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**Bachelor Thesis**

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Family and Society in Jane Austen's Emma and Pride and Prejudice

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla v ní všechny použité zdroje a literaturu.

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## **Poděkování**

Chtěla bych poděkovat Mgr. Petrovi Anténemu, M.A., Ph.D. za vedení mé bakalářské práce, trpělivost, cenné informace a příjemnou spolupráci.

## **Abstract**

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to depict the image of family and society in the author's novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. A perspective of the social role of women during Austen's times is described, the beginnings of feminism and the more contemporary responses of feminist criticism. The writer's family background, relationships and personal experiences are described and compared to the lives of her fictional characters. In the following part, the development of the main heroines is followed through a literary analysis of two selected Austen novels, in which the environments where their life journeys are set and in which they get to know the world thanks to social encounters is taken into account.

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# 1. Introduction

Many theses have been written about Jane Austen. Despite this fact, I decided to contribute with my perspective on this author's work. While reading Austen's novels, the atmosphere of her fictional world caught my interest. Therefore, in my bachelor's thesis I chose to focus on period and social aspects that intertwine in her work and undoubtedly have an influence on destiny of the characters. It will also focus on relationships within the family as the life of Austen and her heroines is primarily based on this environment. The main sources will be two of author's novels, *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

In the first part of the thesis, I will first put the personality and work of the author in the socio-historical context. Perspective of the social role of women during Austen's times, the beginnings of feminism and the more contemporary responses of feminist criticism will be described. The historical period will not be put into great detail. The starting point will be the two chosen novels of Austen's that will point out the author's own relationship to politics and history.

An unusually mundane life path was the main source of inspiration for the writer. She was bound to the limited domestic environment of the countryside. Therefore, in the next part of the thesis, which is divided into several sub-chapters, the focus is the family and social facts that reflected in her work. The author's family background, relationships and personal experiences will be described, which will be compared to the lives of her fictional characters. The characteristics of relationships, environment and period customs will be put into a context with the author's own way of adapting given issues.

Austen's experience of the world was locally restricted, yet each of her novels has a specific and different primary setting. The author was aware of the impact of early socialization in the family and social conventions on an individual's life. Outside world interventions support the works' dynamics and the psychological growth of the heroines. In the following part, the development of the main heroines through a literary analysis of two selected Austen novels will be followed, in which I will take into account the micro-environments in which their life journeys are set and in which they get to know the world thanks to social encounters. In the end, I will try to summarize the results of the work.

## **2. Socio-historical context of Jane Austen's works**

In literary works, tendencies, traditions, events and trends of a certain time period are always manifested to a certain extent. Writers accept or reject them, but the influence by which they change their own conception of reality and outlook on the world cannot be denied. Austen's novels are based on the socio-historical context of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, bringing many changes in social life.

### **2.1. English society at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

Austen's life was accompanied by significant events that influenced the development of the then British Empire. Only a year after the author's birth (1776), newspapers were already filling up with articles about the revolt of the American colonists. There was no indication of the peaceful, harmonious atmosphere captured in her work. Austen never mentions the fact that England was a country at war for most of her life.

Britain got into conflict with France, the Great French Revolution and later the Napoleonic Wars broke out on the continent. These historical moments also affected the inhabitants of the British Isles, as we learn through the fates of the characters in the novels. (McDowall, 1989, p. 125)

This historical period also brought many economic and social changes. As a result of the industrial revolution, people moved from the countryside to the suburbs. British society was still divided into classes (McDowall, 1989, p. 139).

The turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked a divide between two artistic trends – the end of the Age of Enlightenment, which emphasized rational judgments untainted by personal feelings, and the beginning of Romanticism, which celebrated the ideas of freedom, equality and the abolition of social class system. Although Austen's work falls mainly into the Romantic period, it cannot be precisely classified into any art movement, as it is original in its messages.

Austen did not get to know the world from a more global perspective, she never made long trips abroad, not even in her native country. In her work, she does not focus

on philosophical considerations and opinions, but on the everyday reality of the landed gentry, which she knew well from her experience. Her works contain elements of realism, which became a classic form of 19th century novels.

She places the lives of the characters in a universal historical period precisely by never getting into a detailed depiction of social events. She does not try to interweave the works with history, nor to deliberately react to significant events. She very rarely uses dates in her works, so the reader often turns the last page of the novel without realizing in what time the story took place. However, Austen excelled in observation, which is why she always focused on the surroundings closest to her. Thanks to this approach, her novels give a faithful and truthful impression.

## **2.2. New perspectives on the position of women and feminism**

The end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century brought, in addition to many political, economic and social changes, a new phenomenon transforming the structure and dynamics of society up to the present time. Female authors reacting to inequality of women appeared in the then Britain. Encouraged by the ideals of freedom and equality of the Great French Revolution, they began to express their views through literature. They raised questions about the legitimacy of male superiority and the traditional role of females. They reflected on the topics of marriage, education, family, civil and political rights.

We also find signs of feminism in the work of Jane Austen, who was among the first emancipated writers. She was among the beginnings of the female literary tradition depicting heroines from a new point of view, not a traditionally male one. Who inspired and preceded her efforts in this endeavour?

Mary Astell or Mary Wollstonecraft are considered to be one of the first women of this movement, who were beginning to be aware of their inferior position in the patriarchal order and felt significantly restricted by its norms. They dared to step out of the traditional system that supported male autonomy and distanced women from social life, because according to the conventions of that period “*in the domestic sphere womanliness could flourish, a woman could express her true vocation* (Abrams, 2014, p. 44).”

Emancipated women, however, desired intellectual self-improvement and artistic activity. Literature was only meant to serve the weaker sex as a means of entertainment and diversification of free time. Critics suggested that only unhappy women, denied fulfilment in the family, felt the need to write. They warned them that demanding mental activity could harm their delicate health. Publishing books by women was considered immoral, and carried the risk of loss of honour and good reputation of the family. Additionally, negative criticism from men has consistently claimed that women's literature will always be weaker. Female writers therefore tried to get around the restrictions on creation by publishing books anonymously (Morris, 1993, p. 66).

Austen engaged in reading the work of Wollstonecraft. It gave her topics for reflection on contemporary society. One of the first British feminists, Wollstonecraft became famous for publishing the book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). She expressed radical progressive views for her time. She was regarded as too controversial by the then public. She still succeeded and influenced the next generation of female authors that were demanding the elimination of discrimination against women and equalization with their male counterparts (Abrams, 2006).

