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Kateřina Zágorová

Feminine individuality in Jane Austen's novels

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this bachelor's project is to analyse and characterise the unmistakable uniqueness of the women of Jane Austen's creations within the perspective of two of her well-recognised novels – *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and her later piece *Emma* (1815). This project studies the lives of Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, the main protagonists of these novels and aims at providing an analysis of the life of a woman in the work of Jane Austen. The project examines the traditional position of women in the nineteenth century and the extent of its presence in both of the analysed novels. Jane Austen depicts traditions of the conservative aristocracy of the English gentry in an ironical manner and puts the heroines as a challenging elements to these obstinate fundamentals.

## Introduction

“Isn’t it because, through her writings alone, we acquire the impression of a delightful personality and admirable character, in spite of the impersonality of the novels?” (quote by Q.D.Leaves in Miles, 2002, p. 13)

Jane Austen is undoubtedly one of the most well-known writers in the world. By some, she is sometimes considered to be the first female founder of women’s writing as such. However, as, for instance, professor and researcher Oates-Indruchová states herself in her work on women’s literary tradition (2007, p. 38), it would be a very false statement to label Jane Austen as the first one. Nevertheless, she still remains one of those, who had the ability to create works of specific environment and characters, representing the ‘misbehaved’ individuals of their contemporary social climate. Women. Women who were expected of different behaviour and attitude than they performed.

In this bachelor’s project, the author’s aim is to analyse and characterise the unmistakable uniqueness of the women of Jane Austen’s creations within the perspective of two of her well-recognised novels – *Pride and Prejudice* and her later piece *Emma*.

Based on the analysis of the novels, the author explains the major features of women’s life within the English upper and middle class society during the beginning of the nineteenth century, set in the nonurban environment of so-called *landed gentry*. The individual characters of the above mentioned works of Jane Austen are then taken as objects of explaining the significance and the depth of these noticeable traits reflected in their lives and destinies presented in the novels. The author then has chosen the characters of Elizabeth Bennet (*Pride and Prejudice*) and Emma Woodhouse (*Emma*) for a deeper discussion and analysis of these two individualities, given the circumstance of them being the main protagonists of the novels.

This bachelor’s project’s second chapter is dedicated to the historical development of women’s position in the society, which the author considers to be fundamental for the actual positions and lives of the heroines themselves and which serves as the critical contrast between Austen’s environment and reality. In the third chapter of this project, the author provides a comparison of Austen and the heroines with certain women writers of her time. These writers are compared based on the time manner of their production as well as the included themes and features comparable to those of Austen’s. The comparison provides a base for understanding of Austen’s unique perception and description of female characters, as well as her distinguishable usage of irony and satire in the language of her novels, in contrast with the provided writers.

The expected outcome of this bachelor's project is a complex outlook on the female characters and a comparative analysis of the environment created by Jane Austen and the environment of reality within the nineteenth century English social classes the main protagonists are a part of. The result of this bachelor's project is expected to be a detailed study of these women and their identities, shaped by their social background and individual personal qualities.



# **1 Historical background – women in the nineteenth century**

In this chapter, the author intends to provide a short summary of the position of a woman before and during the nineteenth century, the time when Austen lived and wrote her stories, in order to be able to provide a theoretical base for further comparison with the reality of Austen's heroines.

## **1.1 The development of women's position in society**

As to what can be identified as a crucial feature of the life of women in the nineteenth century, it is the outmost factual existence and reality of a patriarchal society. However, based on Lynn Abrams in *Zrození moderní ženy* (2002, p. 7), the nineteenth century creates a crucial and significant turning point in women's history. Following the events of the French revolution, which she marks as the beginning of women's own realisation that their inferiority to men is a source of an ideology possible to argue with and change with a creation of their own one.

The stream and rapidness of the century, that so drastically changed the position of women within society, is explained by huge structural and ideological changes. Influenced by the industrial, political, and intellectual revolution, the attitude towards women's character, position and role changed as well (Abrams, 2002, p. 7). New ideas on women as wives, mothers and also workers have influenced their traditional roles settled until the end of the early modern era. Margaret L. King in her work *Women of the Renaissance* (1991) presents a perfect outlook on women's position during these times. In her work aimed at showing women's life in all aspects of life and in different social positions, King stresses the point of women being important in their roles as wives, mothers, and daughters. The position of daughters in society was strictly recognised within the main male figure in their family (mostly father or brother), as well as the position of wives. Women were defined by the men they were connected to, either by marriage or birth. Their value was graded by the monetary size of their dowry. The most important achievement in life for a woman was to be wedded well. Even though King (1991) recognises a small group of women that were able to obtain good education, it needs to be acknowledged that the number of them was very small compared to all the women even within the same social class.

With this historical reality women entered the nineteenth century. Their traditional roles, as Abrams reminds (2002, p. 10), were changing very slowly, but needed to do so eventually under the importance of the events and a rapid change of life itself in the nineteenth century. The change that was started by the French revolution, the social, political and industrial

processes and the change of attitude was a long and strenuous one and required a whole century of battling for gender equality in every aspect of woman's life. As Abrams (2002, p. 8) points out, women obtained their official right to vote only in the twentieth century, however, without the changes and processes leading up to this important milestone in women's history, this would not be at all possible.

## **1.2 The role of marriage**

Marriage in the life of a woman in Austen's times was regarded as a duty, an honour and a delight, as well as an economic necessity. It was expected of young girls to get married and, as Lynn Abrams (2002, p. 71) mentions, marriage was something young girls were being prepared for since childhood. To be married was a status desired by women. Being a wife enabled women to have a certain amount of power, nevertheless, a wife was still primarily defined by her husband. She was his possession. As Abrams says (2002, p. 71), based on law norms, woman had no independence within her marriage.

In the course of the nineteenth century the role of marriage made a change. From the patriarchal form of a settlement the process led to a marriage that was based on mutuality. Women who chose not to marry made their appearance. Women, who entered the matrimony, started to have higher expectations of marriage and were more critical towards their husbands, as Abrams writes (2002, p. 71). In the nineteenth century, we are also no strangers to divorces, and there are cases of unsuccessful marriages ending in official separation. However, considering love as a factor of marriage was nearly impossible. In the case of middle or upper class, love needed to be in balance with the social and financial position of both the bride and groom (Abrams, 2002, p. 72).

The changes, as well as the continuing traditions, are also visible in Austen's characters and their environment. As Miles (2002, pp. 159-161) mentions, Austen adopts this specific, historically shaped attitude in her portrayal of marriage based on mutuality and friendship. This type of marriage was a new aspect of life that Austen addresses and supports this trend in her novels. It is a distinguishable aspect of both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, as will be mentioned within the next chapters.

### **1.2.1 Spinsterhood**

It would be a false statement to claim all women reached the state of marriage. Undoubtedly, this was an impossible process, and it is known that a considerable amount of women never wedded. Before the nineteenth century, the estimated percentage of unmarried women was

about 25 percent within European society. Very commonly this happened in Northern Europe and towards the end of the eighteenth century women also started to postpone marriage. The habit of getting married as a young woman changed, and more often women entered the state of matrimony around the age of 26 years. Even in some areas of Britain, there were single women who managed households, usually spinsters or widows (Abrams, 2002, p. 91).

### **1.3 Chapter conclusion**

Therefore, the idea of a single woman with a certain amount of independence was slowly emerging in the nineteenth century. It is unavoidable to mention that the nineteenth century is the century of the birth of feminist ideas and thoughts about women's rights and gender equality (Abrams, 2002, p. 8), which have eventually liberated European women from their traditional position as a possession of someone else. These processes, that influenced women's position in life and within society, are also reflected in Austen's novels. In the characters of her heroines, their attitudes, opinions and lives, as well as in the social environment of the novels.

