dobosiewicz 38), as well as being “ meek, submissive to men, gentle, chaste, modest” and unquestioningly accepting the domestic role of women (Dobosiewicz 52) 1. 5. Conduct Manuals and the Novels

Considering that the authors of conduct books represented a very strict approach as far as woman’s behaviour is concerned, it is not very surprising that they were not in favour of novels. Given that the novels presented a different way of a female’s conduct than that in the manuals, the authors were afraid of the bad influence it could have on a young woman entering adult life. Furthermore, according to them novels give neither advantage, nor progress for young female’s development. Fordyce condemns the readers of novels, claiming that ” she who can bear to peruse them must in her soul be a prostitute” (I, 148, quoted from Dobosiewicz p. 55).

Gisborne in turn is afraid that reading novels could develop dislike for reading literature proposed by himself and the authors of other conducts manuals alike. Another reason for a critical aversion to novels is the fact that in many cases women wrote those novels successfully. As Virginia Woolf stated in A Room of One’s Own (1929) , the success of female writers was due to the fact that it was a new genre, in a field in which women did not have to fight for their good reputation as writers with the standards established by men (66, cf. Dobosiewicz p. 55). Thus the authors of conduct manuals criticize not only the readers, but also, if not more, the female writers.

They claim that it destroys the female’s submission to their private domain (Dobosiewicz 55). Vivian Jones in Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity (1990) notes that the desire of being published was destructive for the established borders of spheres, because it could show the private product to a wider audience, that is conversing to the public sphere (140 cf. Dobosiewicz p. 55). Dobosiewicz draws the conclusion that the character of conduct books is paradoxical ” as the success of the genre , evident in a large number of women authors of conduct manuals depended on its being public, whereas the values endorsed in conduct manuals relegated women to private sphere” (55). 2. Romantic Novels. 2. 1.

Introduction to the Novel. Gary Kelly in his article “ Romantic fiction” in The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism (1993) presents a summary of the way the genre of the novel developed in England throughout the period of Romanticism. The Romantic period is described here as the time “ from

the last decade or so of the eighteenth century to the 1830s” (Kelly; 1993, p. 196). Kelly claims that during this period “ most prose fiction was considered subliterary, suitable for children, women and the lower classes” (1993, p. 196). There were only few books read by all the classes, but they were regarded as ” childhood reading or popular classics”(1993, p. 196).

These categories included “ centuries-old chapbooks such as Jack and the Giants, Valentine and Orson, and The Fair Rosamund and longer works such as The Pilgrim’s Progress, Robinson Crusoe and The English Hermitt” (Kelly; 1993, p. 196). Novels were highly regarded neither by the critics, nor even by the readers themselves. They were considered the trash of the circulating library” to be rented, read quickly, and forgotten. Those ‘ novels of the day’ that did cause a stir were quickly cut down to sixpenny chapbooks for the new lower-class market in cheap fashionable novelties, founding the modern market for ‘ romances of all kinds’ (Kelly; 1993, p. 196)

Romantic fiction is today believed to be in captivity of the “ historical issues and commercialized culture of its own time” (Kelly; 1993, p. 197). During Romanticism it was widely read, only newspapers had a similar circulation. It was connected with “ the rise of the reading public”(Kelly; 1993, p. 197). The novels were a source of information about the culture of bourgeois life style. Even though, by and large, “ prose fiction of any kind was regarded as ideologically dangerous and morally, artistically and intelectually deficient” (Kelly; 1993, p. 197) The fiction of that time, the one which was read by the upper and middle classes, called also the” “ modern novel”, “ novels of the day”, or “ fashionable novels””(Kelly; 1993, p. 98) was on the one hand

extremely popular, but, on the other hand, severely criticised. In 1779 the Rev. Vicesimus Knox stated that “ If it is true, that the present age is more corrupt than the preceding, the great multiplication of Novels probably contributes to its degeneracy”(quoted from Kelly; 1993, p. 198). The novels were blamed for distracting young readers from the literature which was considered appropriate to the process of learning moral and intellectual rules useful in life (Kelly; 1993, p. 198). Also women were warned that reading novels might become a threat to the safety of their “ domestic character and duties”(Kelly; 1993, p. 198).

