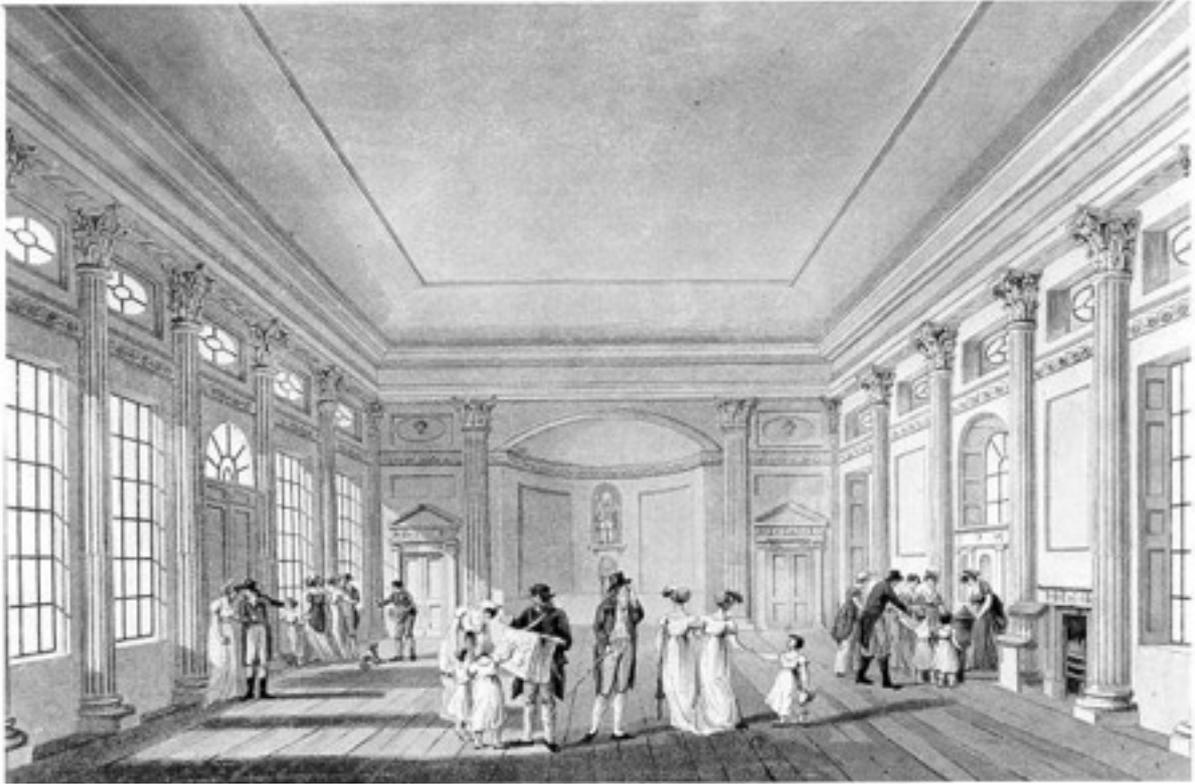


The Jane Austen Novel

Profielwerkstuk by Julia Neugarten



The Comforts of Bath, Rowlandson, The Pump Room, 1798
as frequented in Northanger Abbey

klas 6C

Het 4e Gymnasium

13th of February 2014

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Introduction

Abbreviations	
Pride & Prejudice	(P&P)
Sense & Sensibility	(S&S)
Emma	(E)
Persuasion	(P)
Northanger Abbey	(NA)
Mansfield Park	(MP)

Everybody knows Jane Austen. Over time, perhaps, her novels have become old but the universal truths they contain will always be fresh. For her extraordinary insight into the human mind and heart, Austen has remained loved by a dedicated readership for over two centuries.

I am part of that readership. Nothing interests me more than the magic of fiction, that extraordinary conjuring trick that engages the brain while one processes letters and words and turns them into a story in one's head. How does Austen do it? What makes her works so special? In other words: **What are the defining characteristics of a Jane Austen novel?**

For the duration of this research paper, I will focus on Jane Austen's six novels only. I did not read or consider her other, shorter works because I needed to narrow my field down considerably if this project was to be completed before the deadline.

Of course a novel, any novel, is made up out of many aspects. Style is vital and Austen's style is especially distinctive. Additionally, she can be praised for her exceptionally rounded, human characters. Her novels are dependent on their time and place, because social norms and expectations were usually the source of much narrative tension. Considering all this, I came up with the following subquestions:

- What defines Austen's style?
- Are there any stereotypical characters?
- What are central themes of the novels?
- What are some of the recurring motives?
- How are the plots structured?

However, the prospect of answering those questions solely through literary research and a report didn't appeal to me. In order to remain interested throughout the year it takes to

complete a profielwerkstuk, I wanted to involve more of my personal interests. That's where writing reared its head. I want to be a writer. In a sense, I am one now. When I started this project, I wanted to write something and that is the core of this paper: that I have written a work of fiction to illustrate my research on the characteristics of a Jane Austen novel. I hope you enjoy it as much as I have.

Research

What are the defining characteristics of a Jane Austen novel?

Hypothesis

Based on what I have read so far, there is always a female protagonist, a witty, sharp young woman who feels unchallenged by her environment. Then a man comes into her life. The man is usually either disliked at first, or liked only as a friend. A chain of events is set off through various minor characters. Usually drama is caused by gossip and indiscretions. In the end the man is compelled to reveal his true nature: he is actually very lovable and noble. The heroine, who has most likely looked down on the man before, now realizes this and they get married.

There is almost always a pressing need for marriage out of financial need or need of companionship. The need for a good match is what drives most of the characters to do what they do. Sometimes this need does not come from within the main character at first, but from pressure from her environment. However, when the man shows his true colours she is more often than not eager to get married.

