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# Life, Literature and the Vacuum of Real Life Events, Experiences and Issues in Our Contemporary Society

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## ABSTRACT

Literature is most commonly used to refer to words of creative imagination, including works of poetry, drama, fiction and non-fiction. It is the body of written works of a language, period or culture. Literature is a mirror of life as well as a tool which writers use to mirror and reflect their societies. It has become a means of self expression, an avenue through which the realities of human conditions are brought to limelight. In other words, the literature of any given society is a reflection of the socio-political, economic as well as the religious background of the society. These points out the idea that literature does not exist in a vacuum rather it is from the real life events, experiences and issues in our contemporary society. In this regard, one can assert that what writers put together and blend in their work, under the powers of imagination and creative ingenuity is only a collection of real life events, facts and ideas from their own world. Writers concern themselves with socio-political, economic and religious issues prevalent in their society. This paper studies Realism in some selected works of writers. The authors under study are Asika Ikechukwu and Jane Austen. The works are *Follow the River* and *Pride and Prejudice*. The aim of the study is to determine and expose how these writers gleaned and selected their materials from real life events, in order to buttress it as part of its contribution. This shows how literature and creative works of many writers is nothing but a project of their real life situation and experiences or of those probably close to them. From the study, the researcher gathered and analyzed how man's inhumanity, class consciousness, materialism and poverty among other real life vices, provided materials with which these authors created their fictitious works, experiences and ideas.

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## Introduction

The term literature derives its origin from the adjective "literate" which can be interpreted as the ability to read and write. Literature in one breadth can be said to be books, plays and poems that people think have value. It is also seen as a subject that mirrors people, their customs and traditions for others to see and learn from. It can be said to be a mirror through which man can see the good and the bad aspects of life. Also, it can be said to be the caricature of human society, and all the activities embedded in it. In other words, there is a kind of reciprocal relationship between literature and life. The genres of literature are poetry, prose and drama.

Literature may consist of texts based on factual information (non-fiction), autobiography and reflective essays, or even from historical periods. Important political movements that have influenced literature include feminism, Post-colonialism, Post-structuralism, Post-modernism, Marxism and so on. Literature is also observed in terms of gender, race and nationality which include black writings in America, African writings and so on. Society at large is being mirrored by literature as regards Social Realism. There are two main categories differentiating the genres of literature, such as fiction and non-fiction.

Since non-fiction is an informational text dealing with an actual real life situation, and offer opinions or conjunctures on facts and reality, it is opposed to fiction. It is also distinguished from those fictional genres of literature like

poetry and drama, which is a rhythmic writing with verse form and imagery, evokes an emotional response from the reader. The art of poetry also kindles an exciting pleasure by beautiful, imaginative or elevated thoughts. Fables are short stories that are not based on facts or reality but on fantasy, whilst humour is an important attribute of comedy which has the ability of being amusing or comical. A farce is a comical drama in which both the characters and events shown are fantasy and deserved to be laughed at.

In fables, animals often speak as humans that are legendary. Folklores are songs, stories, myths and proverbs of a person that is handed down by word of mouth. Legend is based on fact but also includes imaginative materials. A tall-tale is a humorous story with blatant exaggeration and swaggering heroes, who do the impossible with an air of nonchalance. The genre of fiction can be defined as a narrative literary work whose content is produced by the imagination, and it is not necessarily based on facts. In fiction, something is feigned, invented or imagined, a made-up story that cannot be real.

Social realism can also be emanated from fiction, where it portrays the lives of people in a given society. Fiction is often regarded by many as an imaginative work of art, which is not, but purely an intention from the author's fountain of creative writings and ingenuity. Fiction is very important and it is one aspect of literature which should be seriously looked into.

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People are often times, being misled to believe that fiction is simply a counterfeit account, of a pre-supposed real life event that is far away from reality. It is this obvious reason that many tend to neglect fiction, as not worthy of any serious attention and construction.