The New Lady’s Magazine in 1790 stated that novels “ not only poison the mind from relishing well-written authors, but render it less firm to resist those temptations they themselves inculcate” (quoted from Kelly; 1993 , p. 199). As mentioned before, novels, alongside of newspapers and magazines became the major readings during the Romantic era. As they influenced the public opinion, they were treated as a dangerous threat to the social order. Novels were criticised by ” moralists, critics, reformers and artistic innovators” (Kelly; 1993, p. 199). Although frequently attacked, they managed to survive. Moreover, the critics noticed that instead of struggling with the new fashion, it is possible to use it for their own purposes, such as spreading their ideology.

What was needed for this idea to succeed, consisted of two aspects of novels to be reformed. The first aspect was a moral one, which was meant to be accomplished by changing its current ” subliterary status in order to validate with the transcendent power of art whatever ideological burden it might be

made to bear” (Kelly; 1993, p. 199). Secondly, an aesthetic aspect was meant to be corrected and controlled by a group of people assigned to this task. This innovation caused a chain of events which installed the novel in the canon of national literature in the Romantic era. 1 (Kelly; 1993, p. 199). 2. 2. The Novel of Manners, Sentiment and Emulation.

The prevailing form of the novel in the Romantic era was ” the novel of manners, or more properly the novel of manners, sentiment, and emulation” (Kelly; 1993, p. 199). Encyclopedia Britannica gives a following definition of the novel of manners: work of fiction that re-creates a social world, conveying with finely detailed observation the customs, values, and mores of a highly developed and complex society. The conventions of the society dominate the story, and characters are differentiated by the degree to which they measure up to the uniform standard, or ideal, of behaviour or fall below it. (…)the social gestures known as manners, however superficial they appear to be, are indices of a collective soul and merit the close attention of the novelist and reader alike. ...)A society in which behaviour is codified, language restricted to impersonal formulas, and the expression of feeling muted, is the province of the novel of manners (…)the novel of manners may be taken as an artistic symbol of a social order that feels itself to be secure. Kelly presents the following definition of this new variant: ‘ Manners’ encompassed social conduct as codes of social differentiation and power with moral and ethical overtones, which were applied to the culture and conduct of the nation as a whole and treated novelistically in terms of the moral, cultural and social options (sentiment and emulation) exercised in private life by individuals. (Kelly; 1993, p. 99-200) These novels served as a

representation of merit and conduct of the upper-classes to be emulated by the readers from the lower social spheres. Furthermore, those readers, conscious of the being inferior to the dominant classes and the distance between their own and higher social spheres, considered the novels to be the representations of their own needs and aspirations, as many times, after the “” Richardsonian revolution” of mid-century, novels incorporated Enlightenment and sentimental social critiques of this relationship[between classes]” (Kelly; 1993, p. 200). Examples of authors of such novels are “ Frances Burney, Frances Sheridan, Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Smith” (Kelly; 1993, p. 200).

As far as the form of these novels is concerned, earlier novels were often in first-person epistolary or confessional form; later, especially men used third-person authoritative narration in standard written English. At the end of the century, though, female authors turned to the use of ” free indirect discourse”, also with the use of narrative irony (Kelly; 1993, p. 201). 2. 3 The Gothic Romance. The narration of the novels, suggesting oppressed subjectivity, contributed to the development of a new trend as far as the content is concerned. The authors were looking for the analogy between social and gender conflicts. “ In a society already patriarchal and antifeminist at all levels, woman is seen as the weak link in every class confronting a superior male-dominated class” (cf. Kelly; 1993, p. 202).

A woman as a protagonist was increasingly becoming an interesting object to read about, as, even for male readers, her struggling with a man could resemble every other struggle of inferior with superior (Kelly; 1993, p. 202).

This trend concerns mainly the variant of the novel of manners called the gothic romance. For like the novel of manners, sentiment, and emulation from which it sprang, the triple-decker, circulating-library gothic romance celebrates subjectivity in the face of social conventions, institutions, values, and individuals threatening to overwhelm the virtuous individual self, and this plot was of interest mainly to the novel-reading classes rather than the chapbook-reading classes.

The woman lacking worldly experience, unmarried, orphaned, or otherwise unprotected by a man enables a display of subjectivity afflicted by the evils of the paternalist, patriarchal, merely social, and above all courtly values and practices of the dominant classes, figured as an older male villain. (Kelly, 202). . The representatives of the gothic romance were Ann Radcliffe, M. G. Lewis, Francis Lathom, Charlotte Dacre, Regina Maria Roche, C. R. Maturnin (Kelly; 1993, p. 202). A distinctive feature of this kind of novels was the fact that after some time it became a form of a cheap chapbook, which, instead of focussing mainly on the oppressed subjectivity, served also the tastes of lower-class readers, putting the emphasis mostly on action.

