THE ELEMENT OF IRONY IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FICTION

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Submitted By
TAHIRA YASMEEN

Department of English Literature,
International Islamic University,
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A DISSERTATION IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER’S DEGREE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERATURE

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I certify that all material in this dissertation has been identified and that no material is included for which a degree has previously been conferred upon anybody.

Signed Tahirayasmeen August, 2002
DEDICATED

TO

My loving parents who showed me
the path of enlightenment
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In writing this dissertation I am indebted to all the meritorious pedagogues for their guidance and cooperation extended to me during the period of my study at this university. First of all I am indebted to my respected supervisor Mr. Munawar Iqbal·Gondal, Associate Professor, Department of English Literature for his keen guidance, painstaking interest, and extreme cooperation in writing this dissertation. He helped me with zeal and ebullience. Secondly, I would also like to thank my brother Khurram Shehzad for composing and printing this thesis, my husband Mr. Shakeel Īrshad Gondal and my father Ch. Sai Muhammad Warrraich for the cooperation they have extended to me in accomplishing this task.

Tahira Yasmeen
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INTRODUCTION

The basic function of literature is to provide 'delight'. With the advancement of literature, most of the literary figures thought that mere 'delight', 'enjoyment' or 'pleasure' was as if to make it aimless and purposeless. So the literary people who were sensitive enough to feel the pang of misery all around them and they were serious at heart to eliminate the vice and encourage the good agreed that besides 'delight' and 'pleasure' there should be some positive practical objective behind any literary story, drama or poem. Very serious thought in this direction brought them to a point that they could use literary piece of work as an instrument to introduce change in the society. They could improve society through eliminating existing evils.

With this noble cause of reducing the vices from the existing social set up through arousing awareness among the masses, the literary writers worked for the betterment of society. Their main objective was to reduce pain and misery and to introduce ease, comfort and relief in life through altering the prevailing social structure.

Many English writers have been trying to bring about social reforms in the society through their works. They invented a literary form 'irony' by which they could expose the weaknesses, follies and absurdities of their characters for the purpose of improvement and rectification. Chaucer, the father of English poetry, paved the way for the writers to come. Following the footsteps of Chaucer the succeeding fiction writers have used irony as a powerful means of reformation. Jane Austen is one of the most outstanding writer among them. She derived 'amusement' out of the follies, weaknesses, faults of her characters making the readers conscious of the abnormalities with the objective of improving them. She
certainly worked within a limited range but within a narrow framework, she did a wonderful work of realizing the people of their weaknesses with a view to remove them.

The present study has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter analyses the life of Jane Austen, especially those factors which compelled her to make use of irony in her writings. The second chapter focuses on the background of irony. The third chapter presents a textual study of irony in *Pride and Prejudice*. The conclusion of the whole study has been given at the end.
CHAPTER ONE

LIFE OF JANE AUSTEN

Jane Austen was born at Steventon in Hampshire, England in 1775. She was the daughter of a well-reputed rector, George Austen and Cassandra Leigh, a woman having a keen sense of humour. Jane Austen spent her childhood mostly in and around Steventon, a fascinating hilly place, in the company of her seven brothers and sisters of whom she was the seventh in order.

She was fond of her brother Henry who later on helped her a lot in the publication of her novels. She was deeply attached to her sister Cassandra Austen who was two years elder to her. They formed an amazingly recognizable pair and remained in contact with each other through correspondence even when they were apart and away from each other. It is this enviable companionship which is perhaps, partially reflected through Jane and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*. Virginia Woolf, talking about Jane Austen's attachment to her sister, remarks:

To her elder sister alone did she write freely; to her alone she confided her hopes and, if rumor is true, the one great disappointment of her life, but when Miss Cassandra Austen grew old, and the growth of her sister's fame made her suspect that a time might come when strangers would pry and scholars speculate, she burnt, at great cost to herself, every letter that could gratify their curiosity, and spared only what she judged too trivial to be of interest.

Jane Austen went to school first at Oxford and then to Abbey school at Reading. She had no formal higher education. All her education was completed at home under the supervision of her father. However, she read extensively and critically. At the age of 13 she was already writing...
amusing and instructive parodies and variations on 18th-century literature—from sentimental novels to serious histories. She admired Dr. Johnson, Cowper, Goldsmith, Fielding and Richardson as great writers of their times. It is the 18th-century masters who won her sympathies most.

By the time she was 23 years old, Jane Austen had written three novels: Elinor and Marianne, First Impressions, and Susan, which were early versions of, respectively, Sense and Sensibility (1811), Pride and Prejudice (1813), and Northanger Abbey (1818).

Life of Jane Austen was limited and confined to Steventon with few friends within the family circles and with visits fewer still. Walking and riding, playing and singing, sketching, supervising the work in the kitchen, hemming, trimming and stitching, and, of course, entertaining the visitors and going to the church were her usual activities. She had a passion for 'dancing' and attended the various balls in the vicinity of Steventon in order to mitigate the dullness of the daily routine. She received a proposal of marriage but she did not want to marry where she did not love. Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra with whom she had a deep attachment never married. One summer while she was with her sister Cassandra at Lyme Regis, Jane met a man and got the impression that they both fell in love with each other. On Cassandra's testimony it is thought that if he had proposed, he would have been accepted. But he did not declare his love. Shortly afterwards he died and Jane Austen settled down for spinsterhood. And perhaps it was this disappointment due to unfilled love that somehow compelled her to cast ironical glance over each and every aspect of her novels.