## 2 Jane Austen

This chapter is aimed at pointing out possible and present relations between Jane Austen and the female heroines and environments presented in her novels. The objective is to prove the ultimate reflection of Austen's own life experiences on her female characters of the novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* that contributed to the creation of their environment and personalities.

### 2.1 Austen's background

It is undoubtable to expect the novel's stories and characters reflect a part of Jane Austen's own background and life and therefore, expect her to create and express a woman individualist built upon her own life experience and influence. As Bush (1975, p. 1) says, the traditions and attitudes of her time complement the social environment she was brought up in. Barnard (1997, p. 117) adds, that Austen's theme was the life of the English landed gentry, an aristocratic class of English rural areas, that created the base of England at that time. In her novels, she tends to high aristocracy or middle class gentry and she never goes lower than that.

As stated in the collection of her selected letters (Austen, 1985, Introduction), that are mainly directed to her close immediate family members and reveal significant parts of her personality and attitude towards marriage or art, Austen's family and financial background did influence the storylines and the destinies of her female heroines. Barnard (1997, p. 177) adds, that her heroines are young women whose story ends with their marriage or a nearing reality of one, in contrast to Austen's own life experience.

Jane Austen was born in 1775 in Steventon as one of eight children. Steventon, located in the county of Hampshire, lies in a fresh, hilly area with various trees and hidden lanes (Lascelles, 1941, p. 1). Even though Lascelles (1941, p. 1) says that Austen describes the landscape very little in her works, she intends to create this certain type of feeling of the nature in the reader's eye. Indeed, setting the novels in the English countryside plays an important role in the stories. Not only the hills, fields, trees or lanes, but the natural features in general underline the character's feelings or the atmosphere of the situation, creating a romantic feature of the novels in using nature as a depiction of the characters (Safdarian, 2015).

As Douglas Bush (1975, p. 2) mentions, Austen's mastery lies in her satire of the social environment of her times. Working with the actual situation in England of her time, where class structure dominates the society, even more the nonurban one, as Bush (1975, p. 2) claims, the more conservative one, which is nicely embodied in the social atmosphere surrounding

Elizabeth and Emma. Both of them are defined as members of a certain class – usually middle class, aristocrats of the English nonurban areas – the landed gentry. Austen’s sharp critics of the traditions set in the social hierarchy could underline her own experience within such environment. As Lascelles (1941, p. 10) says, Jane Austen was a woman who liked visiting friends and acquaintances since her years in Steventon. Suggesting Austen was in liking of social events and interactions, the same fact describes her heroines. Both Elizabeth and Emma obtain social intelligence, often are visited or interacting with others, usually within the same social class. Their connections to higher class, in Elizabeth’s case, and lower class, in Emma’s case, is creating the challenge requiring their characters to mature.

Austen’s creation of a heroine that challenges this world of prejudice and pride by possessing character qualities enabling her to do so could be understood as Austen’s desire to have the opportunity as well.

## 2.2 Sisterhood

Jane Austen was a child of a big family, having seven siblings and growing up in the shadow of all her older siblings. Having one sister, Cassandra, who, as well as Jane Austen, remained unmarried throughout her whole life (Austen, 1985, Introduction), Austen had the ultimate source to build up an environment of sisterhood in nearly all her novels. Cassandra and Jane were very close to each other and their connection is described as strong and a bond of subtle sympathy (Lascelles, 1941, p. 3). As Lascelles (1941, p. 4) also mentions, Cassandra and Jane were everything to each other. They knew each other very well and the bond remained strong even throughout their adulthood. Cassandra admired Jane’s writing, and so did the rest of her family.

In *Emma*, the sisterhood between the main protagonist Emma and her older sister, Mrs. Isabella Knightley appears unbalanced and there is a definite distinction in the sisters’ attitudes and opinions towards the importance of marriage. The reflection of sisterhood bond is also present in *Pride and Prejudice*, this time in a more harmonic relationship between Jane and Elizabeth Bennet. The differences then deepen in the contrast of the younger sisters, but the main emphasis remains on the bond of those two. In this manner, the influence of Austen’s own close relationship with Cassandra Austen is visible in her works. Sisterhood appears to create one of the fundamentals of the Bennet family and as much as it is not that important in the Woodhouse case, sisterhood is present as well.

## **2.3 Absence of marriage**

Jane Austen never married. As Hawthorn says (1975, Note), her life is described as being uneventful, she seems to have never travelled outside South England and the strongest family bond was with her sister Cassandra, although it is known she had close relationships with all members of her family. In comparison with the heroines, both Elizabeth and Emma appear to have quite a tight bond with their families. Both of them are close to their fathers, with whom they appear to have a certain type of mutual understanding.

Jeremy Hawthorn (1986, Note) also says Austen had the possibility to marry at least once, but apparently refused. It is considerable as to what extent the actual inexistence of marriage in her life and the choices she made to do so, influenced her heroines' lives and their own choices. The Austen family was a part of the middle class society, and as Jones (2009, p. 155) adds, these social ranks could not escape a bad marriage. Undoubtedly, the fact that both Elizabeth and Emma obtained the possibility to marry the ones they loved in the end, despite social differences and traditions, has its source in the reality of Austen's life. As was mentioned in chapter two of this project, women were hardly able to get married for love, especially when the financial and social means entered the question. In addition, this aspect usually resulted in an unhappy marriage and became a burden for both parties.

## **2.4 Chapter conclusion**

There is no question about the presence of autobiographical features in Austen's work. Looking at the environment, setting, the depiction of family and social atmosphere in her novels, it is applicable to her own experience. Considering Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse as characters, the author believes Austen desired to create a portrayal of a character she imagined needed to challenge the society. The qualities these two heroines possess appear to give them the power to do so and create a complexity of their individualities that are not perfect, but different from their contemporaries.

### 3 Women in the works of Austen's contemporaries

In this chapter, the author aims to provide a short discussion of the presence of women's characters of Jane Austen's contemporary writers and those who wrote after her period, but the female protagonists of their works became recognisable as individuals. The comparison with Jane Austen's work aims to provide an explanation why Austen is, among the other writers, most known for her creation of women's characters.

Considering the years between 1770 and 1840, the major significant works of prose fiction in England are the ones written by Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen (Heath, c1961, p. 8). However, there is a number of different authors, in majority female writers, whose works and heroines could be compared and taken into accord with the ones of Austen. While William Heath (c1961, Introduction) claims her works are difficult to recognise within a certain period or a group of contemporary writers, others, like Joseph Warren Beach (1962, p. 78), put Austen into *The Earlier Novelists* era, with the main representatives being Scott and Austen. As Heath (c1961, Introduction) writes, besides Austen and Scott, there are no other writers who would reach the significance of those two; however, as Evans (1948, p. 148) mentions, there are hardly two artists representing one period that are more different. It is for that reason, the author chose to compare Austen's work to the ones of two women novelists of her time – Maria Edgeworth and Frances (or Fanny) Burney.

#### 3.1 Maria Edgeworth

As was mentioned, it is not only Jane Austen or Walter Scott, who can be recognised as known writers of their period. For instance, we can recognise Maria Edgeworth, who in contrast with Austen sets her stories in the Irish environment. She is described as a lively writer, aiming at humorous depiction of the Irish gentry (Beach, 1962, p. 78), which can be compared to Austen's portrayals of the same social classes in England, highly presentable in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* considering the depicted social environment. However, as Beach (1962, p. 78) stresses, Maria Edgeworth lacks Austen's genius of construction and wit in doing so.