Encyclopedia Britannica explains this phenomenon in words: “ Like a circus trick, a piece of Gothic fiction asks to be considered as ingenious entertainment; the pity and terror are not aspects of a cathartic process but transient emotions to be, somewhat perversely, enjoyed for their own sake”. Another feature of gothic romances are novelistic devices creating “ dark, tempestuous, ghostly, full of madness, outrage, superstition, and the spirit of revenge” atmosphere (Encyclopedia Britannica). These devices were used

excessively in the way that was meant to be the representation of the criticism of power operating over the protagonist in various ways, for instance by the use of: institutions founded in the past and now outmoded, but nevertheless difficult or dangerous for the outsider to understand, penetrate, or master(…), through social conventions(conspiracies, secret rders) unrecognized or not understood by their victims; through application of hidden laws and instruments of force (the Inquisition), through as unsuspected, inward ??? working transformation (by philtres, magic) of the victim’s perception, values, ideology, or being (…). These forms of power may be accompanied by obliteration of the familiar and domestic (savage nature, storms) and be exercised with the willing or unwilling aid of those (…) who are socially close to the victims and should be protectors or supporters (…) (Kelly; 1993, p. 203) In spite of the clearly visible increasing engagement with the important matters in the developing genre of novels, there were still people inclined to criticism.

Even though novels were more highly regarded in general, “ intellectuals, avant-garde writers, evangelicals, and political radicals – most of them men – continued to associate prose fiction with subcultures of unenlightened plebeians, under- educated women, and uneducated children” (Kelly; 1993, p. 209). The Romantic period, even though full of criticism about the prose fiction, was also a witness of its significant development and alteration, of the birth of the writers outrunning the contemporary conventions and prejudices. Most Romantic fiction fared as ill, or worse ??? soon forgotten, appropriated by “ street literature” or cut down for the nursery or

schoolroom, barely canonical now, and only canonized at the cost of being stripped of its politics.

It is often assumed (and occasionally argued) that, while Romantic fiction deals with the merely social, Romantic poetry best embodies the period’s “ discoveries” about the self and nature, and even that it had more influence on the Victorian and model novel2. Yet Romantic novelists attempted as much or more than the poets in writing about the self, celebrating the domestic affections and local quotidian life, creating a national imagined community, and establishing a national language and literature commanded by the classes who read and wrote this literature and fiction and whose interests they served ??? and still serve. (Kelly; 1993, p. 215) 3.

Jane Austen and Her Novels in relation to the Contemporary Literature. 3. 1. Austen’s Criticism about the Contemporary Fiction. Having presented the main assumptions of the conduct manuals and the literary setting in which Jane Austen’s own writing should be perceived, the way she regarded her art and the writing environment will be discussed. The Austens realized and appreciated the potential of the novel for social criticism and moral discourse at a time when most critics condemned novels as immoral, disseminators of decadent court culture, and subliterature fit only for women (though dangerously seductive for the supposedly weak female intellect and strong female imagination) (Kelly, n. p. Austen was a keen reader of her many fellow writers, especially of Samuel Richardson, Sir Charles Grandison (1754) in particular. Austen was aware of the limitations put on her own sex willing to be an equally important author at that lime. “ Austen was conscious of the

way genres and styles were seen as either ‘ masculine’ or ‘ feminine’. For example, the novel was widely regarded as a “ woman’s” form of writing though certain kinds of novels were seen as more appropriate for male writers (Kelly, n. p.). She even made a complaint about Walter Scott, who had decided to start writing novels, being at that time a highly regarded poet; she said that Scott “ should not be taking the bread out of other people’s mouths” (quoted from Kelly, n. p.).

Mary Waldron in the introduction to the book Jane Austen and the fiction of her time attempts to present Austen’s relation to her contemporaries. Even though Austen was a great supporter of writing novels as well as an eager reader of many, she was not a credulous and uncritical follower of every trend present at her time. In the letters to her family and friends she criticises certain aspects of her literary colleagues’ art. In her letters to her sister Cassandra, Austen claims that her fellow- novelists are to blame for, as she calls it, “ cant” (quoted from Waldron, p. 1). By this word she means a common, not very approving, but lenient opinion about novels, very popular among the present-day advisers.