The society, in which Jane Austen opened her eye, was founded on very rigid class distinctions. The three distinct classes prevailing in her time were: the land-owning aristocracy, the industrialists and the workers and labourers. In her novels, however, Jane Austen deals with neither top-
placed aristocracy nor the poor. What she is really interested in and from where she picks up her characters, is the upper middle-class and the middle-class proper. Walter Scott, one of her earliest and most intelligent admirers holds:

\[\text{Jane Austen confines herself chiefly to the middling classes of society, her most distinguished characters do not rise greatly above well-bred gentlemen and ladies; and those which are sketched with most originality and precision, belong to a class rather below that standard.} \]^{2}

Various involvements of the people of this class, their love and hatred, their clashes, the intrigues, adjustments and readjustments, human weaknesses and angelic reservations are what her novels take up and deal with minute detail involved therein. She was fully aware that the respect people got from others depended directly on their wealth. So she was very much conscious to portray the same through her characters. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy and Bingley are recognized and respected in the society due to their regular annual income. Like all other members of their class they have no other activity except visiting friends, going for walks, playing cards and especially attending balls and parties. The women and aging spinsters were left uncared and totally on the mercy of circumstances. Girls were not educated for any particular profession. They were expected to be accomplished in music, painting, dancing and stitching. Their main purpose in life was to get married to an appropriate, well-placed man. Jane Austen, here like a missionary, exposes their follies, absurdities, vanities and other social vices with an earnest urge within her to make them realize their negative effects and hence avoid them or at least minimize them. For this purpose, she gave an ironical colouring to their conversation or incident.
Jane Austen restricts her plan of action to a very limited range. She picks up the characters and the atmosphere which she understands thoroughly. With her comprehensive experiences she works on her characters and moulds them to such a perfection as to look natural and alive as an experienced sculptor does. She works within her narrow range so artistically that her so-called narrow scope becomes her all-admitted quality towards perfection. Lewis remarks thus: "Her circle may be restricted, but it is complete. Her world is a perfect orb, and vital." The restriction, however, was deliberate. It never means that Jane Austen was not serious with her art.

All art must deal with man's actions in the world. So art is concerned with criticism of life. Since criticism is aimed at improving or reforming the existing conditions, so all art must necessarily be concerned with morality. To motivate, teach or inculcate morality is the hardest possible thing for an artist whose main design is to create amusement and delight. Irony serves as the most effective instrument to achieve the purpose of moral inculcation in an indirect mode not losing the element of amusement and delight rather tending to heighten these desired effects. In Jane Austen's scheme of values, too, morality plays a significant role. And irony, being the instrument of moral vision, is used as the chief tool to achieve her goal and, of course, very successfully. Before establishing any view about her morality the period she lived in should not be ignored.

Jane Austen was at a time the novelist of the eighteenth and that of the nineteenth century: The period in which she lived was that of Romantic poets, of the French Revolution and the War of American Independence. No doubt, the part in which she lived remained unaffected by war upheavals. But she could not keep herself away from the effects of war as her two brothers were in the Royal Navy who reached upto the
rank of admirals. Moreover, her novels reflect the strain of Romanticism as almost every reader of hers knows her familiarity with Godwin, Goethe, Wordsworth, Scott, Southey and Byron.

Jane Austen, however, in her moral outlook seems to be the last exquisite blossom of the 18th-century. Her novels do not merely provide delight and aesthetic pleasure to the readers but morals peep from behind the curtain. Andrew. H. Wright comments

> Working with materials extremely limited in themselves, she develops themes of the broadest significance; the novels go beyond social record, beneath the didactic, to moral concern, perplexity, and commitment.  

In doing so, she definitely reflected the morality of her father's generation. Referring to her morality, Bradley sees in her work a close connection to Dr. Johnson with regard to morality. Dr. Johnson held a rigorous orthodoxy in religion, politics and in his social ideas. But Jane Austen does not remain untouched by what she sees. A coarse and inadequate world with coarse and inadequate standards makes her rather sad. She feels injured from within but being entirely helpless as man in general in this world is, she has no alternative. The standards and criteria in the world she is living are not acceptable to her. Nevertheless she cannot possibly have an escape from them. So she finds herself surrounded by people who are silly, vain, stupid, vexing, pretentious, wicked but all along they are kind, attractive, intelligent, deeply human and above all, capable of loves.

Her observations and their deep effect on her super-sensitive nature oblige her to be moderately ironical and not a narrow expositor of an outworn morality. She does not deal with a religious or theological dogma. Her ethics of social morality never seem to lose the proper strings of intellect and rationality. That is why, mysticism or even philosophical
morality is absent in her novels. What actually trickles down to her isn't nothing but criticism of manners of the people.

Jane Austen once a loving sister to Henry and inseparable companion to Cassandra, a capricious little girl frisking up and down the hilly Hampshire, comes across a pleasant incident just accidentally. And there shoots off from her dejected, injured soul, a serious, mature and spontaneous writer who though loves this world as it is, wants to give a filmy reformatory, moral touch to the existing world in order to make it a little more attractive, a little more acceptable one through her ironical genius. But with all her ironical renderings, and with all her desire to see a little positive change she, in no way dislikes or hates this world deplete with beautiful people. This human touch prevails throughout her works. Nowhere her failure in life gets the better of her and she never exceeds from her gentle, soft irony. Inspite of their follies, foibles, vanity and stupidity, the people do not provide her with the source of resentment. She loves them and accepts them with all their natural faults. It is this universal thread running through her writings and sprinkled all through her art that ranks her with Shakespeare, the ever-green and ever-shining figure in the realm of English literature.
Endnotes


5 Ibid, p. 15, 16.
CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND OF IRONY

The entire class of literary writers falls under two major divisions. One is of those who take Art only for Art's sake. There is a long list of highly renowned literary figures who hold this view. They feel that the basic objective of Art is not to evolve a social system or to reform the existing social setup. It may, in its own way, affect, influence, mould, rectify the modes of conduct or the morals of the society through influencing the individuals. But it should not try to adopt this role purposefully. In short, Art for Art's sake theory holds that 'pleasure' or 'delight' is the sole objective of a literary piece of work.