The books I've read so far have all started with a sudden change. In *Emma*, for example, the housekeeper gets married. In *Sense & Sensibility* the father dies, in *Pride & Prejudice* Darcy and Bingley move to Netherfield, and in *Persuasion* the family faces bankruptcy and has to move to Bath. These events propel the main characters into action out of boredom, need and curiosity respectively.

What Defines Austen's Style?

Quick, witty dialogue, long sentences and intricate lingual constructions stand out in her work immediately. Chapters are relatively short and the novels are often divided up in larger parts by location or important events. Relative to the amount of descriptions, there is a lot of dialogue. This stands out especially when Austen is compared to her contemporaries.

To make her dialogue lively, Austen often wrote in the drawing room while conversations were taking place and read aloud to her family. It is a bit like the way writers these days sometimes write in public places or on the bus, to keep in touch with people in the real world.

As such, we could say that Austen's works are at times very realistic. They are about ordinary people who often have to deal with ordinary events such as paying the rent and buying clothes. For me, as a 21st century girl, the degree of realism in her novels is hard to estimate. There are also situations and events, often plot twists, that I do not regard as at all realistic, such as accidental encounters and fairytale-like endings. How likely was it that Anne Elliot would run into Captain Wentworth again the way she did? How likely was it for Marianne Dashwood to randomly run into Mr Willoughby and his fiancé at a ball?

Compared to modern novels, Austen's can be quite obvious and predictable. When a character is introduced, his or her personality is immediately described, along with their name and rank. This takes part of the reader's task away. In modern literature an author expects a reader to formulate their own ideas on the personality of a character. Austen doesn't do that as much. This can easily be explained: Austen's audience was not as used to reading as we are in our time. They were not used to the concept of uncertainty and the use of their imagination in literature. Simply put, the relationship between writer and reader was very different than it is today. More on that relationship can be found in Appendix 1.

Constructions and expressions used

The singular "they" (usage of the word "they" when referring to a singular entity: "Everybody is to judge for themselves" (P&P)) is used 75 times throughout the novels of Jane Austen. The reason for this is unknown and also possibly unimportant, but it does stand out. ¹

¹ <http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/austheir.html>, consulted on the 9th of June 2013

“to be sure”. There are characters that say this thousands of times. It makes their voices recognizable, but it gets annoying after some time, too. If you pay attention, you will find that many characters have those type of overused expressions that makes their voices distinguishable from others. Austen really gives each character its own voice, by giving them each a very distinguishable vocabulary.

There is a very clear distinction made between *accomplished* and plain ladies.

“For women of the "genteel" classes the goal of non-domestic education was thus often the acquisition of "accomplishments", such as the ability to draw, sing, play music, or speak modern (i.e. non-Classical) languages (generally French and Italian). Though it was not usually stated with such open cynicism, the purpose of such accomplishments was often only to attract a husband”²

Elinor, (S&S) immediately recognizes Lucy as being “ignorant and illiterate” (p. 149). Emma (E) looks down on people and feels entitled to do so because she is accomplished. There seems to be a hierarchy in which women rank according to their accomplishments, meaning music, drawing and other such pursuits, which is quite separate from financial status. Still, money can buy a good education and hence influence accomplishments. It takes the idea of trophy wives to a whole new level.

Some expressions are used only by ignorant characters, such as the “me and...” construction used by Lydia Bennett (P&P), Lucy Steele (S&S) and Mrs Elton (E), and the word “ain’t”, which is primarily used by Nancy Steele and Mrs Jennings (S&S).

² <http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/pptopic2.html>, consulted on the 9th of July 2013

Are There Any Stereotypical Characters?

The Heroine

Elizabeth Bennett (P&P), Elinor Dashwood (S&S), Emma Woodhouse (E), Anne Elliot (P), Fanny Price (MP), Catherine Morland (NA)

Is smart and sharp, more inclined to marry for love than for money, and is often disinclined to agree with her parents if her parents are foolish, such as Mrs Bennett, Mrs Dashwood and all of the Elliots except for Anne. Catherine Morland, eager to please and easily influenced as she sometimes is, forms an exception to this witty stereotype, but then her character is also a parody of the Gothic heroine.

Prince Charming

Darcy and Bingley (P&P), Ferrars and Brandon (S&S), Mr Knightley (E), Captain Wentworth (P), Edmund Bertram (MP), Henry Tilney (NA)

There is always something that keeps the Prince from the heroine, at least for a while. The Prince is always the perfect man for the protagonist. All princes are different, but each one is perfect in his own way. In the category of these heroes, we can distinguish different types. Some are average and almost boring, such as Edward Ferrars, others go through a transformation in the course of the book and turn into Prince Charming, such as Edmund Bertram.

“What we have to forgive them for is what we might have to forgive any human being who’s fundamentally decent and loving and intelligent and also capable of interesting conversation -- time and circumstances have not been altogether on their side.”³

These Princes are the most rounded characters, and the most lovable. Another example is Mr Darcy (P&P), who is introduced as very unsympathetic but redeems himself in a number of ways.

The Untrustworthy Man or Red Herring

Mr Willoughby (S&S), Mr Wickham (P&P), Mr Crawford (MP)

The untrustworthy man, as his title implies, seems to be a good match at first, is handsome and nice, but turns out to be a crook. Most likely this is because he marries for money, though other character flaws are also imaginable.

³ <http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/emaushro.html>, consulted on the 9th of June 2013

The Unattractive Man

Mr Collins (P&P), Mr Thorpe (NA)

This stereotype is quite contradictory. On the one hand, he is a good match, being rich. On the other, he is boring and obnoxious. His character I think is designed to instigate the debate between marrying for money and marrying for love, and making it clear that the author prefers the latter.

