

Palacký University Olomouc

Faculty of Arts

Department of English and American Studies

Jane Austen: Parenthood

Bachelor Thesis

Tereza Vaňková B7310

English Philology

Supervisor: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

Olomouc 2017

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne 4. 5. 2017

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Tereza Vaňková

Děkuji Mgr. Emě Jelínkové, Ph.D. za pomoc při vypracování této práce a za poskytnutí odborných materiálů a cenných rad.

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Introduction

Jane Austen was an English novelist of a Georgian era, best known for her six novels which criticise the English gentry of the late 18th century and beginning of the 19th century—that is the gentry she knew from her own experience. The main themes of most discussions led on her novels are based on her view on marriage, the female protagonists—her heroines and social classes. Another prominent topic of literary criticism focused on Austen’s work is family and specifically parenting and its influence on the development of Austen’s heroines and their siblings. Since her heroines are young girls, their families and education are the two main impacts on their personalities. It will be analysed later in the thesis how significant those two impacts are and how their influence can vary from sibling to sibling.

Each example of bad or insufficient parenting has its reason and influences her heroines in certain ways. Claudia L. Johnson’s suggestion regarding the inadequate or missing fathers is that ‘Austen, as critics have long recognized, typically removes her heroines from the paternal above altogether precisely in order to free them [of obedience] and to oblige them to think and act for themselves’.¹ Moreover, Lloyd W. Brown examines the mother figures and claims that ‘maternal failure [is] an extension of the inadequacies of the woman’s education and individual development’.² Mothers at that time should provide their children with social education, and generally help them with individual development (unless there were governesses). In Austen’s novels, these mothers are mostly failing. In ‘Family Life’ D.W. Harding says that there are some ‘limitations of the family as a psychological matrix and as a social institution’.³ These limitations are for example apparent on the characters Maria and Julia Bertram whose parents failed in their upbringing. Austen often introduces children who could not obtain (through their parents) a perception of socially acceptable behavior. According to these critics, it could be concluded that the lack of relationship with parents might mostly negatively shape the social skills of Austen’s heroines or their siblings.

¹ Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 84.

² Lloyd W. Brown, ‘The Business of Marrying and Mothering,’ in *Jane Austen’s Achievement*, ed. Juliet McMaster (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979), 39.

³ D.W. Harding, ‘Family Life in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,’ in *Regulated Hatred and Other Essays on Jane Austen*, ed. Monica Lawlor (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 30.

This thesis will attempt to find out what relationships do the heroines and their siblings have with their parents, how these relationships influence their decisions and character development, and whether some of the character traits of the parents might be inherited by the child. Additional focus will be also put on surrogate parents, because the reader might wonder if they prove to be a sufficient substitute for the real parent.

In order to find out the particular parent-child patterns, her six main novels—*Emma*, *Mansfield Park*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*—will be analysed. To put the relationships in the perspective of Austen's times, the general parent-child relationships and common upbringing of children in Austen's England will be examined through Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*.

1. Jane's Experience

The biographies written by various authors differ significantly in their view on Austen's own experience with the parent-child relationship. It could be said that the memoirs written by her relations are too positive in order to portray her family in pleasant light. 'There was a firm family unison, never broken but by death'⁴ wrote Austen's niece Caroline and it seems to be true, because the family would stick together in the rough times. Nevertheless, Jane's childhood experience is full of trauma from being abandoned several times during the first ten years of her life.

It was not unusual in Austen's times to give the children to be wet-nursed for several years before they were *socially acceptable*, however, Jane spent more time bonding with her mother during breastfeeding than her siblings, because she was born in a harsh winter. This made her exile harder. Soon after she came back home, she was sent to boarding school at the age of seven and later again at the age of nine. Her sister Cassandra, who by that time according to Claire Tomalin substituted Jane's always busy mother, accompanied her in the boarding schools. Tomalin then argues that 'the emotional distance between child and mother is obvious throughout [Jane's] life'.⁵ It also influenced Jane's character which became defensive, less bold in showing her affection, wary of rejection on the outside, however, as is clear from her novels, still very sensible on the inside. One might wonder whether she remained a maid, because of the lack of affection she received as a child and adolescent. Mrs. Austen was a very active woman, she had to take care not only of her children, but of the students of her husband as well as for the garden, poultry and dairy, thus not much time remained for her daughters. Moreover, she seemed to prefer the company of different people than Jane and thus different personalities. There was also a large age gap between Mrs. Austen and Jane which did not aid their relationship.

This certainly contrasts with the account of Austen's childhood by her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh who wrote in his memoir that: 'it cannot be doubted that her early years were bright and happy, living, as she did, with indulgent parents, in

⁴ Caroline Austen, 'My Aunt Jane Austen: A Memoir,' in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessment Volume I*, ed. Ian Littlewood (Cornwall: MPG Books Ltd., 1998), 46.

⁵ Claire Tomalin, '1775,' in *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), Kindle edition.

cheerful home, not without agreeable variety of society'.⁶ Mrs. Austen was not as indulgent as she is described here, for example she did not mind sending her daughters away or letting one of her sons be adopted by a relative as opposed to Mr. Austen who 'was less keen on'⁷ any of these decisions. Jane was probably closer to her father with whom she shared the love for 'the general gossip about books and authors'⁸ and who would let her from quite young age use his library. He is described as kind man interested in his children. He was also very proud of Jane's literature and supported her in not only buying her the expensive paper but also writing to the publishers. Although her mother liked Jane's writing as well, she always thought of Jane's brother James as the writer of the family which might have been caused by his style being similar to her own.

In her later life, more specifically when Jane was twenty-five, another trauma would hit her when she was told by her parents that they are leaving her so familiar and beloved home and move to Bath. She would despise the idea, and also feel 'a stinging sense of humiliation at any idea of being paraded in the marriage market'.⁹ This decision would certainly put another bar between her and her parents.

Nevertheless, Austen's own relationship to the children around her in her adult life was highly praised by the children themselves. Her niece Caroline Austen wrote that 'her charm to children was great sweetness of manner-she seemed to love you, and you loved her naturally in return'.¹⁰ It seems that she would overcome her fear of rejection in the presence of children, and would want them to feel her love, because she herself was never sure of her parent's affection.

Based on these accounts, it appears that Austen's novels, containing mostly unsatisfactory parents, relates at least in some way to her experience, and might stand as a warning to the society to be wary of some types of behaviour in upbringing of children. All her novels contain some kind of a critique of the society of her times, and parenting, it seems, should not be omitted.

⁶ Austen-Leigh, 'A Memoir of Jane Austen,' 75.

⁷ Claire Tomalin, 'School,' in *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), Kindle edition.

⁸ Claire Harman, *Jane's Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered the World* (Great Britain: Canongate Books, 2009), 42.

⁹ Claire Tomalin, 'Twenty-five,' in *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), Kindle edition.

¹⁰ Austen, 'My Aunt Jane Austen: A Memoir,' 45.

2. Upbringing in Austen's England

In the present-day raising children is much different from the turn of the 18th century. Parents are constantly provided with literature, studies and documents on nurture and child-care. There are more laws protecting children, and parents can be punished for practices which were quite usual in Austen's England. The relationship between parent and child is, therefore, much more intimate than before. In 18th and 19th century England parents kept more of an emotional distance from their children, not only because the rate of infant and child mortality was much higher, but also because there was no knowledge of the strong bond between mother and child, and thus children were 'handed about freely'¹¹ to the wet-nurses (complete strangers).

From Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* it is clear that in the second half of the 17th century families were rather close. The families 'developed much warmer affective relations between husband and wife and between parents and children'¹², however, they were still far from the contemporary ones. Children were identified as 'a special status group, distinct from adults'¹³ which means that they were given different information than an adult (e.g. about sex and death). There was also a beginning of a belief that father should care for, shape and influence his children only till their adulthood. Children should be, therefore, left alone to decide, for example, who they are going to marry, thus 'marriage ceased to be mainly an artificial but necessary constrain (...), and became instead a prime source of personal pleasure, both emotional and sexual'¹⁴, however, as many other historians point out, marriage still remained an institution of reason rather than love, because women without fathers or husbands were practically left without income.

