

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLMOUCI

FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Jane Austen's way to conformity

Cesta Jane Austenové ke konformismu

(bakalářská práce)

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Olomouc 2012

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla v ní předepsaným způsobem všechnu použitou literaturu.

V Olomouci dne

I would like to thank my supervisor, Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.d. for her assistance during the elaboration of my Bachelor thesis, especially for her advice and patience.

Obsah

1. Introduction	1
2. The World of Jane Austen.....	3
3. The Two Austens	6
4. Austen as a Moralising Satirist	8
4.1 Literary Background.....	9
4.2 Satire in Austen's Juvenilia.....	10
4.2.1 Love and Freindship	10
4.2.2 The Three Sisters	12
4.2.3 Lady Susan.....	14
4.3 Satire in Later Novels.....	14
4.3.1 Persuasion	16
4.3.2 Sanditon	18
5. Austen's Heroines as a Moral Standard.....	21
5.1 Process of Learning	21
5.1.1 Emma	22
5.1.2 Persuasion	23
6. Conclusion	29
7. Resumé.....	31
Works cited	33
Anotace	35

1. Introduction

In my Bachelor thesis I would like to focus on one of the most famous authors of British literature. Even though Jane Austen has been dead for almost two hundred years she still arouses reactions. This to a certain extent proves that her writings still have appeal to a contemporary reader. Much has been said and written about Jane Austen and one can easily declare that there is not much to explore any more. Hundreds of books and thousands of essays have been written on all possible aspects of Jane Austen's fiction. This thesis does not aspire to include all the possible elements of Jane Austen's writings. It would remind us of Morris Zapp in David Lodge's *Changing Places*:

"Some years ago he had embarked with great enthusiasm on an ambitious critical project: a series of commentaries on Jane Austen which would work through the whole canon, one novel at a time, saying absolutely everything that could possibly be said about them. The idea was to be utterly exhaustive, to examine the novels from every conceivable angle, historical, biographical, rhetorical, mythical, Freudian, Jungian, existentialist, Marxist, structuralist, Christian-allegorical, ethical, exponential, linguistic, phenozenological, archetypal, you name it; so that when each commentary was written there would be simply *nothing further to say* about the novel in question."¹

The goal of the effort was "to put a definite stop to the production of any further garbage on the subject."² Nevertheless, he has to eventually admit that his deed would lead to an unfortunate situation: famous English Departments would be "left deserted as ghost towns."³ It certainly is not humanly possible to write everything even about one single author. My objective is to explore Jane Austen's process of maturing as an author and to summarize and contrast major differences or resemblances between her juvenilia and her latter works.

¹ David Lodge. *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses*. New York: Penguin, 1992. 44.

² Lodge 44.

³ Lodge 45.

Most readers know Austen's most famous novels such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* or *Emma*. Admittedly, it is often implied that Jane Austen's novels are basically about the same, husband-hunting, and Austen is pictured as an author of romantic novels. However, an attentive eye has to notice that her novels are not only romantic but sharply satiric.

I believe that if we have a closer look at her works, a certain development can be found. Both the satire and the romantic element are undergoing certain evolution. Even in her six major works there are significant differences depending on the period they were written in. The plots of *Emma* and *Persuasion* are more complex and the characters more elaborated than in *Northanger Abbey*. But it is Austen's juvenilia and other early works which most draw attention considering the level of satire and mockery. To a reader better acquainted with her works the differences between Austen's juvenilia and the novels have to appear striking. A stark contrast can be found, the humour and satire is essential in her first works while in her late works the style is more polished and satire sometimes has to be looked for. In summary, the older Austen gets, the less satire and more complexity appear.

In the title of my thesis the word conformity appears. Collins Cobuild Dictionary explains the term as follows: "[it] is behaviour, thought, or appearance that is the same as that of most other people and that is decided by a desire to be the same as other people rather than to be original or different."⁴ My goal is to explore to what extent Austen and her heroines as well conformed to the rules of both thinking and novel-writing. The question of main characters' compliance with social rules will be raised and I expect to find them quite varied. I believe that I will prove that although her satire became more refined in the course of time, it remained acute and insightful for her whole career.

In the third chapter I will explore the discrepancies in the attitude to Jane Austen, her image soon after her death and in the twentieth century. I expect to find a definite evolution, since the time mediates certain detachment. I believe that certain lapse of time can also make us see all the aspects that could not have been

⁴John Sinclair. *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary*. 1987. 294.

seen at Austen's times. In this case, "[...] it seems the lapse of generations has enabled Jane Austen to exchange the disgrace of being out-of-date for the distinction of being antique,"⁵ and the two hundred years from Austen's death can become an advantage for an analysis.

Although Jane Austen's way of writing has changed and the mockery is not so straightforward, the humour did not disappear, it is still the same Austen, sometimes mild, sometimes sharp. She continually satirizes contemporary affairs and it is only her voice that underwent a change.

2. The World of Jane Austen

Although Jane Austen's brother Henry said that her life was "not by any means a life of event,"⁶ one can oppose him by saying that a sharp mind is able to exploit every encounter, event or experience in general. I would like to mention some of these possible influences; circumstances that may have left their traces on her work.

Jane Austen was born on December 16th, 1775 at Steventon rectory in Hampshire. She was the second youngest out of eight siblings, she had six brothers and a sister. Big families were not rare at these times although it must have comprised both joys and sorrows. It was very common to take children several weeks old to a foster family and leave them there until "they approached the age of reason and became socially acceptable."⁷ To a member of the modern society of the 21st century it might sound cruel but it shows us how much social acceptability meant. The separation might have entailed certain alienation of infants and their mothers in later life. This very early experience could be one of the reasons why Jane Austen had a complicated relationship with her mother. In many of the preserved letters to her sister Cassandra, Austen mentions her mother, usually not exactly

⁵ Ian Littlewood. *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments I*. Mountfield, East Sussex: Helm Information, 1998. 240.

⁶ Claire Tomalin. *Jane Austen: A Life*. London [u.a.: Penguin, 2000.: 4.

⁷ Tomalin 6.

warmly. A few times she also remarks on her mother's health and possibly hints at her hypochondria. Jane Austen's father is not mentioned so much in the letters but we can suppose that he was a very busy man, doing everything he could to support his family. In Austen's works the heroine's parents are always very peculiar and one can just ponder to which extent the author used the characters of her own family.

Reverend George Austen ran a school for boys; the house was always full of his own children, his pupils and their laughter and games. Little Jane was in contact with the opposite sex, she played with the boys and it must have been a very lively childhood. George Austen also kept a big library and Jane definitely enjoyed reading. Apart from this, his children also experimented with performing plays. We can imagine that all this influenced a witty girl, the future author. Claire Tomalin declares that little Jane was a "tough and unsentimental child."⁸ It would explain why the humour in her juvenilia is so sharp. Boys and their games are different from girls', usually wilder. If Austen spent so much time with boys of various age, it could have influenced her perspective on the world around her.

All this could have given her an ability to look at the society from a different angle. Although she grew into a fine young woman, in no way rebel, one can think that her distaste for too much sentiment and the cult of sensibility originates in her childhood.

Moreover, when she started to participate on the social events, she gained another kind of experience. Austen was an observer who watches and absorbs various characters and situations and later wittily uses them when needed.