Edgeworth's work *Belinda* that was published in 1801 is a novel presenting two women. Lady Delacour, who deals with the presence of a terminal illness and despite her situation keeps a witty attitude, and a young Belinda, a girl described as "*handsome, graceful, sprightly, and highly accomplished*" (quote in Edgeworth, 1986, p. 1), which we could compare to the descriptions of Emma; however, in Belinda's case, her process of learning is different to the ones of Elizabeth Bennet or Emma Woodhouse. Belinda's process of maturing is moulded by

learning from the mistakes of those around her, rather than making them herself and therefore having the same experience as Elizabeth or Emma, which is vital to the development of their characters. An aspect relevant as well to the comparison to Austen is the attitude to marriage in this novel. As in Austen's works, marriage is regarded as a primary aspect of a woman's life in *Belinda*. The main protagonist, Belinda Portman, is a young woman learning about the social environment around her. Eventually, she is given the same destiny as Elizabeth and Emma, her story ends with marriage based on love.

In contrast to Austen, Maria Edgeworth includes an interracial marriage that would be unthinkable to Austen's environment, although this feature was later removed by Edgeworth herself (McDonald, 2011). Additionally, Austen never acknowledges what is not known to her, as she concentrates only on issues concerning her own experience.

Therefore, what Maria Edgeworth possesses in contrast with Austen, is the presence of issues omitted in both *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*. It is the struggle with the terminal illness in the case of Lady Delacour. In the shade of Austen's mastery of working with moral satire and character's development, Edgeworth does not avoid the negative side of human life. In Edgeworth's *Belinda*, the fact of eventual death is present.

As much as Edgeworth's *Belinda* is comparable to Austen, she seems to have never reached her popularity. Reading Edgeworth appears less exciting than reading Austen, provided Austen made her heroines very accessible to the reader. Their development is based on their own mistakes and that makes the heroines appear more realistic than Edgeworth's. Perhaps, this factor could be the one making Austen's heroines more known than the ones of Edgeworth.

It would not be correct to claim that both Emma and Elizabeth overshadow Belinda, though. While Elizabeth is the most accessible heroine of Austen's, and the most popular due to the approachability of her character, Emma stands further from the reader. She is closer to Belinda's character in the means of her personality; however, Emma's individuality emerges with the realisation of her faults, while Belinda's seem to never reach this state of reflection of her doing.

### **3.2 Frances Burney**

Another contemporary of Austen is Frances (or Fanny) Burney. She wrote before Austen did, and her works are considered to be the ultimate influence for the themes of Austen and Edgeworth (Weisser, 2001). Burney, as well as her fellow contemporaries, acknowledges the processes of a young woman's development. Burney's well recognised novel is *Evelina*, published in 1778, where the later influence on Austen is visible. As Hussey (2016) says,



Burney makes use of social satire as well as Austen does, however in Burney's case it exceeds in sharpness.

The main protagonist of the novel is Evelina Anville. Evelina's character is highly recognised through her innocence and kindness. Evelina is slightly younger than Elizabeth or Emma and her development could be more described as an adolescent girl's process of maturing. She is overwhelmed by the patriarchal society and in a number of situations shrinks back to her innocence when facing a challenge or a behaviour odd to her. In contrast with both Elizabeth and Emma, Evelina's shy and kind personality prevents her from growing into the outspoken heroines as both Elizabeth and Emma are. Evelina lacks their spontaneity, however, she is not to be considered a bland character, as she gradually shows a possession of growing social intelligence and wit (Cutting-Gray, 1990). Evelina's learning process is highly shaped by her compliancy in situations that would challenge Elizabeth or Emma. Therefore, in comparison to those two characters, Evelina's individuality appears to be overshadowed by the accessibility of Austen's characters in the manner of their development.

Both Maria Edgeworth and Frances Burney definitely possess an originality of their own when it comes to the female protagonists of their novels, however, in comparison with Austen they seem to lack her approach to a female character, as well as the features of irony and satire in displaying the heroine's life and attitudes, despite Edgeworth being comparable to Austen in this aspect. As Austen was influenced by Burney's work, there are connections to the themes of her novel *Evelina* to Austen's style, however, Jane Austen's thorough process of maturing of the female characters in her novels connected with the manner of moral satire of the social environment and a mastery at being able to create an original, strong character in process of a valuable self-recognition makes Austen's work memorable above her contemporaries.

## **4 Key features of women's world in the novels**

### **4.1 Identification**

For the purposes of this bachelor's project, it is necessary to identify and point out the significant features that create and develop the female characters in the novels. It is important to stress the role of marriage in the heroines' lives. This chapter is also dedicated to the significance and style of education these heroines receive and to what extent it holds its importance in their social development. Not to be omitted, the crucial point is to analyse the contrast between women and men in the novels. It is as well necessary not to avoid the depicted feminist features that can be traced and seen in certain characters of the novels.

The author also aims to tend to the features that Austen does not touch, even though they create a part of a woman's life throughout the times. Sexuality, religion or war are those aspects, which are overlooked and not included by Austen in the novels.

### **4.2 The role of marriage in the novels**

The importance of marriage is one of the most distinguishable features. The duty of a young woman to wed is stressed as a significant point in every woman's life. As is known from the historical discourse and explained in chapter two of this project, women of early modern history, prevailing to the nineteenth century, had to face the idea of marriage, as well as the idea of motherhood, as a primary obligation. It was not only England, but this trait is noticeable throughout the contemporary European society within multiple social classes, as explained in the second chapter of this project.

The role of marriage in the life of a woman of Jane Austen's era, presented in the lives of her characters, is vital. Marriage, within social framework, was regarded as the only means to ensure certain social and economic status, a theme present in most of Austen's novels (Banerjee, 2015). Understandably, this trait appears in both of the novels and plays a major part in a woman's identity, as marriage serves as an indicator of woman's maturity (Beach, 1962, p. 79). Relationships themselves create a critical part of the heroines' lives (Raghuwanshi, 2016).

#### **4.2.1 The theme of marriage in *Emma***

Emma Woodhouse's character is driven towards finding and helping her friend into courtship and marriage as she thinks about it as doing well to her friend. The key role of marriage in the novel *Emma* is without a question the most distinguishable one of the whole story. Marriage is

exposed as the main interest in the life of every woman, as Emma presents numerous times. The importance of finding and settling with a man of a good fortune, well – bred and of good manners is a life worth experience. Only Emma herself considers her own character to be superior to other women and does not want to settle with marriage ideas as ones fit for her.

*“A woman is not to marry a man merely because she is asked, or because he is attached to her, and can write a tolerable letter”* (quote in Austen, *Emma*, p. 42). Quite a bold statement Emma Woodhouse produces after advising the character of Harriet not to settle with a marriage proposal of Mr. Robert Martin. This quote, as well as the fact that Emma herself admits she never wants to marry (Austen, *Emma*, p. 66) shows the possibility that her character has a different view of this matter in contrast to the other characters in the novel. Emma, a woman of high social status, is able to make a decision whether she wants to marry or not. That is quite a remarkable trait, since one would have anticipated her father to choose a husband for her. Therefore, the character of Mr. Woodhouse plays a slightly unconventional part as being an affectionate father, who seems not to care about Emma’s future marriage arrangements. As Miles (2002, pp. 135-136) points out, Mr Woodhouse represents a tradition and a fear of possible changes. Emma is the last immediate family member, who stayed close to him, and Mr. Woodhouse appears to postpone the idea of her marriage in order not to lose her company.