Families in the 17th and 18th centuries were usually large, the average mother had 7-8 births, but usually about third of the children died before the age of 15—this was more usual in the towns, children in countryside had a better chance of surviving. As mentioned before, parents were more emotionally distant from their children than

¹¹ Claire Tomalin, '1775,' in *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), Kindle edition.

¹² Lawrence Stone, 'The Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family 1640-1800,' in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (England: Penguin Books, 1990), 149.

¹³ Stone, 'The Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family 1640-1800,' 149.

¹⁴ Stone, 'The Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family 1640-1800,' 165.

nowadays, nevertheless, they started to ‘recognise that each child, even if it lived for only a few hours or days, had its own unique individuality’¹⁵ and so the society in Austen’s England began to be more child-oriented. More children’s books and toy-shops appeared, and educational games were introduced. ‘England was clearly moving towards child-oriented family type’¹⁶. Doctors started to encourage mothers to breastfeed their children themselves instead of sending them to wet-nurses, which would not become a common habit till years later, but if a mother breastfed her children she would take a pride in it to the point of having it inscribed on her tombstone. Not only did the breastfeeding bonded the mother and child, but letting go of a practice known as swaddling, where children were ‘tightly bound in bandages so that they were unable to move either head or limbs, for the first months or so after birth’¹⁷, did similar job. Mothers could cuddle with the child and show their fondness. Some children even began to address their parents with more affectionate ‘Mamma’ and ‘Papa’ instead of the still and formal ‘Sir’ and ‘Madam’. Although the family in the 17th and 18th century went through transformation, most parents were still not a large part of their children’s day-to-day lives, and instead gave the *chore* to their servants or governesses or sent their children to boarding schools.

¹⁵ Stone, ‘The Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family 1640-1800,’ 257.

¹⁶ Stone, ‘The Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family 1640-1800,’ 259.

¹⁷ Stone, ‘The Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family 1640-1800,’ 115.

3. Parents and Parenting in Austen's Novels

According to Douglass Bush, Jane Austen 'is commonly and rightly credited with perfecting, if not inventing the novel of ordinary life, the kind of novel in which the smallest and most commonplace incidents are made significant in the consciousness of the heroine'.¹⁸ In Austen's work the heroines' natural environment of their day-to-day life is the environment of their families, and for that reason it becomes socially and morally significant. As Paula Bennet argues Austen 'uses the interaction of family members to illuminate her character's personalities, and her characters are judged largely in terms of the degree to which they fulfil their familial obligations'.¹⁹ It could be said that Austen's novels expose the demand for balance within the family by representing the effect of imbalance on the (mostly social) behaviour of the individual characters. The imbalance is generally illustrated by parents who are either completely absent, or not capable of raising their children properly. Austen satirizes these parents, and as Ruth Perry mentions, the children of these parents 'reflect the moral intelligence and self-knowledge of their parents [...] and as such signify responsibility to a larger world'.²⁰ Austen's goal in representing these characters thus might be a warning or suggestion to her readers that parenting has a great effect and should not be taken irresponsibly. Her personal experience might have contributed to that, since her own character and behaviour in society were greatly influenced by her mainly negative experiences in childhood.

¹⁸ Douglas Bush, *Jane Austen*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), 57.

¹⁹ Paula Bennet, 'Family Relations in the Novels of Jane Austen' (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1980).

²⁰ Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture 1748-1818*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 226.

3.1 Emma

In this novel, the heroine Emma, who is about twenty-one years old, was raised by her father Mr. Woodhouse and Miss Taylor—the governess, because she lost her biological mother when she was just five years old. Even though Austen says at the beginning of the novel that both Emma’s father and Miss Taylor are loving and caring, it does not substitute the real duty of a parent to also shape the children, teach them, correct them and restrain them if necessary. Emma thus grew up too freely and became quite snobbish and arrogant.

3.1.1 Mr Woodhouse – Inadequate father

Austen’s introductory description of Emma’s father—Mr. Woodhouse—seems very positive. Austen presents Mr. Woodhouse as ‘a most affectionate, indulgent father’²¹, so the reader might expect that he could pose as a competent parent. However, Austen quickly lets the readers know that Mr. Woodhouse’s indulgence was not a fine trait, since it allowed Emma to grow up with no (positive) boundaries.

Moreover, further into the novel, the reader finds out that Mr. Woodhouse has more than one poor trait. The narrator describes him as a hypochondriac whose behaviour would better suit a much older person, and although people loved him for his good heart, ‘his talents could not have recommended him at any time’.²² Furthermore, Austen portrays Mr. Woodhouse as ‘a nervous man, easily depressed’²³, who dislikes change of all kind (including marriage), and thus people have to learn to be cautious around him to not disturb him. Emma herself is forced to be much more considerate and prepare every visit or dinner in advance to fit his needs, or rather wishes.

He, just like Emma, thinks too highly of himself. Mr. Woodhouse cannot even understand that people might have a different opinion on a certain matter than himself. For example, he is not able to accept that people, more specifically Emma, are genuinely happy for Miss Taylor being married to Mr. Weston. He announces that to Mr. Knightley:

²¹ Jane Austen, *Emma* (London: Penguin, 1994), 5.

²² Austen, *Emma*, 6.

²³ Austen, *Emma*, 7.

‘Dear Emma bears every thing so well,’ said her father. ‘But, Mr. Knightley, she is really very sorry to lose poor Miss Taylor, and I am sure she *will* miss her more than she thinks for.’²⁴

The emphasis in the extract is his own, and demonstrates rather well his haughty nature.

That being said, Mr. Woodhouse is not capable of raising Emma for various reasons. First, Emma could never be dependent on her father as a child should be, because he was and still is dependent on her. She is said to have been the mistress of the house since she was twelve years old. Emma is the one who has to arrange everything for her father’s comfort and liking. She is even in charge of the evening parties organized at Hartfield, but lets her father feel included. Thanks to this lack of guidance, Emma is very self-reliant which would be a good trait if she were not self-reliant from such a young age, thus disregarding the advices of older and wiser people.

Caring for her father is the only activity of Emma’s that Mr. Woodhouse knows and cares about. He is never seen taking care of her or correcting her behaviour, and so the task of parenting is taken over by the family friend Mr. Knightley, who, according to the narrator, ‘was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them’.²⁵ It is, therefore, Mr. Knightley who speaks out against Emma when her behaviour is particularly disturbing. For example, when she speaks rudely to Miss Bates on Box Hill or when Emma tries to match-make Harriet Smith to Mr. Elton. On the latter occasion, Mr. Woodhouse steps in as well, but not because he finds Emma’s behaviour inappropriate, but because he is against marriage which does not help with constraining of Emma’s manipulative personality.

Additionally, Mr. Woodhouse seems to be too dissimilar from Emma to have a strong bond with her other than the almost obligatory parent-child love. He cannot be a good companion for his daughter—‘he could not meet her in conversation, rational or playful’.²⁶ Emma is described as very clever and self-reliant, and Mr. Woodhouse is none of those. He is very reliant on Emma and compared to her, he is rather limited in understanding. The reader can identify this characteristic of his when Emma has to

²⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 10.

²⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 9.

²⁶ Austen, *Emma*, 6.

explain a riddle to her father. ‘She read it to him, just as he liked to have any thing read, slowly and distinctly, and two or three times over, with explanations of every part as she proceeded’.²⁷ Although, he is aware of Emma being brighter than himself, because she inherited her mother’s brain, he is not much worried about it. He seems to not mind being duller than Emma and dependant on her, because he would wish for her to take care of him for the rest of his life. This constant care for her father influenced her manipulative nature. Since she was used to thinking for her father to make him happy, she might have deduced that other people could benefit from her *help* as well.

For all those reasons, it could be said that Mr. Woodhouse is simply incompetent parent. Actually, he does not parent at all. He does not care about Emma’s activities, beside those that concern him and his comfort and well-being. He might be a loving parent and very friendly person (as Austen emphasises all through the novel) who means no harm, but in fact his blissful ignorance and indulgence does more harm than good. Emma is forced to grow up quickly with father such as Mr. Woodhouse and her self-reliance quickly turns into arrogance which keeps her from learning from the authority that still remains around her.

3.1.2 Absent Mother

Mrs. Woodhouse died when Emma was just five years old—‘too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses’.²⁸ She was substituted by Miss Taylor who was very fond of Emma, but neither Miss Taylor nor Mr. Woodhouse could substitute Mrs. Woodhouse, because with her death Emma ‘lost the only person able to cope with her’.²⁹ With that in mind, it might be said that Mr. Woodhouse could be pardoned a bit for his lack of parenting skills. Also, Austen seems to imply here, that mother’s influence is fundamental in raising a child.