What she criticises mostly is “ stereotypical characters and events which she considered had no credible existence outside the accepted world of the contemporary novel” (Waldron, 1). She clearly states that even in the books she enjoyed reading, there are traces of absurd and unnatural creations of the adventures that had no right to happen in reality as it is (Waldron, 1). She ironically comments, for instance, the book by Mary Brunton titled Self-control in which the heroine, a courageous and intelligent young lady is

seized by her degenerate lover and taken to Canada, where she manages to escape from him in a canoe floating down the river. She states: “ an excellently-meant, elegantly-written Work, without anything of Nature of Probability in it.

I declare I do not know weather Laura’s passage down the American River, is not the most natural, possible, everyday thing she ever does” (quoted from Waldron, 1). Moving on to the next point Austen considered unsatisfying, the “ unnatural conduct and forced difficulties” (quoted from Waldron, 2) will be dealt with. She finds it, inter alia, in Sarah Burney’s Clarentine, by and large considered “ morally improving work” (Waldron, 1). She claims that writers willing to give the readers examples to emulate, should use as a support more realistic situations, which would resemble the experiences shared by the recipient (Waldron, 2). On the other hand, Austen’ s fellow writers got engaged in the political writing, Mary Hays at the radical side, Maria Edgeworth and Jane West on the conservative end.

And even though Austen’s direct critical opinions, if such existed, did not survive till today, it may be probably said that Austen was not in favour of this kind of writing. It is probably enough to mention that this “ polarization of aims” (Waldron, 2) in novel writing led to the emergence of several stereotypes around novel reading. The deluded female who reads too many novels, the model girl, the female rebel, the hero/ guardian who has all the right answers, contrasting pairs of heroines, one right, the other disastrously wrong; most novels, whether politically conservative or radical, made use of some or all of these. (Waldron, 2-3). Austen’s criticism concerning such

conservative writers as Mary Brunton may indicate that this kind of writing was not of her interest.

Furthermore, many conservative writers were influenced by the conduct manuals; Jane West herself was the author of two of them. Austen, in turn, did not propagate in her books the kind of thinking manuals represented, even though she knew them (Waldron, 3) A proof of these two assumptions may be the fact that Mr. Collins, one of the characters in Pride and Prejudice, needless do say, not very respected by his environment and depicted in the way that the readers do not take him seriously, attempts to read one of them to the Bennet sisters as an appropriate book for the young ladies, which did not awake much of an enthusiasm in them. 3. 2. Jane Austen as a Conservative Writer and as a Social Critic. The debate on how to classify Austen’s writing is still not settled.

Various scholars and literary critics stood in opposition to one another, attempting to prove her belonging either to the conservative writers, or to the social critics. In the twentieth century Alistair Duckworth in The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen’s Novels (1971) and Marilyn Butler in Jane Austen and the War of Ideas (1975) were the two scholars claiming that Austen’s place in the theory of literature is among the conservative writers. Duckworth searches for Austen’s resemblance to Edmund Burke who “ considers tradition and convention to be custodians, preservers, and perpetuators of social and cultural values predicated on understanding of the individual as a member of society (cf. Dobosiewicz, p. 20).

Butler claims that Austen was influenced by the French Revolution and the “ war of ideas” (quoted from Dobosiewicz, p. 20) and stands in the opposition to the revolutionary ideas. She argues that in her novels the “ key virtues are prudence and concern for the evidence: the vices are romanticism, self-indulgence, conceit, and for Jane Austen, other subtle variations upon the broad antijacobin target of individualism” (67, quoted from Dobosiewicz, p. 20) The opposite way of perceiving Austen’s literary works is represented, alter alia, by D. W. Harding is his essay “ Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen”(1940) and Marvin Mudrick in Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery (1952).

They both consider Austen a moderate social critic, who, according to Harding, looks for “ unobtrusive spiritual survival, without open conflict with the friendly people around her whose standards in simpler things she could accept and whose affection she greatly needed” (41, quoted from Dobosiewicz, p. 21). Moreover, he argues that her satiric comments could be easily overlooked because of the fact that they are not straightforward enough (cf. Dobosiewicz, p. 21). Mudrick, as Harding’s follower states that her social criticism is connected with her personality features, owing to which she uses irony to avoid “ a full commitment” to the “ deeply conformist and self- complacent society” (quoted from Dobosiewicz, p. 22).

3. 3. Austen’s writing in her own perception.

