

## Realism in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Hard Times* and *Wuthering Heights* – Education

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**Abstract:** *This essay intends to relate three English literary masterpieces through the realistic way they deal with different aspects of education such as differentiation of gender and social status and its use by authorities as a tool to control the social behavior and maintain the status quo, contradicting the statement of the French Revolution that declares “liberty, equality and fraternity” between men. In order to do it so, small extracts of each book will be analyzed having as a basis the texts Educação e Experiência, written by E.P.Thompson, Para o Estudo sócio-histórico da Gênese e Desenvolvimento da Profissão Docente, written by Antonio Nóvoa and Educação de Massas: Uma sombra no século das luzes, by Maria Lúcia Garcia Pallares-Burke, among others.*

**Keywords:** *Education, Pride and Prejudice, Hard Times, Wuthering Heights, Social studies, History, Literature.*

*“[...] They preserve decency and civility in the highest degrees, but are altogether ignorant of ceremony. They have no fondness for their colts or foals, but the care they take in educating them proceeds entirely from the dictates of reason.[...]”*

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (our emphasis)

*“Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English: that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? [...]”*

Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (our emphasis)

### Introduction

In “Por que ler os clássicos”<sup>1</sup>, Calvino says that “a Classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say” and that we never actually read a classic,

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<sup>1</sup> CALVINO, Ítalo. *Por que ler os clássicos*. Trad.: Nilson Moulin. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1994

“every reading of it is in fact a ‘rereading’”, not only because its “fame” precedes them, but also due to the fact that much of what surrounds us today has been done or written under its influence. Following that definition, we cannot deny that, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Hard Times* and *Wuthering Heights* are classics. Much of what we know as fiction nowadays, including not only books, but movies, series, soap operas and so on, is, in some degree, influenced by them, which proves that the importance of the classics is not fading as time goes by.

There is a beauty in the approach that relate Literature and History, mainly because the first one deals with human experiences, which can offer some which can offer some ways of structure of a society in a certain represented time when they are combined, *frames* or panels, and this kind of representation can offer great objects of study to the second one. The three novels that we will try to analyze offer us some common points as we relate them to historical and social aspects, like, for instance, the American and French Revolution, marriage itself (not as a consequence of love, but as a way to assure social and financial security), the women’s role in society, the fall of the old aristocracy, the gentry and the yeomanry, the capitalist system, the eternal fight of reason against fancy, the moral issues, and, as we are going to explore a little further in this article, education and instruction.

More exactly, we are going to deal with the sometimes violent way in which education was used by authorities as a tool to control the social behavior and the fact that it was different depending on the gender or social status, contradicting the statement of the French Revolution that declares “liberty, equality and fraternity” between men. In this context, the control and censorship over books is a good example, of a strategy to try to maintain the common people minds under control, and consequently keep the *status quo*.

A selection of small excerpts or “frames”, extracted from each book, will be analyzed in order to facilitate the visualization and comprehension of those so called “control tools” and the social structure features. The attempt to compose such panel would not be possible if the novels did not offer an inherent realism, the intrinsic attempt to reproduce the real world as we know it. To serve as a base, the texts “*Educação e Experiência*”, written by E.P.Thompson, along with “*Para o Estudo sócio-histórico da Gênese e Desenvolvimento da Profissão Docente*”, written by Antonio

Nóvoa and “*Educação de Massas: Uma sombra no século das luzes*”, written by Maria Lúcia Garcia Pallares-Burke will be used along with the masterpieces excerpts.

It is important to keep in mind that the analysis of such small pieces of each novel cannot support conclusions about all the subjects that can be brought by them and also cannot compose a complete panel by themselves. As already said, the results of the relation, or comparison, of the three masterpieces shared aspects may vary, as they are rich in content and provide enough material for discussion of different fields and areas of knowledge.