The Sidekick

Jane Bennett (P&P), Marianne Dashwood (S&S), Harriett Smith (E), Isabella Thorpe (NA)

The sidekick is a person that the heroine can talk to and confide in, always a woman. She is sympathetic and although her character is usually very different from the protagonist's, it is always someone very dear to her, a best friend or a sister. Like Prince Charming, the sidekick is ideally suited to complement and contrast the personality of the heroine.

Harriett is an exceptional sidekick because her relationship with Emma isn't one of equals. Isabella is an exceptional sidekick because she is not very likeable in the end, unlike, in my opinion, Jane or Marianne. The sidekick, with the exception of the horrible Isabella, has a Prince Charming of her own, who is included in the description of Prince Charming above.

The Obnoxious Girl

Lydia Bennett (P&P), Lucy Steele (S&S), Isabella Thorpe (NA), Mary Musgrove (P), Mary Crawford (MP) and many more

There are many ways for a girl to be obnoxious. Perhaps she is romantically interested in the heroine's prince, perhaps she is simply vulgar and rude, perhaps she is a gold digger. In some cases, such as Isabella Thorpe, the obnoxious girl is presented as likable at first.

The Sympathetic Parental Figure

Mr Bennett (P&P), Miss Taylor and Mrs Weston (E)

This is a character that gives the protagonist sound advice, such as:

“Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr Collins, and I will never see you again if you do.” (P&P, chapter 20)

In the case of Miss Taylor, she is not a parent but a governess. Miss Taylor, however, is difficult to place because, being a confidante of Emma, she could also be in the sidekick category.

The Foolish Parental Figure

Mrs Bennett (P&P), Lady Russel (P), General Tilney (NA)

This is someone who gives the heroine unsound advice and is moved by motives like greed or pride. Often, this character tries to convince the protagonist to marry for money or social status rather than love.

What Are Central Themes Of The Novels?

Love

This is the most obvious of themes in all of Austen's novels, and the one that makes them most enjoyable to me personally. The central question is always who the main character will end up with. There is always the conflict between marrying for love and marrying for financial security. Whether or not this is an accurate depiction of the period in which the novels are set I can't say for sure, that would be a historical research topic. However, there can be no doubt that the quest for marriage was a very big one in the lives of women, and to an extent it still is. Love is what makes these novels relatable to people of all eras. I mean more than the love between spouses. Austen's work is held together by the love between siblings and friends and families perhaps more than by the romantic love central to the plot.

Pride

Often, Austen's characters are proud. They feel too good for one another or too good to help others. Emma (E) feels a sense of superiority over Harriet that isn't very becoming, and Elizabeth and Darcy (P&P) both have a sense of pride to overcome before they can be together.

Prejudice

Many of the characters are prejudiced towards one another. *Pride & Prejudice*, of course, is a prime example of this, but many of the characters in *Mansfield Park* are also prejudiced against Fanny, and it is the prejudice of Lady Russell that makes for most of the conflict in *Persuasion*.

Financial Status

In these novels, financial status is crucial. To women, it makes the difference between a comfortable and an uncomfortable marriage. The less money they have, the more important and difficult it is to find a good match. The more money they have, the less important and the easier it is to find a husband.

Greed

In a society where working for money is the gravest of disgraces, greed is a common occurrence. A prime example of a greedy character is Fanny Dashwood (S&S), who barely grants her in-laws enough money to live. Many women, such as Charlotte Lucas (P&P), marry for security rather than love. In a society where every bit of happiness is dependent

on fortune, can we really condemn the characters that choose, like her, to marry for money? Austen certainly does. Her opinion seems to be that all types of excess are bad. One should not enter into a penniless marriage for love, but to enter into a fortunate marriage without even the slightest bit of mutual affection is equally ill advised.

Impulsiveness

Impulsiveness is a theme that is perhaps made most obvious in *Sense & Sensibility* through the character of Marianne Dashwood. Though her rash and passionate nature isn't condemned outright, there is a certain disapproval in the way Austen chooses to describe her, which is only exacerbated by the stark contrast with her sensible sister Elinor.

Morality

Something I dislike about Austen is that there is often moral judgment in her novels. Characters that act impulsively are "punished" to convey that Austen disapproves of certain actions. For example, Marianne (S&S), does not get the man she wants. I cannot help but view this outcome in the light of her character, which is impulsive and exuberant. Her more controlled sister does get the man she wants, against all odds. Austen is trying to lecture here: be meek and good will befall you. Be too cheeky and you will be punished. She has a more subtle way of lecturing, but her message does not appeal to me.

Equality

Questions of social- and gender equality arise when studying the works of Austen. In the society of her time, women were not the equals of men. Yet Austen shows them as complicated, often strong-willed people. For sure, her characterizations can be interpreted as feminist. She shows clearly the ill way in which women were sometimes treated and especially how they were made powerless by law, being passed over when it came to inheritances and such. Yet there seems to me to be very little disapproval of Regency society in Austen's works. Rather, she describes situations as she sees them without an attempt to criticize outright. She creates fiction within her own environment. I believe she does so without any political agenda but with the aim to amuse an audience. It is only with the eyes of a young woman two hundred years later that the inequality in her era is seen as problematic.

What Are Some Of The Recurring Motives?

There's **balls**, but **dinner parties** are as important or possibly even more important. It is at a ball that Elizabeth Bennett finds Darcy a horrible man (P&P), it's at a ball that Marianne Dashwood finds out that Willoughby is engaged to someone else (S&S).