Despite the criticism concerning Austen’s writing and several studies attempting to place Austen’s art in a particular trend of writing, the main interest of this paper from this subsection on will be not to fix Austen’s

writing in any of the styles of writing, but to construct a unifying critique of the novels based on Austen’s own view of what she was about and her knowledge of the society in which she found herself, without either straying inappropriately into peripheral historical cultural detail or insisting on single authoritative readings (Waldron, 13). As Alistair M. Duckworth, himself being a critic assigning Austen to conservative writers, wrote in 1975: “ In spite of a staggering amount of critical attention Jane Austen can hardly be said, in her bicentennial year, to be understood better than she understood herself” (“ Prospects and Retrospects,” in Jane Austen Today, quoted from Kelly, n. p.). Waldron claims that a great deal of evidence can be found in the very texts of novels, as well as in Austen’s private correspondence.

And even though Austen was to some extent limited in her criticism about the society by the fact that she herself was born and brought up in it, she managed to find certain aspects of it snobbish and hypocritical (13). Her letters to nieces and sister prove that her interest in novels she read considered “ poking fun at what she and they regarded as absurdities” (Waldron, 13). The author found particularly absurd the fact that there existed a popular fixed programme of rules and values accepted by the society justifying novel writing, which made the authors insert in the main text the passages of “ solemn specious nonsense…about something unconnected with the story” (quoted from Waldron, 13).

She resigned from such practices, instead counting on reader’s attention and intelligence which would help him reflect on the text and, if need be, find any kind of teaching in it (Waldron, 13). She limited the setting to the “

commonplace domestic scene” (Waldron, 13) in order to facilitate the learning and drawing conclusions from the text by the reader. Her stories are self-explanatory, but at the same time they avoid imposing on readers any particular perfect way of conduct. ” Because Austen wrote consciously against the grain of contemporary didacticism but within a familiar fictional framework, her narratives become not only ironic but richly contrapuntal; we are conscious of the presence of a number of points of view at every turn” (Waldron, 14).

In the same manner she created the characters in her novels: Because we are not aghast at the predicaments of Austen’s central characters (as we must be with Clarissa, Cecilia, Camilla, Ellis- Juliet, for instance) we can be more open to the intricacies of their minds, which always betray more weaknesses than they initially appear to have. (Waldron, 14) Austen’s characters are neither perfect nor they provide any moral guidance. They behave sometimes in morally inconsistent way, which may resemble the reader’s own hesitations and fears (Waldron, 14). Austen was not trying to make her protagonists role-models for the society, or to change its morality, but she was “‘ delighted in everything ridiculous’ and like all ironists, wanted, not to change things, but to write about them” (quoted from Waldron, 13).

On the other hand, though, her art brings considerable benefits to the reader, because It is this modernity, together with the wit, realism, and timelessness of her prose style; her shrewd, amused sympathy; and the satisfaction to be found in stories so skillfully told, in novels so beautifully

constructed, that helps to explain her continuing appeal for readers of all kinds (Encyclopedia Britannica, n. p.) Austen’s own words about her vision of writing novels may be considered self-explanatory: But I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter.

No, I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way; and though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other. (1 April 1816, quoted from Kelly, n. p.) The following chapters will consider the analysis of Austen’s works as the ones negotiating with the existing conventions. Austen’s spare and economical method was widely admired- but not used as exact precedent. Her influence, though, may have been less direct. There is no doubt that during this phase of its development the novel gradually acquired an immensely increased psychological range, both ‘ good’ and ‘ bad’ characters are portrayed with more subtleties and contradictions; what Johnson3 had objected to in the ‘ mixed’ character became the norm (Waldron, 166)

As the motto of the following chapters Austen’s words from The Letter to Fanny Knight from 23 March 1817 will be used: “ Pictures of perfection as you know make me sick and wicked” 4. Pride and Prejudice. Confusion enters because as a whole intelligence is represented as faulty in the novel” (Marilyn Butler, quoted from Waldron, 37); these words may be considered