Art is real and deals with real life situations that give rise to the large corpus of literary and creative works of art. This will go a long way to convince any literary minded person that fiction could be anything but a creation of real life situations, blended and woven on the powers of imagination. Ngugi Wa Thiongo recognized this crucial role of literature as he asserts in "Home Coming":

Literature cannot grow or develop in a vacuum. It is a given impetus, shape and direction and also an area of social, political and economic forces of concern in a particular society. The relationship between literature and these forces cannot be ignored, especially in Africa where modern literature has grown against the gory background of Europe imperialism and its charging manifestation... (16).

From the above point of view of Ngugi, we gather undisputedly, that literature is of the people, by the people and for the people. It bestows and confers on literature, that superiority of being in art form, and yet a recreation of real life situation of men and women, who struggle everyday to make life more meaningful and worthwhile for themselves. This takes us to the idea of realism in art, for art could be realism when it concerns a real life account of people and the society.

Chinua Achebe, one of the most renowned African writers highlights on the nature of what we generally regard as fiction. He stirred up many dusts of argument in the true nature of fiction. He spoke on what he believes to be the true nature of non-fiction, and why it ought to be regarded as a part and parcel of man's effort, to say the truth about his likes, dislikes and environment, in the most plausible way he could do it. Achebe alludes, "Art is man's constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality, from that which is given to him, an aspiration to provide himself with a second hand on existence through his imaginations"... (107). Achebe believes that what writers do is to recreate in their works, a different order of reality from the one it took from, but not entirely an abstraction. Literature may be art but it deals extensively with issues, experiences, fears, joys, failures and aspirations of the people in a given social milieu. It cannot exist in a vacuum rather it takes its ingredients from the day to day activities and experiences of the people.

As Onuekwusi succinctly puts it, "History reviews what actually happened in the past that can be identified and determined. Fiction deals with what is usual, typical and true to human nature. True to fiction, there is actually a representation. It lies in the reality of aesthetic distancing..." (92). Fiction is as real as it could be and this promotes the study of realism in art. What differs in the order of reality which these writers create is what Onuekwusi emphasized to be the appropriateness of "Aesthetic Distancing"; this is simply that style which a particular writer may choose to adopt. It is the choice of setting, language, character and actions of a particular author which he adopts. An author might choose to set a work in an imaginary faraway land, while exposing the abnormalities before our very eyes. A good example is how Achebe employed a fictitious country Kenya in *Anthills of the Savannah*, when it is obvious that he was writing about his dear country, Nigeria and the extent of

damages, havoc and destruction which the military men had rendered on our dear country Nigeria. That is how "Aesthetic Distancing" applies to works of fiction.

Other writers may choose to be real as they could be while elaborating on a particular society. Just like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie made use of a familiar location in her *Half of a Yellow Sun*, while re-telling the Biafra war experiences and what really happened. The injustice on the part of the Biafran soldiers, how they fought and lost. She called the names of people like Ojukwu, Gowon, among others. The choice is dependent on the author's choice which Onuekwu terms as the appropriateness of "Aesthetic Distancing". Be that as it may, the reality, our real life reality which these works point, could be marked away from the people. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, we learn just like some other novels, that military incursion into politics is the worst thing that ever happened to this great nation. In *half of a Yellow Sun*, we console ourselves on the level of what we really lost during the three years of bloody war. These are the aspects of reality that are being portrayed in the works of fiction. In this paper, the researcher hopes to account for the works of Asika's *Follow the River* and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, respectively. It is on the background that realism in art will be understood and studied in the proceeding discussions.

#### **ASIKA'S FOLLOW THE RIVER**

The novel captures a young girl in her struggle to survive a male dominated world. When Obiuto was born, she was rejected by her father because he wanted a male issue. She went through a lot of pains from her father, amidst constant accusations and beatings. Obiuto finally decided to go to the city to stay with her school mother, Chizy, who was married to Bobo. They were so nice to Obiuto and loved her like their own daughter. Things went well for a while, and then began to go sour, as Bobo started lusting after Obiuto. Obiuto refused his advances. However, when Chizy travelled to the village to attend to her sick mother, Bobo tried to force Obiuto into having sex with him of which she vehemently refused, and as a result, she was chased out of the house, but came back when Chizy returned. Obiuto decided to leave the house and when Chizy wanted to know why, Obiuto told her the whole truth of the matter.

