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SHAKESPEAREAN SPIRIT IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

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Abstract

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) is one of the greatest writer in English literature, he composed over than (150) sonnets. His plays are generally categorized as comedies, tragedies, and histories. A Shakespearean comedy may involve some very dramatic storylines; his comedies are defined in that it has a happy ending, usually marriage. Shakespeare's plays in general, and his comedies in particular affected the whole society in the 18th century and the centuries which follows , the authors have no exception of this effect , so the scope of this study is to examine this impact upon the writings of Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice. When examining Shakespeare's plays, especially the comedies, one can find that there are many similarities between these comedies and the writings of Jane Austen in many concepts and points of view towards the society of England in the 1800s. Their attitudes towards the role of women in the society of the 18th and 9th centuries are almost the same. The emancipation of women and permitting women take their active and important role in the life of their families, deciding their future, and eventually to change the society they live in into a better and liberated one. Both produced strong and mature women believing in the brilliant mind and the potential abilities of women and according to the above reasons and features of writing, Jane Austen and William Shakespeare both are the pioneers of liberation and emancipation of women.

Key Words: Austen, Emancipation, Feminism, Liberation, Shakespeare, Society

Introduction

Jane Austen (1775-1817) is an English writer who first gives the novel its' modern character through the treatment of everyday life. She was born in Hampshire village of Stevenson. Austen began writing the novel which later became *Pride and Prejudice* in October of 1796 and finished it by the following year; she was then twenty-one years old. Little is known of this early version of the story beyond its original title: *First Impression*. *Pride and Prejudice* is a comedy of manners novel that criticizes the social structure between the rich and poor and the role of women in the family. News of a wealthy young man named Charles Bingley stirs up the hearts of women in the town and the girls in the Bennet family are one of them. Mr. Darcy meets Elizabeth Bennet at Bingley's ball and other social conjunctions over the next few weeks. He soon finds himself attracted to Elizabeth, but Elizabeth is utterly disgusted by his wealth, status, and arrogance. Through a series of unfortunate events that turn her family and her sisters upside down, Mr. Darcy is the last person Elizabeth expected to marry. Nonetheless; Mr. Darcy confesses his love for her and even proposes to no luck. Elizabeth

doesn't agree to his proposal until Mr. Darcy explains himself, secretly fixes her family's problems. The stumbling blocks of his love story begins with the tension created by the lover's personalities. Elizabeth is prideful and Mr. Darcy is prejudice despite their attitudes towards each other, their love for each other overcomes their pride and prejudice. In Austen's day, love was often scarified in place of marriage. Marriage was an institution that women depended on to survive. Women made no income and held no inheritances, so marriage to a man meant financial stability. Women did not often find love in their marriage. Elizabeth, however, struggles to find that love in marriage.

Discussion and Analysis

From the opening sentence in *Pride and prejudice* the idea of love and marriage seems to be demonstrated the whole environment of the novel "it is a truth universally acknowledges that a single man in apossession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."¹ Marriage was a significant social concern in Austen's time and she was fully conscious of the advantages of being bachelor or single as she wrote a

letter to Fanny Knight, "Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor...which is one very strong argument in favor of matrimony" ². Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* belongs to the things she cares for mostly: family and values. Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen attempted to maintain the social decorum and a woman's place in society and marriage.

Austen by choosing the theme of marriage and such a kind of heroine, Elizabeth, is to display her opportunity of strength to demonstrate refinement under social and financial pressure. Through Elizabeth, Austen wanted to show that women still have freedom of choice despite the pressures of society. Besides, such determination from Elizabeth to maintain her sentiment was enhanced by the marriage of her friend Charlotte, who believes "happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance" ⁶ and her sister Jane both of them accepted their gendered fate. David Spring in his book, *Interpretation of Austen's Social World* comments that:

*High in the list of reasons for calling Jane Austen's society bourgeois, it would seem, is the ubiquity of money in her novels. Things and persons seem all to have their price. Even naval officers go to sea in a great war to make money.*⁸

In the sense of maturity and the self-respect of the character of Elizabeth Bennet, stands herself apart from the weakness of the women in her time and present a modern model of womanhood. Austen herself admired the character of Elizabeth in one of her letter to her sister Cassandra:

Miss Ben dined with us on the very day of the Books Coming, & in the even we set fairly at it & read half the 1st

*Vol. to wd soon appear we had desired him to send it whenever it came out--& I believe it passed with her unsuspected. She was amused, poor soul! That she cd not helping you know, with two such people to lead the way; but she really does seem to admire Elizabeth. I must confess that she delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, how I should tolerate those who do not like her at least, I do not know."*⁹

By writing novels of manners, Austen, presents heroines with gradual education and gradual maturation

of feeling such a kind of maturation was equal of their awareness about the menace of the social order, circumstances and the abilities. The heroine differs from one novel to another, but eventually they combined to make the moral philosophy of Austen's writing.