Austen was aware of her unequal position and at her inability to change it in any way. This hopelessness led to an internal conflict. She desired to become an independent woman and succeed in the literary world. Her biography shows that she was modest and therefore did not want to inflict shame and the impression of eccentricity on herself or her family. She published her first works anonymously under the pseudonym "By a Lady". Her brother Henry helped with publishing her books, otherwise no one in the family knew about Jane's steps to fame in the beginning. Her works gained certain popularity in her time, although it did not match many of her contemporaries. Austen was endowed with a dose of self-criticism. She belittled her work and spoke ironically about it. She criticized her inability to match the superior male literary expressions (Všetečková, 2009).

Therefore, when the Prince Regent, the future King George IV, honoured her and asked her to capture his persona in the next of her novels, she wrote him a slightly ironic letter about the impossibility of complying. According to her, the conversations of such a man would have to revolve around scientific and philosophical topics, about which she herself knew nothing. She did not dare to exceed the limits of her capabilities. Evidence of her critical self-concept is an excerpt from a letter to the

prince's correspondent: "*I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible vanity, the most unlearned and uninformed female who ever dared to be an authoress*" (Maletzke, 2009, p. 235).

She significantly underestimated her abilities, as she ranked among the greatest intellectually based women of her time. At that time, education was a matter for men, but with good family conditions and financial opportunities, it was not denied to young ladies either. Jane received a good education for her time. At the age of seven, she accompanied her sister Cassandra to a boarding school in Oxford, where classes were interrupted due to a spreading contagious disease. Later she also stayed at a school in Reading (Jane Austen's World, 2010). However, she gained most of her knowledge in home environment by reading and developing her talents in the fields of art and music.

She attributes the same type of upbringing to the heroines of her novels. At home, they were being prepared for their future role as mothers, and higher education was not thought of. Austen endowed them with a natural intelligence and independence despite this. Development of personal dispositions meant both moral and intellectual growth for them, but also the opportunity to gain recognition during intelligent conversations at various social gatherings. This heightened their chances of finding a suitable husband. In the novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) Elizabeth Bennet, one of the female characters with the most feminist stance, critically points out the senselessness of this game and proves her opposition to the established tradition by her indifference to playing the piano.

The heroines wish to acquire new knowledge, so they educate themselves by reading. They long to look beyond the borders of their limited world. Their only options to meet people from their immediate surroundings were social events. Women, however, were dependent on the male part of the family, as the initiative for official introductions and invitations was supposed to come from them. When Mr. Bingley and his friends arrive at Longbourn in the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, it is the fathers who are sent to get to know the new neighbour first.

Male characters, on the other hand, have a considerable amount of freedom. They travel around their native country or around the world, study at universities, determine their professions and are not so limited by social conventions.

The rejection of the patriarchal order in Jane Austen's works is not characterized by radicalism. Instead she uses ironic and humorous statements. Given that Jane Austen's

work is often associated with the theme of feminism, it is also appropriate to mention the so-called second wave of feminist criticism, which from approximately the beginning of the 1970s turns to the tradition of literature written by women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The interest was literary analysis of works used to point out the class, cultural and gender differences that caused the unequal position of women in a patriarchal society. The inclusion of Austen in this current of scholarly research provokes conflicting discussions, as some literary scholars do not agree with the correctness of labelling this author as a feminist. They argue that it is misleading to attribute feminist elements to the work of all female writers of the reviewed period. However, the ideas of feminism must be viewed in different historical periods from different points of view, because changes and development of its ideological focus occur simultaneously with time. It is certain that gender issues pervade all of Jane Austen's works and significantly influence the dynamics of the characters' development. The heroines search for their place in society and finally find it in a happy marriage with a man. Therefore, the author's critique of social and legal injustice between men and women may seem conciliatory.

Among the most famous figures in feminist literary theory are Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Their joint work *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) is considered a seminal text of the second wave of feminist criticism. Here they analyze the work of Jane Austen, but also Mary Shelley, the Brontë sisters, George Elliot, etc. They pay particular attention to women's stories, their position in a male-dominated society. According to them, female writers project their own desire to accept the structure of the patriarchal tradition into the heroines, but at the same time they also want to reject it (Morris, 1993, p. 67). Other well-known critics who examine Austen's work from the point of view of feminism are Mary Poovey or Margaret Kirkham, who compares Austen to Wollstonecraft. According to her, both women are based on Enlightenment, humanistic ideas and place great emphasis on the importance of education for both men and women (Looser, 1995).

Currently, feminist literary criticism within Austen's work focuses on previously taboo topics that include physical displays of affection, sexuality, and more personal characteristics of individuals; nor does it ignore the social and gender aspects that are inextricably linked to Austen's work.

## 2.3. The role of marriage

During Austen's time, it was considered unusual for a woman to choose to live independently or outside the framework of the family environment. University studies, participation in political life, the possibility of choosing employment and professional growth had the nature of an unattainable dream for women compared to today's situation. Girls were financially dependent on their parents, and the main career of their lives, which they could afford to build, was marriage (pemberley.com, n.d.). Therefore, one cannot be surprised at the exaggerated, even parodied, efforts of Mrs. Bennet from the novel *Pride and Prejudice* to find a suitable husband with a decent living for her five daughters. Austen adequately described the prospects of unmarried women with her statement: “*Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor, which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony*” (Austen-Leigh, W. and Austen-Leigh, R. A., 2007, p. 351). She was very aware of the practicality of the institution of marriage, which she chose as one of the main subjects of her works. Through these themes, she managed to indirectly express criticism of the society that puts women in an inferior position.

The fact that the writer herself never married during her lifetime may appear as irony. She experienced a few emotional sparks, but this budding love never turned into a long-term relationship.

For the first time she felt a deep feeling for an Irish relative of one of her friends. She was twenty years old then. The marriage was not desired, as her suitor, Thomas Lefroy, had a long legal career ahead of him. His family would not approve of the marriage either. Jane has never seen him since (Maletzke, 2009, p. 99-101).

In 1802, she received her first and last marriage proposal from Harris Bigg-Wither, a relative of her acquaintances, with whom she often visited. At first she accepted the engagement, but during the night she changed her mind about this rash step. The very next morning she hastily left with her sister Cassandra. As she later describes in letters to her niece Fanny Knight, she could never marry without love, because such life would be equal to the greatest suffering: “*And now, my dear Fanny, having written so much on one side of the question, I shall turn round and entreat you not to commit yourself farther, and not to think of accepting him unless you really do like him. Anything is to*

*be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection”* (Austen-Leigh, W. and Austen-Leigh, R. A., 2007, p. 345).