Jane Austen and her family moved several times. After George Austen's death in Bath in 1805, Jane with Cassandra and their mother even experienced a period of time without a home of their own. It must have been a very difficult position because they were completely dependent on the mercy of Jane's brothers.

Jane Austen was never married. However, there is a discussion about several men mentioned in her letters. In the first preserved letters she mentions her flirting with Thomas Lefroy, "Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in

⁸ Tomalin 32.

the way of dancing and sitting down together."⁹ The description makes us wonder what kind of flirting it could have been. However, it was probably mild considering the contemporary society. We cannot say for sure if Jane Austen was hoping for something more than just friendship and flirting but their relationship would have been impossible anyway, Thomas was expected to marry somebody wealthy. Many years later Thomas Lefroy confessed that he felt "boyish love"¹⁰ for her.

It is known that she was engaged to Harris Bigg-Wither for several hours only.¹¹ Nowadays we cannot be sure about the reason that led Austen to accept and later refuse the proposal. They had known each other for a long time because Harris's sisters were Jane Austen's friends. She was almost twenty-seven then, Harris Bigg-Wither was several years younger and he was an heir to a large house and estate. It could have been a nice match for both of them, yet Austen changed her mind. A lack of love may have been the reason. Perhaps it was Harris Bigg-Wither whom J.E.Austen-Leigh was referring to in *A Memoir of Jane Austen*: "In her youth she had declined the addresses of a gentleman who had the recommendations of good character, and connections, and position in life, of everything, in fact, except the subtle power of touching her heart."¹² The relationship would have been based only on friendship and it was not enough for her.

All in all, Jane Austen's life was not always easy but it was quite calm. Although she was not a rebel in her life, her works prove that she had unconventional perspective on the world around her.

⁹ R.W. Chapman, ed. *Jane Austen, Selected Letters*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985. 3.

¹⁰ Tomalin 119.

¹¹ See Tomalin 182.

¹² Littlewood I 68.

3. The Two Austens

In this part of my thesis I would like to expose the perception of Jane Austen in times after her death and nowadays, which as I believe somewhat differ.

The image of Jane Austen in the nineteenth century was slightly different from the current one. She was portrayed as a spinster living with her mother and sister, writing romantic novels and this picture was strengthened by her brother Henry and his *Biographical Notice of the Author*, a praise of his sister's modesty, goodness and religiosity. It was the first account of Jane Austen's life, written shortly after her death. He speaks about her "quiet and happy occupations"¹³, and considers her "faultless as nearly as human nature can be."¹⁴ About Austen's writing he says that she never commented unkindly other people's vices¹⁵ and that she distrusted of her own judgement.¹⁶

Caroline Austen, Jane Austen's niece, wrote *My Aunt Jane Austen: A Memoir* in which she describes her visits to Chawton when she was a child. She enjoyed the time spent there very much, thanks to Aunt Jane's "sweetness of manner"¹⁷ and various amusements she came up with.¹⁸ Caroline Austen also tells us about her aunt's feeling of inferiority with relation to Cassandra, "[...] Aunt Cassandra could teach everything much better than she could - Aunt Cass knew more [...]"¹⁹

The son of Jane Austen's brother James, James-Edward Austen-Leigh published more extensive *A Memoir of Jane Austen* which seems to be full of nostalgia for the old days. Among other things, he speaks of "modest simplicity of character."²⁰

Only Jane Austen's favourite niece, Edward's daughter Fanny, uses slightly different tone when she refers to her aunt. She admits that both Cassandra and Jane were very clever but she points out that they "were brought up in the most

¹³ Littlewood I 38.

¹⁴ Littlewood I 39.

¹⁵ See Littlewood I 39.

¹⁶ See Littlewood I 38.

¹⁷ Littlewood I 45.

¹⁸ See Littlewood I 49.

¹⁹ Littlewood I 49.

²⁰ Littlewood I 132.

complete ignorance of the World & its ways,"²¹ and if there hadn't been for Edward's marriage and Mrs Knight, "they would have been very much below par as to good society and its ways."²² We can be sure that she does not speak only about fashion.

From these memoirs, except for Fanny's account, a reader gets an image of a gentle old maid, of perfection, loveliness and goodness of heart. This may not be untrue, however, an important part of Jane Austen is missing, her ability to capture various flaws in people's characters and later satirically comment on them.

It is James-Edward Austen-Leigh who mentions Austen's juvenilia and it is apparent that he does not think of them very favourably. He assumes that her first works were Austen's notes of usual faults of other writers which she wanted to prevent in her own later writing.²³ It is evident that Austen's first works are not as refined and complex as her novels but it is not a reason to belittle them. They show us Austen in the beginning of her path towards being a distinguished author. She was already reasonable enough to capture foolishness of human behaviour and by taking it to extremes, make fun of it.

Nowadays we have access to Austen's letters which among other things reveal as Paul Pickrel called it, "the other Jane Austen."²⁴ He adverts to D.W.Harding's essay *Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work* and Marvin Mudrick's *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* where "a creature of pure irony, detached and totally uncommitted"²⁵ is discovered. If we want to find "the other" Jane Austen we have to take into account also the fact, that her sister Cassandra destroyed majority of Jane Austen's letters. It is probable that the preserved letters are of a poorer information value. The reason of Cassandra's action is not known but one can suppose that they were more revealing. Cassandra had the power to form the world's opinion about her dear sister and she surely made use of it. The preserved letters are mostly accounts of domestic issues, social events etc. Nevertheless, even some of them now and then unveil our author's wits and sharp

²¹ Littlewood I 137.

²² Littlewood I 137.

²³ See Littlewood I 78.

²⁴ Littlewood III 88.

²⁵ Littlewood III 89.

judgement such as her comment on a Mrs. Portman: "[...] the good-natured world, as usual, extolled her beauty so highly, that all the neighbourhood have had the pleasure of being disappointed."²⁶ We can also recall this famous quotation: "Miss Blachford is agreeable enough. I do not want people to be very agreeable, as it saves me the trouble of liking them a great deal."²⁷

Not only Austen's letters but also her fiction proves that she was not a simple and sweet creature. A person who created characters like Sir Walter Elliot and Lady Susan Vernon was very well aware of the world around her and its complexities. She was able to see not only the character flaws in herself and other people but also the particular effects of certain kinds of reading, "The young woman who, before the age of twenty could so clearly discern the failings of Marianne Dashwood, could hardly have been subject to them herself."²⁸

If we accept the theory of "the other" Austen we will be able to enjoy a different aspect of her works and moreover, we might enjoy her juvenilia even more than the novels. Her satirical voice which tells us a lot about her morals.

4. Austen as a Moralising Satirist

In this part of my thesis I intend to deal with Jane Austen as a moralizing satirist. The general aim and end of satire is to show the incompatibility between traditional moral standards and actual ways of living.²⁹ This is exactly what Jane Austen does. She does not show the ideal behaviour, she points out the faults and flaws instead. In real world nobody is perfect, and neither are Austen's characters.

²⁶ Chapman 13.

²⁷ Chapman 19.

²⁸ Littlewood I 63.

²⁹ See Basil Willey. *The Eighteenth-Century Background*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962. 99.

