Intertextuality and Ideology: Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' and James Fordyce's 'Sermons to Young Women'

Laura Vorachek, University of Dayton

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Abstract
In Jane Austen's *Art of Memory* and other works, Jocelyn Harris has demonstrated the importance of Austen's literary contexts for understanding and appreciating Austen's art. One context for understanding *Pride and Prejudice* is the conduct book it mentions by name, James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*. Mr. Collins chooses it to read aloud to the Bennet girls, and when Lydia interrupts him, he responds: "I have often observed how little young ladies are interested by books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit." I would argue that reading *Pride and Prejudice* next to Fordyce's *Sermons* reveals that Austen was not only "interested" in this text, but actively engaged with its proscriptions. Mr. Collins’s statement, then, becomes ironic, hinting at Austen's playful response to this "serious" book.

While critics have examined Austen's works in light of the conduct literature of the period, they argue either that Austen falls in line with conduct books or that she completely rejects their advice. However, reading these two texts together illuminates a more complex relationship between Austen and the prevailing ideology of her time.

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Jane Austen. «Pride and Prejudice». Subject: Novels. Chapter 14. “She is a most charming young lady indeed. Lady Catherine herself says that, in point of true beauty, Miss de Bourgh is far superior to the handsomest of her sex, because there is that in her features which marks the young lady of distinguished birth. She is unfortunately of a sickly constitution, which has prevented her from making that progress in many accomplishments which she could not have otherwise failed of, as I am informed by the lady who superintended her education, and who still resides with them. But she is perfectly amiable, and often condescends to drive by my humble abode in her... Other books were produced, and after some deliberation he chose Fordyce’s Sermons. Pride and Prejudice is a romantic novel of manners written by Jane Austen in 1813. The novel follows the character development of Elizabeth Bennet, the dynamic protagonist of the book who learns about the repercussions of hasty judgments and comes to appreciate the difference between superficial goodness and actual goodness. Its humour lies in its honest depiction of manners, education, marriage, and money during the Regency era in Great Britain.