From Austen's words, we can feel the spirit of revolt against the customs and principles of the time. She urges her niece not to commit to such an important decision too soon, but rather to listen to her heart. She puts similar views on the contemporary search for partners into the thoughts of the independent heroine Emma Woodhouse in the novel *Emma*.

In the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Charlotte Lucas, the main character's best friend, chooses a marriage of convenience rather than love. Her chosen one is Mr. Collins, who first applied for her friend Elizabeth Bennet for calculated reasons. But she didn't take him seriously, because his demeanour seemed rather ridiculous to her. For Charlotte, marriage means deliverance from the prospect of a difficult future that would await her as an unmarried woman. She herself claims that she does not believe in romantic love and is looking for a guarantee of a quiet and safe home at her age. Happiness in marriage is a matter of chance and must be earned.

Another example is the scandalous case of Lydia Bennet. A foolish young girl falls under the shallow charms of the immoral Colonel George Wickham and they run away from their family together. Social disgrace is avoided only by Wickham accepting a large bribe to actually marry the girl. Lydia returns home a proud young lady, but time will tell the consequences of her actions. Love based only on physical attraction on both sides fades away. At the end of the story, Lydia spends more time with her happily married sisters in their palatial mansions, while Wickham enjoys revelry in Bath.

In her works, Austen shows the importance of carefully and wisely choosing future partners for marriage, but also the importance of a person's own character traits for success and a sense of personal happiness in this union.

## **3. Family and Society**

### **3.1. Family background**

After including the personality and work of Jane Austen in the socio-historical context, which influenced her work with its contemporary conventions and customs, it is necessary to focus attention on her immediate surroundings. At first glance, it might seem that she did not live in an environment very stimulating for literary activity, if we compare her life with other well-known authors. But it was the reality of ordinary life that became a decisive factor for her work, which still ensures her great popularity among today's readers of domestic novels. Austen was gifted with the ability not only to tell engaging and entertaining stories, but also to create a peaceful atmosphere in which she combines reality with her own imagination.

#### **3.1.1. Relationship with parents**

Parents play a key role in the family environment both in real life and in the novel destinies of young heroines. They represent the starting point, the past, from which future events develop. They provide the conditions for human development and determine the nature of social encounters primarily through their own status.

When reading Jane Austen's novels, it is always important to get to know the heroines' primary background in order to better understand the deeper nature of their actions. The writer herself probably considered this fact necessary, because at the beginning of each story she provides detailed, sometimes lengthy passages about the family background of the heroines. Across her works, she creates a truly varied palette of micro-environments, which can lead us to question who her parents actually were and what their relationships were like.

Jane was born into a large family of the Reverend George Austen and Cassandra Leigh. The father came from a family already distorted by dramatic relationships, and the mother, on the other hand, from a respectable family. After their marriage they

settled first in the country parish of Deane, and after six years Mr. Austen was entrusted with the curacy of Steventon, by which the family gained social esteem and respect throughout the neighbourhood (Maletzke, 2009, p. 17-21).

Many literary historians agree that Austen portrays the traits of her parents through the Bennets of the novel *Pride and Prejudice* – a forceful mother and an educated, calm, mild-mannered father who likes to joke about the foolishness of his wife and younger daughters.

Unlike the Austens, the Bennets came from completely opposite social classes. Mrs. Bennet came from a poorer family. She charmed her future husband with youthful charm, but her dowry was out of the question.

Mr. Bennet and Jane's father also held the same occupation. Austen was often inspired in her works by the professions of her loved ones. Mr. Austen worked at the parish and in addition ran a private school where he taught young boys. He had a positive attitude towards education and valued intelligence just like Mr Bennet. From an early age, the father encouraged his children to read, as both he and his wife were avid readers. An extensive library served this purpose. Romantic husbands and fathers also set up their own offices and rooms where they can pursue their hobbies and take a break from busy family events. Mr. Bennet can often be found spending time in this oasis of peace and privacy and can be seen to become sullen if disturbed. The library, with its rich and high-quality range of publications, meant a great opportunity for self-education for young girls eager to learn and develop their own knowledge (Austen, 2003).

Father and daughter got along in mutual agreement, as can be inferred from the previous statements. Jane was probably not her father's favourite daughter, as the example of Elizabeth Bennet might suggest. If we follow her family life, it is clear that her upbringing was based on the absence of criticism and harsh words.

Austen's novels, on the other hand, almost never portray the mother-daughter relationship in a very positive light. She could not base herself on personal inner experiences, because she had not received a warm maternal feeling since she was young. The mother took care of the household of the rural parsonage and the offspring. In her defence, it must be emphasized that she could not have had too much time to spare, as she birthed a total of eight children. Austen liked to create the image of such large families in her works as well – for example in the novel *Pride and Prejudice* we get a glimpse into the life of the Bennet couple and their five daughters.

However, today's psychologists and social workers would without a doubt rebel against the way children were cared for at the time. The woman kept the newborn for three months and then sent him to a wet nurse, where the child spent the first two years of his life. This emotional deprivation was experienced by every descendant of the Austen family, with the exception of the first-born son. The result of these practices was emotional coldness and an underdeveloped basic trust in the mother (Jane Austen's World, 2010).

A closer examination of the relationships between the mothers and the main heroines of the novels leads us to the conclusion that Jane Austen did indeed lack a model of maternal love, and this therefore reflected in her work. She creates mostly passive human beings, acting foolishly and endangering the education of girls with their poor behaviour patterns and neglect of their true needs. She often introduces them to society too early so that the girls soon find a rich husband. Such rashness portends misfortune in the family, as happened in the case of Lydia Bennet's liberal upbringing. She got to know social life already at the age of 15, and she got married just as prematurely (Austen, 2003).

Austen also manages to capture paradoxical situations in upbringing that are not too far from real life. Some mothers fail to be impartial and fair, and readers may notice that they are favouring one of the daughters. As a rule, these are the youngest ones, whom the whole family spoils. Mrs. Bennet always forgives her daughter Lydia.

Unlike these immoral and hopeless characters, those heroines who are not the focus of the family and who are mentally abandoned and emotionally distant from their mothers are better developed and more successful. The barrier between Elizabeth Bennet and her mother is intelligence and folly.