Though Chizy was hurt, she saw reasons with her. She decided to help her as they both promised to keep in touch with each other. Later, Chizy took her to a wealthy woman, named Madam Lisa, who was in dire need of a house help and luckily for her, she was hired. Weeks later, Chizy left Abuja for Lagos, since her husband was being transferred and posted to Lagos. So, Obiuto was left behind, at the mercy of her benefactor, Madam Lisa.

Initially, Madam Lisa was nice to Obiuto, but when Obiuto refused to sleep with Alhaji Dangama Abudullahi, she sent her packing because Obiuto's refusal to sleep with the Alhaji made her lose a contract worth thirty million naira, that was to be signed by the Alhaji. Obiuto left the house and was almost hit by a car. The owner of the car saw her, had pity on her and took her to a hotel, where he paid for her upkeep. The man, who is known as Chief Asuzu later took her to his house and introduced her to his wife and daughter. Chief Asuzu loved her like his own daughter and for her good result and love for literature, he told her to assist the teacher in his school, in teaching literature. Later on, Melody (Chief Asuzu's daughter) had a misunderstanding with Obiuto and things went bad for her as Chief Asuzu's wife chased her

out of the house because she thought that Obiuto was having an affair with her husband though Obiuto refused all sexual advances being made to her by Chief. When Obiuto left Chief Asuzu's house, she moved in with Henry, who was the reason for the misunderstanding between her and Melody.

Later, Obiuto got an admission into the university, and she faced a lot of frustration from her lecturer, Professor Dikeoha. She refuses have an illicit affair with him and decides to leave the school, but luckily for her, the professor leaves instead. Obiuto finally graduates with a first class honours degree in English. It was during her youth service that she met Alex, for the second time, who eventually marries her. Things began to change for the better, leading to a bright future, as her father changes his view about women.

#### **AUSTEN'S PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**

Her novels are a reflection of her outlook on life, as she spent most of her life insulated from certain sections of the society. The context of her life, its material scenes and background, its social encounters and relationships is vividly and dramatically rendered in her novels, more accurately and penetratingly than the most exhaustive biography could achieve. In particular, she helped to redefine the roles and aspiration of the middle class women like herself, through providing a witty satire of social convention. She helped to liberate contemporary ideas of what women could strive for.

The play opens with the arrival of wealthy Mr. Bingley to the estate of Netherfield Park. This causes a commotion in the nearby village of Longbourn. In the Benneths household, Mrs. Benneth is desperate to marry Bingley to one of her five daughters: Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty or Lydia. When Bingley meets Jane at a ball, he seems to be immediately smitten with her, yet Bingley's snobby friend Darcy is rude to Elizabeth. Through the next few social gatherings, Jane and Bingley grew closer while Darcy, despite himself, begins to get attracted to Elizabeth's beauty and intelligence.

When Jane is caught in the rain while travelling to visit Bingley, she falls ill and must stay at Netherfield. Elizabeth comes to Netherfield to care for Jane, and though Bingley's sisters are rude, Darcy's attraction to her deepens. Mr. Collins, who is Mr. Benneths cousin and heir, as well as a pompous clergyman, visits the Benneths in search of a marriageable daughter. At about the same time, the Benneths sisters also meet Wickham, an army officer who Elizabeth finds charming and who also claims that Darcy is hardened. Soon after, at a ball at Netherfield, Mrs. Benneth, much to Darcy's annoyance comments that a wedding between Jane and Bingley is likely to take place.

Collins in the meantime, proposes to Elizabeth who declines, angering her mother but pleasing her father. Collins then proposes to Elizabeth's friend, Charlotte Lucas who accepts out of a desire for security rather than a need for love.