The other division of writers is that of the moralists, philosophers and reformers who believe that a writer definitely has a particular impact on his readers, somehow, moulding and shaping their lives and character. Keeping this fact in view a writer should try to influence thetas in a way which is more acceptable to the general norms of society. The believers of the view that literature or Art has a moral purpose are rather in majority than those believing the theory of Art for Art's sake. And in fact it is the former who at present hold the field. Even Plato and Aristotle, the ancient pioneers of literature, emphasize its moral value.

To achieve this moral or social goal, the writers use some devices to expose follies, flaws and weaknesses of the society and the individuals with a serious objective to reform and rectify these follies etc. The literary devices and tools mainly in use of such moralists and reformers have been humour, irony and satire ever since.

The idea of irony is almost inconceivable and perhaps unsatiated, too, unless it is historically traced in 'humour' where from it takes roots.
The term 'humour' originates from Latin 'humor' signifying 'moisture'. In the Middle Ages and during the period of Renaissance it was used abundantly in physiology to denote the four bodily humours depending on the four fluids, that is,

Blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. The admixture or comingling of these determined a person's disposition, character, mind, morality, and temperament. The humours released spirits or vapors which affected the brain, and thence a person's behaviour.¹

So, the four main temperaments of a man as sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric and melancholic were due to the predominance of the four fluids blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile respectively.

The theory of humours survives in expressions such as 'ill-humoured', 'good-humoured', 'black with rage', 'yellow with jealousy', 'yellow-livered', 'red with remorse', 'sanguine' and 'melancholic'. It had a great influence on the writers especially dramatists. They devised their characters based on the theory of imbalances. Ben Jonson is the most remarkable example in this regard. His play Every Man in His Humour is, undoubtedly, a marvellous play created on the theory of humours.

The history of humour finds its main flourishing sources in non-literary people like the jongleurs, wandering minstrels and story-tellers. They travelled from festival to festival and by recounting tall tales made both church and king as the target of mockery. There were certain occasions in medieval Europe, such as the carnival and Feast of Fools when all could laugh at themselves releasing the social tensions of the whole year. Holi, a spring festival of Hindus, is a similar sort of occasion when poor children by throwing powders on the heads of the rich ones release their tension.

In later centuries comic art forms, however, developed gradually. Dr. Samuel Johnson very adroitly exposed the well-known public and
private figures through his skillful art of mockery. In *Lives of the English Poets* where he pays rich tribute to English poets upto his times, he is never slow to mock at them exposing their weaknesses and artistic flaws. Once within his range, none could escape the double-headed arrow of his art of mockery.

By the 18th and 19th centuries, the concept of humour underwent a change and verbal attack previously in vogue came to be regarded as unsuitable for gentlemen. Kind humorists took the place of bitter and grotesque ones. The humour of Charles Dickens was considered to be robust as it seldom went beyond grotesquerie leavened by sentimentality. In his novels, he exposes the evils and vices of institutions, organizations and some deteriorated aspects of society in order to bring about healthy changes in them. In *Oliver Twist* he especially picks up the rotten conditions of prisons of his time and in his peculiar humorous way brings the prevailing miserable and deplorable routines into limelight. Creating awareness in the general public he could expect reasonable improvement in the prisons and actually it did bring some change for the betterment of the prisoners.

The idea of humour was altogether overhauled and was absolutely revolutionized through and after the World War I and II. Humour targeted the institutions, orthodoxies, bureaucracies and totalitarian governments of the left and right instead of individuals. The laughter though mostly based on cruelty and aggression, is also the source of freedom and liberty.

The trend of humour extracting joy out of the pains and torments of others is, however, on the decline due to urbanization of humanity, and the advancement of civilization and culture through education.

On the contrary, irony still remains a powerful tool in the hands of ironists who uphold the cause of reformation or rectification.
The term 'irony' originates from the Greek comic character Eirōn, who was totally unlikely to win, but who by his wit triumphs over his boastful opponent Alazon. In Plato's *Republic* written in 4th century B.C. the Socratic irony is derived from this comic origin Eiron. Socrates, here himself takes the role of an eirōn or dissembler and pretending to be ignorant and foolish, asks all sorts of people silly and naive questions. By doing so, he succeeds in exposing their ignorance as more profound than his own.

The word irony also finds its roots in Roman rhetoricians particularly in Cicero and Quintilian. They used the word 'ironia' which stood for a manner of speech in which the speaker's words meant just the opposite of what they actually signified. The similar idea of irony is also presented in *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*. According to it, irony is

The use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning as when expressions of praise are used when blame is meant. 

The first mention of 'irony' in English literature is found in 1502 where a man says one but means quite the contrary. Later in *Spencer's Shepheard's Calendar* (1579) a reference is made to a passage as 'An Ironicall Sarcasmus spoken in derision.....' Until late in the 17th or early in the 18th century the term 'irony' was not in general use. Though at this time irony, "as a mode of thinking, feeling and expression, was beginning to attain a high degree of sophistication".

Dryden used the word irony only once but D.C. Muecke pointed out in his splendid essay called *Irony* written in 1970 that there were other familiar words in his frequent use such as fleer, gibe, jeer, mock, rail and scorn which were equivalent to the concept of irony. As
compared to such rough, almost abusive words, 'irony' meant something refined and polished devoid of any tinge of insolence and uncultured element. So considered, moderate and urbane irony is a more literary term.

In England and Europe, the concept of irony developed gradually. By 1750, Swift in *Gullivers Travels*, Pope in *The Rape of the Lock*, Fielding in *Joseph Andrews* and Johnson in *Lives of the English Poets* had masterfully made use of this mode of expression.