Then there are **letters**, of course. In S&S, Lucy uses a letter to demonstrate her engagement to Edward. Letters were the only means of communication or miscommunication, and as such were vital to social entanglements. It is a letter in which Darcy explains his past behaviour to Elizabeth (P&P), and it is through a letter that she is informed of her sister Lydia's disastrous marriage to Wickham.

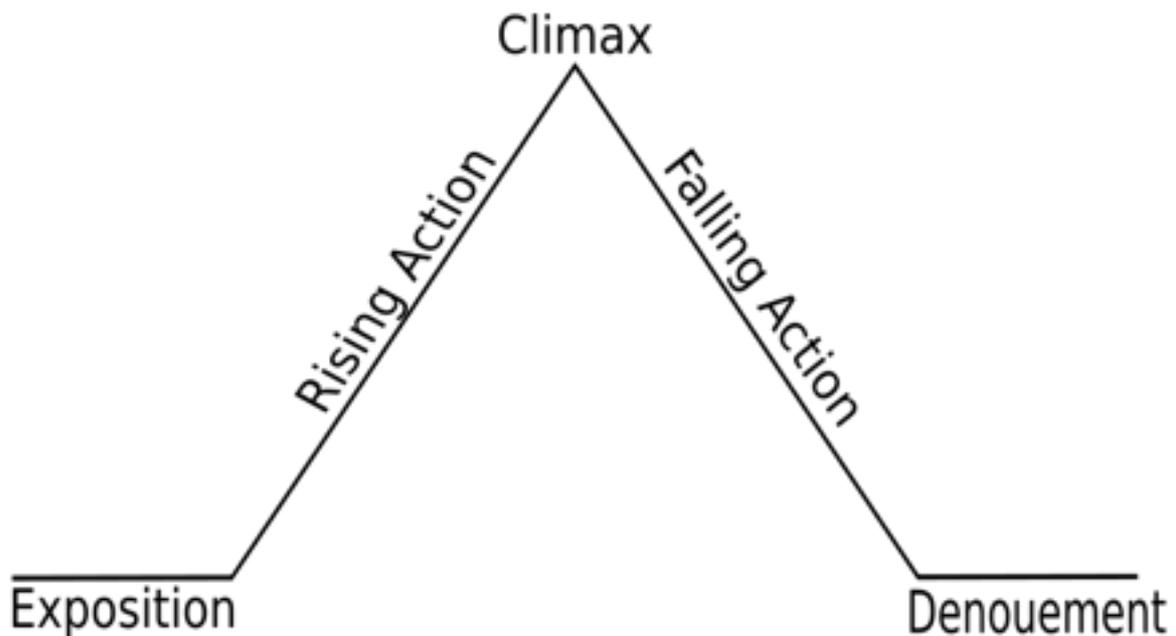
Often, **journeys** are made to break the tedium of life in the country. In S&S, Elinor and Marianne visit London, in P&P Elisabeth visits Darcy's estate and it is quite possible that her regard for him is swayed when she sees the luxury in which he lives. in *Persuasion*, a journey is made to Bath, although this is of a more permanent nature. Catherine (NA) pays visits to both Bath and Northanger Abbey. These journeys enable the heroines to become slightly more cosmopolitan and independent, run into people they otherwise wouldn't run into and, in some cases, encounter the intricacies of society. If it weren't for her trip to London, when would Marianne (S&S) have found out that Mr Willoughby had betrayed her? Would Elizabeth (P&P) have fallen for Mr Darcy if she hadn't seen his beautiful estate? Let's hope so. Would Anne (P) even have met Captain Wentworth again if she hadn't moved to Bath? What would *Northanger Abbey* be without a journey to that same place?

How Are The Plots Structured?

How is the plot usually built up? How is it propelled from a starting point into a climax and resolution and what are the climax and the resolution?

Aristotle's Theory and Freytag's Pyramid

Making sense of my findings so far is a daunting prospect. However, it became infinitely simpler when I discovered Aristotle's ideas on dramatic structure. According to him, all narrative structure as used in literature can be divided into five parts, as shown in the diagram below designed by Gustav Freytag.



Freytag's Pyramid⁴

First comes the exposition, in which the main characters are introduced and their setting is established. Then comes the rising action. During the rising action tension or uncertainty builds from whatever conflict the protagonist faces. The part at which the story is at the height of its tension is called the climax or crisis. This always carries an element of insight for the protagonist. At the very least, the outcome becomes more clear

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Freytags_pyramid.svg, consulted on June 12th 2013

as options are eliminated. From then on action is falling, as the conflict the protagonist faces unravels. This part of the story sometimes has a moment of final suspense, when the outcome of the story is still unclear. The denouement, or ending, concludes the story and often provides its audience with a sense of fulfillment or closure.

However, we run into some difficulties when applying this theory to Austen. Most of that trouble is due to the fact that Aristotle designed his ideas for tragic plays. Plays differ from novels in the sense that they always have a very clear three-act structure, as can also be recognized in Aristotle's theory. Most of Austen's novels are much more intricate and subtle of plot than that, and they also usually have more than one storyline. In most of Austen's novels, there are multiple story-lines which cannot be put into such a graph as shown above very easily. However, a slightly more complicated model of plot *can* be applied, as shown in Appendix 2.

This model shows some similarities between novels. The most striking, of course, is the fact that each novel ends with the main character(s) happily or at least satisfactorily married. Beyond that every trend I could possibly point out, in my opinion, oversimplifies matters, but I will try none the less.

In every **exposition**, the characters, their personalities and situations are introduced. In each case, there is an unexpected, often life-changing event that starts off the plot. During the **rising action**, it is often the case that one character starts fancying another, but of course there are obstacles. There is no possible way to link all six of the **complications**, except to say that they complicate matters further in some way. The **climaxes** are all equally difficult to generalize. There is very little I can say about the **falling actions and final suspenses**, except that there seem to be rather a lot of journeys and illnesses. Then the **denouements and conclusions** all have one thing in common: they lived happily ever after.