appropriate to characterize the plot of Pride and Prejudice. The whole novel consists of various misunderstandings, most of them coming from the overuse of reason or bad emotions, so to say based on the common sense, such as pride which was meant to hide bad material status or aloofness coming from the existing social conventions. In its plot, incidents, and characters Pride and Prejudice is an interesting variation on the novel of manners and sentiment. But its originality is in its manipulation of the triangular relationship between narrator, protagonist, and reader” (Kelly, n. p.). Kelly claims here that the reader’s perception of the novel is closely connected with the fact that the narration comes to the reader through Elizabeth’s inward thoughts, separating us from the point of view of the rest of the protagonists. It becomes even more interesting when it occurs that through the great deal of the book, the reader, sympathizing with Elizabeth, was making a huge mistake with her, passing opinions which were, by and large, wrong and subjective. In short, the novel constructs an exercise in reading for both protagonist and reader, and manipulates narrative so as to make the reader conscious of the fallibility and precariousness of reading of any kind” (Kelly, n. p.) 4. 1. Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy ??? the Reversed Ideals. “ She is talkative, satirical, quick at interpreting appearances and articulating her judgments” (Gilbert, Gubar, 157). This characteristics of Elizabeth differs so greatly from the descriptions of the other eighteenth and nineteenth century heroines that it is probably an excellent evidence on Elizabeth’s uniqueness on the background of the female protagonists of Austen’s fellow writers.

The features of her character are also underlined greatly by comparing her with her beloved sister Jane, who certainly may be called Elizabeth’s counterpart. Jane, who is quiet , unwilling to express her needs or desires, supportive of all and critical of none. While moral Jane remains an invalid, captive at the Bingleys, her satirical sister Elizabeth walks two miles along muddy roads to help nurse her. While Jane visits the Gardeners only to remain inside their house waiting hopelessly for the visitors she wishes to receive, Elizabeth travels to the Collins’ establishment where she visits lady Catherine. While Jane remains at home, lovesick but uncomplaining, Elizabeth accompanies the Gardeners on a walking tour of Derbyshire.

Jane’s docility, gentleness, and benevolence are remarkable, for she suffers silently throughout the entire plot, until she is finally set free by her Prince Charming (Gilbert, Gubar, 157). Jane, as a character, seems to be the perfect object to write and read about for the conduct manuals’ followers. Her ways of acting as well as the obstacles she meets in her life resemble the features of the meek, submissive, fragile women, so admired by Gisborne and Fordyce. Mr. Bingley, Jane’s Prince Charming also seems to be perfect; handsome, rich and genteel. Moreover, he is clearly in pure love with her. Here, Elizabeth, as the character of the main focus in this subchapter will be compared to Jane.

Considering the way Darcy reacted on her during their first official meeting, the reader would not expect him to be Elizabeth’s Prince Charming: ‘ Which do you mean’ and turning round, he looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said, ‘ She is tolerable; but

not handsome enough to tempt me; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men. You had better return to your partner and enjoy her smiles, for you are wasting your time with me’ (PP, ch. 3, p. 2). Certainly, this is not the way an enchanted man should talk about a woman. Even though, subconsciously, the eader may expect Darcy and Elizabeth to be meant for each other, after such a remark it becomes clear that their relationship will not be typical. Their further contacts do not let the curious reader down, as in the situation when Mr. Darcy seems to finally notice Elizabeth’s beauty, she acts in a very untypical way for a young woman in the age of looking for a husband. Being asked to dance, she refuses sarcastically: ‘ Indeed, Sir, I have not the least intention of dancing. — I entreat you not to suppose that I moved this way in order to beg for a partner. ‘ Mr. Darcy with grave propriety requested to be allowed the honour of her hand; but in vain. Elizabeth was determined; nor did Sir William at all shake her purpose by his attempt at persuasion . You excel so much in the dance, Miss Eliza, that it is cruel to deny me the happiness of seeing you; and though this gentleman dislikes the amusement in general, he can have no objection, I am sure, to oblige us for one half hour. ‘ Mr. Darcy is all politeness,’ said Elizabeth, smiling. ‘ He is indeed — but considering the inducement, my dear Miss Eliza, we cannot wonder at his complaisance; for who would object to such a partner? ‘ Elizabeth looked archly, and turned away. Her resistance had not injured her with the gentleman, and he was thinking of her with some complacency (PP, ch. 6, p. 3-4). So perverse is the relationship of Elizabeth and Darcy, that the reader can expect anything from their relations.

Darcy, being sometimes pompous, arrogant and unsociable, makes such mistakes during the social occasions, that many times even the reader could be prone to believe in his bad intentions and self-importance. Elizabeth, on the other hand, blind by her misjudgement and too certain of her own opinions about people, many times based on prejudice, gossip or unchecked information, proves to be a controversial protagonist; the one whose opinions should be reconsidered by the reader. Waldron claims that Darcy’s pompousness has its origins in the fact that, in fact, he tries to hide his complexes and to prevent himself from being vulnerable to get hurt.