The opinions of Emma on the marriage proposal of Mr. Elton appear striking. Her reaction to this matter is an evidence of the feeling of her superiority and the judgement towards this type of marriage (Austen, *Emma*, p. 104). On the other hand, her supportive attitude towards Harriet’s potential in Mr. Elton’s future as a wife opposes this idea. She is very fond of the ideas of arranging marriages for others, only not for herself. As she states: *“And I am not only, not going to be married, at present, but have very little intention of ever marrying at all?”* (quote in Austen, *Emma*, p. 66)

In this behaviour, that Emma performs, the tone of social prejudice is noticeable. Emma is quick with her judgement of Mr. Robert Martin, when she is acknowledged with the fact that Harriet received his proposal (Austen, *Emma*, p. 49). Emma’s decision to influence Harriet’s choice to refuse Mr. Robert Martin is based upon his social position, she stresses the point that he is only a farmer and Harriet could do better for a husband.

#### **4.2.2 The theme of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice***

*“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”* (quote in Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 1)

Marriage, as well as in *Emma*, is one of the key points of this novel. It undoubtedly plays a vital role in the Bennet family. The only thing the Mrs. Bennet's life is centred around seems to become a proud five time mother-in-law. Upon the historical timeline, this behaviour could be expected, and it appears Mrs. Bennet's reason for such a behaviour is to secure the future of her daughters and so she makes it "*the business of her life*" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 4). Mrs. Bennet's attitude represents the tradition of taking marriage as a duty for every young girl to perform. Her definition as a wife is significant for her character.

Marriage thus appears to be the business of all characters in the novel, as well as the feature Austen, through the character of Elizabeth, criticises. The whole company around Elizabeth Bennet is created by women looking for a husband as a main turning point in their lives. Even Jane is dedicated to find a husband in Bingley's character, highly driven by her mother.

Elizabeth's character creates a bright contrast to this attitude of others. Firstly, it is her act of refusing the marriage proposal from Mr. Collins (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 76). As much as the attitude of Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma* was nearly ignorant towards the idea of his daughter's marriage, the same feature is present in Mr. Bennet's character. His connection to Elizabeth is outstanding in comparison with his other daughters. After her refusal he comforts Elizabeth and expresses his content with her act (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 79). This appears unthinkable for a young woman in her position and situation underlined by the fact that as women, none of the Bennet sisters will be able to inherit the estate after their father's death, which could leave them in a considerably difficult financial situation. Additionally, this situation could be helped by making a connection with Mr. Collins. Elizabeth is definitely being rebellious, in the terms of putting her own interests and feelings first, instead of considering the financial means prior to these, which is a trait in her time basically unknown to the society.

Secondly, Elizabeth's outlook on marriage as an institution is different from others. Elizabeth bases marriage on a mutual agreement and feelings that enable this connection. However, for instance, her friend Charlotte exclaims that marriage and happiness hardly mingle together and it is nearly impossible to expect both of these appear together (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 15).

In comparison with *Emma*, where the importance of marriage plays an essential role for the main protagonist, the same extent cannot be traced in Elizabeth's case. Both of them are aware of what marriage represents, and both of them try to resist the fact in certain ways. The resistance they perform makes them appear different, in times foolish for other characters, but it also makes them outstanding as characters.

### 4.3 Women in patriarchal society

In Austen's period, women's roles were only very slowly changing from those traditional ones as wives and ladies of the house. Women were educated, however, in comparison with men, their opportunities very highly limited.

In both of the novels, education is not a feature substantially present in women's life. Emma Woodhouse's education is known as home education, as a representative of the upper class, Emma receives this type of education as number of other women of her class (Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice: Notes on Education, Marriage, Status of Women etc.*, 2014). Home education presents a sufficient type of education women are allowed to obtain and Austen does not necessarily express any kind of their desire to receive better education. In *Emma*, it is expressed that the character of Harriet Smith receives an education in a boarding school, but other schools, considering women in the novels, are not mentioned in connection with them.

Therefore, it is not known what type of education receive the Bennet sisters. Regarding their social position, they have probably been educated at home as well, as it is known they possess a knowledge of manners and literature. However, in comparison with the men surrounding them, it is obvious women's education did not hold a sufficient importance in their lives.

If one considers the male characters present, there is the need to think of the character qualities that enable the main female protagonists to stand out as such. It could be believed Jane Austen aimed at creating a model male character that would represent the well-bred men of higher social level and would create a great contrast to Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*. Men are vital, simply because they are the creators of the women's positions within a mainly developed patriarchal society, and the novels present them as superiors to women.

As much as the position of men and women was imbalanced in reality, in the novels it is visible in a representative manner. For instance, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's marriage, despite appearing content, is not a balanced one. Mr. Bennet officially manages the household and his dominant position is apparent in a number of situations. For instance, when Mrs. Bennet wants her husband to attend a ball in Netherfield, where a new resident, Mr. Bingley, could have the opportunity to meet one of the Bennet daughters (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 1-3). This particular scene presents Mrs. Bennet's acknowledged inferiority of herself to her husband. In addition, the situation also represents the recognition of women when being presented to others, as women are recognised and defined by their male superiors.

On the other hand, Emma Woodhouse does not hold such a contrast to men as Elizabeth does. The fact is given by her social position, that is superior to Elizabeth's one, as well as Emma's overall attitude to the people surrounding her. Emma is extremely socially prejudiced when it comes to other characters, her ultimate recognition of anyone is based upon their possessions, with the only mild difference in her attitude to Harriet Smith. However, Emma's snobbery is her strongest character quality.

The imbalance of genders as such is presented in *Emma*, for instance in the relationship of Mr. and Mrs. Knightley. As Jones (2009, p. 122) points out, Emma's sister, Isabella Knightley, is a woman who has conformed to her husband. She acknowledges his superiority by accepting his temper rather than moderating it. Jones (2009, p. 122) also mentions, that this aspect contributes to the enjoyment in marriage, which in the case of the Knightleys will differ from the potential marriage of George Knightley. Jones gives the credit for this impression to Jane Austen, reacting to the ideas of Mary Woolstonecraft.<sup>1</sup> Isabella represents the woman of tradition, the woman society expects every woman to be. In contrast with her, Emma is a woman opposing this traditional position in displaying a mind of her own.

#### **4.4 Feminism**

In this manner, considering Elizabeth, Emma and other heroines, it must be thought about the traces of feminism in Austen's work. Austen's time is not entirely known for feminist ideas, such as gender equality in economic or social sphere. All is connected to the traditional roles of women and men as well. Austen herself was not really considered a feminist for a long time (Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice: Notes on Education, Marriage, Status of Women etc.*, 2014). However, she must be acknowledged as one.

Considering the novels, it could be said feminism appears in certain situations as well as a complex thought. For instance, the appearance of a marriage refusal in *Pride and Prejudice* made by Elizabeth based on her own decision is a feminist feature. As was said, women refusing marriage were not often encountered. This trait made its appearance in the nineteenth century and slowly started to enter women's lives. Austen's overall approach to marriage is progressive, as was mentioned in the first chapter of this project. She challenges the traditional attitude to

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<sup>1</sup> Hazel Jones (2009, pp. 121-122) mentions Mary Woolstonecraft's reaction to a work of James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young women*, who stood for definite roles of women as good wives to their husbands. Woolstonecraft, a famous English advocate of women's rights at the end of the eighteenth century, labeled Fordyce's depiction of a woman as "a house slave, whose being is absorbed by a tyrant" and addressed his thoughts: "a tractable, repressed woman rarely made a good companion, while wives with mind of their own were better able to understand and befriend their husbands" (quote in Jones, 2009, p. 122).

this institution with a different approach that her heroines represent. Austen's intention is to stress that woman is not only to be considered as a body, but a mind as well.