It is quite ironic that Emma is the one who is made to resemble her mother even though she has not spent much time with her as opposed to her older sister Isabella, who resembles her father and gets along with him in ways other people cannot:

²⁷ Austen, *Emma*, 62.

²⁸ Austen, *Emma*, 5.

²⁹ Austen, *Emma*, 29.

She was not a woman of strong understanding or any quickness; and with this resemblance of her father, she inherited also much of his constitution; was delicate in her own health, over-careful of that of her children, had many fears and many nerves, and was as fond of her own Mr. Wingfield [doctor] in town as her father could be of Mr. Perry. They were alike too, in a general benevolence of temper, and a strong habit of regard for every old acquaintance.³⁰

Thus, with Emma, who inherited her mother's talents³¹, Austen creates yet another heroine who has no other option than to act according to her best judgment, and who cannot rely on the dependable mother.

3.1.3 Ms Taylor – Governess

The place of Emma's mother 'had been supplied by an excellent woman as governess, who had fallen little short of a mother in affection'.³² Miss Taylor raised Emma since she was five years old. She was very fond of both Emma and Isabella, but Emma was her favourite. The governess was an excellent woman and posed as a great friend. There was almost a sisterly bond between her and Emma, but she could never substitute her mother.

Just like Mr. Woodhouse, Miss Taylor was too gentle towards Emma: 'Even before Miss Taylor had ceased to hold the nominal office of governess, the mildness of her temper had hardly allowed her to impose any restraint'.³³ Not only her father allowed her to grow up doing whatever she wished to, Miss Taylor would allow the same which further strengthened Emma's manipulative disposition.

As opposed to Mr. Woodhouse, she would offer her judgment which would be held dear by Emma, but the final decision was always of her own. For that reason, Miss Taylor cannot be taken in consideration as a good replacement for Mrs. Woodhouse, whose opinion would most probably be much more important to Emma. Miss Taylor is

³⁰ Austen, *Emma*, 72.

³¹ Austen, *Emma*, 29.

³² Austen, *Emma*, 5.

³³ Austen, *Emma*, 5.

simply not considered equal to Emma which would never happen with her biological mother.

Emma herself does not consider Miss Taylor to be of motherly nature towards her. She herself portrays her as a

friend and companion such as few possessed: intelligent, well-informed, useful, gentle, knowing all the ways of the family, interested in all its concerns, and peculiarly interested in herself, in every pleasure, every scheme of hers—one to whom she could speak every thought as it arose, and who had such an affection for her as could never find fault.³⁴

This excerpt also shows that Miss Taylor provided the opportunities that allowed Emma to grow up into the woman she became, since Miss Taylor, equally to Mr. Woodhouse, never corrected her, and even took interest in Emma's ploys. She failed to accomplish her assignment to be a suitable motherly figure in Emma's life when she overlooked her obvious character flaws.

Miss Taylor persists to perceive Emma as faultless even after Mr. Knightley provides his observation of Emma's character. She still believes that Emma is 'an excellent creature [...] [with] qualities which may be trusted; she will never lead any one really wrong; she will make no lasting blunder'.³⁵ But the readers know that Emma led quite a few people wrong. For example, she made Harriet Smith believe that Mr. Elton is in love with her and almost ruined her future by pushing her to decline an offer of marriage by Mr. Martin.

Therefore, Miss Taylor is not a proper guidance for Emma, because even though she is very intelligent (as opposed to her father), useful and affectionate, she has similarly to Mr. Woodhouse only a shadow of authority.

Without mother, involved father or any other strong authority Emma becomes self-reliant as the head of the household only at the age of twelve which adds to her arrogance and love for manipulation. Even her older sister was too similar to her father to act as a counter-force to Emma's unchecked authority, and thus Emma becomes the head of the household two years before her older sister gets married and leaves home.

³⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 6.

³⁵ Austen, *Emma*, 31.

3.2 Mansfield Park

The heroine of this novel is Fanny Price, a shy young girl who at the age of ten became a part of the Bertram household, because her own family was very poor. Lady Bertram is a sister of Fanny's mother, and therefore it could be expected that Fanny will be accepted into the family with no reservations. However, Fanny is never treated equally to her cousins by Lady and Sir Bertram, because 'their [children's] rank, fortune, rights, and expectations will always be different'.³⁶ But her other aunt Mrs. Norris is much worse in her behaviour towards Fanny even though she has no children herself and should not really have a reason for a preference in her nieces and nephews. It seems as if this novel is another example of a failure of parents or substitute parents which is so typical for Austen.

3.2.1 Biological Parents

If it was up to her mother, Fanny would probably never come to live to Mansfield Park. It is quite obvious from the novel that Mrs. Price very much preferred her sons to her daughters except for the youngest Betsey, and therefore, would rather send one of her sons to receive a better life within the Bertram family. There is almost no information about Fanny's relationship with her biological parents before she is sent to Mansfield Park, but since she is extremely shy and quiet child, it could be said that she was not raised with much attention (which is no wonder given the number of her siblings) or intention to give her a good start for becoming a confident adult.

When Fanny arrives to her biological parents many years after she left them, she is very disappointed with their attitude towards her and the whole household. The only thing that she wishes from her family when entering the house is for them to love her. However, even this simple wish is not granted to her, because her parents are not paying her much attention.

Her father—Mr Price—is completely incompetent parent, he is a dirty drunk whose only interests in life are the newspapers and the topic of navy. When she tries to remember him from her childhood, she realizes that he was never tender to her or her siblings, she only recalls roughness and loudness. This kind of environment would certainly cause a child to become rather quite or shy just as Fanny did. The only time he

³⁶ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1995), 8.

genuinely notices his daughter during her visit is when she is accompanied by Henry Crawford who is of higher social class, and his whole personality changes just for this brief occasion.

Nevertheless, Fanny is even more disappointed in her mother. She hoped for at least one loving motherly figure in her life, but could not find her. Mrs. Price is not an unkind person, but the only moment of affection that Fanny experiences in her presence is the moment of her arrival to her biological parents. Fanny realizes that her mother has no free time to give her and her fondness never reaches beyond the welcoming kiss. Fanny recognizes that she is no longer considered to be a true part of her biological family and suddenly feels estranged in her former home.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Price are improper parents to Fanny. Mr. Price is not suitable parent for any of his children, and Mrs. Price is a ‘partial, ill-judging parent, a dawdle, a slattern, who neither taught nor restrained her children’³⁷, but she, at least, seems to be rather satisfactory mother to her sons who grew up to be self-reliant men with adequate jobs.

3.2.2 Sir Thomas – Hard and Neglectful

From the first moment Mrs. Price asks for help, Sir Thomas provides ‘friendly advice and professions’.³⁸ It is also up to Sir Thomas whether or not Fanny becomes part of the Bertram household, although Mrs. Norris is the one who persuades both Sir and Lady Bertram to take her in. Before Fanny comes, he finds it necessary to make sure his daughters always know that they are of better social status than Fanny without them becoming arrogant. He recognizes that they cannot be equal and asks Mrs. Norris to assist him in his aim to ensure they are raised correctly. As will be seen later on in this thesis, she fulfils her task excessively. For this reason, Fanny never feels as a true part of the family and his daughters become arrogant and ill-behaved, anyway.

When Fanny arrives to Mansfield Park she is ‘awed by Sir Thomas’s grave looks’³⁹ and even though he is the one who tries to calm her down in the new environment, she takes more liking in Lady Bertram who barely says anything to her,

³⁷ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 306.

³⁸ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 4.

³⁹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 12.

but is able to smile at her. It shows how important it is for a child to not only hear kind words from her parents or guardians, but also see and receive some fondness from them which ironically even her biological parents were not able to give her. Sir Thomas is not able to be affectionate towards his own children, let alone his niece. For this reason, he has never discovered the true character of his daughters, because they always suppressed themselves in his presence:

In everything but disposition they were admirably taught. Sir Thomas did not know what was wanting, because, though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him.⁴⁰

Sir Thomas' lack of tenderness and good spirit that would allow his children to free themselves of the constraints and have fun in front of him not only affects the characters of his daughters, but also his eldest son Tom who becomes an overspending and extravagant man, and often leaves the Mansfield Park to release himself of his father's strict ruling.