He believes that he failed as a brother when he let Wickham deceive Georgiana, he also needs to be in control to take measures to his friends being cheated or mistreated. Finally, he finds himself puzzled in the situation when Elizabeth is clever, witty and smart, as he never meets women of lower rank capable of rebuking him of something (50-51). “ The direct interaction between confident heroine and insecure hero is new in fiction (Waldron, 51). As it could probably be expected, the love affair of the two main protagonists develops in a rather surprising way. Usually the moment when the man proposes to the woman in this literary genre is meant to be the moment of the happy resolution, bringing to the mind a cliched phrase; “ and they lived happily ever after”. Nothing such commonplace happens here.

The moment of the first proposal may be called a disaster, as it reveals, not to say confirms, Darcy’s doubts and Elizabeth’s pride: ‘ 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. ‘ Elizabeth’s astonishment

was beyond expression. She stared, coloured, doubted, and was silent. This he considered sufficient encouragement, and the avowal of all that he felt and had long felt for her, immediately followed. He spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride.

His sense of her inferiority??? of its being a degradation??? of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit (PP, ch. 34, p. 4) As the quote proves, Darcy spends more time talking about Elizabeth’s inferiority as far as social position is concerned. She, in turn, still sees him as an arrogant, bad person. Probably no reader would expect such a proposal. Fortunately, Austen does not leave the reader in the position of doubt about their love. Here Elizabeth’s and Darcy’s alteration starts. This is a turning point, after which the plot is heading a deserved, happy resolution.

Even though till that moment “ Elizabeth is disturbing comfortable norms- is she good or isn’t she? ” (Waldron, 48), she is a vivid character, who may unintentionally for her; but not for Austen; teach. She may seem controversial and far from the conduct manuals’ ideal, but we do not have to believe that there were no girls like Elizabeth between 1796 and 1813, when the novel was written, revised and published. They were probably all too common for the taste of the older generation, and themselves generated the improving works designed more or less to turn back the clock in manners and behaviour to something which may or may not have existed in the past

Waldron, 41) In Pride and Prejudice, Austen, against the ruling convention, proves that “ in life there are neither ideal people nor perfect solutions to their problems” (Waldron, 38). But even though, or maybe owing to this fact, the reader may identify with the protagonists and see that a human character, even if faulty, may change to the extent that provides him not perfect, but certainly a good life. 5. Emma Emma, being a novel written and published in the late stage of Austen’s literary career (1815), reveals the author’s maturity as well as big experience in the process of creating a protagonist both controversial and interesting for the reader. Moreover, surprisingly, it is not only the eponymous heroine who differs greatly from the pattern of hero creations of Austen’s fellow writers.

In Emma she takes the familiar stereotype of deluded girl versus mentor/lover, mixes it, among others, with the theme of the dependent girl (Jane Fairfax and Harriet Smith) and the model female (Jane again) and weaves a fiction of amazing intricacy in which none of the stock characters behaves exactly as might be expected and in which the reader’s sympathies are never thrust into a moral conduit (Waldron, 113) 5. 1. Emma the heroine. Austen, being aware of the opinions about her previous novel, Mansfield Park4, when writing Emma, was determined to create a character which would be somehow more distinctive from the other ones. “ Austen was aware that her theory of what a novel should do run counter for the most part of public expectations, which still believed it should have an unequivocal moral message(...) (Waldron, 112).

She comments on the novel with the words “ I am going to create a heroine whom no one but myself will much like” (quoted from Bradbury, 172), a statement which was supposed to underline Emma’s uniqueness in the world of contemporary fiction. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination claim even that: Emma is clearly an avatar of Austen the artist. And more than all the other playful, lively girls, Emma reminds us that the witty woman is responding to her own confining situation with words that become her weapon, a defense against banality, a way of at least seeming to control her life. Like Austen, Emma has at her disposal worn-out, hackneyed stories of romance that she is smart enough to resist in her own life (158).

Emma, on the surface level, is a person born to be living happily, without worries or any problems, depicted by Austen in words: Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her (E, 1). If we add to it the fact that her family situation does not make her, not to say let her, get marry, the question why did Austen make her the eponymous heroine occurs. Had it not been for certain subtleties in Austen’s description of Emma, such as the words “ seem to unite”, the readers would not have been able to believe in the fact that Emma’s life would be of any interest for them (Waldron, 113).