There are important points in the novels that could be associated with the ideas of feminism. In both novels Austen addresses issues that women had to face at their time. For instance, Elizabeth's decision to refuse a marriage proposal from Mr. Collins or the fact Jane Bennet was eventually able to marry for love. Elizabeth is definitely independent in her thoughts and opinions. In *Emma*, Emma Woodhouse is believed to be a feminist portrayal of Austen (Hilbrandt, 2017). She appears to be actually independent, and her lack of interest in getting married definitely makes her a feminist, as marriage is not only expected, but it is considered to be a woman's duty to get married. When Emma expresses these thoughts to Harriet, Harriet produces a reaction that underlines the traditional attitude towards marriage (Hilbrandt, 2017), as she refers to Emma's talk as an odd one for a woman (Austen, *Emma*, p. 66).

Jane Austen plays with feminist ideas and showcases them in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. Both heroines have independence in their opinions and independence in selecting their own direction. Austen supports this new, different attitude to marriage in both of them. Elizabeth is able to refuse and Emma is able to not desire to get married.

#### **4.5 Missing features**

Evans (1948, p.146) proposes, that from the beginning of the novels it seems as if Austen's characters live lives untouched by the past or events happening in Europe in her period. Having never left England, as Austen spent her life only in four English towns, the political issues, wars or other events seem not to be a part of her novels. It is not a lie that her heroines never encounter a present issue in Austen's period, and they seem to live a life untouched by illnesses, wars, or for instance, religion. Dorothy Van Ghent (1961, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 99) adds, that Austen's subject matter is truly limited by this fact. Austen keeps to the hills and counties of England, where she knows life well and understands it. She keeps social environment as she knows it herself, and therefore it is no wonder that death, sexual themes, hunger, war, guilt or God do not appeal to her enough to include them in her stories.

Even though it does not have to mean this is limited by her personal inexperience, these features are obviously missing in her novels, and neither Elizabeth nor Emma acknowledge these issues. Van Ghent (1961, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 100) admits, that these features of the human life are simply not needed for the purpose of Austen's stories. They are not necessary for the main concern of her novels – the importance of marriage – and therefore she omits them.

Barnard (1997, p. 117) adds that with Austen's language mannerism based on irony and satire, the involvement of situations including death or acknowledgement of war would be considerably inappropriate. Austen's language is crucial for her novels and their originality and this aspect would degrade the value of it.

According to Miles (2002, p. 160), Austen avoided the theme of sexuality in her novels in order not to support the idea of marriage as a primary relationship between bodies, but a connection between souls. She supports the progress of the attitude towards marriage as an institution of love, not social interest, which would enable women to be considered as equivalent human beings to men. Therefore, her avoidance of sexuality is understandable. In Austen's novels, this aspect supports the historical progress in the attitude towards woman as a human being, as well as the change in the approach to the institution of marriage.

Despite the fact that Austen's heroines lack certain aspects of life in their storylines, it does not seem to be necessary for their development in the novels. The main focus is centred on themes that Austen felt she needed to acknowledge and criticise and apparently these aspects of life did not need to be among them. It certainly has its reason. For the time manner of the novels, it would not be profitable if any of these aspects of life were added. Besides, it would be difficult to include them in a story dealing with issues of gender and social inequality and certainly, it would not benefit the language and the stories of the novels. Acknowledging current political issues, wars, or adding sexuality as a theme would distract the themes that Jane Austen meant to approach, such as social prejudice, attitude to marriage or development of a woman in the social conditions of her time.



## 5 The female characters

The aim of this chapter is to analyse and characterise the female characters in the novel *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* based on the presented key points of a woman's life identified in Jane Austen's studied works that serve as this bachelor project's fundamental sources for research. In this chapter, the author critically analyses the characters and strives for the objective of uncovering and development of their individualities and identities.

The novels present a variety of female characters of different positions within the social hierarchy, women of various opinions and life fundamentals that create a bright contrast to each other. Present are women of aristocracy, middle class as well as the women in the roles of servants and on the poorest social level. The characters of Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse are the protagonists of studied novels. Their characters could be analysed based on their contrast to other characters and to one another. The individuality of each one of them stands out in the crowd of other female characters in the novels. In this chapter, the author's goal is to emphasise these contrasts and furthermore define the distinction of the characters.

### 5.1 Elizabeth Bennet

In the means of the most noticeable and memorable female character of the novel, we recognise Elizabeth Bennet as an embodiment of womanhood as liked to be thought of. According to Siddika (2013), she is the presence of the perfect woman created by the characteristics of unconventional intelligence and strong dedication. Being ethical within her relationships regarding her family, friends and importantly, with the character of Mr. Darcy, and not letting herself to be downgraded or manipulated by any of the seemingly superior characters, creates an image of what some call a character of perfect womanhood.

According to Bush (1975, p. 91), Elizabeth is not one of the flawless heroines, but she represents the sense of thorough humanity complete with her satirical wit or her sense of independence. Austen's usage of ironical language highlights Elizabeth's character significantly and enables her to present a bold, sharp and witty personality. The language mannerism of Austen is a trait that enables her heroines to become original, because the reader is able to witness the women's development, their desires, faults and their attitude, underlined by Austen's mastery of irony in a language that targets the faults of society as well as the heroines do themselves.

Undoubtedly, Elizabeth Bennet's character is one of the most known female characters in the history of literature, for her uniqueness and boldness, unthinkable for a woman of her

times. As was stressed in chapter two, women's journey towards being able to refuse anything, for instance a marriage proposal (as marriage itself defined a woman) was a strenuous and a difficult one. Austen, in the character of Elizabeth Bennet, challenges these standards. She is not afraid of breaking them and making a way for a woman who is very capable of making life decisions herself.

Others argue that Elizabeth is not a perfect character. For instance, Robert Miles (2002, p. 114), in his work dealing with an analysis of Austen's characters development, emphasises the importance of the self-observance, self-reflection and critical outlook developing with Elizabeth's process of learning. The key point of her character is developing the accessibility and willingness to accept the possibility of a wrong judgement or a preconceived notion based upon a fixed opinion, as one can witness within her first opinion on Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy. One is able to recognise Darcy's character in this matter as the reason of Elizabeth's learning process. His character is the one making her question her judgement and is slowly changing her attitude towards himself. As Miles (2002, p. 115) also points out, that one cannot omit the important role of the indirect speech of Elizabeth. While Darcy's thoughts are kept hidden, the reader is there to witness Elizabeth's mind process in conveying Darcy's character. Darcy's character is known only by the results of his behaviour while Elizabeth's is learned and comprehended as a process. Austen's approach in this matter means a very realistic progress the characters are experiencing and is brilliant in its honest picture of allowing the reader to witness the process of Elizabeth's maturing.

Another important feature of Elizabeth's process of realisation of her mistakes in judgement is represented by the character of Mr. Wickham. As Barnard (1997, p. 118) mentions, Elizabeth's most dangerous moment of her first judgement almost makes her fall in the hands of Mr. Wickham, where his story of the betrayal of Mr. Darcy is in Elizabeth's mind underlined by Darcy's behaviour towards her and she immediately accepts it.

This insight on a character's process of development is crucial for the outlook on Elizabeth in the terms of her as an individual. Austen lets her develop gradually. As Miles (2002, p. 27) states, Elizabeth is not a stoic character, nor could she be acknowledged as an unmoving figurine. She is growing and developing and her character is slowly overshadowing the other women, simply for the reason that she moves forward. Having this quality enables her to become an individuality, a character recognisable for its uniqueness. The same features are visible in Emma Woodhouse's character as well. Their development as human beings, learning from their own mistakes, is a vital trait of both characters.