His children together with Fanny would wish to love the man, but they are not capable of it. When he is leaving to Antigua, both his daughters and Fanny are described as longing to be grieving for Sir Thomas, but they simply cannot.

[He] was no object of love to them; he had never seemed the friend of their pleasures, and his absence was unhappily most welcome. They were relieved by it from all restraint; and without aiming at one gratification that would probably have been forbidden by Sir Thomas, they felt themselves immediately at their own disposal, and to have every indulgence within their reach.⁴¹

Fanny is feeling ungrateful in this situation, because Sir Thomas provided her with home and education and she is not able to grieve for him which is, without doubt,

⁴⁰ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 16.

⁴¹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 25.

not her fault, since she never received any affection from him. He is not missed in his absence and the time of his return is described as a 'black month'.⁴²

However, when he returns from his travels, he treats his family with unexpected fondness. He treats Fanny with kindness and affection which she has never received from him: 'His manner seemed changed, his voice was quick from the agitation of joy; and all that had been awful in his dignity seemed lost in tenderness'.⁴³ He is happy to be back with his family, oblivious to how saddened some members of it have become, because his strictness remains part of his character.

His parenting errors—such as his negligence and constant restraint of his children—are revealed to him only when Maria runs away with Henry Crawford after being married to the dull Mr. Rushworth (who he was not sure about, but gave them his approval anyway), and when Julia elopes with Mr. Yates whom she does not really love. Julia longed for freedom which she believed would be taken from her completely after her father would find out about her sister's affair. Had her father not been so restrictive, she would return home without having to resort to the foolish attempt to liberate herself which was absurdly her only option. He suffers terribly from his daughter's affairs.

Too late he became aware how unfavourable to the character of any young people must be the totally opposite treatment which Maria and Julia had been always experiencing at home, where the excessive indulgence and flattery of their aunt had been continually contrasted with his own severity.⁴⁴

He is the only character that realizes the mistakes he had made with his daughter's education and his own behaviour towards them in the important moments of their upbringing. With the understanding also comes a change in his approach to the children that remain in Mansfield Park. It is too late to become a good guardian to Fanny even though after his travels he became quite acceptable, but he has a second chance with Fanny's younger sister Susan that replaces her in Mansfield Park after Fanny marries Sir Thomas' only proper child—Edmund. Had he realized his mistakes sooner, his

⁴² Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 83.

⁴³ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 135.

⁴⁴ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 366.

daughters would not see elopement as the only option and his eldest son would not ventilate his frustration in spending money.

3.2.3 Lady Bertram – Inadequate

Although, Lady Bertram is Fanny's favourite parental figure, she is far from appropriate guardian. She is 'a woman of very tranquil feelings, and temper remarkably easy and indolent'⁴⁵, but also awfully vain, caring only about good looks in people. Fanny is at first discouraged by Lady Bertram's silence and the readers later realize that Lady Bertram is not much involved with her children's lives, instead she lets Sir Thomas and her sister Mrs. Norris take care of everything.

She was a woman who spent her days in sitting, nicely dressed, on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent to the latter when it did not put herself to inconvenience, guided in everything important by Sir Thomas, and in smaller concerns by her sister.⁴⁶

She is rather satisfied always staying in Mansfield Park, not even going for a regular walk. She is a truly lazy person who does not accompany her children on almost any occasion. Fanny becomes her treasured companion who she cannot imagine leaving her. '[Fanny] talked to her, listened to her, read to her'⁴⁷ and assisted her in her work. Sometimes, Lady Bertram makes Fanny do her work and overlooks her well-being. Similarly to Mr. Woodhouse, Lady Bertram is too comfortable to act as a proper parent and Fanny and her cousins suffer because of it.

She is so often indolent to her surroundings that she seems to be always falling into a doze. However, despite her unfavourable traits, she is the kindest parent figure in Fanny's life. She agrees that Fanny should have a horse of her own even when Mrs. Norris does not, she send her personal housemaid to Fanny to help her get dressed for her first ball, she admits that Fanny will be terribly missed when she goes to her

⁴⁵ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 3.

⁴⁶ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 16.

⁴⁷ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 27.

biological parents. Lady Bertram seems to love her children even though she does not show it very well. When they start leaving the Mansfield Park to live their adult lives, she says: 'I wish [Edmund] was not going away. They are all going away, I think. I wish they would stay at home'.⁴⁸ If she was not so lazy to be a bigger part of her children's lives, she would probably be rather decent motherly figure that could at least provide her children with attention and affection which they lacked from both of their parents.

It is certainly not satisfactory that someone as vain and indolent as Lady Bertram is the best parental figure in Fanny's life, but without her (and Edmund) in Mansfield Park, Fanny's life would be miserable. Lady Bertram was more of a friendly companion to Fanny than a motherly figure, however, she gave her more affection than her biological mother. Neither Lady Bertram, nor Sir Thomas were able to give Fanny much confidence in herself, only the education was provided, thus Fanny remained the quiet and rather shy girl.

3.2.4 Mrs. Norris – Abusive Guardian

Before Fanny was even born, Mrs. Norris became very angry with Fanny's mother for marrying Mr. Price, and did not speak to her for about 11 years. However, she is the one who persuades Sir and Lady Bertram to accept Fanny to their home and help Mrs. Price. For this reason, the readers might think that she would be fond or at least indifferent towards Fanny, but she is the exact opposite. Mrs. Norris is obsessed with always reminding Fanny of her lower status, she wants Fanny to be constantly grateful for the opportunity given to her by her aunt and uncle which later makes Fanny feel guilty.

When Fanny thinks, she is about to be moved to Mrs. Norris' house, she becomes miserable, thinking of how uncomfortable she feels in her aunt's presence and how 'she has never received kindness from her aunt Norris, and could not love her'.⁴⁹ And that is true, Mrs. Norris never wished Fanny any good—'Mrs. Norris had no affection for Fanny, and no wish of procuring her pleasure at any time'⁵⁰—she did not want her to get her own horse, to go for a trip to Mrs. Rushmore, to borrow a carriage when invited

⁴⁸ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 224.

⁴⁹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 19.

⁵⁰ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 61.

to dinner for the first time, or to have her first ball. Mrs. Norris is not a good guardian, she is an abusive aunt, and nobody would let her take care of Fanny in these days. She makes Fanny feel uncomfortable, inferior and guilty, but also does not care about her well-being.

But Mrs. Norris' behaviour does not only have a negative effect on Fanny, but on Maria and Julia Bertram as well. Although, she loves and adores her nieces very much, it is precisely her excessive spoiling and praising of the girls that nurture them into the scandalous women they become. Unlike Sir Bertram, Mrs. Norris cannot see the errors in her ways and stands by Maria even after the affair that brought embarrassment on the whole family. She is the worst guardian and parental figure of them all, because one niece would suffer under her guidance from too much hate and the others from too much love.

3.3 Northanger Abbey

The protagonist of *Northanger Abbey* is Catherine Morland who was born as the fourth child (out of ten) to loving and practical parents. She is probably the only heroine whose parents are adequate despite some of their unpleasant character traits. Throughout the novel, Catherine is also taken into care by Mr. and Mrs. Allen—the family’s neighbours and friends—who take her to Bath where they are supposed to supervise the seventeen-year-old girl and guide her through the society. This task they fail to accomplish.

3.3.1 Mr. and Mrs. Morland – Practical Influence

Catherine Morland comes from a happy and normal family. Her parents are not neglectful, overly restraining or poor. They are both intelligent and practical with good temper. Catherine was educated by both of them: in accounts and reading by her father, in French by her mother. However, it is mentioned that she was not keen on education and tried to avoid it whenever she could (as most children would).

Mrs. Morland wanted her children to be well-disposed, however, she had to take care of so many children that the ‘elder daughters were inevitably left to shift for themselves’⁵¹. Moreover, she was a good woman who would not force her daughters to be skilled in any activity (such as playing the pianoforte) if they were not gifted for it or simply disliked it. Thus, Catherine took liking in reading romantic poetry and novels (mainly gothic ones) rather than reading more educational literature or playing a musical instrument and singing. She becomes very imaginative girl which differentiates her from her practical parents.