With the large number of writers practicing irony emerged many analysts and theorists. At the turn of the 18th century, a serious, thoughtful consideration about the concept of irony developed in Germany. A few well-known theorists analyzed this special form of expression. As the result of their incessant and persevering efforts various aspects of irony appeared in formal, distinguishable shapes identifiable as different forms of irony. Frederick Schlegel named the irony he perceived in *Troilus and Cressida* as the irony of events and the irony in Lear's rejection of the daughter who loved him most in *King Lear* as the tragic irony. A.W. Schlegel analyzed the ironical nature of the equilibrium maintained between the serious and the comic. Subplots in Shakespeare's plays can be cited as examples in this regard. Karl Solger introduced the idea of World Irony or Cosmic Irony or Philosophical Irony. Hardy's novels present the best examples of Cosmic irony where fate plays the predominant role and man is just a puppet, a toy in its hands. In *The Return of the Native*, almost all characters are entirely under the control of fate. They, themselves, seem to be nothing but puppets, utterly powerless and helpless in face of the pre-destined circumstances. Frederick Schlegel also gave the idea of romantic irony. Irony used by Shakespeare in his play *As You like It* can be referred to as romantic irony.
By the end of the 19th century, most of the forms and modes of irony are found to have been explored, identified and classified. But as a matter of fact, none of the definitions fits in to cover every aspect of irony. However, there can be no disagreement on that most forms of irony involved

The perception or awareness of discrepancy or incongruity between words and their meaning, or between actions and their results, or between appearance and reality. In all cases, there may be an element of the absurd and the paradoxical.  

The two basic kinds of irony are: 'verbal' and 'situational'. In the words of Johnson, verbal irony is a mode of speech in which the meaning is contrary to the words. Verbal irony is found in such instances as one man says to another when they meet every day 'I haven't seen you for ages'. 'That's not bad', said of something superlatively good or beautiful.

Situational irony refers to a situation when one is laughing at the misfortunes of another while unknowingly he is the victim of the similar oddities. For instance a disabled person refers to the physical disability of another person making it the source of laughter or joy.

The spirit of irony prevails in the works of a large number of writers like Voltaire, Swift, Gibbon, Henry James and Thomas Mann. There is an ironic temper or tone rather than overt or direct irony in their works. These authors have the ability "to make the smile on the face of the reader broader and broader and broader, very, very slowly, until, finally, he finds himself laughing."  

Some writers attain godly position viewing their creation with a smile. The idea behind this concept is that God is the supreme ironist, watching all the humanity with an ironical smile. In theater, the spectator holds the similar position. Thus the human condition is regarded as totally absurd. Some ironists seem to enjoy the absurdities and weaknesses of
their characters by making their flaws as the butt of their laughter. This kind of attitude is evident in Lucan, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Swift, Flaubert, Thomas Hardy, Henry James and Thomas Mann.

As far as the use of irony as a means of expression is concerned, the second half of the 17th century is indicative of the fact that at that time or even earlier than that many writers were well-acquainted with the possibilities and use of irony. Only they did not consider it so well-established as to be relied upon for conducting or bearing a whole work. Socrates with his naive irony, Dante's vision of 'Inferno', Sir Thomas More's ironical approach throughout Utopia, the fool's ironical comments in King Lear showing the tragedy of the old man and Falstaff as an ironical parody of Henry IV are some of the examples of the writers who made abundant use of irony in their works.

At the beginning of the 18th century, the use of irony becomes rather fashionable as it is used almost by every writer. The renowned literary artists like Addison, Defoe, Steele, Swift, Pope, Johnson, Fielding and Voltaire made abundant use of this literary tool.

In the later part of the 18th century, the use of irony almost disappeared from the literary scene. It was, however, revived by the prose writers like Peacock and Thackeray in the 19th century. Except Byron's, the verse is rarely ironical in this period. Here Samuel Butler stands out as an unmatched perfect ironist with his remarkable works such as Erewhon, The Fair Haven, Erewhon Revisited and The Way of All Flesh.

Irony, in the 20th century, still holds the field and is still a chief mode of expression serving as a levelling tool, projecting the truth and curbing the wicked and the undesirable for which purpose it chides, purifies, refines, deflates and scorns. It is therefore, still a very effective
mode of expression in the hands of artists desiring to see and leave the world better than he found it.
Endnotes.


5 Ibid, p. 461.
through the last comments on Fanny Burney's *Cecilia*. *Pride and Prejudice* occurred in the book in bold letters and suddenly flashed on her mind as a more suitable title of her novel in hand.

Here again she stuck to her pervading trait of irony. The heroine of her novel Elizabeth is in the irresistible grip of prejudice about Darcy's behavior stamping it to be his 'pride'. In the course of time, ironically, the first impressions of Elizabeth about Darcy and Darcy's about Elizabeth are reversed when a little light of reasonability and rationality shakes off the mist from their minds.

Jane Austen right from the very beginning of *Pride and Prejudice* is ironical even in the title. The reader clearly feels that whatever is going on in the minds of the principal characters is sure to be soon reversed. So what exists or prevails at the moment is just opposed to the reality. This highly skillful use of irony makes the reading of *Pride and Prejudice* a delightful experience. This difference between appearance and reality is adroitly sprinkled throughout the novel. Cultured, well-behaved pleasing gentlemen and gentle ladies turn out to be villainous whereas apparently ill-mannered, rugged, and rude people are found to be just the opposite. This irony amuses the reader and he laughs to his fill without being harmful to anybody.

The first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* opens with the conversation of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet on the topic of Mr. Bingley's Netherfield park containing a pleasant blend of irony and wit. The heated discussion is full of reciprocally-bounced witty and ironical remarks making the opening of the book very pleasant. It certainly gives the readers the sensation of a fresh gale of air.