Yet is that everything that can be said about Austen's plots? Decidedly not. Austen is to be praised for her clever use of coincidences and, above all, her characterizations.

Types of narrative tension

When analysing literature one of the most interesting questions is this: what compels the reader to read on? We are all familiar with the rare phenomenon: a truly unputdownable book. What makes it so?

In Austen, the most compelling question is: will the heroine get the man she wants? This question is often drawn out by use of **red herrings**, men the protagonist thinks she wants who turn out to be less desirable than initially assumed, such as Mr Willoughby (S&S). With secondary characters, this basic question is often very straightforward and easily answered, such as with Jane Bennett and Mr Bingley (P&P). It is the endless struggle the heroines have to go through to get their men that makes the protagonists as dear to us as they are. If the romance between Elisabeth Bennett and Mr Darcy had been as easy as the one between Jane and Bingley, its happy ending would have been nice, but not half as satisfactory as it actually is.

Emma might be the only exception to this rule. Emma's basic question is not whether she'll get the man she wants, because she does not fall in love, or realise that she is in love, until the last pages of her book. In *Emma*, the narrative tension is different. It is built up out of a number of questions. Who will Emma end up with? Who will Harriet end up with?

The difference between *Emma* and Austen's other novels is that the main question is: "What is going to happen?", rather than "How is it going to happen?".

Narrative tension and the kind of questions a narrative relies on will be elementary aspects of the writing process.

Conclusion

What are the defining characteristics of a Jane Austen novel?

The sad truth is that it will take a research paper the length of a Jane Austen novel to list, describe and analyse all of the characteristics of a Jane Austen novel, and that in spite of all of my generalizations it is very difficult to fit all six novels into one model. My research is concluded and summarized best in my novella, *Prospects & Presumptions*. None the less I will attempt to summarize my findings here, and more briefly in the checklist found on page twenty-two.

Though Austen's novels all have very similar central conflicts centering around marriage and social life, their characters and story lines are diverse. I think Austen's brilliance lies in the way she mixes comfortably recognizable situations and characters with surprises and plot twists. The only thing that unites all of her oeuvre is the one thing every reader can relate to in some way: love.

Writing
some notes on
Prospects & Presumptions

Writing The Novel

There are few prospects as daunting as that of writing a novel in a year. Granted, what I have written here can by no means be described as a novel. At a meagre 26.000 words, *Prospects & Presumptions* is a novella. Having written it in eight months remains one of the things I am most proud of, but I could never have done it without the guidance and inspiration Jane Austen provided me with.

It is, after all, more her novel than mine. Like a piece of overgrown fanfiction, *Pr&Pr* could never have been created without the original work of Austen. Its characters, situations and plots were in some cases taken directly from Austen, and its style is a poor imitation of Austen's incredible human insight and wit.

How did I go about distilling from Austen's works those parts that most inspired me to write? The first stage was reading, obviously. Although of course I had opened an Austen novel before deciding to spend a whole year studying them, I had at first not yet read all of her books. So I did that, and tried to make up my mind about what I liked and didn't like about them. I spent a lot of time pondering whether or not to attempt imitating her style, how I felt about her presence as an author in her works, what plot developments I liked and could make use of, what I wanted to avoid copying. In this part of my research, I will attempt to explain why I made the choices I made and what I intended with them.

One of the things that stood out to me most is how much literature has changed in 200 years. Austen, as a narrator, is always present in her works. She oversees everything that happens, which takes away a lot of the narrative tension found in modern literature but has its own charms and advantages. Her style is laden with adverbs, which are frowned upon by many a modern writer, and her tone can at times be almost annoying in its cleverness.

The thing I disliked most and very much wanted to avoid, was the moral judgment imposed by Austen, particularly in *S&S*. I think Marianne Dashwood was punished too harshly for her impulsiveness, a trait all too understandable in a sixteen year old girl. Furthermore, Marianne is treated almost with condescension, as Austen, in my opinion, implies heavily that Marianne doesn't know what's good for her. Marianne doesn't get what she wants because Austen thinks it is not what's best for her.

I also quickly decided that the heroines I liked best were the relatively assertive ones. Assertiveness does not have to mean hardness or lack of feeling, but a certain sharpness is very refreshing to me in a female protagonist thus Lily Kingston was born.

The time in which my novella was to be set also made for some dilemmas. Knowing that I would never be able to fully capture Austen's outdated vocabulary or her knowledge of Regency society, I was at first hesitant to start writing. Anachronisms gave me some trouble because the etymology of words and expressions was sometimes hard to

determine. I sincerely hope that my use of language and style in *Prospects & Presumptions*, after studying Austen's for some time, is not so modern as to distract the reader.

The part of the writing process that I perhaps found easiest was inhabiting the characters I had designed, aided, as in all things, by the characters of Austen. Understanding the mind of a young girl looking for love is not too hard to do, and the relationship between parents and their daughters was also not hard to fathom. There are more autobiographical elements to *Prospects & Presumptions* than I'd like to admit.

As a writer, this project has taught me a lot. First and foremost I have grown more confident in my abilities as an author, more certain of my perseverance and use of language while writing. Looking back on the past year, I feel a huge sense of accomplishment.

As you can read in the preface to *Prospects & Presumptions*, the writing process wasn't easy. My first draft was written hastily, without rereading or a great amount of background research. I discovered that writing aimlessly and endlessly was the best and perhaps the only way for me to create at all. I sat down behind my laptop and typed so quickly and carelessly that my fingers hurt. As soon as I became too self-aware, I'd find myself staring at blank pages for hours.