In Shakespeare's comedy the most outstanding features is pervading obsession with marriage. In many instances single or multiple marriages are used to provide comic closure, as in *As You Like It* and *Love's Labor's Lost*, in which four couples marry or are expected to marry, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Nothing and Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in each of which two couples marry. In other examples the very fact of marriage is used as the mainspring of the comedy, as in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, where the very title of the play indicates the importance of marriage, or, to a lesser extent, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, in each of which a marital relationship plays a central part. Emma Smith in her book *Shakespeare Comedies* argues that: "To talk about Shakespeare's women is to talk about his men, because he refused to separate their worlds physically, intentionally, or spiritually." In *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare's women are strong and spoken, still ultimately yielding to male power, but firm and cunning enough to out with the opposite sex in the most critical situation. An example about Shakespeare's female characters that he has given license to act outside her role as a woman is the Lady Olivia of *Twelfth Night*: when she falls in love with Viola disguised as the young page Cesario, she works hard to try to woo him taking on the role of hunter where she would normally be the hunted. This gave her incredible appeal as a strong and empowered woman, beside he is "of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth" as well as "a gracious person", but like Hermia of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when faced with the love of Demetrius, Olivia refuses to back down and submit to man she doesn't want.

She is strong, and she rules over her household with an unquestioned hand, with servants at her beck and call even her live-in uncle firmly under her thumb. Another example of the female character in Shakespeare's comedy and their strength is the daughter of Shylock, Jessica, in the comedy entitled *The Merchant*

of Venice, she appears far stronger than Olivia, or more probably, simply more reckless as she immediately gives over the power she has seized; when she submits to marrying the Christian gentlemen Lorenzo and taking his faith as her own.

Another perfect example of Shakespeare's bright, strong and clever women is the lady Portia of Belmont, a woman of such renowned beauty and status that men are willing to risk the fate of their very lineage for a chance to win her hand. She stayed strong to the will of her father when it comes to the decision of who she will marry. Besides, Portia knows the intricacies of the law better than anyone even the Duke of Venice himself, although she has no business entering the male-dominated world of laws; Shakespeare presents a young woman who save the entire male community in its most desperate hour and prove the agility, intelligence and untapped potential of her entire sex in the Taming of the Shrew. Shakespeare's intuition is the discovery of inward self, with love as personal, and hence with the relationship of lovers who face the problem of reconciling liberty and commitment in marriage. In the book of Shakespeare's the Basics the author stated that:

*"Now it has to be born in mind that a woman was not supposed to have the right to choose for herself a suitor or spouse: that was the male's prerogative. Comedy can therefore be seen as challenge for sorts to the authority of fathers or husbands to-be, which is played out in some imaginary world-the magic wood, or a place where women in male disguise are never recognized as women until they wish to be. The whole play is itself, of course, a make believe world, too."*²⁰

The economic helplessness of most women, the arranged marriages, the authority of fathers and husbands, whose obedience expected from daughters and wives; were issues that touched the lives of everyone in Shakespeare's time. Shakespeare's genius for portraying human behavior had depicted the condition of women within a patriarchal system and the limitations of his time. Obedience and silence were very much part of the patriarchal conception of femininity. A conception which the female characters in Shakespeare's plays such as the Taming of the Shrew or Antony and Cleopatra or

Twelfth Night or A Midsummer Night Dream who refuses to adhere.

In Taming of the Shrew, because Katherine speaks freely and asserts herself she is labeled as "shrewish." When Hortensio describes her to Petruccio, he swept out that she is "renowned in Padua for her scolding tongue". And he also told him of her fair fortune if suitable man comes courting and wins her hand in marriage. Petruccio is seeking his fortune in her dowry when he begins his ritual of winning the family and Katherine to his love. Katherine is representative of everything that sixteenth-century woman should not be. The disobedience to her father initially and her husband, Petruccio, later, are the most societally unacceptable example of her deface. Katherine's character far from silent throughout the play, but only is she verbal; she is articulate and witty in being so. In her argument with Petruccio in Act 2 scene 1, Katherine matches her suitor insult for insult demonstrating her equal intelligence to his.

Petruccio' (come, come, you wasp. I faith you are too angry)

'Katherine' if I be waspish, best beware my sting

Petruccio' My remedy is then to pick it out

*Katherine' Ay, if the fool could find it where it lies.*²¹

These lines were used by Shakespeare to prove that women may be equal to men in mental capacity to depict such presence of equal female to male intellect, the reader needs to notice Katherine's sudden change of opinion in Act 4 Scene 6, that she realizes Petruccio's folly from the beginning. It becomes clear to her that each time she defies or argues with him, Petruccio responds by taking away something of importance to her. Shakespeare suggests that women may not be the weaker vessel as was commonly believed. Katherine uses her intellect unbeknownst to Petruccio to achieve what she wants. John Beans in the book of Shakespeare's Comedies argues that in reading Taming of the Shrew:

"Kate is tamed not in the automatic manner of behavioral psychology but in the spontaneous manner of the later romantic comedies where characters lose themselves in chaos and emerges,

*as if from a dream, liberated into the bonds of love."*²²

Accordingly, *Taming of the Shrew* is one of the feminist plays. It need to be read as an example of how women could achieve empowerment simply acting within their roles giving off a kind of exaggerated performance and allowing men to believe they have them in their place.

Conclusion

This essay has examined the Shakespearean feminist insights in Austen's novels of manner. The study has found that Austen uses feminist voices in her narrative as a means of empowerment. For this reason, the study's analysis has discussed some Shakespearean plays to demonstrate the integral influence of Shakespeare's utilization of dramatic personae to render females equality in a male-dominated society. In like fashion, the interpretation of this Shakespearean depiction of women empowerment has unraveled, and simultaneously explored, Shakespeare as a forerunner of *Austenian fictional feminist style*. As such, the study has explored the against androcentric hegemony in both authors' society in two different ages. Thus, Shakespeare and Austen have been scrutinized as the literary precursors of women empowerment.

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