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." (ch. I : p 1) But the fact is just the other way round. Here 'single man' refers to Mr.
Bingley. Soon it is revealed that it is not Mr. Bingley who is in need of a wife. It is rather Mrs. Bennet who wants husbands for her young daughters thereby showing situational irony. The idea is supported by the account from Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster in these words:

A truth universally acknowledged is probably less than true; and the real truth is not that single men want wives but that poor young women need husbands, 'their pleasantest preservative from want'. Far from describing the state of affairs even around Meryton, that sonorous first sentence, taken at face value, expresses the gossip's fantasy that women exchange or traffic in men, and not vice versa.

And hence Mrs. Bennet rightly believes that the rich men exist for people to marry.

Jane Austen, however, does not stick to one aspect of irony. In chapter VI, when Sir William Lucas, taking Elizabeth's hand, offers her to Darcy as a dancing partner, Elizabeth shows her reluctance in a very polite manner. The conversation which ensues contains some very fine variety of colorful aspects of irony. Elizabeth's response to Sir William Lucas is:

"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 compliance; for who would object to such a partner?"

Elizabeth looked archly and turned away. (ch. VI: p 23)

'Verte Darcy is all politeness' seems to be a complement to Mr. Darcy on the surface whereas it conceals the meaning quite the reverse indicating verbal irony. But 'politeness' has a variety of meanings according to the varying situations. The 'politeness' in one situation may be quite opposite to that of other situation. Darcy's 'politeness' may also be referred to his inward unwillingness to dance with her; or it simply be due to social pressure. Elizabeth might have meant to tease Mr. Darcy. She knows that Mr. Darcy is really ready to dance with her. But she shows that he might have shown willingness out of 'politeness'. Her 'all politeness' has deeper implications attacking all his behavior making him realize his earlier behavior in the ball from where she was actually injured and of which she is fully conscious and to be sure her declination to dance is nothing but an act of vengeance. So 'he is all politeness' with all its apparent pleasantness is a poisonous arrow darted to the 'pride' of Darcy. Her smile with archness is a gesture which surely would have not gone unaffected in its objective and Darcy was not so insensitive as not to have felt the sharpness of the ironic style of her turning away with arched smile.

Similar situations occur in the novel between the protagonists of the story in the next conversational episode.

"...... soon afterwards Mr. Darcy, drawing near Elizabeth said to her —
"Do not you feel a great inclination, Miss Bennet, to seize such an opportunity of dancing a reel?"

She smiled, but made no answer. He repeated the question, with some surprise at her silence.

"Oh!" said she, "I heard you before; but I could not immediately determine what to say in reply. You wanted me, I know, to say "Yes," that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. I have therefore made up my mind to tell you, that I do not want to dance a reel at all - and now despise me if you dare."

"Indeed I do not dare." (ch. X : p 48)

Here again there is a pleasant exchange of ironic remarks which show the verbal kind of irony. How bold and ironic is 'now despise me if you dare' and how gallant and friendly is Darcy's 'Indeed I do not dare.' Though Darcy's request is turned down yet he does not seem to give any impression of his inward injury or defeat. He rather changes every touch of unpleasant or harsh attitude to the pleasant one through his yielding 'Indeed I do not dare'. Even Elizabeth's 'I heard you before' loses its harsher implications before his polite attitude. However harshly ironic the conversation may be, it brings them nearer to each other, introduces frank and bold instead of earlier formal, ceremonious, partially estranged manner of communication. The credit of all this certainly goes to Darcy. For all his pride he is surely a polite, well-behaved and sweet-mannered gentleman. The novel Pride and Prejudice is replete with such and similar situations.

In chapter VII, when Mrs. Bennet plans for Jane to travel to Mr. Bingley's estate in bad weather, Elizabeth does not spare even her mother and says to her "if she should die, it would be a comfort to know that it
was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders" (ch. VII : p 29). It certainly shows her dislike of her mother's schemes of marrying her daughter so disgracefully. It certainly refers to verbal irony. In this regard she is not different from her father who is usually after Mrs. Bennet with his repeated ironic, though witty, remarks. Mr. Darcy's enquiry continues whether it is polite or impolite, encouraging or scornful. During his struggle for enquiry through his peculiar way of cross-examination, shoot up similar patterns of irony which are repeated many times.

When enquired of books, she beautifully explains her point of view but not without irony. What she refers to is that one should concentrate on a single present situation one is involved in. One must participate in a ball or a function or a party with an undivided attention. While in the ball, certainly she cannot be supposed to think about books or to make some reasonable comments on them. Her response to Darcy's question "What think you of books?" is:

"Books - Oh! No - I am sure we never read the same or not with the same feelings" (ch. XVIII : p 90) which is full of reason and on further reasoning on the part of Darcy she responds wittily:

"I am sorry you think so; but if that be the case, there can at least be no want of subject. - We may compare our different opinions."

"No - I cannot talk of books in a ball-room; my head is always full of something else."

"The present always occupies you in such scenes - does it?" said he, with a look of doubt. (ch. XVIII : p 90)

Darcy's 'look of doubt' and Elizabeth's arch comments take the added ironic value when connected with varying situations Darcy and Elizabeth pass through.

Later on there is similar process of question and answer which goes on almost in the same ironic tone.
He smiled, and assured her that whatever she wishes him to say should be said. "Very well - That reply will do for the present - Perhaps by and by I may observe that private balls are much pleasanter than public ones - But now we may be silent." Here is a very good example of verbal irony contained in this dialogue.

"Do you talk by rule then, while you're dancing?" "Sometimes. One must speak a little, you know. It would look odd to be entirely silent for half an hour together, and yet for the advantage of some, conversation ought to be arranged as that they may have the trouble of saying as little as possible." This is the mixture of both verbal and situational irony.