Bingley suddenly departs for London on business and Caroline informs Jane by letter that not only will they not be returning but her brother is planning to wed Georgiana, Darcy's sister. Jane feels bad and Elizabeth thinks Darcy and Caroline are deliberately separating Bingley and Jane. The sister's aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner invite Jane to London, hoping that she will get over that. When Mr. Gardiner tracks them down, Wickham demands his debts be paid off in return for marrying Lydia. The Benneths assume that the Gardiners gave in to the demands, since Lydia and Wickham will soon return as newlyweds. This makes Mrs. Benneth happy. Elizabeth soon discovers that Darcy, not Gardiner, paid off Wickham's debts out of love for her.

Bingley and Darcy returns to Netherfield, and Bingley finally proposes to an overjoyed Jane. While Darcy goes to London on business, Lady Catherine De Bourgh visits Elizabeth, warning her not to marry Darcy. Elizabeth refuses to promise, on his return, Darcy asked Elizabeth again to marry him. This time she accepts telling him that her prejudice against him has made her blind. Darcy acknowledges that his pride made him act rudely. Both couples are married and the Benneths family rejoices in their daughter's happiness.

#### **Social Realism in Asika's *Follow the River***

Through the sharp and unblinking eyes of Obiuto, we see a lot, learn a lot and we know and believe that the future holds a lot for us, men and women alike. Obiuto may be bold and daring, she may have been through a lot, but the most captivating, charming and significant aspect of her life is her will power and determination to survive against all odds. Obiuto grows up to be hated by her father, who wanted a male child by all means, but Obiuto's mother kept on giving birth to girls. On the day Obiuto was born, and immediately he discovered the sex of the child, we were told that "his smiles were like fumes of a hot water that evaporated into space". He carried Obiuto for a while, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. He holds her for what seems like eternity, Obiuto then makes a sign quite unlike new born babies, who will always wriggle for want of breath. They were both caught in a crossroad, unsure of which way to follow.

In the novel, Obiuto is seen to be born with a colour quite different from that of her parents, she is close to the colour of a paw-paw fruit and Obiuto's father had eyed his wife suspiciously. She knew she had a lot to answer about Obiuto's perfect but quite an odd complexion. To worsen her case, she had an oval face and something like a pointed nose, while Obiuto's father is crimson dark, with a strange type of nose that suits his face. It is neither pointed, round nor flat; it is just there at the centre of this face, shapeless as witnessed in the novel. He also has a round face with low dark eyes that gives him the looks of a lion. Obiuto's mother's face is there on Obiuto's face, her father's two dark eyes were evenly represented for the nose, Obiuto rejected both noses to inherit the pointed type of nose. Her hair is dark to her father's satisfaction but for her complexion, he could not understand.

The novel makes us know that the doctor senses this eerie feeling in the atmosphere, and the uncanny silence that follows the vanished smile, the moment Obiuto is placed into her father's arms. There was this kind of hatred that grew in his stomach when the doctor is telling him that his wife has a "white" stomach, and that she is prone to deliver fair and beautiful children. The doctor tries to explain unequivocally to a man whose face is as hard as faeces plastered on the wall. The fact that Obiuto came when her father so much desires a male child, could account for the level of hatred he showers on her on a daily basis. Despite everything she does, he reminds her that she is foolish, foolish beyond repairs.

Though her father hated all his children because they are females, Obiuto's own is exceptional. All the time, he would be calling Obiuto all sorts of names, quarrelling with her as if she is the one that created herself to be a woman. He wished his seed would have ignored her and fertilized a male instead. The walking stick in his hand would always miss Obiuto with an inch as he flings it aimlessly and carelessly on her. Obiuto on her own knows that one day, the staff will land on her skull because she would not have the walls to protect her at all times.