In some cases, Austen does not include mother figures in the stories, and due to their untimely deaths, the young heroines grow up only under the guidance of their father. She places the life of Emma Woodhouse (*Emma*) in such an environment. The new caretaker tries to compensate her with more or less successful maternal feelings but their relationship is more like friendship (Austen, 2014).

### 3.1.2. Sibling relationships

Jane Austen had a happy childhood among her six brothers and only sister Cassandra. She maintained positive relationships with all of them throughout her life and they supported each other through difficult and happy times. Their parents were busy taking care of a large family, so the siblings were much more dependent on each other. This kinship relationship often replaced the insufficient parental feeling.

Austen tries to capture the relationships between siblings in her work in a similar way. Heroes and heroines of her novels find the most significant and distinctive human values in sibling relationships, which convey a feeling of friendship, protection, safety, security, or simply the possibility of having someone to talk to about problems.

It also serves as a connection to the family when the heroine finds herself in a foreign environment, as in the case of Jane Bennet, who corresponds with Elizabeth during her stay in London.

From a practical point of view, Austen could not devote to all her secondary characters bound by the sibling bond as she was creating families with a large number of brothers and sisters. Instead, she focused on sibling pairs that she described in more detail, which also helped her outline a more intense, deeper mutual feeling.

Taking into consideration the fact that she was inspired by her own family background that included seven siblings, then Austen can be regarded as fully competent for these reflections. During that time family used to be a more closed community. Therefore, the main source of searching for and starting friendships was the family environment that had a fundamental influence on the author.

In Austen's novels we can meet the type of characters that are modelled on her older brother Edward. He was lucky in life because the family's wealthy relative Thomas Knight became fond of him. He and his wife were childless, so they began taking little Edward to their house for the holidays. They later informally adopted him, giving him a more promising future and the boy's mother a blissful feeling with the prospect of a secure old age. He was the sole heir of the Knights. As an adult he chose the surname Knight (Jane Austen's World, 2009).

An example of the use of this motif is found in the novel *Emma*. Frank Churchill, a boy dependent on his parents, is forced to grow up with his wealthy uncle and aunt in

London after the death of his mother. His father Mr. Weston had no choice, he could not support his son himself and was not able to provide him with an adequate education. Frank hasn't visited his father since he was a child because his relatives took possession of him. They also gave him their surname and declared him their heir.

In Jane Austen's works we find several girl characters who are devoted to their older brothers. However, one of the most important and central roles in her work is played by the relationship between two sisters, in which Austen's own feeling for her sister Cassandra is reflected.

The older sister was the biggest life support for Jane. The girls were bound to each other by a strong bond and a deep friendship, which was a source of warmer emotions for them than what they received from their own mother. Jane could not imagine a single day without her sister, so since childhood she wanted to accompany her everywhere. Mrs. Austen expressed her daughters' inseparability with these words: *“If Cassandra were going to have her head cut off, Jane would insist on sharing her fate”*(Maletzke, 2009, p. 37).

If, exceptionally, their paths had to be separated for a short time, they still stayed in touch through correspondence. This gives us a rare glimpse into the writer's life, albeit somewhat censored by Cassandra's intervention after Jane's death. At that time, writing letters served as the only way to communicate with loved ones during separation and travel, which is why Austen includes the form of letters in her novels. Correct and sophisticated expression and composition were each person's calling card. Correspondence is most often attributed to siblings in Austen's novels.

In the 18th century, there was a certain pattern for depicting the characters of sisters – one good and one bad. This differentiation was meant to portray their exact identity and highlight the contrast between their characters. Jane Austen did not consider this typology, nor did she attempt to mystify sisterly love, as the trend dictated in the early 19th century (May, 2002). She became famous for her original portrayal of sisterhood, which can be described as a common feature of all her novels, as in each of them we find a heroine who has at least one sister.

She created the most famous and legendary sister pairs in English literature to this day. This includes sisters Jane and Elizabeth Bennet. These pairs are not further divided into good and bad, but the author has chosen a different angle of character distinction. Heroines are typical in that one of them always makes decisions based on rational

judgments, the other based on her feelings. One always shows a moderate degree of naivety and is subject to weakness in critical situations. The other sister has a stronger spirit that helps her overcome her own problems while encouraging others and being a support to those around her. Both are going through emotional, love troubles, and each copes with it differently. The pain and hard path to happiness strengthens their relationship.

For Austen, therefore, the focus on siblings, especially sister relationships, was a happy choice from both a logical and a psychological point of view. It captures the destinies of heroines who are currently going through a difficult phase of adolescence or early adulthood. They are trying to find their identity, the meaning of life and their place in it. Young girls turn more often to their peers for advice and understanding and do not confide so much in their parents. Austen managed to capture this side of human coexistence absolutely faithfully.

### **3.1.3. Love of nieces**

Jane Austen didn't just draw inspiration from her experiences siblings, but she greatly valued good relationships with her nieces and nephews. She was an exemplary and loving aunt, and she also enjoyed creating these types of characters in her novels. Jane was particularly fond of nieces Fanny Knight (Edward's eldest daughter) and Anna (James' daughter from his first marriage) (Maletzke, 2009, p. 148). She kept in touch with both by writing letters.

Anna stayed with her close relatives very often in her youth, because her mother died and James could not soothe the girl's grief. She became a complicated personality attracting problems to herself. She inherited her father's literary talent, so she tried to write her own works. She liked to get advice from her experienced, gifted aunt. Creative tips were the most frequent topic of their correspondence. For example, one piece of advice was: „ *Let the Portmans go to Ireland; but as you know nothing of the manners there, you had better not go with them*” (Austen-Leigh, W. and Austen-Leigh, R. A., 2007, p. 357).

This short section from Austen's letter can also be considered as one of the definitions of the author's work. She always stuck to the principle of displaying only the reality that she knew from her experience.

Niece Fanny, on the other hand, approached her aunt with purely affairs of the heart. They wrote confidential letters to each other with honest statements, not concealing any hidden secrets. Jane Austen referred to Fanny as her second sister. In the last months of her life, this relationship, based mainly on written communication, brought her great mental relief from pain and suffering.