"Are you consulting your own feelings in the present case, or do you imagine that you are gratifying mine?" "Both", replied Elizabeth archly; "for I have always seen a great similarity in the turn of our minds." (ch. XVIII : p 88)

Darcy's complete submission in his statement 'whatever she wished him to say should be said' satisfies Elizabeth and she requests for the silence to be prevailed. But Darcy is not going to spare her. 'Do you talk by rule then?' is sufficiently teasing which is very appropriately and in detail defended. 'Sometimes one must speak a little, you know.....' sounds fairly sagacious. Though ironically posed Darcy's quarry seems as if it is student-like in a very respectful manner with a sense of predicting fear of being hushed up.

But this is certain that behind all this reserved and controlled conversation there are feelings which, in spite of all irony, urge them to prolong their conversation. There seems to be no desire of discontinuation. This, gradually, helps lifting up the misty illusions in their vision and in their feelings about themselves. Consequently, they are drawn nearer, closer and hopefully in future are sure to be bound with the silken ties of affection.
Elizabeth's understanding of Darcy is getting better and revised as denser layers of ambiguity are getting thinner and thinner. Jane Austen does not, in anyway, want her readers to believe that Darcy's character has been thoroughly or completely understood. But it is certain that Elizabeth can judge him in a better way. This is very much clear from Elizabeth's response to Wickham's questions full of irony about Darcy.

"I dare not hope", he continued in a lower and more serious tone, "that he is improved in essentials." "Oh, no!" said Elizabeth. "In essentials, I believe, he is very much what he ever was." While she spoke, Wickham looked as if scarcely knowing whether to rejoice over her words, or to distrust their meaning. There was something in her countenance which made him listen with an apprehensive and anxious attention, while she added.

"When I said that he improved on acquaintance, I did not mean that either his mind or manners were in a state of improvement, but that from knowing him better, his disposition was better understood."

Had Elizabeth been in her earlier frame of mind when she had very unpleasant impression of him, she could have been more doubtful about Darcy's nature. But she, in a very mature way, refutes the concept of Wickham and clarifies her point of view more elaborately till Wickham is touched with surety that his wickedness will no more be effective here. She admits that she cannot claim to have understood Darcy in its entirety but, at least, she can better understand his dispositions. This is really very sensible of Elizabeth since a wise person contents himself with better understanding as the complexity of human nature is beyond human limitations of understanding and judgments. Wickham is rightly apprehensive that well-fortified Darcy may not be villainously assailed.
Elizabeth is surely more rational and knows the difference of 'pride' and vanity in far clearer light. Her completely honest self-judgment can be found in the lines:

"Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly - pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have quoted prepossession and ignorance, driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself." Here comes the completion of Elizabeth's judgment of Darcy and of herself. This is actually a refined stage of realization that both of them now regard each other quite differently in feelings. How all this happens is beautifully elaborated by Reuben A. Brower:

The ironic remarks and commentary have included hints that revealed ever so gradually Darcy's developing interest in Elizabeth. Mr. Darcy's "politeness", his "repeated questions", his "gallantry", his "look of doubt", if interpreted favorably indicate his increasing warmth of feelings. Elizabeth's pert remarks and impertinent questions bear an amusing relations to this change in Darcy's sentiments. Besides being more ambiguous than she supposes, they backfire in another way by increasing Darcy's admiration. Her accusation of "pre-medicated contempt" brings out his most gallant reply, and her "mixture of sweetness and archness" leaves him more "bewitched" than ever. In this and other ways the repartee provides local "amusements" while pointing forward to the complete reversal of feelings that follows the meeting at Pemberley.

Irony seems to be inherent in the nature of Jane Austen. She exposes the weaknesses of her characters and provides a source of entertainment to her readers and herself.

This dialogue between Elizabeth and Darcy may be keenly observed to identify this trait of the author.
"Miss Bingley", said he, "has given me credit for more than can be. The wisest and best of men, nay, the wisest and best of their actions, may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke."

"Certainly", replied Elizabeth - "there are such people but I hope I am not one of them. I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies do divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can - But these, I suppose, are precisely what you are without." (ch. XI : p 54)

Elizabeth very wisely responds to Darcy's protest that she certainly laughs at 'whims', 'follies', 'inconsistencies' etc. of the people who are a little above or below the norm but what is wise and good is never the target of her amusement.

Here Elizabeth is a true spokesman of Jane Austen. Abnormal behavior in any form, in any nature cannot escape her sharp observation. Even a slight source of amusement cannot fail to trick her and slip away. There is certainly an unequivocal admission. Elizabeth is Jane Austen's voice. But Elizabeth nor her creator feels amusement at the expense of others' feelings. Elizabeth has appeased Darcy in this regard but she is not satisfied unless she mitigates his pain to almost zero. 'But these, I suppose, are precisely what you are without' is what nullifies the whole negative effect from Darcy's effect.

Though Elizabeth and her author both proclaim that it is only the 'whims', 'inconsistencies', 'follies' and 'nonsense' what is their target of critical assault and not the 'wise' and the 'good'. But the admission is rather too noble as Laura G. Mooneyham remarks:

But the operation of Elizabeth's wit is not limited to the deflation of minor flaws and weaknesses; the progress of the novel proves that many of Elizabeth's barbs have been directed against what is wise and good in Darcy.
Another characteristic of Jane Austen's irony is that it does not focus on the natural defect. The following dialogue pinpoints the same feature. "...... My temper would perhaps be called resentful — My good opinion once lost is lost for ever." "That is a failing indeed!" — cried Elizabeth. "Implacable resentment is a shade in a character. But you have chosen your fault well - I really cannot laugh at it. You are safe from me."