Miles (2002, p. 118) also stresses the point of Elizabeth's personality when it comes to her intentions. He mentions the line where she admits to herself, while overlooking the Pemberley estate, that this location is quite a magnificent one despite her refusing Darcy's earlier proposal. The thought crossing her mind is, perhaps, unexpected, where she finds herself thinking of being the wife of the owner of Pemberley (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 201). In contrast to her feminist thoughts that Austen embodies in Elizabeth and her liberated decisions concerning her potential marriage, she lets her have the moment of financial situation realisation. As a woman, Elizabeth still stands by financial means, however, not to be forgotten, her first refusal of Mr. Darcy's proposal was made upon her decision not to settle with a man she, at that time, felt not in love with and that, according to her misjudgement, had made arrangements that destroyed her sister's hopes of getting married to Mr. Bingley (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 133). An act that could be understood as Elizabeth's recognition of her own value in not marrying a man possessing these qualities, based on what she thinks Darcy had done.

Elizabeth finds herself in love with the place (Pemberley estate and the surrounding nature), considering being married to Mr. Darcy while looking over the area. Miles (2002, p. 118) argues that in this moment Elizabeth is conforming to the social values and is attracted to the ideas, on the other hand, he makes an excellent point in stating that Elizabeth's gradual process of getting to know Mr. Darcy is performed without his actual presence. It seems to be a crucial point of her learning process as such, where she is enabled to witness Darcy's character without him being present. Elizabeth recognises Darcy's personality throughout the place itself and she is enabled to witness his inner self while overlooking the place.

When it comes to love, it appears to be a primary criterion for Elizabeth, as she differs from other women in society, for whom love is pushed behind other means. The ability of a woman to have the opportunity to put love before economic status, age, or social position is quite a move by Austen. Within her period, historically, this is not an act to be known, understood or accepted. By allowing Elizabeth to refuse, Austen presented a woman capable of doing so in her times and therefore, she allowed the woman to put herself in the first place.

### **5.1.1 Mr. Darcy**

The heroine's relationship with the character of Mr. Darcy is very significant. Not only the point of gender, difference in their social position but also the manner of the novel *Pride and Prejudice* that expressed both of them as characters in a process of learning and in bright contrast to each other. They differ in gender and social position, on the other hand, there is not

a big difference in their first impressions of each other, where Darcy judges Elizabeth by her looks and she does by his judgement.

“*She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me.*” (quote in Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 7)

Darcy’s character is highly challenging for Elizabeth. His behaviour towards her forces her to work with her judgements and her attitude. Darcy is Elizabeth’s subject of learning, as well as she is his. As Miles (2002, pp. 113-121) also explains, at first, they face a phase of despising each other, for both of them appreciate different values. Each of them represents the conflict of a value of person. Darcy judges upon the outer appearance, while Elizabeth is driven towards the inner side of a person. Both attitudes are justifiable within their own environments and characters, but they are not acceptable if meant to interact with each other. Throughout the relationship of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, Austen presents the moralist plot of a first judgement. Darcy’s character is as difficult to uncover to the last chapter, as it is in reality, and Austen is brilliant at not letting too much known about him, exactly as his character does in the novel.

In all, undoubtedly, Elizabeth Bennet represents a strong female individual, a nonconformist character embodying the values of a contradiction towards the social standards and expectations. Additionally, though, she as well represents the need to develop and learn. Although she is considered to be a portrayal of a perfect womanhood, she has her flaws. The perfect could stay with her process of realising them and working on them.

### **5.1.2 Mrs. Bennet**

The contrasts between the character of Elizabeth and other female characters can be noticed easily. One of the most noticeable ones is created by the different attitudes towards important decisions created by Elizabeth and by her mother, Mrs. Bennet.

The differences are not only explicable in the manner of age or the generation gap, but also within the symbolic attitudes towards society in general, in which these two seem to differ significantly. Mrs. Bennet signifies the values and objectives of a woman of her class and era – her target is to wed all her daughters so none stays unmarried. The degree of her strive is highlighted numerous times during the whole novel, as, for instance, in the seventh chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, pp. 18-23), where sick Jane is left at the Bingley’s house with Elizabeth tending to her. Her mother seeks this time as a good opportunity for Jane and Mr. Bingley getting closer to each other, and refuses to interfere by visiting her sick daughter. This trait, which Mrs. Bennet possesses contributes to the overall appearance of her character. To

get to know her personality and her life, a great source are the conversations between her and her husband. Filled with humorous attitude towards the behaviour of his wife, Mr. Bennet is a great contrast to her character, as can be appreciated for instance in the very first dialogue of the novel (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 1).

Mrs. Bennet's personality is highly defined by her attitude to marriage. Seeing that as the most significant part of a woman's life and social development, she underlines the importance of this life event as a part of woman's fate. In high contrast with her daughter Elizabeth, who dares to turn down a marriage proposal, of which her mother highly disapproves. These two represent the clash of a woman's choice and actual opportunities. Mrs. Bennet is a settled wife, doing what is expected of her – being a wife, a mother, and so she expects the same of her daughters.

The character value of her possible sons-in-law are secondary to their wealth. As she presents in multiple conversations with Mr. Bennet, the ownings and richness of the potential grooms is what matters the most. Not only to her, but to her husband as well. For instance, Mr. Bingley's physical traits are inferior to his possessions as well as Mr. Darcy's. Even though Mr. Bennet acknowledges Elizabeth's happiness in her decision to marry Mr. Darcy, the first thought belongs to the number of carriages Elizabeth will gain by this marriage, in other words how wealthy she will be as Darcy's wife (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 264). As is visible, a wealthy husband is a must. Thinking of women, the contrast is palpable, as in their case the most important features being judged are beauty and family (social position).

### **5.1.3 The Bennet sisters**

The attitude Mrs. Bennet takes on is reflected greatly in her daughters. The oldest one, Jane, is undeniably considered intelligent, and of course, beautiful, as important as physical traits are in Austen's novels. For instance, physical beauty, which Jane Bennet is gifted with, creates an important trait based upon which women are judged and selected by the male part of society. As was mentioned previously in the analysis of Elizabeth Bennet, this feature is represented for instance in Darcy's first judgement of Elizabeth.

The Bennet sisters, individually, but as well as a whole group, are defining characters. A noticeable contrast is present in the characters of Jane and Elizabeth and the youngest sisters Kitty (Catherine) and Lydia. The age difference definitely creates a gap their behaviour could be judged upon, but so does the type of relationships present between these four characters, as well as their acquaintances and people around them. As of the individualities, the sisters seem to be daughters of different minds and environments. While Elizabeth and Jane are the ones

readers recognise as thoughtful, possessing social intelligence and a noticeable amount of social mannerism, Kitty and Lydia are on a much different note. They are depicted as reckless, lacking a certain social knowledge and good manners. Definitely, it is given by their lack of experience, their young age, but considerably also by the character of their mother, whose values and character qualities are obvious in these two sisters.

The character of Mary Bennet is not to be forgotten. Unlike her sisters who all seem to be strong and unique characters, the one of Mary makes a bland impression and fades into the background. However, by her acting, such as playing the piano or talking about certain topics she only tries to stand out among her sisters who all seem to ,outshine‘ her‘ (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 13). The fact that she is caught between these two couples of sisters and neither of them is the one for her to fit in could be interpreted as another part of womanhood and represent the variety of women characters. In a manner, Austen is considerably negative to Mary’s character, whom she describes as the only plain character of the family (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 16). That implies Mary Bennet is not an outstanding character in knowledge, manners, or beauty. However, in contrast with her sisters, she is simply overshadowed by their blooming characters, especially the ones of Elizabeth and Lydia.

Mary Bennet, playing a piano or talking at dinner when nobody is interested in the topic of her monologue, is a woman desperately wanting to be a part of the world of not only her sisters, but her family as well. The fact that Mrs. Bennet cradles more interest in the rest of the sisters is very palpable, as well as Mary’s attempts to be noticed.