Then came the daunting task of editing and taming the unruly first draft. This was made infinitely easier by the feedback of Welmoed Drewes, which was constructive and to the point. Of course many scenes needed to be rewritten and plot holes resolved, but her advice gave me a sense of direction and renewed my motivation and feeling of purpose. At that point, my writing became more measured out and deliberate, and for some time I exchanged my laptop for an old fashioned pen and a notebook to become more conscious of what I was putting to paper. I never imagined that change would influence my writing so strongly, but it did, and *Prospects & Presumptions*, I hope, became better for it.

The final stages of writing were perhaps the most enjoyable, because I started to make out the end result, and it was immensely satisfying. Of course there were still things to improve and I have resigned myself to the fact that there always will be, but overall I am content with how everything turned out. Now please quickly go read it quickly and let me know what you think!

The Checklist

This is the list of characteristics I found when studying the works of Austen. *Italics* indicate that I used the characteristic in *Prospects & Presumptions* in some way, or at least attempted to.

Style

quick, witty dialogue

long sentences

intricate lingual constructions

relatively short chapters

divided into parts by location or event

about ordinary people

accidental encounters/occurrences

fairytale-like endings

quite obvious plots

when a character is introduced, his or her personality is immediately described

a present and recognisable authorial voice or omniscient narrator

dramatic irony

The singular “they”

the expression “to be sure”

a distinctive voice for each character

accomplished versus plain ladies

“me and...” construction

the word “ain’t

Characters

The Heroine: Lily Kingston

Prince Charming: Clifford Porter

The Untrustworthy Man: Mr Redding

The Unattractive Man

The Sidekick: Joanna Kingston, Martha Winterson

The Obnoxious Girl: Rose Winterson

The Sympathetic Parental Figure: Mr Kingston

The Foolish Parental Figure: Mrs Kingston

Themes

Love, pride, prejudice, financial status, greed, impulsiveness, morality, equality

Motives

balls

dinner parties

letters

journeys

Plot

red herrings

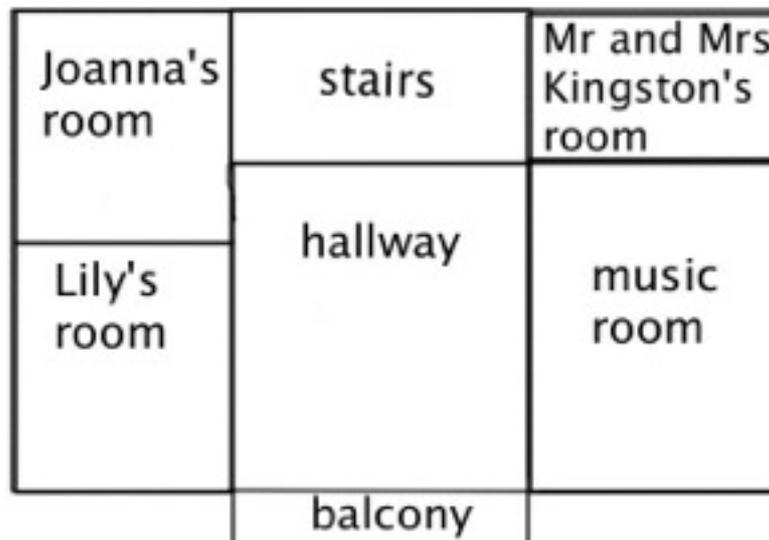
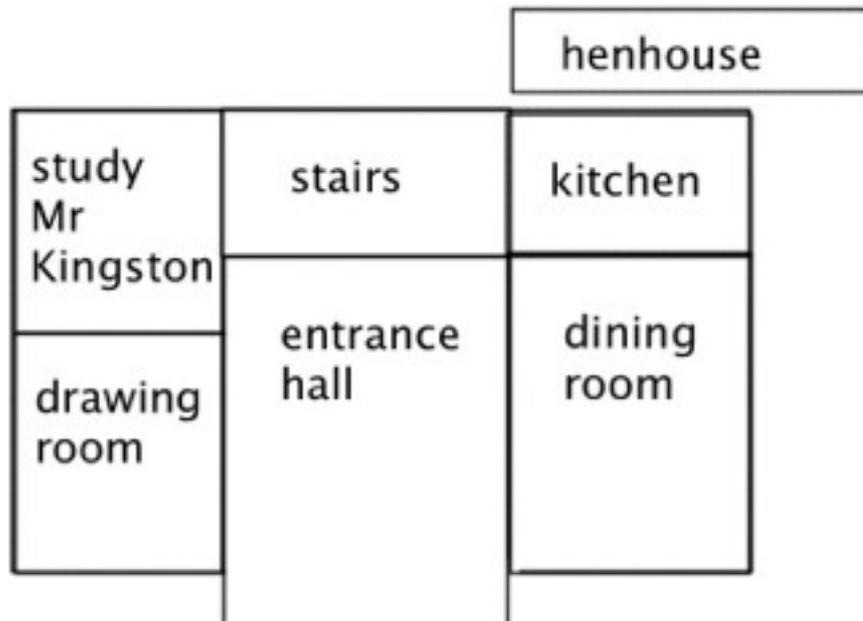
*a sudden change in the beginning
(spoiler alert!) marriage at the end*

Background

To further illustrate the writing process, I have here added some of the background story I designed in the early stages of writing *Prospects & Presumptions*.

Firstly, the architectural layout of Northing Cottage is as follows:

Above: ground floor, below: upper floor



The Film

A short film, a sort of trailer for this research paper, can be found here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfjMmiVIC7o&feature=youtu.be>

The trailer is a montage of existing movie adaptations of Austen's work, juxtaposed to illustrate the characteristics of her novels, which I have found in my research.