The image of nieces and their relationship with uncles and especially aunts contributes to the dynamics of the plot in Austen's novels. As with siblings, in this relationship heroines often receive more understanding than from their parents as well. Relatives often start storyline by taking their nieces on trips — for example, the Gardiners offer Elizabeth Bennet to join them and accompany them as they travel around England. Mrs. Gardiner represents Jane and Elizabeth's close advisor in matters of first love. Along with her husband, she helps the whole family in trouble when Lydia runs away with Colonel Wickham to London.

### **3.2. Ways of spending time**

Austen, in her works dealing with everyday life, could not forget how her characters spent their time. She focused mainly on the upper social classes, whose free time occupied most of the day. The reason for at first glance idle life was the fact that the income of the rural nobility were from annual annuities.

From the novel *Pride and Prejudice* it can be concluded that the men enjoyed fishing, as did Mr. Darcy with Mr. Allen, who happened to visit Mr. Darcy at Pemberley with his wife and niece Elizabeth on their way to the north of England. Then, during one of the walks, the owner of the magnificent mansion and extensive lands offered to Miss Bennet's uncle that they could go fishing together.

There were not many opportunities for women to find employment. They were only allowed to move freely within the family. Of course, it depended on the environment in which they lived. As Lynn Abrams states: “*Urban women may have experienced a*

*greater variety of occupations and often participated in artisan manufacture, trade and commerce”* (Abrams, 2014, p. 43-44).

The household was run by servants and cooks, if the family could afford to hire them. It is interesting that despite all the mundanity that Austen depicts in her domestic novels, we almost never catch the characters engaged in ordinary domestic activities, which include cooking, cleaning, and more. When they sit down at the table to have dinner together, the meal is already ready.

However, Austen does not leave her heroines idle. In the texts we can find several mentions of handicrafts that women were engaged in. One such example comes from Mr. Bennet's observation: “*Observing his second daughter employed in trimming a hat...*” (Austen, 2003, p. 8). His second eldest daughter Elizabeth in the novel *Pride and Prejudice* is not the type of female character who is subject to the whims of vanity and anxious about her appearance. Elizabeth adjusts her hat as she prepares for a social event – a ball at the home of Longbourn's new resident, Mr. Bingley. Elizabeth does not come across as a social outsider. She knows what is liked and what is currently considered modern. At the time of Austen's life, fashion was opening up to a free view, wigs were put aside, the Greek style of flowing fabrics was imitated, dresses with deep necklines revealed more than the previous skirts and corsets (Maletzke, 2009, p. 30).

People from near and far met at the balls. Visitors could thus find out news from their friends, but also gain new contacts. These were mostly richer and respected families of the middle or upper classes. The writer herself, like any young girl, loved dancing. In this regard, her family developed social activity. For the novel's heroines, country balls became long-awaited events that they looked forward to with enthusiasm. They often express the need to find a good dance partner. Dancing skills were highly valued at the time, as can be seen from the speeches of some of the characters.

But if no ball was taking place, people met at dinners organized for several officially invited well-known residents of the neighbourhood. For example, the Weston couple in the novel *Emma* enjoyed such an evening sitting with friends. Their description also gives us an insight into the customs and manners observed during these events. After dinner, the women left the men's part of the company and went to enjoy themselves in another salon. If any of the men decided that the evening could come to a close, they also retired to the room where the women usually engaged in conversations about life, fashion and relationships.

In other works as well, Austen introduces us to ways of diversifying the program of visits. In the Bingley family or in the company of Lady de Bourgh in the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, the entertainment shifts from casual conversation to card games such as whist, loo, piquet. It depended on what each participant preferred. Of course, there were also people who did not like playing cards and preferred to read. Books are a frequent topic of conversation between fictional characters. There are also many references to real literary works.

The popularity of music grew not only during visits. Playing a musical instrument filled a significant part of free time. At the beginning of the 19th century, the piano in particular became a symbol of the time and values of the middle classes. Paul Johnson states in his book that the instrument proved their culture, wealth and respectability. At least five pianos were owned by the Highbury community that Austen mentions in *Emma*. The musical instrument was becoming a commercial item, as evidenced by its easier availability. Around 1815 a more advanced model cost only eighteen pounds three shillings, including carriage. The same sum was paid by Frank Churchill for a piano which he had secretly sent to Miss Jane Fairfax (Johnson, 1998, p. 108).

Austen also had exceptional musical talent. She got up early every morning to practice playing the piano. But she never displayed her talent too much for admiration. She enjoyed this hobby alone in seclusion, without listeners. Only later did she like to play and sing to her lovely nieces and nephews.

The heroines of her novels also love music. Elizabeth Bennet's younger sister diligently practices the piano. However, Mary lacks the necessary talent, and therefore the responses to her piano playing and singing are not very favourable.

In addition to music, the girls also enjoyed art. Jane Austen's sister and nieces were gifted with this talent, thanks to which we have preserved rare portraits of the famous writer. Austen also attributed artistic talent to some of her characters. For example, Emma decided to paint a picture of her friend Harriet Smith in the novel of the same name. She wanted to leave the portrait to Mr. Elton, whom she believed was courting Harriet.

The content of the day and the way of spending free time also affects the environment in which a person lives. Rural residents were more tied to family gatherings or limited means of family entertainment, while cities offered a richer selection of activities.

### 3.3. Rural and urban life

Jane Austen's work was determined not only by her family background and the people she met during her life, but also by the physical character of the local environment in which she became an observer of everyday reality. It did not bring with it great sources of inspiration, as she did not travel much and was tied to home. She did not know the variety of landscapes in foreign countries, nor in her homeland.

The countryside, where she spent most of her life, is considered the main area of her experience. This was reflected in her work, as she also places the birthplace and background of her characters mainly in the English countryside of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Austen was born in the village of Steventon in Hampshire, where she lived in the family circle until she was 26 (1775-1801). After eight years of an unstable life filled with frequent changes of residence and visits to relatives, she returned back to her native county, this time to Chawton. Jane was very fond of the home in the country for its peaceful atmosphere and the possibility of long walks, which even the heroines of her novels indulged in. She perceived poverty as a negative aspect of the countryside. She valued comfort and financial security, which is also reflected in her work. She dreamed of living in Kent, as she mentions in one of her letters to her sister Cassandra: *“People get so horribly poor and economical in this part of the world that I have no patience with them. Kent is the only place for happiness; everybody is rich there”* (Austen-Leigh, W. and Austen-Leigh, R. A., 2007, p. 119). This piece of correspondence demonstrates that rather than houses with cramped spaces and low ceilings, Austen dreamed of elegant drawing rooms and select society. But even in this respect there were limitations given by the locally limited area of the countryside. The neighborhood was comprised of only a few families. Opportunities for social gatherings fell into stereotype. The same environment is reflected in her novels. A certain monotony of rural life can be felt in them, but it was rather beneficial for Jane Austen's work: *“Her interest is in human motive, the reactions of individuals to each other, and therefore a narrow social setting was ideal material for her. The small area of experience allowed closer analysis of recurring situations and types; she could deal with them with absolute accuracy by never stepping beyond the limits of her personal knowledge”* (Grmelová, Grmela, 1992, p. 59).