Obiuto, being a well mannered girl would not talk back at her father, but the one that pains her most where her father is, was that her father will always talk about men whispering to her through his thatched fence, telling her that "they have started feeding your ears with sweet words and fake promises." They have started telling her how she is beautiful than their mothers... (7). All these words give pains to Obiuto a lot, whenever her father starts accusing her of what she knew nothing about. Her father keeps on telling her one popular adage in Igbo that "a child that says the father will not sleep will not taste one herself." She will always sit down to wonder why her father hated her this much. At times, she will start blaming God for letting her surface in this earth. She suffered a lot in the hands of her father, simply because she happens to be a female child including her sisters. In the words of Nzerem:

Obiuto could be seen as one of many literary characters out there but she is more than that, she is one of us, she lives with us, we are connected to her life by that simple bond of sympathy as human beings co-existing. Imagine that fate of Obiuto, one may consider the fate of millions of souls out there, so close to us, helpless as they seem, under the scourge of intimidation and hatred, praying and crying endlessly for help, for the crime they knew nothing of. This novel calls for more than our pity for the kind hearted girl, Obiuto, and for a sober reflection on our own personal life... (32).

The author shows the kind of hatred a father has on his child. Another social realism portrayed in the novel is sex abuse. This happens when Obiuto travels to stay with her school mother in Abuja. At Chizy's house, Obiuto sees another world different from her own; she reasoned that her village is nothing but a prison yard. She is so happy and comfortable in her school mother's house until one day, the least she expected happened. Bobo, who was her school mother's husband started making silly advances on her. Obiuto suffered as she was sexually harassed in the hands of Bobo. Though she makes Bobo to understand that she cannot do such a thing, not even to her school mother who for her sake, she is in Abuja but Bobo persisted. Obiuto could not bear the sexual harassment any longer, so she decides to let the cat out of the bag, by telling Chizy all she has been going through. Chizy acknowledges Obiuto's virtue and determination. Later, Obiuto is sent packing by Bobo because of her constant refusal to make love with him.

Obiuto is not just one of the characters created in fiction that appeal to us, but ought not to be forgotten because she is not real. She is a living character and many of her kinds still live amongst us, searching for direction, pleading and crying for help. The idea of going to the far end of a village to lure a young girl into what one can call "modern slavery" is still in vogue. This is shown when Obiuto left her school mother's house to Madam Liza's house, where she thought she would make ends meet. But on the other hand, Madam Liza tries to lure her into sleeping with Alhaji Abdullah Dangama, the Chief Executive of Shiroro Group of Companies, who is also into a contract with all kinds of stuff, importation, exportation and immigration. Upon all his wealth, Obiuto refuses to give in to his advance.

This young girl is taken away from her parents with promises of a bright and beautiful future that may never come. Some of these children are automatically cut off from their link and kinship when they are in the city. Obiuto is subjected to all kinds of sexual harassment, but knowing

where she came from, refused to yield to their proposals. She knows her reason for leaving her home town for Abuja, and how she wants to change her father's attitude towards women. She could only have a reminiscent and a heart touching nostalgic feeling of their village, but may never get there even if she was allowed to make a return journey. Their survival is heavily dependent on the mood, whims and caprices of their benefactors, which is the case of Obiuto in the novel, and the case of so many children in our real life situation. The author captures and describes Obiuto's initial experience in the city as thus:

Obiuto hardly eats in Madam Liza's house; she will wake up early in the morning, to do the unending house chores just to make ends meet. She will do all sorts of things, just to impress Madam Lisa and also to make sure that she is satisfied, so that she can pay her... (19).

This is the condition of Obiuto, a situation typical to that of many girls out there in our society. Also sex abuse has become a thing of serious concern in our contemporary society, even beyond. It is with sadness, that we learn the harsh realities of these set of people, as demonstrated in the lives and times of Obiuto. She is thrown out by Madam Liza because of her refusal to be involved in illicit affair with Alhaji Dangama. Madam Liza believes that Obiuto's refusal to Alhaji would make her to lose her millions of naira contract. Under the scorching sun and rain, Obiuto is there suffering and is being beaten by the rain until God sent Chief, a good man, who saw her condition and rescued her from that trauma.