## Education

Children could have two types of education, a religious or a secular one, both being restricted to people who could afford it or could count on someone to do it so. The mass education system was based on boarding schools, homeschooling, convents, and Charity Schools, being the latter two used to teach religion, humility, resignation and submission. Also at that time, debates about the role of the popular education and the uses of ignorance were settled, and the intellectuals were thinking about how happy a shepherd, a farmer, a machine operator or any other working class man would be, if he became able to acquire knowledge and information, if he were able to think by himself. Educated people were more likely to understand the contradictions and inequalities imposed by the system, and rebel against it, causing revolutions and violence against the system or the wealthy minority. The conclusion is that both, education and ignorance of the masses, were, then, ideological tools in which the social harmony was based on.<sup>2</sup>

In *Pride and Prejudice*<sup>3</sup>, the education and instruction was mainly given at home and, at that time – the beginning of the nineteenth century –, the figure of the governess, as a tutor, was really important. In Austen’s novel, the Bennetts could not afford a governess. Mrs. Bennet, the mother, was in charge of it. The excerpt of Lady Catherine dialogue with Elizabeth, in chapter 30, clarifies it:

‘Has your governess left you?’

‘We never had any governess.’

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<sup>2</sup> PALLARES-BURKE, Maria Lúcia Garcia. “*Educação das Massas: Uma sombra no Século das Luzes*”. In: *Brasil 500 anos: Tópicos em História da Educação*. EDUSP, 2001

<sup>3</sup> AUSTEN, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility*, Modern Library College editions, New York The Modern Library, Random House, 1950

‘No governess! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without a governess! I never heard of such a thing. Your mother must have been quite a slave to your education.’

Elizabeth could hardly help smiling as she assured her that had not been the case.

‘Then, who taught you? Who attended to you? Without a governess, you must have been neglected.’

‘Compared with some families, I believe we were; but such of us as wished to learn never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly might.’

Brontë's novel, *Wuthering Heights*<sup>4</sup>, is full of children who are abandoned in a cold and unfriendly world or suffer with the animosities of abusive parents in a patriarchal family mode: Heathcliff as an orphan in Liverpool, Hindley sent away to college and so on (which, more or less, resembles the conditions they fight against - or not, as in Louisa's case- in Dicken's novel, *Hard Times*<sup>5</sup>). The effect of this is that we, as readers, are never able to judge the characters completely, in an objective way: there is no black and white.

Again, one of the reasons for that is the way children are raised and educated. Like in *Hard Times*, children are victims of a social context that dehumanize people (the industrialization process and the increasing mechanization that took place in England in the eighteenth century), influencing hearts and minds of its people and creating a request for standardized actions and patterns based on rational behavior and utilitarianism, which, little by little, took away the individuality of the people.

The ‘spirit of the time’ not only saw people as an alienated mass, but, also, saw children as young adults demanding certain behaviors and stealing their childhood. The school, or the education, was then the proper way to impose these codes of behavior. Coming back to the relation with *Wuthering Heights*, education was as a way to distinguish people, and in this romance, it was used as a vengeance tool as well, as Heathcliff kept Hareton from any civilizing influences, which made him, during almost the whole novel, rustic and rough. The fact that he cannot read along with the fact that

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<sup>4</sup> BRONTË, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Collector's Library

<sup>5</sup> DICKENS, Charles. *Hard Times*. Seventh Printing, May Rinehart Editions, 1963

he also has a so-called ‘inferior’ accent are reasons enough to some characters question his intelligence:

“Could you believe in the existence of such a colossal dunce? [...] My cousin fancies you are an idiot. There you experience the consequence of scorning “book-larning”, as you would say. Have you noticed, Catherine, his frightful **Yorkshire pronunciation?**”

(our emphasis)

We can deduce that education was, at that time, a feature of distinction, a possibility of social mobility. As it was still in the process of adjustment to a mandatory system, the instruction process was a way that the new social stratum found to approach the habits, mainly the cultural ones, of the previously dominant class. Heathcliff, for instance, possessed the money, but had no access to the culture due to the mistreatment of his education. Having the book context in mind, this could be a clue to explain his “irrational” behavior. However, there was, as we are going to explore a little further, another important issue concerning education: the gender, as instruction became a tool to maintain the social roles of men and women and offered patterns of behavior.