The limited social environment allowed her more detailed description of characters and events, which did not abandon their familiar stereotypes and did not get into unfamiliar situations. She always portrays three to four families living in the countryside and their interactions with each other through visits and various events. The characters engage in a variety of activities, as described in the previous subsection.

The harmonious peace of the countryside and the monotony of everyday life are almost always disturbed by a newly arrived neighbour or an invited relative. This is often a person coming from the city, or from another area of England. They bring a different morality, a different type of behaviour and new manners. Social status also sometimes separates them from other residents. This highlights, for example, the arrival of Mr. Bingley (*Pride and Prejudice*). Frank Churchill (*Emma*) is admired long before his planned reunion with his father after years of living with relatives in London. He introduces many new storylines into the plot and, together with his secret love, Jane Fairfax (niece of another resident of Highbury – Mrs. Bates), enriches the plot with a motive of secret and mystery. They hide their sympathy and engagement. When everything comes to light, the hero, initially praised for his easiness and kind demeanour, finds himself in a reprehensible situation. His morals are not as impeccable as they once appeared. The main character Emma also didn't like the strange prodigality about him when Frank rode his horse to London just to get a haircut. However, Emma lived in her own world with limited options.

Austen does not limit herself to depicting life in the country and to indirect influences of the outside world on this place through the introduction of new characters with usually low morals. Sometimes she also allows her heroines to travel out of their native environment and learn the pros and cons of urban life. They can thus see places different from those they have known so far.

The writer herself had this opportunity in 1800, when Jane and the rest of the family were surprised by the announcement of their nearly seventy-year-old father that he was retiring work at the parish and wished to move to Bath. He was accompanied by his wife and two daughters. The house and vicarage were inherited by the eldest son James. Jane took the departure from her native home, where she had spent more than half of her life, very hard. The city never grew on her. The noise and bustle was not close to her. It also reflected on the state of her mind and personal experiences. During this period, she carried out literary activity very rarely. She could not even practice the piano, which had been sold before leaving for Bath (Maletzke, 2009, p. 123-126).

In the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, a conversation about rural and urban life comes up. Mr. Darcy is critical of the closed and unchanging society in the countryside, while Mrs. Bennet opposes him. She defends her homeland and compares it to the capital, which only abounds in more shops in public spaces. Mr. Bingley adds his opinion that wherever he is, he is happy there. This problem-free relationship to both environments is influenced by his tolerant character. The bitter dispute between her mother and Mr. Darcy is settled by Elizabeth, who is ashamed of her mother's lack of understanding of the views of their proud host.

Austen does not give detailed descriptions of London. She got to know the capital only briefly during visits to relatives. Later, she also often visited her brother Henry, who had moved here. She hadn't seen many parts of London, so her vision of the city was limited to just a few places. She always enjoyed cultural activities here by visiting theatres and art exhibitions.

Heroines like Jane and Elizabeth Bennet (*Pride and Prejudice*) spend a long time in the capital visiting relatives and friends, but we don't learn much about their experiences in the city.

Lydia Bennet runs away with Wickham to this city after she and Colonel Wickham become lovers. Under pressure from the Bennet family, they have to get officially married here. The foolish daughter then arrives home with her husband. In a dialogue with Elizabeth, she summarizes her assessment of her stay in London: "*If you'll believe me, I did not once put my foot out of doors, though I was there a fortnight. Not one party, or scheme, or anything. To be sure London was rather thin, but however the Little Theatre was open*" (Austen, 2003, p. 302).

She was probably forced to remain in her London abode throughout the preparations for the wedding. The city could bring a source of new temptations and become a cause of trouble. The girl knew that the theatre there was open, but she did not have the opportunity to visit it.

The city represents a place of corruption, a danger to good morals and we meet bad characters here. The heroines get into conflicts or the family environment is affected by urban morals. After they reach a certain point of knowledge and character transformation, they return home to the countryside. It is depicted as an ideal place of peace and safety, where all problems will be solved in the end. Readers can thus enjoy the happy ending of stories.

In Austen's novels, the differentiation between rural and urban environments has a significant effect on the fate of the characters. Just like the physical environment, the social structure of the time is also significantly reflected in it.

### 3.4. Social Status

English society of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was characterized by a division into social classes. People were aware of this social hierarchy, in which status is determined by origin, property, income, wealth, and from which the assignment of residents to higher, middle and lower social classes follows. This historical fact represents another period context in Jane Austen's work.

Austen belonged to the upper middle social class, or rural nobility, referred to in the English language as "gentry". Her father administered the parish, which ensured the family social esteem and respect throughout the neighbourhood. The social circle of contacts was limited to meetings between several families. The introversion also stemmed from the nature of social status. It was not very customary to seek friendship and meet with people of lower or higher social status. Steventon, where the Austens lived, was home to around thirty other families who were herdsman, farmers working the adjacent fields or servants working for the Austens. But the family did not try to come into contact with rural farmers, herdsman, or the local aristocracy (Maletzke, 2009, p. 28-29).

Austen's background is significantly reflected in her works. In them we can find a large number of heroes and heroines coming from the middle class that she knew best.

The aristocratic classes in Jane Austen's novels are represented for example by Lady Catherine de Bourgh (*Pride and Prejudice*), who probably obtained her title by marrying a baron. Lady Catherine is characterized by unpleasant domineering attitudes. She wants to control the life of all people subordinate to her. She disapproves of the intermingling of social classes through marriage, for example objecting to the engagement of her nephew Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet. She has been defending the arranged marriage of her nephew and her daughter for years. Concurrently, she insults Elizabeth and expresses rude objections: "*While in their cradles, we planned the union: and now, at the moment when the wishes of both sisters would be accomplished, in their*

*marriage, to be prevented by a young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family!”* (Austen, 2003, p. 336).