Chief, who is a well known wealthy man, had pity for Obiuto and took her home. In the house of Chief, Obiuto regained her happiness. She took Chief as her father and Melody, as her biological sister. She was later disappointed by Chief, who harassed her sexually. Later, Chief's wife told her to pack her bag and leave their house. All these are forms of realism which is shown in the novel and in our real life situations. Melody on the other hand, accuses Obiuto of snatching her boyfriend away from her. This is the evidence of realism in our real life.

When Obiuto is thrown out, she could not find her way and did not know anyone to run to. Fortunately, Henry came her rescue. Henry is Melody's boyfriend, the one who Melody accused her of snatching. Henry harboured Obiuto and catered for her. Obiuto falls in love with Henry and anytime she wants to follow the wrong path, she would remember what her mother told her and where she comes from. Obiuto is such a nice girl to the extent that everyone in Henry's hostel liked her.

Another social realism is being portrayed around Obiuto again, when Professor Dikeoba, tries all he could to lure Obiuto to bed but Obiuto, being a responsible girl, refused to yield to him. Dikeoha noticed that Obiuto is not an anyhow girl, so he decided to punish her by seizing her result, which she took with her fellow course mates. He makes things so difficult for her, even after Obiuto narrated her poor story to him. It is obviously the level of his devilish attitude towards Obiuto, and the likes of others that prompted these words from Nzerem as thus:

Is wickedness in born or is it a product of circumstances? This and many more questions you may want to ask after reading this exploration of the human psyche. The theory of child abuse, sex abuse, hatred, poverty and man's inhumanity to a fellow man flows through the entire work. *Follow the River* is a heart rendering, provoking

and mind blowing story about a little girl who was asking for nothing but love from the hands of those that she thinks, could help her to fulfill her dream... (6).

Asika depicts the city as real as it could be. The city is nothing to be compared with the village. The village is serene, peaceful and tranquil, but the city is filled with rogues, hoodlums and all sorts of man's wickedness. It has the good, the bad and the ugly infused together. The product of such unity is evident in the life of Obiuto as in the novel. Asika depicted Obiuto and her first encounter with the city thus:

Throughout the journey, her eyes occupied a large portion of her face as she tried to memorize all the beautiful things she saw on the road. There in the car, she sat with pride and glamour, the type of pride Olachi in *Love of an Angel* had when she travelled to the city. She took out her nose to inhale the fresh air and warmth of the city, amidst the parches of dust which settles lavishly on her face... (24).

Asika captured the exploitation of the lower class, the class of the peasants and common men by the bourgeoisie and the super structures around Obiuto and her family. The strokes of poverty have eaten deep inside them and that is the reason Obiuto could not bear the pains any longer. She decides to travel to the city to at least make something meaningful out of her life. Obiuto's mother suffered much in the hands of her husband because of her inability to give him a male child. She is denied of everything, and could not see anything to eat.

#### **Social Realism in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice***

The novel is an aspect of realism, and this is because it exposes the happenings and marriage conventions in England. The gap between the upper and the middle class as at then, its setting which is one realistic aspect of the novel is set in England and some places mentioned in the novel, can be found in England such as Longbourn, London, Meryton, Netherfield, etc. All these places are realistic. The novel paints a realistic picture of marriage conventions in England, the way the rich young men who had acquired wealth go in search of a wife, as can be seen in the first page of the novel, where the novelist says, "It is universally known that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife"... (2).

The writer surveys people's behaviour towards marriage, how a young woman who is not married in England then, had lost her social stand in the society and how a man makes his choice of a life partner. In the novel, Mr. Bingley, a rich young man, wants a wife, and decides to organize a ball for all the young men and women in Netherfield and Longbourn (this is one realistic aspect of the novel where people organize a ball or party in England just to get acquainted with someone). Bingley did this just to get a wife for himself and his rich friend, Mr. Darcy, whom he came back with. At the ball Mr. Bingley gets acquainted with Jane that he danced with her, and Mr. Darcy because of his pride, refused to get acquainted with Miss Elizabeth and this made Elizabeth to become prejudiced.