Not only are Mr. and Mrs. Morland caring and practical, but they are also very honest and quite trusting. They do not need much time to decide about matters if their respectable acquaintances’ positive opinions are involved. Therefore, they let Catherine go to Bath with the Allens, and later give her the permission to travel to the Northanger Abbey. When Catherine’s brother James and her friend Isabella get engaged, Catherine is quick to assure Isabella about her parent’s permission for the marriage, for her parents would never oppose their children’s wishes.

⁵¹ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1995), 4.

‘It is impossible,’ said [Catherine], ‘for parents to be more kind, or more desirous of their children's happiness; I have no doubt of their consenting immediately.’⁵²

The same happens when Catherine and Henry Tilney (whom she loves dearly) wish for her parents’ permission to get married. They have no objections, because ‘nothing, after all, could be more natural than Catherine's being beloved’⁵³ they are rather proud and happy for their daughter, and Henry’s intelligence, good manners, lack of bad reputation (and probably even his ancestry) are enough for their consent.

However, their pragmatic way of life contrasts with Catherine’s imagination and sensibility, and causes them to be rather insensitive to James’ and Catherine’s feelings. They feel sorry for James’ end of engagement, however, they believe that it is really no loss, and that this experience will allow him to learn and be more cautious next time he chooses a bride. Furthermore, when Catherine appears to be depressed after her return from Northanger Abbey, her mother assumes that the reason for this is the modest home contrasting the Abbey or the lack of activities she experienced in Bath.

[Her parents] never once thought of her heart, which, for the parents of a young lady of seventeen, just returned from her first excursion from home, was odd enough!⁵⁴

Her parent’s unemotional behaviour clashed with her imaginative nature and contributed to Catherine’s frequent escapes to romantic poetry and gothic novels. The literature even more promoted her imagination that got her to rather awkward situations. Their disregard of the children’s emotions is therefore responsible for Catherine’s prolonged pain, because her parents are not able to provide her with consolation.

Despite her mother’s and father’s insensitivity to some of their children’s feelings, they represent a loving and competent parents which is fairly unusual for Austen’s novels.

⁵² Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 85.

⁵³ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 178.

⁵⁴ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 168.

3.3.2 Mr. and Mrs. Allen – ‘Surrogate Parents’

During most of the novel, Catherine’s guardians are the Allens—the family’s trustworthy and respectable neighbours with whom Catherine travels to Bath. However, they do not actually do much of the guarding and thus are not suitable for Catherine.

Mr. Allen is often absent altogether to provide some adult and reliable opinion or recommendation, though when he does it is an appropriate one. Because he was far more intelligent than Mrs. Allen and more capable of providing Catherine with proper guidance, he should have spent more time with Catherine and his wife to pose as the helpful guardian and prevent some of the unpleasant situations.

Mrs. Allen does not have much of an opinion herself regarding Catherine’s actions in Bath to be an adequate advisor. Most of the time she just parrots someone else, mostly her husband, and when she cannot do that she sticks to the unhelpful ‘Do just as you please, my dear’⁵⁵ which results in Catherine’s discomfort as she is too inexperienced in proper behaviour within the Bath society.

Her intelligence and manners are lacking; her biggest passion is fashion. Fashion is also the only subject about which Mrs. Allen is able to converse for a longer period of time. Thus she introduces Catherine to the Bath’s society while caring more for her dress than her protégée’s safety. Catherine is also more worried about the proper manners than Mrs. Allen is, for example when they are sitting at a table as apparent intruders during a ball and Mrs. Allen’s only worry is her hair. Ironically, in this situation Catherine is the one who takes the role of a guardian.

Receiving almost no help from her guardians, Catherine is pressured to make her own decisions. Lacking the proper guidance, she must learn to read in the various characters that she encounters in Bath, since she realizes that not all people are as honest as her family and often like to skew the truth to their advantage.

⁵⁵ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 41.

3.4 Persuasion

Persuasion is a novel largely concerned with the issue of class and its influence on people within the society. The heroine Anne Elliot together with her sisters Elizabeth and Mary, her father Sir Walter and her somewhat substitute mother Lady Russel deal with the advantages, obligations and pressures of being of a higher class. The heritage of the family and the baronetcy of Sir Walter Elliot is responsible for the pride pertaining to the whole family. However, pride is not the worst trait of this family, since Sir Walter is probably the worst father appearing in Austen's novels and this thesis.

3.4.1 Sir Walter – Vain and Impractical

Tony Tanner in describes Sir Walter's parenting as 'parenthood as narcissism'⁵⁶, because Sir Walter is only interested in his eldest daughter Elizabeth as she is the one who resembles him the most. His character is described as extremely vain, caring a lot for good looks, constantly looking at himself in the many mirrors he owns.

He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy; and the Sir Walter Elliot, who united these gifts, was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion.⁵⁷

From Austen's description, it is clear that Sir Walter is simply too self-absorbed to be a good father, he is not capable of taking care of anyone but himself. Furthermore, because Mary and Anne Elliot did not inherit his looks or aspirations, they are not worthy of his attention and suffer because of it.

His two other daughters were of very inferior value. Mary had acquired a little artificial importance, by becoming Mrs. Musgrove; but Anne, with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any

⁵⁶ Tony Tanner, 'In Between: *Persuasion*,' in *Jane Austen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 209.

⁵⁷ Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1995), 4.

people of real understanding, was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way—she was only Anne.⁵⁸

His attitude towards Anne is of ignorance. She does not resemble him in any way besides the pride in her family social status, and even this pride is displayed differently by each of them. Anne considers her father's sycophancy when it comes to Lady Dalrymple undignified, and in contrast Anne's father would never think of meeting someone like Mrs. Smith who was left with nothing.

Sir Walter's only interest in Anne is her marriage to someone who could improve his entry in the Baronetage he likes to read so much. That is why he is against her marriage with Frederick Wentworth the first time he proposes. Frederick Wentworth was a man of no fortune at that time, and turning down his proposal would not be a great surprise in Austen's England, but Sir Walter's attitude was the problem. He showed how uninterested he actually is in his daughter's future life and wellbeing when he declared to not provide her with any dowry. This certainly had to hurt young Anne, to realize her father's absolute lack of concern for her.

His vain and impractical character also contributed to the family's debt and need to move to a more modest accommodation, because neither Sir Elliot nor his similarly self-centred daughter Elizabeth are able to give up some of their indulgences not only because of their pleasure, but also to not appear undignified in the eyes of society.

Although Elizabeth is the perfect daughter in Sir Walter's eyes and gets his full attention, it is not a very positive thing for Elizabeth. Her inheritance of her father's vanity and ambitions have contributed to her unsuccessful search for a worthy husband which may one day destroy her life since Austen's times were not kind to single women.

Mary Elliot—Sir Walter's youngest daughter—possibly missed his attention in childhood and adolescence so badly, that in adulthood she is desperate for the attention from anybody that can give it to her. When she does not get it, she becomes unbearable, almost ill.

Sir Walter is an awfully inadequate parent, not only because of his favouring of one daughter at the expense of the younger ones, but also for his lack of attention, guidance or love for Anne or Mary, which scars Mary probably for the rest of her life

⁵⁸ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, 5.

and causes Anne much emotional pain. If Elizabeth did not resemble him so much, he would not act as a father at all.

3.4.2 Absent Mother

The biological mother—Lady Elliot—is again missing, and this element provides Austen with another opportunity to introduce a heroine with one influence missing and the other being unsatisfactory and therefore the upbringing enables her to go through her own period of trial and error.

The loss of Lady Elliot also provides for Sir Elliot's succumbing to his desires for the delights he cannot afford. Lady Elliot was the one who had been improving Sir Elliot's character for seventeen years till the day she died. She is described as excellent woman, intelligent, whose friends and children made her attached to the world even though she was not the happiest person.⁵⁹ With her death, three children lost a loving mother, and Sir Elliot the only person who could moderate his unfavourable nature.

However, since she left Elizabeth—her eldest daughter—when she was already sixteen years old, it is not certain that Elizabeth's awful traits inherited by her father could be adjusted by her mother's influence. He certainly had thirteen years to tailor his daughter to his liking, but she had to resemble him a lot to start with, otherwise he would lose his interest in her. That means that even Lady Elliot, the excellent mother she was, could not defy nature, and raise Elizabeth to her taste. She could only be helpful to Elizabeth the same way she was to Sir Elliot and give her advices.