"There is, I believe, in every disposition or tendency to some particular evil, a natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome." "And your defect is a propensity to hate everybody." (ch. XI : p 54, 55)

The accuracy and precision of self-analysis of Darcy makes Elizabeth bolder enough to use phrase like 'a shade in a character'. But she is quick to add that such things are beyond her criticism. Negative criticism would, perhaps be meant when Darcy so boldly and honestly brings out his 'failings'.

In case of simple and complex characters again, Elizabeth is the mouthpiece of Jane Austen. Here Jane Austen's irony is in full swing to discriminate between the simple characters who are easy to understand and the complex ones who assert their individuality by showing various facets of their personality in varying degrees and are never fully exposed. Elizabeth is interested in the latter one and so does the author.

Referring to this fact Marvin Mudrick observes

Jane Austen's irony has developed into an instrument of discrimination between the people who are simple reproduction of their social type and the people with individuality and will, between the unaware and the aware."

Jane Austen's art of irony does not remain confined to protagonists alone. The minor characters are equally important to her and hence she practices her irony talent in delineating them rather more adroitly. Their
absurdities and follies which are not hard to detect make their characters more amusing and entertaining for the reader.

The review of *Pride and Prejudice* depicting ironical instances will perhaps remain incomplete if the inconsistencies and oddities of minor characters are not exposed and discussed. It will simply be a 'touch of brush' type treatment yet it may add to the comprehensive value of the study.

The author's own comment on Mrs. Bennet is "She was a woman of mean understanding, little information and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; it's solace was visiting and news." The only tension she carries in her head is that Mrs. Bennet's estate would fall to his relatives than to those of her immediate relations and that of her daughters' marriage. She would not mind to go any length to achieve her satisfaction in these two matters. Her desire to marry Jane with Mr. Bingley is so vehement that she does not even care for Jane's health and life and Elizabeth is obliged to pass ironical comment on her mother: "If she (Jane) 'should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders." (ch. VII : p 29)

Mr. Bennet knows that his wife is too much interested that his estate should go to someone nearest to her and not to him. That is why he off and on mentions the name of his cousin to whom the property would, supposedly, go to after his death. Mr. Bennet plays upon Mrs. Bennet's weakness and never loses an opportunity to bait her.

"About a month ago I received this letter...... from my cousin, Mr. Collins, who, when I am dead, may turn you all out of the house as soon as he pleases."

Try to imagine the anguish Mrs. Bennet undergoes.
"Oh! My dear," cried his wife, "I cannot bear to hear that mentioned. Pray do not talk of that odious man. I do think it is the hardest thing in the world that your estate should be entailed away from your own children; and I am sure if I had been you, I should have tried long ago to do something or other about it." (ch. XIII : p 58)

Look at the plea she puts forth to convince Mr. Bennet.

The problem of getting her daughters married, however, involves her much more directly.

"...... Mrs. Bennet seemed incapable of fatigue while enumerating the advantages of the match. His being such a charming man, and so rich, and living but three miles from them, were the first points of self-gratulation...... It was, moreover, such a promising thing for her younger daughters as Jane's marrying so greatly must throw them in the way of other rich men......" (ch. XVIII : p 96)

Mr. Darcy, being within earshot, overhears and thinks it rather too vulgar and concludes that any alliance with Mrs. Bennet's family, for his friend or for himself, would be obviously unwise and indignified.

Another minor character who provides a great source of amusement due to his absurdity and overconfidence is Mr. Collins. Sometimes his stupidity crosses the limits of courtesy and hence his rudeness, in other words, pains the sensible and refined reader. Jane Austen herself begins a superfluous descriptive paragraph starting with:

"Mr. Collins was not a sensible man." He was fatuous, a sycophant and conceited. His wife-hunting is of ample amusement. His foolishness is constantly unshakable. His impertinent proposal to Elizabeth is declined and for the moment his misadventure seems to be discouraged. But he recoups soon and proposes as fervently to Charlotte Lucas three days later and when departing from Longbourn he wishes his "fair cousins...... health and happiness, not excepting my cousin Elizabeth."
The fact that he is a clergyman rather goes against him and his foolishness is intensified and his morality mullified.

"..... I have been so fortunate as to be distinguished by the patronage of the Right Honorable Lady Catherine de Bourgh, widow of Sir Lewis de Bough, whose bounty and beneficence has preferred me to the valuable rectory of the parish, where it shall be my earnest endeavor to do mean myself with grateful respect toward her ladyship, and be ever ready to perform those lites and ceremonies which are instituted by the Church of England." (ch. XIII : p 59)

How flattering, humiliating and unclergy-like is the account! This is what makes his character incongruent and hence amusing.

Lady Catherine is equally amusing because of her self-importance. She poses to be important and influential but she is neither since Darcy because of his position and rank, and Elizabeth due to her boldness and intelligence refuse to accept her importance. Her persuasion that Elizabeth should remain away from Darcy and that Darcy should not have any link with Bennet's, is turned down leaving her powerless, uninfluential and unimportant. Irony lies in the fact that she is, piteously, powerless and unpersuasive whereas she, herself, thinks to be quite otherwise. So due to lack of authority, power and importance which she poses to really possess, she stands out as a purely comic figure.

Another comic character is that of Lydia. Lydia is actually Mrs. Bennet in miniature. She is what Mrs. Bennet used to be when she was young. She is a self-assured, highly sexed, wholly amoral and unintellectual girl. When she runs off with Wickham, she is under no social or moral pressure. Nor she feels any feeling of repentance or penitence. Family dishonour or disgrace is not her concern. What is important for her is what she wants and how her sensual needs are satisfied. What it will lead to is not her headache.
"Well, mamma...... and what do you think of my husband? Is not he a charming man? I am sure my sisters must all envy me. I only hope they may have half my good luck. They must all go to Brighton. That is the place to get husbands. What a pity it is, mamma, we did not all go."