The attitude of parents, when it comes to their children getting married, could be another social realism that is portrayed in the novel. This can be seen in the character of Mrs. Benneth, who has five young daughters, and she wants rich husbands for them by all means. She desperately wanted one of her daughters to get acquainted with Mr. Bingley, whom she heard is a wealthy man that came to Netherfield

to buy a large fortune. She tells her husband in the novel, "You are over scrupulous surely, I dare say Mr. Bingley will be very glad to see you, and I will send a few line to him, to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whosoever he chooses of the girls, though you must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy"... (4). This exposed the action of some parents in the eighteenth century England, towards marriage. It shows how they wanted their daughters to marry a man with great fortune. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, the aunt to Mr. Bingley also wants her daughter, Miss Anne to marry Mr. Darcy, so that they can have the family fortune together.

As a social realistic novel, it exposes the young girls in the eighteenth century England, who are so desperate to get married as well as their action towards it. These can be seen in the character of Miss Lydia Benneth, when she eloped with Mr. Wickham, a man who is so desperate for the wealth of the Darcy's family. Another is seen in the character of Charlotte Lucas, a friend to Elizabeth, who marries Collins, when Elizabeth refuses to accept Collins as her husband. All this satirizes and embodies social realism during the eighteenth century England.

The eighteenth century Aristocrats, were not left out. During that period, there was much gap between the upper and the middle class. In the novel, Mr. Darcy, Miss Bingley and Lady Catherine de Bourgh are from the upper class. Mr. Darcy is very proud and has no regard for women, because he feels any woman who likes him, does so as a result of his wealth. Darcy tells Mr. Bingley at the ball, how it would be a crime to get acquainted with any of the ladies at the ball, apart from Mr. Bingley's own sisters, because they are from the upper class. Since Bingley's own sisters are engaged, he made a comment in the novel, "Your sisters are engaged and there is not another woman in the room, whom it would not be a punishment for me to stand up with."

Mr. Darcy is proud because of his wealth, and sees the ladies at the ball as people from the low class. According to Mr. Bingley, "I have an excessive regard for Jane Benneth; she is really a very sweet girl, and I wish in my heart that she were settled, but with such a father and mother, and such low connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it"... (30). There is also the aspect of class discrimination, which can be seen when Darcy and Mrs. Hurst complain about the low life of the Benneths family, and how it will lessen their chance of marrying a rich man in England.

Mrs. Catherine de Bourgh, Darcy's aunt is a lady from the upper class who looks down on people from the middle class. When she came to see Elizabeth, she complains about them not having a governess. She laments thus, "No governess! How was this 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"... (139-140). This shows that there is a big gap between the upper class and the middle class in England, where the rich marry the rich and the poor marry the poor; that is why Mrs. Catherine wants her daughter, Miss Anne to marry Mr. Darcy (her nephew). She disregards the Benneths family because they are not from the upper class.

The novel is also realistic in that it exposes the materialistic aspects of life of those in England during the Victorian period. In the novel, Mrs. Benneth is very materialistic that she wants her daughters to marry rich young men. She tells her husband about Mr. Bingley's coming to Netherfield and his wealth; how he will be a suitable husband

for one of their daughters. Another character who is materialistic is Mr. Wickham, who wants to take possession of Darcy's fortune that he lied to Elizabeth that Darcy is a wicked man. Wickham is the godson of Mr. Darcy's father and the son of his estate agent.