#### **5.1.4 Women of the upper class**

Going back to Elizabeth and the reason for her originality in not only the story, but among female characters overall, it is a must to mention the other female characters that contrast with hers. With her social position, values and character qualities, Caroline Bingley should possess the best mannerism and social intelligence among other females in the novel. However, Caroline’s character, as well as the majority of those who are a part of the upper class, tend to be gifted with negative qualities by Austen. As other women of her class, she is socially prejudiced. For instance, regarding the attitude towards characters inferior to her, Caroline Bingley creates an obvious contrast to Elizabeth. Her personality is hostile and sharp, however, presented from the point of view of her class, she is, perhaps, what would be expected of her in this place, Austen’s objective being a mocking criticism of these social classes. As much as Elizabeth grows to be her opposite, the contrast is gradually intensified.

Another female character very contrastive to the one of Elizabeth's is the persona of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, a wealthy aristocratic woman of a high class and name, yet the one with probably the least amount of emotions and degree of morality out of the whole number of female characters. Her incapability of acceptance of a possible mixed class marriage is demoralising. Representing the traditions of previous centuries, she is not a likable character, seemingly because she is so contrastive and very conservative in her opinions of young woman's interests, as she presents while dining with Elizabeth, Darcy, the Collins and Fitzwilliam (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 116). She is not discrete with her opinion of a young woman's maturing being supervised only by her parents without the presence of a governess. The ultimacy of her social stiffness is her visit to the Bennets' house in order to ensure that Elizabeth is in no possible case attempting to marry Mr. Darcy (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 248).

### **5.1.5 Charlotte Collins**

Significant part of Elizabeth's character emerges due to presence of Ms. Charlotte Lucas, later Mrs. Collins when married. As friends, the characters are tightened by a bond since their childhood. They are similar in their pleasant nature, yet so different in their outlook and plans for future. For Charlotte, a marriage is a must and not necessarily connected to happiness or love (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 15).

Her character is highly defined by her lower self-esteem created by being convinced of not possessing physical attractiveness and reaching a higher age than expected of a single woman in society. Her character represents the limitations for women – if not defined by husbands, or parents (fathers), she does not feel defined at all. That is when her character cannot find peace with Elizabeth's who is defined as a pretty woman and by being younger than Charlotte, she has the possibilities to acquire what Charlotte yearns for – a marriage.

## **5.2 Emma Woodhouse**

For the purpose of this project, the character of Emma Woodhouse from the novel *Emma* was chosen for her outstanding character and a social position that is different from Elizabeth Bennet's one. Despite both novels' setting being nearly the same, the social class of the heroines differs. And so do their attitudes and character qualities in certain aspects.

It is known that when Jane Austen created the novel *Emma*, her intention was to create a heroine who would be disliked by everyone but her (Eugene Goodheart, 2008). Truthful to her statement, she managed to present a young woman of a friendly, but manipulative and naïve

character, that the reader is acknowledged with in the very first paragraph of the first chapter. Considering Elizabeth Bennet's described perfection in the means of womanhood, as was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Emma and Elizabeth appear to have two completely different ways of being recognised, and it is not only the characters, but also the novels themselves seem to differ significantly. Sir Walter Scott, in his review of *Emma*, published in the *Discussions of Jane Austen* (Heath, c1961, p. 8) claims that the novel has less to say than any other novel of Austen's. Truth to be said, what the novel presents, is an environment of prejudice mainly seen through the eyes of Emma, whose heavily present defective values are the ones the reader understands her environment with. As Miles (2002, p. 136) points out, it is difficult to recognise Emma's snobbery as a faulty behaviour as the novel is narrated in Emma's indirect speech.

Emma Woodhouse is the main protagonist of the novel *Emma*. She is a young noble woman who is considered to be a member of upper class. Living with her father, Emma, a highly sociable creature, indulges in relationships with neighbours, old family friends and nearly anyone, whom she considers to be worth of her company. Emma's main interest appears to be making arrangements of marriages for people around her. Having been successful once, with her former governess, she keeps on making sure all of the ones who she knows find their partner as well. She is deeply mistaken while trying to make a match for Harriet Smith, however, her recognition of her misjudgement is a long and gradual process.

Emma's process of learning and self-recognition is as important as in the case of Elizabeth. Like in *Pride and Prejudice*, the first sentence of the novel is very telling:

*"Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her."* (quote in Austen, *Emma*, p. 1)

The reader is thus able to acquire a very good impression of the aspects of Emma's life and is able to obtain a good impression of her character as well. Emma is a woman in possession of all a human could possibly desire – wealth, comfortable living and there is nothing that she would need to stress about. If taken into consideration, it could imply that if there is any fault in Emma's personality, it would be very difficult to correct it, as this position would give her no reasons to do so. Although a few lines later it is admitted that Emma possesses a certain feeling of superiority which is not to her benefit, it is also said it sadly does not stop her in her acts.

Therefore, Emma's gradual movement towards acknowledging the faults of her behaviour is considerably longer and more strenuous than Elizabeth Bennet's. In the first



argument with Mr. Knightley, Emma is completely convinced of her own unquestionable understanding of the situation. She is convinced of her insight into Mr. Elton's feelings towards Harriet (Austen, *Emma*, pp. 44-54). Her perspective, however, heavily differs to Mr. George Knightley's and it is the first argument in the novel, where it appears possible to understand Emma's behaviour as not an acceptable one.

The persuasion of her own perfection in judgement absolutely disables her from rational decisions and she is not afraid to forward them onto others, as in the case of Harriet. The style of Austen's writing only complements this aspect. As much as Emma's misconception reaches when it comes to understanding what is rational and what is not, to the similar extent the reader understands her decisions and it is difficult to gain a fresh outlook on situations, where Emma's decision making is absolutely misguided. In this manner, the reader is learning as fast as Emma is.

As well as in the case of Elizabeth, and the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and the main protagonist Emma Woodhouse are given the voice by Austen's writing style, blooming with irony and wit. As Barnard (1997, p. 120) says, Austen in both novels keeps a very realistic outlook on life that she sprinkles with her manner of irony and this aspect makes her original.

### **5.2.1 Harriet Smith**

As well as in the case of Elizabeth Bennet, the other women present in the novel *Emma* could be recognised within a certain contrastive aspects that differentiate them from Emma's character. One of them is Harriet Smith, a young woman of a lower class attending a boarding school in Highbury.

A dear friendship between Harriet and Emma surprisingly exists despite Emma's social prejudice towards members of other classes, such as Mr. Robert Martin. Emma's liking of Harriet could be explained as purely using Harriet as her object of manipulation and amusement of herself in her matchmaking attempts. However, Emma appears to be truly delighted with Harriet's presence and a nature of Emma's personality is encountered in Harriet that is not in other characters. Emma appears to truly care for Harriet's well-being, even though her shadowed judgement prevents her from playing in Harriet's favour. On Harriet's side, her character is highly influenced by her youthful inexperience and naivety. She is a blind trustee of Emma's opinions and decisions, and even though her initial reaction towards Mr. Martin's proposal would have been different, she mindlessly follows Emma's judgement (Austen, *Emma*, pp. 41-44).

However, Harriet is essential to Emma's development as a character. The unsuccessful attempt of matching Harriet with Mr. Elton leaves a trace of sadness and unreachd accomplishment in Emma. Emma feels sad for Harriet in her situation and acknowledges her possible fault in judgement, that is later also influenced by other characters, as well as Harriet's, when Emma makes a wrong assumption once again considering a possible connection between Harriet and Mr. Frank Churchill (Austen, *Emma*, pp. 306-307). As it seems, Harriet creates one of Emma's means of learning about her faults.