4.1 Literary Background

Jane Austen was born and grew up in a century marked by a developing novel, a century of great names of English literature, such as Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Ann Radcliffe, etc. Nevertheless, there were not many kinds of literature permissible for young ladies. I would like to mention one that was, and by this I mean conduct books. Conduct books are certain manuals of etiquette, authors explain how to be a good daughter and later a good wife. The most popular titles were for instance Lord Halifax's *Advice to a Daughter*, Lady Sarah Pennington's *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters*, Dr. Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* and Mrs. Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*. Conduct books stressed the superiority of women as mothers and guardians of domestic happiness and the goal was to become a "[...] Proper Lady who oversaw the activities of the house but did not work herself [...]."³⁰

Conduct books are related to sentimental novels since sentimental heroines are always images of perfection almost as if the authors of conduct books would have designed them.

"The conventional type of conduct books for young ladies, influenced by Richardson's novels, stressed the importance of obedience to parents, especially in their choice of husbands."³¹ Samuel Richardson was a very important figure in the eighteenth century literature and Jane Austen liked his novels. Although she also had similar outlook on manners and morals as above mentioned Lord Halifax,³² she still parodied them since they had a particular impact on young girls. It is probable that Austen felt the same antipathy towards glorification of impeccable heroines as towards deploring corrupt villains. The whole idea of etiquette teaching is to be able to maintain decorum, which can be, and very often really is, just a disguise.

³⁰ Barbara Darby. "The More Things Change...The Rules And Late Eighteenth-Century Conduct Books For Women." *Women's Studies* 29.3 (2000): 333. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 23 April 2012. 336.

³¹ Frank W Bradbrook. *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors*. London: Cambridge University, 1967. 92.

³² See Bradbrook 21.

4.2 Satire in Austen's Juvenilia

In her juvenilia she mocked the cult of sentimental novels, for instance Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* or Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*. Their protagonists are usually faultless girls, very naive, full of sensibility longing for eternal love with a man of the same qualities. Fanny Burney is another author worth mentioning. "Her heroines, modelled on those of Richardson, are more or less passive embodiments of virtue, easy victims who needed the protection of their parents, and in their absence, had to be rescued by the hero."³³

4.2.1 Love and Freindship³⁴

The novel in a series of letters "Love and Freindship" was written by Jane Austen when she was only fourteen, but it became clear that she had a great talent. The protagonist, Laura, is asked by her friend Isabel to tell a story of her life to Isabel's daughter. A wild chain of incidents starts, the action is fast, the characters regroup and relocate all the time. The story is completely grotesque, improbable situations happen in almost every letter. Laura is a comic figure showing the irrationality of excessive sensibility. She falls in love at first sight, suffers injustice, loses her friends and finds them again, keeps fainting and running mad. Everything is exaggerated and everyone who has a little bit of common sense is a villain.

Above mentioned obedience to parents is an element appearing there as well but the characters behave the other way around. Laura and Sophia persuade a fifteen-year old girl named Janetta that she should not want to marry the man her father approves however he is "Sensible, well-informed, and Agreeable;"³⁵ these are just

³³ Bradbrook 110.

³⁴ The diphthong 'ei' is Austen's own mistake, she continues making it throughout almost all her writings

³⁵ Jane Austen. *Sanditon and Other Stories*. London: David Campbell, 1996. 312.

trivialities for them. They are convinced that he has no soul but the main reason of their dislike for him is that it is Janetta's father who recommends him. So they manipulate her into an elopement with a gold-digger. All this out of belief that Janneta's father cannot be right and the forbidden love is always the best. In the sixth letter of "Love and Freindship" Laura's future husband explains his refusal of marrying a girl he liked only because "never shall it be said that I obliged my Father."³⁶

In the fifth letter Laura describes how she met her Edward. After an amusing scene of knocking she falls in love very quickly, "No sooner did I first behold him, than I felt that on him the Happiness or Misery of my future Life must depend."³⁷ As most of the heroines in juvenilia, she falls for Edward absurdly soon and gives up her whole life for him. We can conclude from it that Austen somehow advises readers to get to know each other better and free themselves from sentimentality before premature judgements and decisions. In her novels, Fanny Price and Emma Woodhouse de facto grew up with their future husbands and also the rest of the heroines know their beloveds for a long time before marriage.

Laura tells her story years later, at the age of fifty-five. Fifty-five is the age when "[...] a woman may be said to be in safety from the Perseverance of disagreeable Lovers and the cruel Persecutions of obstinate Fathers."³⁸ A reader could expect that with time Laura would come to her senses and see the whole picture but she is not capable of that. Even thirty-seven years later she is still the same and that intensifies the absurdity. Sentimental heroines were young girls and it is hard to imagine such a heroine in her latter years. Fainting of a young girl on a sofa may be emotional and appealing, fainting of a woman who is in her forties or fifties would be ridiculous and probably considered a disorder. The character of Laura does not evolve and this results from her incapability of learning. Learning is something fundamental in Austen's latter novels. We will have a look on that later on.

³⁶ Austen, *Sanditon and other stories* 299.

³⁷ Austen, *Sanditon and other stories* 299.

³⁸ Austen, *Sanditon and other stories* 295.

4.2.2 The Three Sisters

The author without any doubt ridiculed sentimental novels and their heroines in this piece of writing as well. Mary Stanhope receives a marriage proposal and her first sentence is: "I am the happiest creature in the World, for I have received an offer of marriage from Mr. Watts."³⁹ This opening can be misleading, since it sounds very romantic, as if she was in love and hoped for such a thing. Soon after that she reveals that she does not want to accept the proposal since she finds Mr. Watts repelling, she "cannot bear to look at him" and "hate[s] him more than any body else in the world."⁴⁰ But there is a reason for happiness – a so-called triumph over her sisters and neighbours. The whole story is about Mary considering the proposal, meditating over trivialities. She changes her mind repeatedly.

"The Three Sisters" is full of hypocrisy and I dare say, even wickedness, presented by means of mockery and irony. Here the heroine is a fool too but a fool in a different way. Her need of not being outdone is considerable. Another reason for marriage would be the money. Mary is not the only one who behaves this way, her sisters are exactly the same. Austen uses more than one point of view to intensify the absurdity of girls' behaviour. It is true that when a girl married, it was regarded as a success and "The Three Sisters" is not the only piece of writing where Jane Austen points it out. Anne Elliot's younger sister Mary also thinks it "creditable to have a sister married."⁴¹

In a sense, "The Three Sisters" is exceptional also because it lacks any romance. In "Love and Freindship" Laura actually felt love for somebody even though it was laughed at. Mary does not feel love, she may not even be able to feel it. So what do they have in common? Still both works satirize basically the same – extremes. The relationships are warped and the heroines succumb to false morality.

³⁹ Austen, *Sanditon and other stories* 274.

⁴⁰ Austen, *Sanditon and other stories* 274.

⁴¹ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*. London: Penguin, 1943. 252.

The story "The Three Sisters" was dedicated to the new-born Jane Anna Elizabeth Austen, her brother James's eldest daughter. The inscription says, "[...], I dedicate to You the following Miscellaneous Morsels, convinced that if you seriously attend to them, You will derive from them very important Instructions, with regard to your Conduct in Life."⁴² Jane Austen dedicated more of her first works to various family members, she wrote even the inscription in a playful way but what strikes us in this particular case, is the word "instructions". It seems that if Austen meant to be educative she chose a strange genre. However, it is quite understandable. Having read a story like one of these, having laughed at Laura or Mary, it would be very odd if a girl behaved similarly.