The novel is socially realistic because it is a humorous portrayal of the social atmosphere of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England. It is principally concerned with courtship, in the lives of most of the characters such as Mr. Bingley and Miss Jane, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, etc. The novel also exposes the importance of money in England, the need for a lady and a man to be wealthy, for them to have a life partner who is also wealthy. In the novel, if Elizabeth were to be from a rich and influential family, Mr. Darcy would not have pride in him. This can be seen in the novel where he tells Mr. Bingley of the low class of Jane which will not be suitable for him (Mr. Bingley). This means that Mr. Darcy disapproved Bingley's marriage to Jane because she is not from the upper class. The aristocrats in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century England are being portrayed in the novel. It also paints a picture of Pemberley estate in England and its measurement is specified as being "ten miles round"; this shows the richness of the estate.

Furthermore, another aspect of realism in the novel is that it exposes how nature can contribute to the life of a person. In the novel, nature contributed when Jane became sick, thereby making Elizabeth to come and stay with her at the Bingley's house. During this period, Mrs. Bennet is very happy that her two daughters were in Netherfield and will get acquainted with Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy, which is what she had always wanted.

There is also a realistic aspect of feminism in the novel, where fortunes of family inheritance were given only to men in England. In families where only female children can be seen as in the novel, where Mr. Bennet has no sons but daughters, the property and inheritance is being given to Mr. Collins (a cousin of Mr. Bennet) because in England then, women were not given possessions of fortunes. Mr. Collins, who then wants to retain the fortune with the Bennets, decides to marry Elizabeth who refuses his proposal.

The feminist aspect of life in England was portrayed, where women were regarded as nothing in the society. They were not allowed to make their choices in marriage; the eighteenth century was when female writers rose up to write about their predicaments in England as a way of satirizing feminism at that time. Austen tries to expose the treatment most women in England get from men. In the novel, Miss Jane had to go to the ball for her to get acquainted with the Bingley's family; she had no chance of choosing whom she wants to marry. Charlotte Lucas had no choice but to marry Mr. Collins; Mr. Bingley had to summon all the ladies for a ball, for him to make a choice of the woman he wants to marry.

Another social realistic aspect of the novel is that it exposes jealousy among the life of individuals and how they criticize other people's character and whatever they do is out of jealousy. This can be seen in the life of Miss Bingley, when she realizes that Mr. Darcy is beginning to get acquainted with Miss Elizabeth. She often tries to provoke Darcy into disliking his quest, by talking of their supposed marriage and planning his happiness. There is also a realistic picture of the kind of dressing in England then, how women wore hat and gown as their attire; this can be seen in the female characters in the novel. There were marriages between Bingley and Jane, Darcy and Elizabeth, Collins and Charlotte, etc. *Pride*

and *Prejudice* is a complex novel which mixes romance with realism. Jane Austen portrays a variety of features to make the novel seem more realistic and relevant to the period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

At the same time it has also the touch of romance. The social life for women during the 18<sup>th</sup> century was that it was almost impossible to survive without a man's care. So it was typical for a young woman to live in her father's house until she moved into her husband's house; women would not inherit or own property. They had very few opportunities to earn their own money. Because of this social climate, the reality is that the five Bennets' sisters do not have a choice about marriage; they must marry in order to secure their financial future. Their father's estate will be inherited by their male cousin, Mr. Collins.

### Conclusion

The author of *Pride and Prejudice* exposes the happenings, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The writer tries to paint a picture of the happenings during this period, marriage conventions in England, and the gap between the upper and the middle class as at then. Also shown is the way rich young men who had acquired wealth, go in search of wife and the desperation of young women who want to get acquainted with rich husbands. This can be seen in the character of Miss Lydia Bennet who eloped with Mr. Wickham. The author also paints a picture of pride on Mr. Darcy's side, and he wants to get acquainted with people of his class. The quest for materialism can also be seen in the character of Mr. Wickham, who wants to take possession of Darcy's fortune; he also lied to Elizabeth that Darcy was a wicked man.

In the same vein, one can say that real life situations have continued to be the most variable tool, which literary works of art are being rendered. As Asika Portrays in his novel, a young girl who struggles to be loved by her father but turns out disappointed, all because her mother could not give birth to a male child. Also, in *Pride and Prejudice*, the upper class neglects the lower class and disassociates themselves from their lives.

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