My PWS consists of two parts: a study in the defining characteristics of Jane Austen's novels and a novella in which I use some of the characteristics I have found. The film serves to illustrate the study and my findings briefly.

The characteristics which can be found in the film are as follows:

- accidental encounters and occurrences that are quite obvious plot devices
- a heroine
- a prince charming
- an untrustworthy man
- a ball
- a marriage and a happy ending

Sources

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Pride and Prejudice (2005), directed by Joe Wright

Sense and Sensibility (1995), directed by Ang Lee

Appendix 1

Narrative tension in Jane Austen's *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*

NB: This essay was written on the 29th of October 2013 for a university application. I have included it here because I consider it relevant to my research.

By Julia Neugarten

In 1811, Jane Austen's first novel was published. She was to reimburse her publisher for any losses made on the novel. However, *Sense and Sensibility* was a success, the first edition selling out within twenty months. Austen was, and has remained over the centuries, a writer whose works are enjoyed. What is it that makes her novels so enjoyable? What does Austen do, in terms of style and narration specifically, to appeal to her contemporaries as well as so many after her death? How does she create the narrative tension that has so many of us on the edge of our seat, turning the pages frantically? In this essay I will illustrate how the narrative tension is the result of the difference between how her characters see the world and how she sees her characters.

Austen is an omniscient, intrusive narrator. She is above her characters and oversees their situations. "the intrusive narrator is one who not only reports, but also comments on and evaluates the actions and motives of the characters, and sometimes expresses personal views about human life in general"⁵, as Austen often does. She knows more than the characters do, because she knows what everyone thinks but neglects to say.

Compared to modern novels, Austen's are, at first glance, quite obvious in the way they narrate the story. When a character is introduced, his or her personality is immediately described, along with their name and any other information important within the novel. This transparency of information takes part of the reader's task away, telling rather than showing them what they need to know. It is a literary device not often used in more recent literature. Also, in order to interest an audience with an attention-span not yet used to novels, Austen is extravagantly clear when introducing the characters and plot.

"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. (...) 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;"⁶

Over the course of four lines, Emma's character has already been clearly described by the omniscient narrator: smart, pretty and happy but somewhat spoiled and conceited. In modern literature authors often expect readers to formulate their own ideas on the

⁵ *A Glossary of Literary Terms, seventh edition* by M.H Abrams, Cornell University, published by Earl McPeck (1999), United States of America

⁶ *Emma*, Jane Austen, First published in 1816, This edition published in Penguin Books (1966), Great Britain

personality of a character, based on the situations and reactions the author chooses to show them. Austen doesn't do that as much, leaving less to the imagination of the reader. Where a smaller part of the drama is hidden from the readers, one would expect a decrease of narrative tension.

Yet the presence of an omniscient narrator does not in the case of Austen's works nullify the narrative tension. Rather, it serves to enhance it. The complicated relationship between what the characters know, what the readers know and what the author knows provides for ample narrative tension in Austen's novels. The novels derive their tension from irony, which arises when "there remains the root sense of dissembling or hiding what is actually the case".⁷ In other words, sometimes the narrator hides part of the truth or approaches it in an ironic manner, maintaining the mystery that creates tension within the plot.

The following quote, one of Austen's best-known, illustrates her skilled, witty use of irony:

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."⁸

"Part of the ironic implication (based on assumptions that Austen assumes the audience shares with her) is that a single woman is in want of a rich husband."⁹ The sentence relies on the complicated relationship between author, reader and characters, from which most narrative tension in her fiction arises.

So how exactly does this relationship create narrative tension? Although we can describe Austen as an omniscient narrator, each of her stories is told from the point of view of the protagonist. Austen does this to make the narrative less reliable. Though she, as a narrator, is all-knowing, her characters are not. When she makes us look at the story from the protagonist's point of view, we sometimes miss out on information vital to the plot. Narrative tension arises because the readers think they understand what's happening, but this turns out not to be the case, because the protagonist's perception was flawed.

The basic structure of the narrative tension created through unreliable point of view is as follows. Austen's protagonist often are in a situation where won't marry a man because of some flaw they see in his character or situation. When it turns out that he doesn't possess that flaw at all, the plot is resolved. One could even argue that the flaw never existed. It existed only in the perception of the protagonist. It is in fact not the man that has changed, but the protagonist's view of him. The narrative tension is created by the perceived flaw in the man's character, which points out an actual development in the protagonist's character. The tension is resolved when the protagonist receives new information or views him differently, suddenly making him a good match after all. It relies on the point of view we are shown, which is a combination of an omniscient narrator commenting on the events as they unfold and third-person narrative from the occasionally unreliable point of view of the protagonist.

⁷ *A Glossary of Literary Terms, seventh edition* by M.H Abrams, *ibid.*

⁸ *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen, First published in 1813, This edition published in Penguin English Library (1972), Great Britain

⁹ *A Glossary of Literary Terms, seventh edition* by M.H Abrams, *ibid.*

The case of Mr Darcy (*Pride and Prejudice*) is a good example of such a misunderstanding of character on the part of the protagonist causing narrative tension. In his introduction, Darcy is described as a good match by the omniscient narrator.

“Mr Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year.”¹⁰

It is only Elizabeth’s impression of him that is unfavorable, and later, at the time of his first proposal of marriage, gets in the way of their match. Yet we can scarcely blame her after Mr Darcy has been so obnoxious as to say of her:

“She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*.”¹¹

There is a difference between how the omniscient narrator sees Mr Darcy and how the protagonist sees him. Austen uses this discrepancy to create narrative tension. She makes sure we do not know that Darcy is in fact a noble man, because Elizabeth doesn’t know this either. When, at last, the true nature of his character is revealed, it plays an important role in resolving the conflict and wrapping up the plot in a satisfactory manner.