She would be much more helpful to Mary and Anne. Mary would have at least one parent who would give her the needed attention and might not grow into the needy woman she became. And Anne would have a mother that she so resembled, who would again pay attention to her and be affectionate as a parent should.

3.4.3 Lady Russell – Substituting the Absent Mother

Lady Russell was a very close friend of Lady Elliot, to whom she would offer her affection and advice. After her death, she served as a helping hand in the upbringing of the three Elliot sisters, and Anne became her favourite.

⁵⁹ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, 4.

To Lady Russell, indeed, she [Anne] was a most dear and highly valued god-daughter, favourite, and friend. Lady Russell loved them all; but it was only in Anne that she could fancy the mother to revive again.⁶⁰

Anne did not resemble her father in any way, she inherited her mother's (Lady Russell's dearest friend's) character and looks, and for that reason Lady Russell loved her the most. Because Anne was Lady Russell's favourite, she would have a close relationship with her and trust her advices just like her mother. Therefore, she rejects Frederick Wentworth's first proposal, she has faith in the older and wiser opinions of Lady Russell, and believes that she only means well. Unlike Miss Taylor's advices to Emma, that of Lady Russell's to Anne are taken to her heart and often acted upon.

The narrator makes sure that it is clear how genuinely is Lady Russell concerned with Anne's welfare. She tries to substitute Anne's family as well as she can in always being there to provide Anne with contentment and guidance. Moreover, she herself is distressed when Anne's family does not treat her right. For example, when Sir Elliot and Elizabeth favour the company of Mrs. Clay (Elizabeth's friend) over Anne's as they move to their new house which must have pained Anne greatly. Lady Russell views this treatment of Anne as unjust which it certainly is. For all those reasons, to Anne Lady Russell 'was in the place of a parent'⁶¹, contrasting with Miss Taylor who could never substitute Emma's mother.

Lady Russell always means well with Anne, however it blinds her in a certain way, and that is her approach to finding the appropriate suitor for Anne. She had all the best reasons in mind when she advised Anne to not marry Frederick Wentworth for the first time, but when Mr. Elliot appears to be interested in Anne, she is blinded by his social status and fortune, and is unable to see his faults and flaws. She is perhaps more interested in Anne being married to a man of somewhat suitable character and heritage, because she is trying to remove her from 'the partialities and injustice of her father's house'⁶², because again she only means well. However, in the end she acknowledges Captain Frederick Wentworth as the best suitor for her surrogate daughter, and is genuinely happy for Anne.

⁶⁰ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, 5.

⁶¹ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, 190.

⁶² Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, 22.

Lady Russell's attention, guidance and affection surely contributed to Anne's considerate, clever and practical personality. Thus, Lady Russell appears to be an adequate substitute mother to Anne Elliot, in spite of her flaws. However, her favouring Anne (and Sir Elliot favouring Elizabeth) again leaves the youngest Mary without anyone providing her with enough attention which results in her pushy and demanding character.

3.5 Pride and Prejudice

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen introduces the Bennet family consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and their five daughters. The heroine of the novel is the second oldest daughter Elizabeth who together with her older sister Jane much differ in education from their three younger sisters—Lydia, Kitty and Mary. Mary A. Burgan suggests that this difference between the sisters is caused by Mr. Bennet’s indifference and lack of interest in the familial responsibility—‘his leaving the field almost exclusively to the exertions of his wife [...] has meant that the younger three daughters have grown up to be silly and useless girls’.⁶³ This not only suggests that Mr. Bennet is not a positive example of a parent, but also that the excessive influence of Mrs. Bennet on her daughters has a negative effect on their characters. The recurring theme of inadequate parents is again present.

3.5.1 Mr. Bennet – Negligence

‘Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character.’⁶⁴ His sarcasm and the pleasure he gets from making fun of his wife and three youngest daughters is what makes him occupied for most of the novel. Austen inverts the common theme of unhappy wife and happy/satisfied husband when she turns Mr. Bennet into the unhappy partner. However, Mr. Bennet does not ventilate his frustration on his family nor does he keep a mistress, he only indulges in the occasional sarcastic joke and is rather inattentive to his younger daughters. As such he cannot be considered completely as an inadequate parent, only a man broken by an unhappy marriage.

He shuns himself from his family, shutting himself in his library. When it comes to parenting, he is rather indolent, inactive father. However, it seems that he once took care of the education of his daughters, since the eldest Jane and Elizabeth are well-behaved girls who know how to act in the society. It could be said that when all ‘respect, esteem, and confidence had vanished for ever [from his marriage]; and all his

⁶³ Mary A. Burgan, “Mr. Bennet and the Failures of Fatherhood in Jane Austen’s Novels,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 74 (1975): 540.

⁶⁴ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1992), 3.

views of domestic happiness were overthrown'⁶⁵ because of Mrs. Bennet's character not being suitable for his own, he also lost the interest in raising his daughters properly.

Gracia Fay Ellwood suggests another point of view:

[Initially] Mr. Bennet was an actively involved father, drawn to little Jane by her beauty, serene benevolence, and self-discipline (conspicuously like and unlike her mother), and drawn even more to little Elizabeth by her quick intelligence (very like his own). The motivation for his attentions would have been self-gratification. In the early days, he would also have been supported by hope that the crucially necessary boy was just around the corner.⁶⁶

But as the readers realize, he ends up disappointed in his family, excluding only Jane and Elizabeth, for whom he has the greatest affection. Elizabeth is the one who is most alike him which makes their relationship somewhat similar to the one of Sir Walter and his eldest daughter Elizabeth, but Mr. Bennet's affections come from his daughter's intelligence while Sir Walter's interest in his daughter comes from her arrogance and vanity. Both fathers fail in parenting when they choose to love and give attention to one daughter over the others.

Elizabeth is also the only daughter whose opinion matters to Mr. Bennet. For example, he turns to her to see her reaction to Mr. Collins, or understands her hints to stop Mary from playing the piano and singing for too long. But when his parenting mistakes/duties are revealed to him by Elizabeth, who asks him to intervene in the dreadful behaviour of Lydia before it is too late, he dismisses her, because he would rather make fun of his *silly daughters* than engage in their upbringing.

Elizabeth feels that her father's talents if 'rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife'.⁶⁷ Had he not given up on his family and intervened in the upbringing, his younger daughters would have most probably behaved similarly to Jane and Elizabeth.

⁶⁵ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 228.

⁶⁶ Gracia Fay Ellwood, 'How Not to Father: Mr. Bennet and Mary,' *Jane Austen Society of North America* 22 (2001), accessed April 17, 2017, <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/online/vol22no1/ellwood.html>.

⁶⁷ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 229.

Elizabeth thinks that children like herself and her sisters are at disadvantage with parents like Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, who are imprisoned in unhappy marriage, which shows how inadequate they are as parents.

Even when Mr. Bennet finally realizes that his indifference causes his youngest daughter Lydia to elope, his subsequent restraint of his other daughter Kitty (too similar to Lydia) is quite extreme and tyranny. It seems as if he is not able to formulate appropriate rules that would restrain and educate his daughters without forbidding them from everything pleasurable to them, or that would not just let them mature freely (only with the influence of Mrs. Bennet).

3.5.2 Mrs. Bennet – Bad Influence

Austen describes Mrs. Bennet as rather unintelligent and easily distressed character whose ‘business of [...] life was to get her daughters married’.⁶⁸ Together with her daughters she is the target of her husband’s sarcastic humour which she often does not understand. She is a victim of his ridicule, because he married her for her ‘youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour’⁶⁹ without truly knowing anything of her character. As proposed earlier, this is most probably the reason for the lack of appropriate upbringing of their younger daughters. The three youngest daughters were overly influenced by only her character while growing up and thus became unappealing, ill-behaved *silly girls*.

Mrs. Bennet’s purpose to marry her daughters as quickly as possible is not surprising or wrong. She has five daughters and no son which means that after her husband’s death all the property will go to his relation Mr. Collins. She wants her daughters to be provided for before that happens. But her behaviour and means of acquiring husbands for her daughters is what often makes her look ridiculous and more harmful than helpful. For example, she sends Jane to Netherfield only on a horseback although it is clear that the rain is coming. She hopes that the rain will force her daughter to spend the night at Netherfield and thus bring Jane closer to Mr. Bingley. She completely overlooks the harm that the rain might cause her daughter, and because of this decision Jane becomes quite ill. In that time an intense cold could kill a person.