Austen's stories must be more entertaining than conduct books which she was acquainted with. Austen's intention to educate is thus another aspect a reader has to keep in mind. She "teaches" in a reversed way, pointing out what not to do, instead of showing the ideal behaviour. Although Austen's satire is sharp, she does not ridicule morality itself but taking it into extremes, "The juvenilia are full of mock morality, parodying the conduct books and the solemn Fanny Burney."⁴³

One of the most appealing scenes of an emotional welcome is described in "Evelyn". A Mr. Gower arrives in the village called Evelyn and amazed by its charm looks for a house he could stay in. He is advised to try the home of Mr. and Mrs. Webb where he encounters a great generosity, "Welcome best of Men [...] I wish my purse were weightier, but Mr. Webb must make up my deficiencies –. I know he has cash in the house to the amount of an hundred pounds, which he shall bring you immediately."⁴⁴ They not only give him all the money they have in the house, but also the house itself and finally even their daughter. The author once again reduced things to the absurdity.

⁴² Austen, *Sanditon and other stories* 288.

⁴³ Bradbrook 23.

⁴⁴ Austen, *Sanditon and other stories* 407.

4.2.3 Lady Susan

At the age of twenty, Jane Austen produced a piece of writing which is completely different from all the others, "Lady Susan". There is a strong resemblance between "Lady Susan" and *Dangerous Liaisons* by Choderlos de Laclos. "Lady Susan" has a special place among Austen's writings because it is her only wicked protagonist. Susan Vernon is not a good mother, not a good person. She enjoys playing with other people's lives and feelings. The story is not burlesque anymore and is more complex, therefore we can place it somewhere between Austen's early juvenilia and mature works. Lady Susan is very intelligent, pretty and brilliant when it comes to intrigues. Austen shows us an immoral creature who, wherever she comes, looks for a man she could seduce, sometimes even more than one. One of her major tools is language: "Consideration and esteem as surely follow command of language, as admiration waits on beauty."⁴⁵ She is so accomplished that she manipulates Mr. De Courcy into believing that all he heard about her is a simple misunderstanding. However, after all the scheming we witness, we must to a certain extent admire Lady Susan for her abilities. At the end of the story she does not suffer for her sins, she is not punished. If Jane Austen had wanted to moralize she would have chosen a different ending. I believe that it is the character of Mr. De Courcy that teaches us a lesson. Although he knew about Lady Susan's behaviour at Langford, he was not strong-minded enough and yielded to Lady Susan himself. Sometimes submitting to evil may result in worse consequences than being the evil itself.

4.3 Satire in Later Novels

"Jane Austen's artistic problem was always that of reconciling the moral intention which lay behind her fiction, her natural comic instinct, and the taste of the public for which she wrote."⁴⁶ In this part of my Bachelor thesis I would like to explore

⁴⁵ Austen, *Sanditon and other stories* 161.

⁴⁶ Bradbrook 114.

to what extent Austen follows the comic instinct in her late works, especially in *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*.

In general, Jane Austen tones down her literary satire in subsequent years. Nevertheless, we must not forget Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility* and Catherine's delusions in *Northanger Abbey*. Marianne Dashwood is extremely influenced by sentimental literature and poetry while in Catherine Morland's case it is gothic fiction. These characters let their reading influence their judgement excessively and are very passive. This suggests that they are too lazy to think independently, they are easily controlled by either their fiction-based emotions or other people. We can say that they lack common sense (at least in the beginning of the story). Thus they remind us of protagonists of Austen's early works. It is not a coincidence that *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility* were written as one of the first of the six major novels. They show us Austen's process of evolving, they are an intermediate stage between burlesques and more mature works.

Although Jane Austen wrote her first works when she was very young, they prove that the author was very witty and could easily see through smoke and mirrors. She criticized sentimentality, yet she ended up writing romantic novels. Can we suspect her of accepting the literary standards of that time? The problem is more complex. In the third chapter I tried to explain the concept of "the other Austen," as based on the essay "Regulated Hatred". Robert P.Irvine explores the topic as well and states that basically there are two ways of reading Austen. One considers her novels an image of a "lost ideal of polite social interaction"⁴⁷ while the other is conscious of more negative aspects of it. As a matter of fact, he says that we can find in her novels "an account of her society as its own sort of nightmare."⁴⁸ By this he means people chattering with a deceptive smile about trifles while they are full of antipathy or intrigue, the society where manners are sometimes more important than character.

Austen's novels are always balancing on the line between the grotesque and the romantic. This is one of the features that make her novels so very readable even

⁴⁷Robert P Irvine. *Jane Austen*. London: Routledge, 2005. 93.

⁴⁸ Irvine 93.

for people who do not particularly relish romantic fiction. The humorous element is still there even though to a lesser extent.

4.3.1 Persuasion

The change of tone in *Persuasion* is apparent, Austen is not so playful anymore. Even when we compare her early novels, for instance *Pride and Prejudice*, with *Persuasion*, we find out that the atmosphere of the latter is darker and more serious. It is caused mostly by the temperament of the heroine herself, Anne Elliot is definitely Austen's most mature main character. I will discuss Anne's personality in the next chapter.

The beginning of the story is to a certain extent similar to her other great novels. The Elliot family have to leave Kellynch Hall because of Sir Walter's costs of living. In the first chapter there is a discussion about money; when he is told they should retrench, he almost gets angry.⁴⁹ He, Sir Walter, cannot retrench as he spends money just on the necessary items for a man of his rank. To lose a home as a result of his inability to admit a problem and accept a possible and not at all that tough a solution, is a proof enough of his stupidity.

Anne's father, Sir Walter Elliot, is just a caricature of a gentleman. Austen, in general, depicted very peculiar father figures in her books; still Sir Walter Elliot excels. The only person he loves is himself and most of all he loves his title. The novel opens with a paragraph saying that the only book Sir Walter ever opens, is the Baronetage.⁵⁰ He is full of self-conceited arrogance and vanity. When Sir Walter finds out that his tenant could be a navy man, he does not want to hear a word about it. His opinion of this profession is that it "has its utility, but I should be sorry to see any friend of mine belonging to it."⁵¹ and continues with his objections: "[it] brings persons of obscure birth into undue distinction and cuts a man's youth and vigour most horridly."⁵² The sentence actually sums up the whole

⁴⁹ See Austen, *Persuasion* 11.

⁵⁰ See Austen, *Persuasion* 7.

⁵¹ Austen, *Persuasion* 17.