Fortunately, further reading of the novel shows such features of Emma which make her a dubious, fascinating character, different from the ones known from the other pieces of writing. Emma and her friends believe her capable of answering questions which puzzle less quick and assured girls, an ability shown to be necessary in a world of professions and falsehoods, puzzles, charades, and riddles. But word games deceive especially those players who think they have discovered the hidden meanings, and Emma misinterprets every riddle (Gilbert, Gubar, 158). Emma is a player, who, even though accomplished, witty and clever and superficially well prepared for the games of life, fails in many of them.

She is certain of her own acuity and common sense to such an extent that in most cases she, even though full of good will, is the one to interfere with the other people’s life in a harmful way. The story of Harriet, who is chosen by Emma to be her friend, and whose life, out of the latter’s short-sighted willingness to be helpful and noble, was very close to be ruined, is a proof that Emma had still a lot to learn before she tries to be someone else’s guardian angel. “ The operative principle [of the book] is, in short, an irony that works against the heroine”(Bradbury, 183). The presence of the omniscient narrator provides the reader with the version of events which is less subjective than the readings of the characters’, which concerns mostly Emma, because these are her misjudgments that make the plot. And because we commonly see through Emma’s eyes, and because Emma doesn’t see this further interpretation, it is dramatically delayed and becomes the center of our sustained interest” (Bradbury, 184). The real evils, indeed, of Emma’s situation were the power of having rather too much

her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself: these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her (E, 1). The life of Emma and features of her character are Austen’s fascinating ironical ways for depicting the contemporary ideal of a woman.

Her virtues, such as beautiful appearance and being rich, on one hand desirable in a heroine of the novel, on the other hand, as in Emma’s own perception her main role for the large part of the book is to be the observer of the others’ lives and the initiator of the events in their lives, seem to be useless. Even though not directly stated, the issue on which the plot is based, is whom will Emma marry (Bradbury, 179). The reader does not get misled and wonders if it will be Frank Churchill or maybe Mr Knightley. The usual way of creating the heroine’s life would probably lead to Frank, as he is eligible, rich, handsome, intelligent and accomplished. But, again, the irony occurs. Emma and Frank, expected by almost everyone to fall in love, break the stereotype. Emma’s ‘ love’ is more a matter of determination than tender emotion and means very little” (Waldron, 128). She succumbs to the stereotype for a while, but a careful reader notices that it is a matter more of the social expectations than of the genuine feelings (Waldron, 128). Emma’s giving in to the stereotypical ways of looking at people is revealed not only this time. It is visible that her attitude towards Jane Fairfax is based on the superficial and hasty assumptions on her character. As she, at first glance, is a model conduct book girl, maybe even Emma’s counterpart in the novel, it

is not very surprising that Emma may not be pleased with her presence in Highbury.

She even accepts Knightley’s opinion that her averse towards Jane is because “ she saw in her the really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself” (E, 166, quoted from Waldron, 126). Jane’s character, so admired by the society, her virtues and talents, gaining worth in the light of the fact that she is poor and lacking in social connections, underline only Emma’s vices. The more highlighted are Jane’s features, the better it is visible how much there is for Emma to learn and change to become a heroine who fits in to a contemporary role model. The characteristic feature of Emma as a character is the fact that she overcomes a great change throughout the course of the plot.

At the beginning she is a self conscious, witty and stubborn girl, after the events which influence her thinking, such as her constant misjudgments of people’s intentions, putting unearned thrust in Frank and loosing it, interfering in Harriet’s life with bad results, offending Miss Bates, finally being too short-sighted to notice her own falling in love while matching everyone else; she becomes a person who is a better companion, friend and member of the society. Emma’s eyes were instantly withdrawn; and she sat silently meditating, in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes. A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress; she touched, she admitted, she acknowledged the whole truth.

Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet’s having some hope of a return? It darted through her with the speed of an arrow that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself! (E, 47). What is interesting is the fact that is not because he starts to be perfect, but because she starts to understand her failings and imperfections, looses her impudence and admits that she needs guidance as well as she needs some time to fully grow up. As Waldron states “ She has not perhaps fulfilled the conduct-book ideal, but has done her best in the circumstances” (131).

It is important to remember that Emma, as a multidimensional character, unlikely for her cont