⁶⁸ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 3.

⁶⁹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 228.

Moreover, because of her intentions she often overlooks her daughter's lack of manners and the possible consequences of her loose nurturing. After all, her own manners are far from right. Therefore, she is not concerned for Lydia's love of the military or her flirtatious behaviour, and when she elopes, she does not blame herself in the least for it. In the end, she is very happy for Lydia, because she is her favourite daughter, and because she is married and taken care of even though in a manner embarrassing to the family. She does not realize that this kind of marriage might one day become a miserable prison for her daughter.

Her determination to marry her daughters also makes her angry with Elizabeth when she rejects Mr. Collins' proposal completely overlooking that Mr. Collins is an idiotic caricature of a man who would never be able to make Elizabeth happy. However, she is probably not forcing Elizabeth to marry the man only because she wants to keep the property in the family, but also because 'Elizabeth was the least dear to her of all her children'.⁷⁰ It might be some kind of a punishment for Elizabeth, because Mrs. Bennet admits that marrying one of her other daughters to Mr. Collins would not bring her so much pleasure.

Furthermore, her weak understanding causes her two eldest daughters to be often embarrassed by her during dinners and balls. For example when she misunderstands Mr. Darcy who talks about the unvaried society in the countryside as opposed to the city, and loudly argues that the countryside is just as good as the city except for the shops and public places.

'Indeed, Mamma, you are mistaken,' said Elizabeth, blushing for her mother.

'You quite mistook Mr. Darcy. He only meant that there was not such a variety of people to be met with in the country as in the town, which you must acknowledge to be true.'⁷¹

However, Elizabeth's efforts to moderate her mother are often unsuccessful, and thus Mrs. Bennet continues to embarrass herself and the family, talking of things she does not understand. This is, of course, a disadvantage to her intentions to marry her

⁷⁰ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 101.

⁷¹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 40.

daughters to good suitors, because her temper and bad manners might discourage them from socializing with the family.

The lack of any positive constrain, education and role-model appears to be the problem of both Mrs. and Mr. Bennet, since in the moment their daughter Kitty escapes the influence of her mother and sister, and starts spending more time with her older married sisters, her behaviour improves. Unfortunately, the inattentive father and silly mother contributed to Lydia's immature and foolish personality, which led to her becoming stuck in the unhappy marriage, moving from place to place and asking her sisters for financial aid. As Jane and Elizabeth prove, had Mr. Bennet been more attentive, her fate would have been much better.

3.6 Sense and Sensibility

The heroine of *Sense and Sensibility* is Elinor Dashwood, the eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Dashwood. However, the focus of the novel is also largely held to Elinor's younger sister Marianne. Mr. Dashwood appears only at the beginning of the novel, because he dies soon after, thus the readers do not get much information concerning his character, nevertheless the little that is given to the reader illustrates him as a quite adequate parent. On the other hand, Mrs. Dashwood's character which is too romantic for a widow that suddenly has to care for the whole household depicts her as unsatisfactory parent. That is, before she realizes her mistakes.

3.6.1 Absent Father

Mr. Dashwood is introduced as a goodhearted man who does not mind fulfilling every of his uncle's wishes, so he can make him comfortable in his old age. He seems to be a loving and affectionate parent who wishes nothing less than his family's happiness and security. His temper is described as 'cheerful and sanguine'⁷².

After his death, his wife and daughters grieve for him very much which demonstrates that their affection for him was honest equally to his for them. The characters of his daughters are decent and had he not died the mistakes that his wife made throughout the novel probably would have been avoided with his aid as the paternal mind with different view of the situations.

Nothing in the course of the novel signals some past neglect committed by him during the upbringing of his daughters. Even his wife lacks the experience of inattentive husband as can be seen from the moment she looks at the absence of interaction between Mr. and Mrs. Palmer with great surprise. All in all, Mr. Dashwood seems to represent an adequate father figure that managed to provide his daughters with good education and seemingly gave them enough attention and affection. His absence again allows the heroines to experience their own errors.

3.6.2 Mrs. Dashwood – Loving, But Too Romantic

Mrs. Dashwood is described as a kind, indulgent mother whose daughters have never lacked her affection, however, 'common sense, common care, common prudence,

⁷² Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1993), 2.

were all sunk in Mrs. Dashwood's romantic delicacy'.⁷³ She is a loving parent, but also an impractical one. Rather than handling her responsibilities herself, she relies on her eldest daughter's—Elinor's—advice. As opposed to her mother, Elinor is not impulsive and emotional and so her advice is always 'effectual, possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, [...] to counteract, to the advantage of them all'.⁷⁴ It is Elinor that prevents her mother from making several mistakes such as leaving Norland without any propriety, renting a house that they could not afford or keeping a carriage that would be of no use to them.

Moreover, Mrs. Dashwood is also not able to recognize that Marianne's attitude and behaviour around John Willoughby are not appropriate, despite Elinor's persuasions. Even though Marianne is as clever and sensible as her older sister, she inherited her mother's eagerness to everything and lacks any prudence. Because they resemble each other so much, Mrs. Dashwood is not able to recognize the ill-behaviour, since it is so similar to her own. This blindness towards her daughter's errors is very alike to that of Mrs. Bennet towards Lydia.

Furthermore, in *Pride and Prejudice* there is also the older sister—Elizabeth—concerned about her younger sister's behaviour more than the parent. Elinor is concerned for her sister, but Mrs. Dashwood cherishes Marianne's sensibility, and identically to her relies on her feelings more than on common sense. When it seems to be too late, and Marianne appears to be in love with Willoughby, Elinor urges her mother to at least ask her daughter whether she is engaged to him. But her mother dismisses her, because she does not want to hurt Marianne's feelings and she believes her daughter will tell her of her engagement when the time is right. Mrs. Dashwood does not understand her parental duties and responsibilities, and neglects the inconveniences that might come without her intervention. Of course, they come when Marianne breaks down in her pain after she finds out that Willoughby got engaged to Miss Grey.

Only after Mrs. Dashwood lives through the fright that the image of her 'dying' daughter brings her, she realizes 'her own mistaken judgment in encouraging the unfortunate attachment to Willoughby'⁷⁵ had been responsible for her daughter's

⁷³ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 82.

⁷⁴ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 4.

⁷⁵ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 329.

collapse and illness. Mrs. Dashwood understands that she failed in fulfilling her responsibilities and should not support and even encourage Marianne's behaviour.

Later in the novel, Mrs. Dashwood recognizes another of her errors. As a result of her focus being held on Marianne, she overlooked Elinor's troubles and pains concerning Edward Ferrars.

She now found that she had erred in relying on Elinor's representation of herself; and justly concluded that every thing had been expressly softened at the time, to spare her from an increase of unhappiness, suffering as she then had suffered for Marianne.⁷⁶

Because Elinor is self-controlled in her emotions unlike her mother, Mrs. Dashwood has a difficulty understanding her composure. She tries to be more attentive to Elinor's feelings, and learns that not everything has to be exaggerated.

Mrs. Dashwood is one of the few truly loving parents whose aim is to see her daughters happy. Also, together with Sir Thomas, she is one of two parents analysed in this thesis that learn from their mistakes, however before that happens her daughters are left to err and suffer.

⁷⁶ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 349.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyse how influential is the upbringing and education to the characters of Austen's heroines (and their sibling's), and whether some of the parents' personality traits were inherited by the children. It intended to find out how the relationships between the parents and their children affected the heroine's decisions. The goal of the first chapter dedicated to Austen's own experience was to present information that might later in the thesis reveal whether the parents from her novels have something in common with her own. The second chapter offers facts about the common upbringing and parent/child relationships in Austen's times to compare whether Austen's characters follow the usual practice. And finally, the third chapter exposes how significantly the parents and guardians shape the heroines' personality and influence their decisions.