⁵² Austen, *Persuasion* 18.

personality of Anne's father, he judges people according to their social status and appearance. He believes that his title makes him superior. After all he is satisfied with letting his house to an admiral: "I have let my house to Admiral Croft' would sound extremely well; [...] An admiral speaks his own consequence, and, at the same time, can never make a baronet look small."⁵³

Anne's father and her elder sister Elizabeth are very much alike. She agrees completely with her father. Both of them are selfish and extravagant. None of them can feel any attachment to Anne. Elizabeth prefers her shallow companion, Mrs. Clay, whom she addresses her opinion about Anne: "She is nothing to me, compared with you."⁵⁴

Anne's younger sister, Mary, is slightly warmer towards her, "not so repulsive and unsisterly."⁵⁵ She is a hypochondriac, she comments her health very often. She gets sick mostly when she needs company and attention. Anne knows it and also knows how to help her – a little "patience and forced cheerfulness"⁵⁶ and in a few minutes she is healthy again. One cannot help thinking that Mary, though silly and not perfect, more resembles a normal person. Nevertheless, she shares her father's and eldest sister's feeling of superiority, which is apparent when she speaks about Mr. Charles Hayter. "[...] it would be shocking to have Henrietta marry Charles Hayter: a very bad thing for her, and still worse for me."⁵⁷ Later, while having a walk, their company gets close to Winthrop, home of the Hayters. Mary addresses Captain Wentworth: "It is very unpleasant having such connections! But, I assure you, I have never been in the house above twice in my life."⁵⁸ Mary makes a fool of herself as the only answer is Captain Wentworth's scornful look.

In summary, the whole family is full of Elliot self-importance based on their social status.⁵⁹ Austen does not criticize nobility in general but she has a very "sensible attitude towards rank".⁶⁰ She mocks people with a false sense of superiority who take themselves (and their title) too seriously. By combining

⁵³ Austen, *Persuasion* 23.

⁵⁴ Austen, *Persuasion* 142.

⁵⁵ Austen, *Persuasion* 74.

⁵⁶ Austen, *Persuasion* 37.

⁵⁷ Austen, *Persuasion* 37.

⁵⁸ Austen, *Persuasion* 85.

⁵⁹ See Austen, *Persuasion* 35.

⁶⁰ Bradbrook 111.

morality and humour the author shows that one should not pronounce judgements on others based on their position but on their personal merits.

4.3.2 Sanditon

Although Austen's last novel is unfinished, it is recognisable that she further expands the topic of above mentioned hypochondria.

The story is set in the countryside and starts with a meeting of two families, the Parkers and the Heywoods. Mr. Parker has an accident, sprains his ankle and Mr. and Mrs. Heywood take him into their house. Mr. Parker gets more space to show off. The only thing he can speak of is a small town of Sanditon.

At the beginning of the novel, Mr. Parker has a long speech about Sanditon, how perfect a place for recreation it is: "Nature had marked it out [...] The finest, purest sea breeze on the coast [...] excellent bathing – fine hard sand – deep water ten yards from the shore – no mud – no weeds – no slimey rocks [...]." ⁶¹ He gets more and more enthusiastic and exaggerates.

"Only conceive sir, the advantage of saving a whole mile, in a long journey." ⁶² Jane Austen, who was a keen walker ⁶³, hints that if people walked or exercised more, they would not need places like Sanditon in the first place. Another evidence of his opinions is that "no person could be really well, [...] without spending at least six weeks by the sea every year." ⁶⁴ To a today's reader it must sound almost surreal, that people leading life of idleness, needed such a long recreation.

In *Sanditon* Austen returns to the topic of hypochondria. Mary Elliot in *Persuasion* was an excellent example, however, in *Sanditon* the topic is exploited to a larger degree. Mr. Parker's siblings are a classic of above mentioned way of life. They are all notorious hypochondriacs, almost at death's door according to

⁶¹ Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories* 11.

⁶² Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories* 11.

⁶³ See Tomalin 148.

⁶⁴ Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories* 15.

the letter sent to their brother. Diana Parker explains her brother that from her experience, friction is the solution for a sprained ankle: "I rubbed his ankle with my own hands for six hours without intermission. [...] He was well in three days."⁶⁵ This excerpt reminds us of Austen's younger voice. The scene of rubbing an ankle for six hours is very comic, the author once again slips into a burlesque. The letter continues with a grotesque account of treating Diana's sister, Susan, of a headache, "Being convinced that much of the evil lay in her gum, I persuaded her to attack the disorder there. She has accordingly had three teeth withdrawn."⁶⁶ He mentions Sidney Parker as a reasonable man, who would laugh at the letter. But Mr. Parker himself believes that his sisters suffer very much. He is a good-hearted but not very bright man, he fails to see the absurdity of the letter and so he becomes a part of the charade. Nevertheless, we cannot say that Mr. Parker is a wholly comic character. He is one of the kind fools that reappear throughout Austen's novels, for instance Mrs. Jennings in *Sense and Sensibility* or Miss Bates in *Emma*.

Another important character is Lady Denham. She was given a lot of space throughout *Sanditon*. The author used direct speech to introduce her to us. A slight contradiction in the description of her character can be observed. On the one hand, it is still the Austen we know, the critic of self-important aristocracy, ridiculing their petty problems, "[...] Lady Denham like a true great lady, talked and talked only of her own concerns."⁶⁷ On the other hand, a reader can notice a bit of sympathy with Lady Denham from the author's side, "[...] there was a good humour and cordiality about her [...] and a heartiness of welcome towards her old friends."⁶⁸ Austen is not as sharp as she used to be and the type of characters who did not have any qualities, for instance Sir Walter Elliot, start having some. Nevertheless, as Charlotte Heywood is getting to know Lady Denham, surprised at her meanness, she eventually alters her opinion on her, "Charlotte's feelings were divided between amusement and indignation – but

⁶⁵ Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories* 29.

⁶⁶ Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories* 30.

⁶⁷ Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories* 43.

⁶⁸ Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories* 34.

indignation had the larger and more increasing share. [...] 'I can see no good in her. – Thus it is, when rich people are sordid.'"⁶⁹

Later on Austen again engages in literary satire. Sir Edward Denham seemed at first agreeable and handsome to Charlotte, but very soon she finds out that he enjoys talking about poetry although he does not know much about it.⁷⁰ In the eighth chapter an interesting dialogue between him and Charlotte takes place. Sir Edward is considered stupid by the heroine since he approves of novels which "display human nature with grandeur [...] – such as exhibit the progress of strong passion [...] – our hearts are paralyzed [...]."⁷¹ He apparently enjoys sentimental novels and that affects him more than it should since "his great objection in life was to be seductive."⁷² Charlotte is the one who has common sense, she is "sufficiently well-read in novels to supply her imagination with amusement, but not at all unreasonably influenced by them;"⁷³ According to our sober-minded heroine, and thus Austen herself, novels are primarily for amusement and one should be careful about possible impacts on one's view of life.

Mentioned examples show that although Jane Austen's way of writing was gradually changing, the humour did not disappear. She still satirizes contemporary affairs and it is only her voice that underwent a change. It is quite clear that as people mature, their tastes develop. In the last period of Austen's life, her satire is much more refined and polished and she turned her attention from literary to social satire.

⁶⁹ Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories* 47.

⁷⁰ See Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories* 41.

⁷¹ Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories* 48.

⁷² Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories* 49.

⁷³ Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories* 35.

5. Austen's Heroines as a Moral Standard

I have already mentioned Austen's critical view of society which I have illustrated by several characters in *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*. Robert P. Irvine suggests that Austen's insight into maladies of the contemporary world is caused by a sort of estrangement. "Austen's true meaning, as encoded in her irony, can only be appreciated by the critical few. These few are those who are, like Austen, alienated enough from their social world to perceive its underlying cruelty."⁷⁴ This alienation may have been a reason for the diverse responses to Austen's work after she died. Irvine further comments on Elizabeth Bennet, she "defines herself in opposition to the world around her, defines herself by her ability to separate herself from it and thus to subject it to rational criticism."⁷⁵ It implies that Austen transfers the estrangement into her protagonists as well. We see the rest of the characters from protagonists' viewpoint and astute readers hence perceive Austen's judgement.