### **5.2.2 Mr. Knightley**

In the case of Elizabeth Bennet Mr. Darcy played an important role in the gradual process of her character's maturing, and with respect to Emma Woodhouse, the same role is encountered in the character of George Knightley. He appears to be the only one daring to oppose her ideas and create a critic of her own doings. He is very sharp with his criticism towards Emma's involvement in Harriet's proposal situation, as he believes she should have accepted Mr. Martin's proposal. In *Emma*, the character of Mr. Knightley plays a teaching persona to Emma, where his own judgement is usually right and Emma needs to gradually acknowledge the truth of it. In the end of the novel, the process is finished with the marriage of Emma and Knightley, where Emma herself admits her faults to him.

### **5.2.3 Jane Fairfax**

Jane Fairfax is a character that challenges Emma. As Miles (2002, p. 141) stresses, the moment, when Jane Fairfax enters the story significantly, is in the twentieth chapter, where Jane acquires a presentation with the usage of indirect speech (Austen, *Emma*, p. 122). Prior to Jane's voice that is not influenced by Emma's point of view, it is known that Emma dislikes Jane Fairfax. The reason does not reveal itself for some time and it seems justified until Jane's character is revealed. Until that time, the only attitude on Jane is Emma's one.

Jane is a complete opposite to Emma in everything but her age. Jane is described as a kind, clever young woman, possessing good mannerism as well as good education. There is a noticeable tension between Emma and Jane, whom Emma seems to envy her character qualities. As Mr. Knightley (Austen, *Emma*, p. 125) brightly acknowledges, Emma's found fault in Jane is due to her accomplishments that Emma herself would like to achieve.

### **5.2.4 Mrs. Elton**

Mrs. Elton creates an embodiment of the woman of the upper class comparable to Caroline Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*. She is wealthy, but lacks good manners as well as any presence

of a process of learning, in contrast to Emma. Therefore, the dislike Emma takes to Mrs. Elton is very understandable. Mrs. Elton's behaviour towards others is unacceptable and her non recognition of such a situation even worsens the acceptance of her character for the reader as well as it does for Emma herself. By acknowledging unwanted faults in Mrs Elton's behaviour, Emma is able to realise that she despises them and does not desire to take on such behaviour as Mrs. Elton. Mrs. Elton creates a part of Emma's self-recognition and understanding of her own faults.

### **5.3 Chapter conclusion**

The main point of both characters' individualities is their process of development by realising their own mistakes in judgement, and is expressed in their changing attitude throughout the story. Both Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet are allowed to stand out due to their contrast with other characters, who serve them as means of learning. Despite the difference in their social background, both of them are endowed with social prejudice towards others. Both of them perform a journey of realisation that the importance of inner qualities is more important to see than the opposite one. Not to be forgotten, both Elizabeth and Emma are connected in representing a challenge for their social environment. They are outstanding for their nonconformism, and instead use self-recognition as the means of making a progress.

Both Emma and Elizabeth complete this journey with lessons to those who hold social prejudice towards them and both of them are allowed to be rewarded for it by love and marriage entering their lives.

## Conclusion

Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet are different. One of them comes from a wealthy family, the other one does not. One of them is opposed to the idea of marriage for herself completely, the other one only strives for marriage based on mutual love and respect. Elizabeth comes from a full family, Emma's only immediate family is her father. However, there are many aspects connecting them. Both of them are victims of their own first judgement and both of them act on it. Elizabeth, as well as Emma, is a part of a social construct that expects women to marry and to put financial means before their own feelings. Both of them undergo a process of learning, that makes them realise their first impressions and judgements are wrong and they need to find a deeper understanding of issues before they judge them or try to change them.

Austen's originality that lies in these two characters is created by their accessibility in the manner of the reader's opportunity to perceive their environment through their eyes, to recognise the faults of their behaviour and the behaviour of others and to be able to witness the process of their maturing as well as recognise the features that enable this process to happen. It involves a certain amount of independence, the willingness to learn, and the ability that is allowing them to say what they think out loud. It involves representing a different type of a woman than was known in the times of Jane Austen. To create such a woman and deal with the issues Austen did by means of Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse involves a writer not afraid to uncover the women's world. Jane Austen maybe did not create perfect heroines, but she created women that could be identified with in terms of what they are dealing with. And, certainly, the popularity, that her novels have reached, was underlined by her unmistakable style of ironical portrait of those issues that enabled her to stand out above other writers of her times, such as Frances Burney or Maria Edgeworth, who dealt with the same issues in their novels.

With all the faults encountered, Austen allowed the heroines to be rewarded for their endeavours. She gifted them with marriage in the end and that has also gifted me, and perhaps, other readers as well, that with any aspect to be criticised and improved in people and in society, there is the possibility to accomplish it. And that being a woman is not limiting anymore.

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## Résumé

Bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou a charakteristikou podstaty jedinečnosti ženských postav představených v pracích Jane Austenové z perspektivy dvou jejích významných románů – *Pýcha a předsudek* (1813) a jejího pozdějšího díla *Emma* (1815). Tato práce se zaměřila na studium života hlavních postav těchto prací, - Elizabeth Bennetové a Emmy Woodhouseové a analýzu života ženy z pohledu těchto postav. Práce poskytuje porovnání prostředí románů, které Jane Austenová zasadila do života anglické venkovské aristokracie, s historickým vývojem života žen a vývojem jejich tradičního postavení v devatenáctém století. Odhaluje těžkosti života žen, které se odvážily oponovat konzervativnímu systému a umožnily jak jeho, tak svou změnu. Elizabeth i Emma představují hrdinky, které svou nezávislostí představovaly výzvu těmto zatvrzelým pořádkům. Bakalářská práce se také krátce zabývá srovnáním hrdinek obou románů s ženskými postavami románů soudobých spisovatelek Jane Austenové pro zhodnocení její dovednosti vytvořit individualitu ženy, která je vlastní pouze jí samotné.

## Annotation

<b>Jméno a příjmení:</b>	Kateřina Zágorová
<b>Katedra nebo ústav:</b>	Ústav cizích jazyků
<b>Vedoucí práce:</b>	Mgr. Petr Anténe, Ph.D.
<b>Rok obhajoby:</b>	2018

<b>Název práce:</b>	Ženská individualita v románech Jane Austen
<b>Název v angličtině:</b>	Feminine individuality in Jane Austen's novels
<b>Anotace práce:</b>	Bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou a charakteristikou podstaty jedinečnosti ženských postav představených v pracích Jane Austenové z perspektivy dvou jejích významných románů – <i>Pýcha a předsudek</i> (1813) a <i>Emma</i> (1815). Tato práce se zaměřuje na studium života hlavních postav a analýzu života ženy v těchto románech a také poskytuje porovnání s tradičním postavením ženy v devatenáctém století.
<b>Klíčová slova:</b>	Jane Austenová, žena, individualita, manželství, tradice, společenské prostředí, Elizabeth Bennetová, Emma Woodhouseová
<b>Anotace v angličtině:</b>	The project aims to analyse and characterise the uniqueness of the women of Jane Austen's creations within the perspective of her two well-recognised novels – <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> (1813) and <i>Emma</i> (1815). This project studies the life of the main protagonists and analyses the life of women in these novels as well as provides a comparison with the traditional position of women in the nineteenth century.
<b>Klíčová slova v angličtině:</b>	Jane Austen, woman, individuality, marriage, tradition, social environment, Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse
<b>Přílohy vázané v práci:</b>	CD
<b>Rozsah práce:</b>	42 s.
<b>Jazyk práce:</b>	Anglický jazyk