In the novel of the same name, Emma manipulates Harriet Smith into falling in love with Mr. Elliot, but she later admires Mr. Knightley. She is not on the same social level with both men, as her origin is unknown. The former treats her with great disdain after this discovery, showing her his opinion of his superior status by looking down on her.

The amount of income and wealth determines the lives of heroes and heroines. Austen does not like to deal with characters who are too poor, whose income is not at least a thousand pounds a year. Such people lack social significance and, therefore, interest. It depended a lot on the family into which an individual was born, which affected his entire future life.

Position in society and property are not always a guarantee of proper, true knowledge of other people. Rather, they are judged by their actions. Malcolm Bradbury, who in his essay focuses mainly on the characters in the novel *Emma*, states what we can observe in their actions thanks to individual expressions: “... *as they act we perceive that there are in the novel superior and inferior people in moral as well as social terms. The social order yields to the moral. The morally inferior people tend in fact to be socially high, to considerable dramatic effect*” (Grmelová, Grmela, 1992, p. 62).

The value of social status does not define the quality of a person. In many cases, socially underestimated individuals show a higher level of moral behaviour than is the case with the above-mentioned nobility. We find proof of this indirect proportionality in the Martin family, about which snobbish Emma does not want to hear anything, especially in connection with the relationship between Mr. Martin and her friend Harriet Smith. Emma does not recognize his rural origin and does not wish to have any contact with people from this environment. But her actions turn out to be reprehensible and wrong. Mr. Martin is conscientious in his duties, remains devoted to Harriet, and respects others.

The tension in the plot often stems from the nature of different social status. Conflicts arise between the status and actions of the characters, from which the positive values that are universally recognized to this day win out.

## 4. Development of heroines in Jane Austen's novels

Jane Austen's personality was substantially determined by her family and social environment, without which she would not have created such a wide spectrum of different types of characters in her novels. She projects her personal experiences into them, autobiographical features that contribute to the communication between the author and the reader. Female readers in particular feel a kind of communality within this process, an echo of their own lives. Austen depicts characters with desires, flaws, virtues, problems and joys. She was able to depict the image of a personality that gives us *“the false impression that we know the people we meet in the fictional world as well as anyone else, perhaps as well as ourselves”* (Miles, 2009, p. 27).

However, the characters do not remain statically rigid, but change due to the influence of the home environment and society, unusual events, meeting new people. Robert Miles presents Barbara Hardy's idea of character development in his publication: *“The illusion of personality in fiction is dependent on how characters change according to the societies they find themselves in”* (Miles, 2009, p. 28). He further clarifies in relation to Jane Austen's work that characters who are not subject to transformation fall into the category of caricatures or grotesque types. They then serve the author as figures for comic or satirical purposes.

In the previous chapters, parallels between the writer's real life and her work were discussed. Through all these real factors she managed to capture the inner and outer lives of the heroines in a dynamic dimension. They go through a learning process understood in a non-traditional sense. This does not mean that they are improving their knowledge, but they are learning to morally understand the essence of the world, the meaning of life, their relationship to other people, ethical principles and accepted customs in the historical period in which they are currently living their story.

At the beginning of their journey, they are in a certain state of ignorance or misconception that is gradually disproved with the coming conflict. It is often the case that the more torment and suffering they undergo, the deeper the character's psychology change is (Miles, 2009).

Fairytale motifs can be noticed in the narrative concept of characters' development. In Austen's novels good meets evil. There is always an obstacle that prevents the heroines from peacefully spending their ordinary and extraordinary days. They have to

overcome it themselves to achieve their dreams. While overcoming these trials of life, they learn a moral lesson and become wiser beings.

#### **4.1. Pride and Prejudice – Elizabeth Bennet**

Jane Austen began writing the first version of the novel *Pride and Prejudice* in 1796. The protagonist Elizabeth Bennet attracts the main attention. She is free from romantic ideals, she relies on reasonable behaviour, but she does not avoid imprudent prejudices either.

Elizabeth gives a glimpse into the ordinary life of the Bennet family, which is not deprived of social events. The large family of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet includes five daughters – Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Catherine and Lydia. This micro-environment creates a parallel to the author's life with its social status, the nature of the parents, but also their mutual relationships. The main concerns of the foolish and superficial mother are related to finding suitable partners for adult daughters and providing dowry. After the death of the father, the vicarage in which they live would be assigned to a male descendant in the immediate family. That would be Mr. Collins, superficial and ingratiating man with obsequious manners working for aristocratic Catherine de Bourgh. The heroine's story unfolds from this environment, in which her perception of society, individuals and their evaluation is transformed through chance encounters.

Elizabeth is rightfully one of the most famous, most discussed female characters in Jane Austen's novels, because she does not represent the traditional heroine of her time. She comes closest to the character of the author herself with her independence and intelligence. Austen writes about her new heroine in one letter: *“I must say that even I find her (Elizabeth) one of the most fascinating characters ever to appear in literature, and I don't know how I can be forgiving of those who don't at least like her”* (Maletzke, 2009, p. 183).

Austen was aware that not all people would be flattered by young Miss Bennet's statements. Her language and speeches often sound critical, as she likes to ironize the actions of other characters. For this quality, the other part of the reading public accepts her positively, because they admire her cheerful nature, sincerity and brilliant sense of humour.

She responds ironically to the questions of people that try to embarrass her in front of others. She is not afraid to openly criticize members of other classes. She boldly talks about the flaws of other people but at the same time maintains respect to those who are distinguished by intelligence and good manners.

She probably values her older sister Jane the most for her kindness, intelligence and guilelessness. The only thing she criticizes the sister for is her sometimes blind trust in other people and her naive belief that they will always do good. But Elizabeth is able to sacrifice herself for her sister and do anything to be close to her when needed. The sisterly devotion is shown when after a rainy night the heroine does not hesitate to walk to Mr. Bingley's distant mansion where Jane dined the previous evening. She had to extend the visit because she suddenly fell ill due to a cold.

Elizabeth can also laugh at herself and make jokes about herself, which is something that is quite unique among the other characters in the novel, with the exception of her father. Compared to her sister Jane, she does not lack healthy self-confidence. However, strong self-belief often turns into stubbornness, which is a significant manifestation of the negative side of her nature.

She accepts the opinions of others with critical suspicion and distance. She does not let anybody to talk her into believing any foolishness and does not believe everything that is accepted as the truth. She follows her own judgement and believes in the infallibility of her intuition. She judges others by her own standards and compares them to her ideas of proper behaviour. However, her principles and ways of viewing the environment often fail, so she herself must come to the knowledge of her transgressions in the perception of character traits. Until then, however, her observation is not flawless, and therefore some of the actions of others bring her disillusionment.