It would seem that Austen's heroines are flawless since they reflect the imperfections of society but it is not so. I would like to focus on the protagonist of *Persuasion*, since it is her last finished novel and I believe that it can tell us the most. I have already exposed the aims of Austen's irony so now I will try to analyse the heroine herself.

5.1 Process of Learning

I would like to explain the title of this subchapter. As Robert Miles says, there is an element in Austen's novel which we could call process of learning.⁷⁶ Elizabeth Bennet unveils her own prejudice against Darcy, Emma Woodhouse is shown her pride, Catherine Morland is freed from her gothic delusions and Marianne Dashwood gets rid of her excessive sensibility. One way or another, they all discover a flaw in their character and on their way to perfection meet the one. He

⁷⁴ Irvine 94.

⁷⁵ Irvine 102.

⁷⁶ See Miles, Jane Austenová. Brno: CDK, 2009. 63.

also declares that Anne Elliot is the heroine who learns the least.⁷⁷ It is to a certain extent true, throughout the novel Anne does not experience any moment of revelation about herself as the rest of Austen's heroines do. The case of Anne Elliot is different and I will expose the contrast.

On the other hand, Emma Woodhouse is going through an evolvment par excellence.

5.1.1 Emma

Emma is very dissimilar to all the other novels. The rest of Austen's main characters, such as Anne Elliot, Elizabeth Bennet or Elinor Dashwood serve as representatives of certain moral standards. In *Emma*, the author "teaches" us, the readers, as well; even though she does it in a different manner. Emma Woodhouse is a pretty, rich and accomplished young woman who is interested in matchmaking. Jane Austen herself said of the heroine: "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like."⁷⁸ A reader sees everything through Emma's eyes and he does not realize he is being manipulated. Emma at the beginning is arrogant and vain. She believes that she knows best what is good for other people, she is projecting her wishes onto them.

The choice of heroine is unusual indeed. "It is much easier to set up a separate fool for comic effects and to preserve your heroine for finer things. Sympathetic laughter is especially difficult with characters whose faults do not spring from sympathetic virtues."⁷⁹ In this case, we really do not laugh at sympathetic virtues, Emma is not a kind fool as those Austen used before. *Emma* is also Austen's only novel in which we cannot rely on heroine's consciousness because she is mistaken almost about everything, and most about her own feelings. She thinks that Mr. Elton is in love with Harriet Smith, then she wants to match up Harriet and Frank Churchill and denies that she herself loves Mr. Knightley. We can only speculate about what would happen with Emma, if Mr. Knightley was not there.

⁷⁷ See Miles 63.

⁷⁸ Austen Leigh. *A Memoir of Jane Austen*. 157.

⁷⁹ Wayne C Booth. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967. 246.

The probable scenario is that she would not realize her flaws and would still be a conceited girl who plays with other people's lives. Fortunately Emma has Mr. Knightley who shows her how badly she behaves and she can gradually make atonement and become a better person.

According to Wolfgang Iser, "[...] The study of a literary work should not concern only the actual text, but also, in an equal measure, the actions involved in responding to the text."⁸⁰ Austen achieves the situation when the reader still feels for the heroine, although she is the least perfect of her heroines. Here Austen's art reaches a peak since the reader is easily mystified as well, Emma's self-deception is transferred onto us. Wayne C. Booth defines the process as a "parallel emotional response between the deficient heroine and the reader."⁸¹ When reading *Emma*, we follow the same path as the heroine and thus we "become" arrogant and vain ourselves.

Emma at the end of the novel is a different person; the process of learning has been extremely successful and she becomes more modest. This is not the case of Anne Elliot who is already mature and humble at the beginning of the novel.

5.1.2 Persuasion

The story is very intimate and Anne Elliot is one of Austen's most appealing heroines. From the beginning of the novel we are being acquainted with a twenty-seven-year old, calm, passive girl who does not speak much. It is apparent that Anne lost a lot of her bloom, vigour and desire for life. She is still the same person, with modesty, taste and feeling⁸² but it seems as if she gave up on life. She does not dance anymore, "very much preferring the office of musician to a more active post."⁸³ Anne has to face a constant reminder of her almost lost youth and enthusiasm, she spends a lot of time with Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove who are "like thousands of other young ladies, living to be fashionable,

⁸⁰ Wolfgang Iser. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" *New Literary History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, On Interpretation: I (Winter, 1972). 279.

⁸¹ Booth 249.

⁸² See Austen, *Persuasion* 23.

⁸³ Austen, *Persuasion* 45.

happy and merry."⁸⁴ Not only can we feel a touch of irony in the sentence but we are also given a nice portrayal of what a young lady should be like to have the best prospects.

The heroine loses her home and there is no prospect for amelioration of their financial situation. The lack of a home is a constant element, Anne moves from one place to another and she cannot do anything about it since she is dependent on other people. Her sister Elizabeth resolves whether Anne should stay in Uppercross or go with them to Bath by saying, "Then I am sure Anne had better stay, for nobody will want her in Bath."⁸⁵ She is simply there where she is needed.

Anne Elliot does not have a home, nor many affectionate friends. Lady Russel is the only person she can trust and rely on. All the other members of her family are just caricatures. However, even Lady Russel is not flawless, we will discuss it in later on.

Unlike other Austen's heroines, Anne Elliot has already found her better half. However, she missed an opportunity for a happy life with him; she was persuaded by her close friend Lady Russel to cancel the engagement. The story starts eight years later. We know that Anne has already realized that Lady Russel's conviction has cost her happiness and that to a certain extent blames herself for being too easily persuaded. "She was persuaded that under every disadvantage of disapprobation at home, and every anxiety attending his profession, [...] she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement than she has been in the sacrifice of it."⁸⁶ Although she learnt to live with the disappointment, the sense of regret can be detected almost throughout the whole novel. Captain Wentworth, however, appears again on the scene. Austen describes Anne's thoughts about their first meeting after so many years very elaborately, "Her eye half met Captain Wentworth's, a bow, a courtsey passed; she heard his voice; [...] the room seemed full, full of persons and voices, but a few minutes ended it. [...] 'It is over! It is over!' she repeated herself again and again, in

⁸⁴ Austen, *Persuasion* 39.

⁸⁵ Austen, *Persuasion* 31.

⁸⁶ Austen, *Persuasion* 27.

nervous gratitude. "The worst is over!"⁸⁷ The depiction of this scene is very powerful and intensive, a reader almost feels Anne's excitement.

From the beginning it is apparent that Anne did not forget Captain Wentworth. After the first meeting she tries to suppress her feelings, "[...] she began to reason with herself, and try to be feeling less. Eight years, almost eight years had passed, since all had been given up. [...] Alas! With all her reasonings she found, that to retentive feelings eight years may be little more than nothing."⁸⁸ To her, he is the same man she loved eight years ago. Old wounds reopened, she cannot help thinking about a second chance. Nevertheless, Captain Wentworth sees it differently.