"Very true; and if I had my will, we should......" (ch. LII : p 317)

"Both mother and daughter never repent nor feel any qualurs of conscience thin outspokenness, barefaced avowals are what are amusing but sometimes they fall heavy and unpleasant on tender and delicate natures.

Charlotte, unlike Collins, is bright and intelligent. She is twenty-seven and youthful living spirit. Elizabeth and Charlotte have long been friends and they know each other full well. When Charlotte accepts the proposal of Mr. Collins, it is more than a surprise to all but to Elizabeth particularly. To Elizabeth it is naturally an impossibility that simple and complex, dull and intelligent should be bonded into matrimonial ties. For Elizabeth it is hard to believe that Charlotte should accept Collins as a partner. Elizabeth's sense of judgment is generally very accurate and is very readily accepted by all in her family even by Mr. Bennet who is usually hard to be convinced. But, here, in case of Charlotte, her judgment rather fails. Charlotte, on the other hand, does not take any step without sufficient thinking. Right or wrong, there is her personal logic behind every act. In marrying Collins, she is not blind to the stupidity and foolishness of Collins but she is also not, unaware to his social status, his wealth and his social contacts. In that particular social setup she knew that security was the most important thing to wish for. Despite his social abnormalities, it was Collins who could provide her with economic and social security. That is why she mortified herself to give into the marital bond with such a laughing stock as Collins. Her ideas are quite evident in the account below where she is conversant with Elizabeth:
"I am not romantic...... I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins' character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state." (ch. XXII : p 123)

In short, irony is a great instrument and Jane Austen never fails to make the best of it whenever and wherever she wants or whenever or wherever the situation demands. Surely, it is her irony which paves the way to materialize her objective of moral vision. It is obviously her ironical treatment of her materials and characters that create interest and keep it on unbroken up to the end. Again it is this irony which helps changing the outlook of protagonists of the story. The nature and inherent qualities though remain unchanged, their vision, their horizon of outlook is altogether overhauled. Darcy in the end is not the same who slighted Elizabeth in the first meeting for not being handsome enough to tempt him. The impression of his being proud, haughty, insolent and of a man possessed of a worse type of ego to make him insensitive to the feelings of others, is, of course, washed up. Darcy in the later part of the book is quite the reverse. He is affable, friendly and far more understanding. Nor does Elizabeth remain unchanged. Her first views about Darcy now seem to be merely the outcome of her wrong perception. Through long ironical statements and questions, her perception is cleared off and she judges Darcy with a disillusioned vision. Her prejudice gradually melts into a better understanding. At the end neither Darcy is proud nor Elizabeth prejudiced. It is simply the magic of soft, gentle irony that they draw nearer through elimination of all misconceptions and misgivings. They rise above the ordinary human level and travel towards perfection. This is actually the real aim of what we call Jane Austen's moral vision. Jane Austen never lets her irony be embittered. It goes on untainted working successfully and changing the attitude of her characters wherever she
realizes it to be essential. Mrs. Bennet's attitude drives the suitors away but temporarily. The main characters are brought together through villainous characters such as Lady Catherine. Even Lydia's actions which are ignoble are gradually changed into an acceptable form through her marriage with Wickham. Jane Austen's moral vision through her most powerful weapon, irony, is successful and every situation is changed into a pleasanter one, making the end a very happy one.
Endnotes


3 Ibid, p. 73.


CONCLUSION

From the preceding discussion it can be concluded that Jane Austen makes pervasive use of irony. Since irony is an effective means of highlighting the difference of appearance and reality, it colours the incidents, situations and behaviour of characters in a way that provides a source of amusement and delight for the readers. She uses irony so profusely in all of her works that hardly any scene, situation or incident can be found untinged with it. It is sprinkled all over and is the main source to maintain the interest of the reader who could otherwise be easily bored due to a monotonous atmosphere of a particular society. The parties, match-making, marriages etc. automatically lose interest for the reader especially when in every novel the subject matter remains unchanged. It is only the ironical style which helps the reader touch the end of the novel.

Jane Austen keeps herself away from deep emotions and sentiments of love. High aspirations, deep frustrations and heart-breaking disappointments which usually keep up the reader's interest linked and unbroken, are what she avoids. Chuckling over incongruities, absurdities and foibles of the people is what she can do and that is what she did throughout her works.

Then it can create misconception that nothing can be discerned beyond amusement which may be perhaps the sole purpose. She may be blamed of being detached, disengaged and disinterested observer of her contemporary society. She is only an amused silent spectator and nothing beyond. It may, perhaps, be unjustified to weigh her artistic work. She was not at all disinterested. It was rather her keen interest in the 'follies', 'inconsistencies' and 'incongruities' of the people of her time and her deep desire to rectify them that unknowingly urged her literary art to be ironic.
Her irony was simply to make the people realize the prevailing oddities and abnormalities so that the desirable rectification may take place within a reasonable span of time. It can, consequently, be inferred that she was not without a 'vision' and her vision was a 'moral vision' so as to enable her to introduce the desired improvement and desirable changes in the society around her.

It is because of this 'moral vision' that malignant activities of Caroline Bingley and disrupting moves of Lady Catherine against Elizabeth Bennet frustrated themselves altogether changing the situation in Elizabeth's favour. Darcy's efforts to convince and compel Wickham to marry Lydia Bennett were to save the family from a blot of ignominy. These and many others like these are the examples and very clearly betray Jane Austen's desire to keep the people away from the wicked moves which could cause pain, misery and torture to the people in the surrounding and in this way the general atmosphere of the surrounding society be kept untarnished, uncorrupted and unpolluted.

Her morality, however, be taken as something different and distinct from other literary writers. Her main objective is not to see her protagonists as angelic figures with all virtues and no human failings. Nay, she wished to see them harmless, ecstatic and tranquil with a strong faith in 'live and let live'.
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