Lecture: *Pride and Prejudice*: Money, Marriage, Morals, Manners

I: REALITY OF LIFE FOR WOMEN IN ENGLAND IN 1800

A. Marriage—a great prize because one’s existence depended on it
   1. Seen as a financial and social necessity more than an act of love
      - Companionate marriage is a relatively new concept, secondary to practical coupling
      - Forced marriages and arranged marriages were commonplace
        --Bastardy Act of 1733, forced the marriage of an unwed mother to the alleged father
   2. Not a lot of eligible bachelors
      - High casualty numbers due to constant wars
      - Apprentices not allowed to start families
      - Many men had to first establish a home/living (the case of Mr. Collins)
      - The eldest son inherited the most; a lot more “spares” than “heirs”
   3. Genteel women who did not marry—
      - Became a burden to male relatives
      - Or were forced to work as a governess
      - By 30 were doomed to spinsterhood
   4. Women who did marry—
      - Likely did so in their mid-twenties (puberty not until 18-20 due to poor nutrition)
      - Couldn’t sue or own property
      - Children belonged to husband
      - Could not end marriage, even in the event of abuse or infidelity
        - Men were legally allowed to abuse their wives so long as injuries were not life-threatening

B. Sex and Breeding

1. Double standard for men and women
   - Married and unmarried men frequently had mistresses and visited prostitutes
     - 70,000 prostitutes in London in 1800—total population, 900,000
     - Venereal disease rampant
   - Women shunned for pregnancy out of wedlock—big scandal!
   - Men using early forms of condoms with prostitutes=perfectly acceptable
   - Married women who attempted contraceptive methods=judged immoral (only options were abstinence or breastfeeding, both of which the husband could prohibit)

2. Pregnancy and Childrearing
   - Some women put off marriage deliberately to postpone first pregnancy
   - Likely pregnant within a year of marriage
   - Most middle-/upper-class women employed a wet nurse; much more likely to get pregnant again right away
   - Could conceive roughly one child every year until menopause
   - Infant mortality rates (death before age 2) as high as 50%
   - Complications/death in childbirth increased with every pregnancy—after around 15 pregnancies (and maybe 6 babies safely delivered), chance of the mother dying was 1 in 2.
   - Wealthy women delivered babies at home—usually no doctor/midwife
   - No anesthetics or antibiotics—very little understanding of infection
   - Most mothers experienced miscarriage and/or stillbirth
II. AUSTEN’S SOCIAL COMMENTARY

A. “A Delicate Satirist”
   - She doesn’t want to offend her friends, but wants to resist their values
   - Austen pitied women who ended up in deplorable marital situations
     - Mode of satire = caricatured or exaggerated characters
       -- Mrs. Bennet – Austen dislikes her “She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper.”
       -- Mr. Collins
       -- Lady Catherine – a parody of male authority who holds no moral sway, only money
     *Humor occurs when caricatured characters interact with realistic ones.
       (from criticism of D.W. Harding)

B. Limited Scope
   - She wrote about a very small world – country gentry in England in 1800 – 5 marriageable women in a leisure class family with shrinking funds
   - In defense of Austen, she knew what she could write about well and did it
   - Sees under the surface
     -- Polite manners on the outside, but the subsurface is a barbaric hunt for manflesh!
     -- Men with money were necessary for economic survival
     -- Single men were considered property of neighborhood
     -- 1st chapter – diction – fortune, property, possession, establishment, business – economic interest over feelings of love
   *On the other hand, women are depicted as a kind of currency that binds and organizes male society.
     -- Men needed women’s wealth to enhance their own status
     -- Women who let their feelings / sexuality get in the way could sink themselves socially & economically, and deeply scar their families

A Bit about Money

Darcy = £ 10,000 per annum
Bingley = £ 5,000
Mr. Bennet = £2000
Agricultural worker = £42
Skilled laborers = £ 55-90
Clergymen = £ 283
Lawyers = £ 447
Big merchants = £2000

Austen’s father = £600 in his prime earning years
Austen for her novels = £700
Works Cited