### **Education and the women’s social role**

Women’s education worked as an ideological tool also being mainly a way to reach a very clear end: find an appropriate match. The girls weren’t induced to question their role in society, but to be resigned and act with deference. As they were also excluded from the labor world and political discussions were out of reach, domestic tasks, codes of behavior, and other small accomplishments were almost the only things left to learn and talk about.

At the time Jane Austen wrote *Pride and Prejudice*, the education of women was directed to entrap men. So, besides manners, artistic skills and reading, the book shows that the women were expected to make countless accomplishments that were nothing but tasks they should be able to perform gracefully. With exceptions, like Jane Austen herself and the main character of the romance, Elizabeth, womenfolk at that time didn’t seem to understand that their education was directly related to their role in society. The represented girls were raised to be perfect brides and wives, to serve as standardized trophies.

Performing gracefully domestic tasks was not enough though. Mr. Bingley explains in chapter eight, that every young lady could ‘paint tables, cover screens, and net purses’. Both, Mr. Darcy and Miss Bingley agree that having those skills weren’t enough if a girl wanted to deserve the “accomplished” compliment. In their point of view, ‘a woman must also have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, [...] and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions’. Mr. Darcy even adds another feature: ‘something more substantial, the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.’

It is important to remember that those readings were supposed to be instructional, and sometimes were even controlled by the families or religious institutions, as Mr. Collins shows, in chapter 14, after denying himself to read a novel and unsuccessfully trying to read the Fordyce’s Sermons and as we are going to analyze in this article:

“I have often observed how little young ladies are interested by books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their **benefit**. It amazes me, I confess; for, certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as **instruction**...”

(our emphasis)

This role of women appears differently in the other two novels as well: In *Hard Times*, Louisa, a girl raised under a restrictive education, allowed only to read books permitted by her father, is forced to marry a man that she does not love (Mr. Bounderby), but she does not offer any resistance against the marriage, facing latter the consequences of her lack of disposition to “rebellion”, and in *Wuthering Heights* Catherine chose Linton to her husband instead of Heathcliff because the second would not be able to offer her a financially safe future, with the comfort and an upper class status that the first suitor would. As we can see, the subject appears in the three novels, and offers us a good perspective about how the ‘love’ relationships were settled at the nineteenth century. In that scenario, keeping the ladies away of the “fancy” and “true love fantasies” that romances were beginning to evoke was essential to their so-called “welfare”.

### **Books: a danger and a tool**

In “Literature and Cinema, Images of Femininity in Pride and Prejudice”, Vasconcelos<sup>6</sup>, says that novels found strong opposition among those who believed the reading of it could fill the young women’s heads with all sorts of silly ideas about love and marriage. The fear of those subversive ideas being spread by books was also one of the major concerns of the debaters against and pro mass education: to teach people how to read was to give them freedom to choose **what** to read, what ideas to defend or, in other words, to think freely.

We now reach a ‘who came first’ question: if the girls had nothing else to do and weren’t influenced to think critically (or to think at all), it was natural they would prefer books related to their own world, with the prospective of a perfect match, a romantic love and a happy ending, instead of ones dealing with philosophical, religious, or political issues – books that could be hard to the common reader, not used to its language and depth of content - The majority of damsels were only interested in reading for pleasure or to pass the time, because without knowing it, the girls were led to prefer books written to serve as models of behavior by the system in which their lived in.