From the analyses, it is clear that Austen included an inadequate parent or guardian in all the novels. In *Emma*, Mr. Woodhouse represents a parent who is too permissive, inactive in her daughter's life and dependent on her instead of the other way around to pose as a suitable father. Miss Taylor, Emma's governess, should substitute her mother, however, she is similar to Mr. Woodhouse in her permissiveness and rather becomes Emma's friend than a guardian, thus represents another insufficient parental figure. Both of them contribute to Emma's rather arrogant character that enjoys manipulating people. Although wishing for their happiness, she overlooks her mistakes until it is too late. Finally, Emma's missing mother introduces a recurrent theme in Austen's novels, the theme of a missing parent, who would be better in upbringing his/her children than the one still alive. This theme occurs also in *Persuasion* (Lady Elliot) and *Sense and Sensibility* (Mr. Dashwood), and actually provides the heroines with opportunity to think and act for themselves and thus make their right or bad decisions which help them develop in the characters they become.

Mansfield Park introduces five types of incompetent parents. Fanny's biological parents are not able to provide Fanny with the much needed attention and affection to help her grow up into a self-confident young girl who then comes to the Bertram household. Although Sir and Lady Bertram provide Fanny with the necessary education to fit in with the higher society, they cannot change the already shy and quiet girl, because just as her parents they are rather inattentive and never treat Fanny as one of

their children, since they believe it would be inappropriate. Her aunt Mrs. Norris only adds to Fanny's feelings of inferiority and guilt of not being able to love her guardians the way she should, constantly reminding her of her rank and her obligation to be always grateful for everything she was given. On the other hand, the Bertram children are given too much praise by Mrs. Norris and at the same time they feel overly restricted by their father which causes nearly all of them to behave inappropriately and bring the family much embarrassment.

Mr. and Mrs. Morland from *Northanger Abbey* are the only example of rather competent and loving parents despite their lack of understanding of their children's feelings. Thanks to their upbringing, Catherine becomes confident and very honest girl with good manners. However, Catherine's guardians the Allens are either too busy in Mr. Allen's case to provide the helpful guidance, or incapable of doing so in Mrs. Allen's case. They are another example of parental figures that provide their protégée with the opportunity to make her own decisions and in Catherine's case gain knowledge about the society outside of her family circle—people's ways of dishonesty and machination to get what they want.

Persuasion presents the worst father of the analysed novels—Sir Walter. Not only does he completely overlooks two of his three daughters because they do not reach his standards, but he supports the daughter he cherishes in her awful vanity because it resembles his own. His ways of upbringing cause his youngest daughter Mary to be always hungry for the attention that he was supposed to give her in her childhood and adolescence, and his eldest daughter Elizabeth to be unaware of her vanity and impracticality. The heroine of the novel—Anne Elliot—luckily inherited only his pride in their heritage, since she was influenced mostly by Lady Elliot and later her substitute Lady Russell. Because she enjoyed the attention of her mother till she was fourteen and later she became the favourite of Lady Russell who provided her with affection and advice, she grew up to be witty, practical, patient and considerate woman.

The famous *Pride and Prejudice* presents a mother who means well but her ways of achieving the happiness of her five daughters are questionable and a father who lost his interest in providing his daughters with valuable guidance. The eldest Jane and Elizabeth were given their father's attention and education, which limited their mother's influence on their characters, and grew up into well-mannered intelligent young women. However, their mother's rather silly character still has an impact on their lives, because

they often become embarrassed by her in the society or she directly negatively influences their well-being when she forces them into harmful or unpleasant situations. Nevertheless, their three younger sisters are even worse off, since they never received the guidance from their father, only his sarcastic mocking, and thus their personalities were largely influenced by their foolish mother who does not seem to notice any errors in their immature, silly and inappropriate behaviour.

Finally, *Sense and Sensibility* introduces the already mentioned theme of the missing parent—Mr. Dashwood—whose description of personality and behaviour suggests that he would provide his daughters with better guidance than his wife—Mrs. Dashwood. Mrs. Dashwood is very indulgent and loving mother to her three daughters. However, her excessively romantic character blinds her to Marianne's inappropriate behaviour towards the man she falls in love with and causes her to neglect the care for her older daughter Elinor who is more sensible and humble in showing her emotions. Marianne inherits her mother's romantic nature and without any caution provided by her mother, she is forced to live through her errors, which cause her much emotional pain and later even decline in health. Elinor, on the other hand, is left with little attention from her mother, whose focus is put on the more expressive Marianne. Therefore her own suffering, which she kept solely to herself, is revealed only at the end of the novel after her mother realizes her mistakes.

Austen included all these kinds of parental figures in her novels to show how damaging might the inappropriate upbringing be to the children. Since people in her time, including her mother, believed that young children did not require much besides being kept clean, warm and well fed, they possibly never thought that the affection and attention of the parents could be so important for the well-being of the children and the mental health of the potential adult. Mrs. Austen's lack of affection and attention added to Jane's own lack of affection to herself and others, and her fear of rejection. Therefore, her experiences certainly contributed to the presence of the inadequate parents in her novels whose poor nurture resulted in their children's errors and suffering.

Resumé

Cílem této práce bylo analyzovat jaký vliv na hrdinky Jane Austenové (a jejich sourozence) měla výchova a vzdělání, a zda některé děti zdědily vlastnosti svých rodičů. Záměrem práce bylo zjistit, jak vztah mezi rodiči a jejich dětmi ovlivnil rozhodnutí vyobrazených hrdinek. První kapitola je věnována vlastním zkušenostem Jane Austenové, a tudíž prezentování informací, které by později mohly odhalit podobnosti mezi rodiči z jejích románů a jejími vlastními. Druhá kapitola nabízí fakta o běžné výchově a vztazích mezi rodiči a dětmi v dobách Jane Austenové. Třetí kapitola odhaluje jak významně rodiče a poručníci formují osobnost hrdinek a ovlivňují jejich rozhodnutí.

Jane Austenová ve svých románech zahrnuje veškeré tyto typy rodičů, aby ukázala, jak může nevhodná výchova dětem uškodit. Jelikož lidé v jejích dobách, včetně samotné matky Jane Austenové, věřili, že malé děti nepotřebují více než být udržovány v čistotě, v teple a být dobře nakrmeny, mohli si také myslet, že pozornost a láska nejsou tak důležité k obecnému blahobytu a mentálnímu zdraví potencionálních budoucích dospělých. Nedostatek lásky a pozornosti, kterou její matka Jane projevovala, později přispěla k tomu, že Jane samotná neprojevovala přílišnou náklonnost lidem ve svém okolí a trpěla strachem z odmítnutí. V jejích románech tyto zkušenosti zapříčinily přítomnost neadekvátních rodičů, jejichž špatná výchova vyústila v chyby a utrpení jejich dětí.

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Annotation

Author: Tereza Vaňková

Department: Department of English and American Studies

Title of thesis: Jane Austen: Parenthood

Supervisor: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

Number of pages: 47

Year of presentation: 2017

Key words: Jane Austen, parenthood, *Emma*, *Mansfield Park*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, family, 19th century prose, Georgian society

Abstract: This thesis focuses on various representations of parents and parenting in Jane Austen's six finished novels. Parenting in Austen's times was radically different from the present day, and the representations in her novels are closely correlated with the historical background. I am to show the main traits of parenting in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* and search for the similarities to her own experience. Thanks to all those aspects of parenting found in Austen's novels, her own view on parenthood might be revealed.

Anotace

Autor: Tereza Vaňková

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: Jane Austen: Rodičovství

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

Počet stran: 47

Rok obhajoby: 2017

Klíčová slova: Jane Austenová, rodičovství, *Emma*, *Mansfieldský park*, *Northangerské opatství*, *Anna Elliotová*, *Pýcha a předsudek*, *Rozum a cit*, rodina, próza 19. století, společnost Jiřího III.

Abstrakt: Tato práce se zaměřuje na různé vyobrazení rodičů a rodičovství v šesti dokončených románech Jane Austenové. Rodičovství v dobách Jane Austenové se radikálně liší od současnosti a vyobrazení rodičovství v jejích románech koreluje s historickým pozadím. Cílem je ukázat hlavní rysy rodičovství v *Emmě*, *Mansfieldském parku*, *Northangerském opatství*, *Anně Elliotové*, *Pýše a předsudku*, *Rozumu a citu* a vyhledat podobnosti s jejími vlastními zkušenostmi. Díky všem aspektům rodičovství nalezených v románech Jane Austenové by mohl být odhalen její vlastní názor.