Several times Austen uses Captain Wentworth's point of view. She applies it for putting a reader "in a state of pleasurable suspense by the obstacles that delay this [happy] ending,"⁸⁹ since Captain Wentworth does not want Anne back at first. "He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill, deserted and disappointed him; she had shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, [...] It had been weakness and timidity."⁹⁰ These sentences take us into Captain Wentworth's mind. It makes us believe, as Captain Wentworth believes himself, that Anne Elliot had made a mistake and that "her power with him was gone forever."⁹¹ Austen switches the point of view and achieves reader's uncertainty about further development of the plot.

In the course of the story Anne and Frederick start talking again. He is being gradually reminded of Anne's virtues, she starts to blossom out again and they slowly rediscover their love.

During their stay in Lyme Anne has an interesting conversation with Captain Benwick. They talk about his late fiancée and Anne recommends him to read more prose than poetry to calm down his disturbed soul. It is worth noticing that she suggests moralist writings,⁹² works she used to satirize. She tells him that time

⁸⁷ Austen, *Persuasion* 58.

⁸⁸ Austen, *Persuasion* 59.

⁸⁹ Irvine 104.

⁹⁰ Austen, *Persuasion* 60.

⁹¹ Austen, *Persuasion* 60.

⁹² Austen, *Persuasion* 100.

can heal everything yet she is the one to prove the contrary and she is aware of it, "[...] nor could she help fearing, on more serious reflection, that, like many other great moralists and preachers, she had been eloquent on a point in which her own conduct would ill bear examination."⁹³ Anne knows that those who moralize do not always live by the rules themselves and there are things that one simply cannot affect.

Although Anne does not go through any kind of "moral climax," as is for instance Marianne Dashwood's freeing herself of sentimental ideas, she experiences another kind of revelation. She discovers that Captain Wentworth's affection for her has been restored. This revelation consequently changes her as well. In short, Anne in the beginning and at the end is different. It is because of her increasing self-confidence and also belief that what was once lost, can be gained again.

In the climax of the novel Captain Wentworth admits that he had "imagined himself indifferent, when he had only been angry; and he had been unjust to her merits, because he had been a sufferer from them."⁹⁴ Thus it is him who alters more, he comes back to learn humility and realizes that he still have feelings for Anne Elliot.

Whether it was right or wrong to cancel the engagement is not easily judged. Lady Russel is Anne's surrogate mother and the only authority. However, she is not perfect, "[she] had little taste for wit"⁹⁵ and "[...] alone among all the characters in Austen's novels – is seen simultaneously right and wrong, worthy of regard, yet mistaken."⁹⁶ When Frederick Wentworth appears again and it is possible that he is considering courting Luisa Musgrove, there is a hint of Lady Russel's vice: "[...] internally her heart revelled in angry pleasure, in pleased contempt, that the man who at twenty-three had seemed to understand somewhat of the value of an Anne Elliot, should, eight years afterwards, be charmed by a Louisa Musgrove."⁹⁷ She feels satisfaction that her advice to Anne several years ago now proves legitimate.

⁹³ Austen, *Persuasion* 101.

⁹⁴ Austen, *Persuasion* 243.

⁹⁵ Austen, *Persuasion* 25.

⁹⁶ Littlewood III 105.

⁹⁷ Austen, *Persuasion* chapter 13.

The question of Austen's attitude to the marriage market is very complex. Austen's critical voice about the widespread power of money and social status is very much discussed. The conversation that takes place in the beginning of "The Watsons" summarizes the reality and the predicament of an unmarried woman.

"A heart, wounded like yours can have little inclination for matrimony.' 'Not much indeed – but you know, we must marry. – I could do very well single for my own part – A little company, and a pleasant ball now a then, would be enough for me, if one could be young forever, but my father cannot provide for us, and it is very bad to grow old and be poor and laughed at.'"⁹⁸

Sometimes it is the head at the expense of the heart that is the most important factor in deciding if, and who to marry. Mary Musgrove in *Persuasion* soberly comments on women's limitations, "I do not think any young woman has a right to make a choice that may be disagreeable and inconvenient to the principal part of her family [...]."⁹⁹ Although most of the time Austen mocks Mary, I believe that here Mary conveys the plain reality. We can recall the case of Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*, she marries a man everybody else contempts because it gives her a position in life. But not only Charlotte, Elizabeth Bennet also admits that after having seen Pemberley, "[...] she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!"¹⁰⁰ We cannot despise her since she would certainly not take Pemberley with somebody like Mr. Collins.¹⁰¹ However, the situation would get more complicated, if she had Mr. Darcy without Pemberley estate. None of Austen's characters end up with somebody either poor or with no prospects. We can sum up by saying that some of Austen's heroines were simply very lucky in falling in love with wealthy men.

Let us get back to *Persuasion*. Very simply put, Frederick Wentworth in the beginning is poor and therefore refused. After coming back with a considerable fortune, he is accepted. We can only wonder what would have happened, if

⁹⁸ Austen, *Sanditon and other stories* 79.

⁹⁹ Austen, *Persuasion* 60.

¹⁰⁰ Austen, *Persuasion* 234.

¹⁰¹ See Littlewood III 291.

Frederick had come back penniless. Perhaps the "maturity of mind"¹⁰² would not let Anne (and probably neither her family) marry a man without means.

The regard Anne feels towards Lady Russel makes her come to the conclusion that although Lady Russel was mistaken in her advice, she herself was right in submitting to her. "I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience."¹⁰³ I do not mean to belittle Anne's torment but it is quite a turnabout. At the moment of reunion with Frederick, she does not regret having yielded to Lady Russel and given him up. We have to take into account that "morality is about fulfilling the duties that you have as a result of the social position in which you find yourself."¹⁰⁴ We can change the word "duties" for "expectations." Anne was then aware of making a mistake, however, she also knew that she was obliged to follow Lady Russel's advice. Her duty was to follow Lady Russel's advice, however it might have been wrong. This is Anne's moral strength, she behaved morally, nevertheless she had to suffer the consequences. Just as E.M.Forster says, "Only a writer, who has the sense of evil can make goodness readable."¹⁰⁵ Jane Austen has to ability to create both wicked characters and characters of high moral principles.

¹⁰² Austen, *Persuasion* 250.

¹⁰³ Austen, *Persuasion* 248

¹⁰⁴ Irvine 106.

¹⁰⁵ E. M Forster. *Aspects of the Novel*. Ed. Oliver Stallybrass. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990. 171.

6. Conclusion

Jane Austen is one of the few authors who draw attention even two centuries after their death. This authoress is unique not only because she became (as one of first women) part of our textbooks, but also because her novels are very attractive for nowadays' readers. Her life was relatively short and she managed to finish six novels, two of them posthumously. However, Jane Austen started to write when she was very young. Her first works, in three volumes, include short pieces of writing that show us the famous writer from a different perspective. In my Bachelor thesis I tried to cover both Austen's juvenilia and her most mature novels.

Austen's image has been changing throughout the twentieth century. It seems as if there were two camps – those who still see Austen as a kind maiden aunt, and those who consider her a malicious satirist. Nevertheless, she is one of the authors who are able to combine a sharp tongue with sensitive and slightly moralising approach. Wayne C. Booth aptly remarked that:

"Those, who love 'gentle Jane' as a secret friend may undervalue the irony and wit; those who see her in effects as the greatest of Shaw's heroines, flashing about with her weapons of irony, may undervalue the emphasis on tenderness and good will. But only a very few can resist her."¹⁰⁶

I believe that I have demonstrated both these aspects. I have shown how her satire works in several pieces of writing. Austen's juvenilia mostly deals with literary satire. She criticizes overly sensitive heroines and excessively influenced readers; however, she owes a lot to the authors such as Samuel Richardson or Fanny Burney. By means of exaggeration and parody Austen shows how her early heroines lose the contact with real world, the satire is brutal.