The novel *Hard Times* presents a similar situation, although it is not only focused on women. When, in chapter four, Mr. Gradgrind talks to Mr. Bounderby in order to understand what could be happening for his “full of facts children” to have such a ‘degraded’ behavior (the conversation takes place after Mr. Gradgrind found his children at the Circus, in the previously chapter). Mr. Bounderby, then, asks:

“[...] whether any instructor or servant can have suggested anything? Whether Louisa or Thomas can have been **reading** anything? Whether, in spite of all precautions, any **idle story book** can have got into the house? Because in **minds that have been practically formed by rule and line**, from the cradle upwards, this is so curious, so incomprehensible”

(our emphasis)

This excerpt shows clearly that the censorship over books inside the families and the society was a common practice. Dickens is, of course, exaggerating and creating caricatures, but he is surely denouncing a condition of his period. And, as the control over books also seems to be present in *Wuthering Heights*, we have again a structure, or

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<sup>6</sup> VASCONCELOS, Sandra Guardini T.. *Literature and Cinema, Images of Femininity in Pride and Prejudice*, São Paulo, Humanitas, FFLCH USP, 2001



a panel, formed by the three novels that allows us to infer that, historically, this censorship, this control over books was thought as a necessary tool to maintain the order and a certain pattern of behavior, making it easier to social institutions, as the govern, schools, or the instructors and families to control their children and adolescents, bringing them as far as possible from the dangerous ‘idleness’ and ‘fancies’ that could lead them to reflections, critical or subversive thoughts and actions, ruining the once conservative family institution and their families’ surnames.

However giving a person the power to choose **what** to read could be dangerous, because it could lead to critical thinking, will to self expression, political consciousness, taking up sides, partisanship, or, in other words, having ideas to defend and fight for.

In *Wuthering Heights*, for instance, we have a small attempt to “rebellion” against the control over books and the exercise of subjectivity: Catherine Earnshaw had to use her permitted books to write a diary on its margins in a way that it looked as harmless commentaries about the Testaments that she was, probably, forced to read. The books turn out to be important to the progression of the narrative as they reveal hidden thoughts and feelings of the character.

We can affirm that the one thing that cannot be entirely controlled is what a person feels, thinks or believes. This is the only thing that is truly subjective, the basic principle of our individuality that the different systems have been trying to take away.

## Conclusion

After seeing a little about how instruction is represented in the three novels, we can see that education, instead of experience or sensibility, was appreciated at those times and, that the formal education was based on gender and social stratum. In this patriarchal society system, the girls learnt basically domestic tasks, reading and religion, while the boys learnt a little about science, math, business, politics and other ‘market’ tasks. The social differentiation was imposed by the high cost of education which made it accessible only to rich people or those who had the luck of knowing someone willing to provide it for them. The incipient mass education was based on subservience and religion. There were even restrictions to the poorer to remain at school, due to the social mobility aspect attached to it.

There was also a heated discussion about the importance of teaching the masses, the role of reading and the danger attached to it. And, as it was hard to control the



marginal press and the subversive readings that could be used as tools to make the mass fight for their rights and create revolutions, the main idea was to control what people could or could not read. In the books, education was directly related to rationality and privilege, and, because of that, we can see that the so-called fancy, feelings, along with nature or instinct were seen by some characters as inferior in the three novels.

In addition, the control over books was important as they could offer patterns of behavior especially to women. So, when selling books became a lucrative market, there was an imposition over authors to write about exemplary women, and a silent imposition over the feminine public to read religious and 'instructional' books only.

In this sense, the three books present small signs of an attempt of controlling society through education intrinsically related to social and historical aspects, we notice that the authors were successfully able to insert realism in different degrees within their works. Each one of them tried to show the reader a picture of the society, a scale model using different lens, different miniatures and perspectives to build the representation, but, still, looking closely, we are able to find similarities. The major similarity is that they could not, as novelists, forget about the need of pleasuring readers, but they could not close their eyes to the 'atrocities' happening around them either. We believe that Austen, Dickens and Brontë, as people interested in the book market, knew the power possessed by this communication tool and also knew how to use it well.

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