At the same time, the extent to which Elizabeth is wounded by Mr Darcy’s remark reveals her character to be quite proud in nature. The same goes for her refusal of his first proposal. Austen’s characterization isn’t as straightforward as we had first assumed, then. She uses events to illustrate her protagonist’s character. The discrepancy between the omniscient point of view and that of the protagonist serves a dual purpose: building narrative tension and showing us more about the protagonist’s personality.

Emma, I think, provides us with the most striking cases of irony in Austen’s works, which also relies on the relationship between what the author, the characters and the readers know. Emma has a different perception of Mr Knightley than the readers do. These differing points of view cause narrative tension. Mr Knightley is introduced as follows:

“Mr Knightley, a sensible man about seven or eight-and-thirty, was not only a very old and intimate friend of the family, but particularly connected with it as the elder brother of Isabella’s husband.”¹²

He is described as an older family friend, the elder brother of Emma’s sister’s husband, and one that Emma’s father is particularly fond of. Such family ties and age differences do not usually make for romantic interests. We are lead to believe that Mr knightley is not a possible husband for Emma because of his intimate relationship with her family, and that is also what Emma believes. But both the reader and the protagonist of the novel are mislead, because it is Mr Knightley that Emma marries in the end, when she discovers her own feelings for him and her foolish presumptuousness in never considering him as a husband before. Mr knightley does remark on the age difference between them, but once they have realized that they love one another, this is no longer an obstacle.

Emma, famed from the very beginning, as quoted above, for her cleverness, spectacularly misreads a number of social situations, such as her relationship to Mr knightley. The

¹⁰ *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen, *ibid*.

¹¹ *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen, *ibid*.

¹² *Emma*, Jane Austen, *ibid*.

problems this causes then trouble her throughout the novel, which is ironic considering how she is first described as having “lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.”¹³ The irony in her character, of being simultaneously sure of her social skills and, in fact, a poor judge of social situations, is what makes the book amusing. Her lack of self-knowledge is also what makes Emma a naive heroine. “whose invincible simplicity or obtuseness leads him to persist in putting an interpretation on affairs which the knowing reader—who penetrates to, and shares, the implied point of view of the authorial presence behind the naive persona—just as persistently is called on to alter and correct.”¹⁴ (sic.) She and the irony within her character can only exist as long as there is an omniscient narrator to provide the contrast between Emma and the way her environment regards her, and comment on it.

Austen’s novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* seem at first glance to be straightforward. However, Austen proves herself aware of the fact that she is using omniscient narration and irony as literary devices, and able to manipulate them in order to further the characterization of her protagonists and to build and resolve narrative tension. Her use of these literary devices is admirable in its being both very simple and very complicated, enabling her to attract both contemporary and current audiences.

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¹³ *Emma*, Jane Austen, *ibid.*

¹⁴ *A Glossary of Literary Terms, seventh edition* by M.H Abrams, *ibid.*

Appendix 2

plot development

	exposition: what is the situation?	rising action	complication	climax	falling action and final suspense: will everything be ok?	denouement and conclusion
P&P	The main characters are introduced. Bingley and Darcy come to Netherfield.	Bingley wants Jane and Darcy wants Elizabeth, but the Bennet's bad connections make them hesitant.	Bingley moves away from Netherfield. Elizabeth dislikes Darcy more than ever.	Darcy's proposes, Elizabeth declines, and Darcy sends her a letter explaining his behaviour.	Elizabeth comes to regret refusing Darcy as she meets him again and adapts her opinion. Lydia elopes with Wickham.	Elizabeth learns of Darcy's interference in Lydia's wedding. Marriage Darcy & Elizabeth Jane & Bingley
S&S	The main characters are introduced. Mr Dashwood dies. The Dashwoods move in with John out of need.	Elinor fancies Edward. Marianne fancies Willoughby.	Edward turns out to be engaged to Lucy.	Willoughby leaves and turns out to be engaged to someone else.	Marianne becomes very ill. Elinor hears that Edward has married Lucy.	Marianne recovers. Edward turns out not to have married Lucy. Marriage Elinor & Edward, Marianne & Brandon
P	The main characters are introduced. The Elliots have to go to Bath out of financial trouble.	Anne still fancies Captain Wentworth.	It seems as though Wentworth fancies Louisa. Also, Mr Elliot pursues Anne.	Mr Smiths is revealed to be a villain.	Wentworth thinks Anne is going to marry Mr Elliot.	Mr Elliot writes to Anne. Marriage Anne & Wentworth
E	The main characters are introduced. Miss Taylor gets married.	Emma tries to set Harriet up but it never works out.	Emma doesn't even want to get married herself.	Emma realises that she loves Knightly.	Emma is very afraid that Knightly will marry Harriet.	Knightly confesses that he loves Emma. Marriage Emma & Knightly Harriet & Mr Martin
NA	The main characters are introduced. Catherine goes on a trip to Bath.	Catherine fancies Henry.	Catherine tries to go out with the Tilneys but Thorpe wants her for himself. Isabella and James get engaged.	Catherine has some conspiracy theories about General Tilney, Henry tells her off.	Catherine is sent away from the Abbey. Isabella and James break off their engagement.	Marriage Catherine & Henry
MP	The main characters are introduced. Fanny moves to Mansfield Park.	The Crawfords arrive and Sir Thomas leaves town.	Edmund almost wants to marry Mary.	Fanny refuses Henry's proposal.	Fanny is sent to Portsmouth, Tom becomes ill and both Maria and Julia elope.	Fanny returns to her real home, Mansfield Park. Marriage Fanny & Edmund