I focused on the moral aspect of her writings as well. In her first works the main characters do not have any morals, they are vain and superficial. On the other hand, Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* is Austen's most mature heroine and a woman of

¹⁰⁶ Booth 266.

high moral principles. She does not do what would make her happy, but what is expected. Austen shows that living according to people's expectations is not always a weakness. If we consider her a moralist her heroes are not perfect as opposed to the ones by Richardson. It is especially apparent in the case of Emma Woodhouse, she starts as an arrogant spoiled child and she is gradually gaining her virtues. In all her works she criticizes snobbery and arrogance. It is most evident in the case of Sir Walter Elliot, Lady Catherine de Bourgh or Lady Denham.

Jane Austen was not a radical. Nevertheless, I have shown that even though Jane Austen's style of writing changed, she still kept her keen judgement. The two aspects of her writings are two sides of the same coin.

7. Resumé

Hlavním tématem mé bakalářské práce je Jane Austenová, britská autorka z přelomu 18. a 19. století. Její romány se staly součástí kánonu anglické literatury a přesto jsou velmi populární i dnes. Drtivá většina čtenářů je obeznámena s šesti díly: *Pýcha a předsudek*, *Rozum a cit*, *Northangerské opatství*, *Mansfieldské panství*, *Emma* a *Anna Elliotová*. Cílem této bakalářské práce bylo prozkoumat vztah mezi ranou a pozdní tvorbou Jane Austenové.

V druhé kapitole v krátkosti popisuji život Jane Austenové. Zmiňuji události, které ji dle mého názoru ovlivnily v její literární kariéře.

Třetí část práce se věnuje dvěma různým pohledům na autorku. Ta je často prezentována coby pisatelka romantických románů, která využívá satiry k pousmání čtenáře a odlehčení svých děl. Toto vnímání podporuje i většina pamětí, které po její smrti vydali příbuzní. Druhý koncept bychom mohli přeložit jako "ta druhá Austenová." Ten spisovatelku ukazuje v jiném světle, jako tvrdou kritičku tehdejší společnosti. Toto hledisko rozebírám i v další kapitole, která se zabývá satirou v jejích dílech. Prvotiny Jane Austenové čtenáře upoutají svou nekompromisní kritikou útlocitnosti a přecitlivělosti hlavních hrdinek. V příběhu "Love and Freindship" je zřejmé, že postavy jsou modelovány dle tehdy populárních sentimentálních románů, jejichž nejznámějším autorem byl Samuel Richardson. Sentimentální román souvisí s takzvanými "conduct books", určitými manuály etikety a slušného chování pro dívky a mladé ženy. Austenová ukazuje, že výběr čtené literatury je velmi důležitý a je třeba zachovat si selský rozum. Ojedinělým případem mezi těmito prvotinami je "Lady Susan." Hlavní postavou je intrikářská a manipulativní Susan Vernon, která dokonce ani k vlastní dceři nechová žádnou náklonnost. I přesto, že v místě jejího nového "působíště" se do detailu ví o její pověsti, stejně jejímu kouzlu a výřečnosti podlehne další oběť, Reginald De Courcy. Autorka demonstuje, že vybranými způsoby a srdečností je možné zamaskovat úpadek morálky. Zvláštností je, že na samém konci nedochází k vytrestání Lady Susan. To by tedy napovídalo tomu, že hlavním terčem kritiky nemusí být jen Lady Susan samotná, ale i Reginald De Courcy, jakožto její velmi snadná oběť.

V románu *Persuasion* zkoumám nejdříve postavy otce a sester hlavní hrdinky, postavy Sira Waltera Elliota, Elizabeth Elliotové a Mary Musgrovové, které spojuje nadutost a snobismus. Zatímco Mary je jeden z hlavních zdrojů humoru, Sir Walter a Elizabeth jsou už svým způsobem zruční.

Před smrtí Austenová začala pracovat na dalším románu s názvem *Sanditon*, bohužel jej již nedokončila. Z fragmentu je jasné, že dále rozpracovává téma hypochondrie a zahálčivého života, které se již vyskytlo v několika z předchozích děl, například v *Pýše a předsudku*, *Emmě* či *Anně Elliotové*. Také se zde objevuje hlas jejího mládí a vrací se ke kritice nevhodného výběru knih skrz postavu Sira Edwarda Denhama.

Pátá kapitola se zabývá hlavními hrdinkami posledních dvou dokončených románů, Emmou Woodhousovou a Annou Elliotovou, a pozoruje jejich vývoj v průběhu knihy. Emma je mladá a ješitná žena, která jako jedna z mála postav Jane Austenové má jak postavení a peníze, tak i krásu a důvtip. Bohužel se svými dary nezachází příliš rozumně a to vyústí v omyly, které jen náhodou nezpůsobí zúčastněným žádnou újmu. Autorka dílo brilantně vystavěla a to tak, že čtenář je sveden na scestí a přes vady, které Emma má, je s ní svázán. Emma si tedy s pomocí pana Knightleyho vezme poučení ze svých omylů a vykročí s ním ruku v ruce vstříc své budoucnosti. Oproti tomu Anna Elliotová je vyzrálá a skromná již na začátku knihy. Na začátku se čtenář setkává s klidnou a nevýraznou dvacetisedmiletou dívkou, která propásla svou šanci na štěstí. Dá se tušit, že i její příběh skončí sňatkem s jejím vyvoleným, Frederickem Wentworthem. Pozorujeme, jak se v ní rozmáhá odvaha znovu věřit. Docházím k závěru, že tím, že se Anna před samým začátkem příběhu podřídila autoritě, dokázala svoji morální nadřazenost.

V mé bakalářské práci jsem zkoumala oba aspekty díla Jane Austenové, její ironické já a zároveň jistou laskavost, jak se projevují v jejím díle. Došla jsem k závěru, že tato dvě pojetí Jane Austenové tvoří dvě strany jedné mince a to je to, co ji činí výjimečnou.

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Anotace

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Téma práce: Cesta Jane Austenové je konformismu

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

Počet znaků: 68 404

Rok obhajoby: 2012

Klíčová slova: Jane, Austenová, vývoj, satira, konformismus

Jazyk práce: angličtina

Charakteristika: Práce se zabývá srovnáním raných a pozdních děl britské autorky Jane Austenové. Hlavní prvky, které se zkoumají jsou míra či směřování její satiry a to, do jaké míry můžeme považovat její práce za moralistické. To se ukazuje hlavně na kontrastu juvenilií s jejími posledními díly, jako je *Emma*, *Persuasion* či *Sanditon*.

Annotation

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Department: Dep.of English and American studies, FF UP

Title: Jane Austen's way to conformity

Supervisor: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

Number of characters: 68 404

Year of presentation: 2012

Key words: Jane, Austen, development, satire, conformity

Language: English

Characteristics: Main theme of the thesis is development of Jane Austen as an author. It analyzes her way to more conformist writing by comparing her early and later works. The main goal is to determine the degree of satire and morality in diverse periods of Austen's career.