She expresses her disappointment and dissatisfaction with the world, which stems from the fickleness of human characters. She does not understand the essence of the actions of some friends and acquaintances. The reason for her indignation is Mr. Bingley's sudden departure from the neighbourhood without saying goodbye or leaving any message for Jane everyone thinks he has fallen in love with.

Elizabeth also reacts to the marriage of her intelligent friend Charlotte Lucas to a relative of the Bennet family, Mr. Collins. She objects that the two can never be happy together when they married only on the basis of agreement and the benefits for both parties. However, she is wrong in assessing their future together as in the course of the

story, the newlyweds partially show satisfaction with the family environment they have built together. However, Elizabeth believes that a successful marriage can only be one in which the partners are united by love, so she tries to maintain her idealistic ideas about her own destiny in the future life. Her attitude reflects emancipation, which is mainly based on experiences gained in the immediate environment. Her own parents taught her how important it is to assess and get to know the person with whom we want to share life. Years later, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are more like strangers who can't find a common topic of conversation except for matters related to the running of the household.

Elizabeth Bennet's character and aforementioned opinions lead to many mistakes, thus paving the way for her self-discovery and insight. The character who helps her to do this and goes through the learning process with her is Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy. He accompanies his friend, Mr. Bingley, and his sisters to their new mansion in Netherfield. He attends a country ball that the Bennet sisters and their mother also attend. People first admired him for his attractive appearance and high monetary income. But with his cold demeanour, he irritated most of those present.

Elizabeth would not accept the judgment of the majority without her own critical evaluation of the facts. Moreover, the first meeting was not a flattering start to their acquaintance. Mr. Bingley invited Darcy to ask her to dance. He refused and at the same time despised the young woman's feelings when he claimed that the most beautiful woman in the hall was already dancing. He recognized a certain beauty in her appearance, but expressed in a condescending way that Elizabeth was not worthy enough of him. He left an unfavourable first impression on the heroine, which influenced her bias towards his proud demeanour. The heroine's friend Charlotte Lucas argued that in rich people of noble origin, as in the case of Darcy, pride is justified. However, Elizabeth objects: “...*I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine*” (Austen, 2003, p. 21). Although Miss Bennet comes from a lower social class, she does not abound in great wealth, but she maintains her pride, which no one has the right to insult just because they are socially superior to her. The relationship between Darcy and Elizabeth is thus marked by class differences, from which mutual misunderstandings arise. She sees his pride as a consequence of his social status, and he initially tries to distance himself from her because of the simple family environment that surrounds her.

Elizabeth's social prejudices are confirmed when she meets Colonel Wickham, who knows Darcy from the past. He tells her lies about how the aforementioned proud man treated him unfairly and dishonestly. But this is all fiction that arose on the basis of his insulted vanity that he was not granted wealth and advantages. Wickham has a special personal charm, a sweet nature, and also boasts an attractive appearance, which makes the other characters believe him. It is questionable whether Elizabeth was actually in love with the Colonel at first, as she did not admit it herself. She only admitted his extraordinary physical attractiveness. Believing Wickham's handsome and at first sight innocent face, she condemned the unspeakably intolerable behaviour of their mutual acquaintance much more sharply. As she states: *"I can much more easily believe Mr Bingley's being imposed on, than that Mr Wickham should invent such a history of himself as he gave me last night; names, facts, everything mentioned without ceremony. – If it be not so, let Mr Darcy contradict it. Besides, there was truth in his looks"* (Austen, 2003, p. 85).

The superficiality of her judgment, which she condemned in her mother and younger sisters, did not escape even the main character. Once again, she was fooled by her first impressions, just as she had been with Mr. Darcy.

Antipathy towards Darcy reaches a peak when Elizabeth learns from his cousin the truth about the men's rapid departure from Netherfield and the sudden break in contact between Jane and Bingley. Pride led Darcy to the reprehensible act of convincing his friend of Jane Bennet's cold feelings and the unappealing future that would await him after marrying a girl who came from a lower class than himself. Contradictorily, however, he himself fell in love with Elizabeth and dared to propose to her despite her unequal origin. But instead of joy and a happy reception, he was met with a harsh rejection, which developed into a sharp argument. The feelings that had been suppressed between them for a long time manifested themselves in their entirety. Elizabeth told him honestly and openly what she thought of him: *"From the very beginning - from the first moment, I may almost say – of my acquaintance with you, your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form the groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immovable dislike, and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry"*(Austen, 2003, p. 188).

Her speech proves how her opinion of Mr. Darcy was decided from the first moment, suggesting that her judgments have not changed further. The hero thinks he has hurt her pride, so he leaves after a futile argument. Elizabeth was filled with anger and at the same time great surprise that a man with such a position in society had fallen in love with her. The first signs of doubting whether she has been too hard on him begin to appear. The next day she meets Darcy, who has written her a long letter explaining all his actions regarding Bingley, Jane and Wickham. The letter marks a turning point in her understanding of Darcy's character, finally partially seeing how deeply she was wrong: "*She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. – Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd*" (Austen, 2003, p. 201).

She feels humiliated and very ashamed when she learns the truth and realizes the senselessness of her actions. She was ashamed of her blindness, prejudice, and injustice, which had been caused by her vanity and foolishness. Reasonable thinking and common sense betrayed her this time and she finds it inexcusable. She dwelt in detail on Mr. Darcy's letter, through which she came to know herself and acknowledge her own imperfections. Darcy deserved gratitude for his love, his overall character should be honoured, but Elizabeth did not regret rejecting him, as she still did not understand the transformation that had taken place within her.

From her deeper reflections, however, we can deduce that affection for the previously condemned person is already being born in the heroine's heart. She was worried about Jane, who had lost a better future with the man she loved because of her family's foolish actions. Elizabeth herself considers whether it would even be possible for her to live with Darcy. Presumably her attitudes towards the material side of life are changing as her thoughts turn to Mr. Darcy's wealth, to the financial security she will never be afforded now.

At the beginning of the story, Elizabeth defended the human values and opinions for which she respected her father. They were close in character and had the same outlook on things. Robert Miles provides the characterization of Mr. Bennet that underlies Elizabeth's initial rejection of Mr. Darcy: "*Mr. Bennet advocates intrinsic value versus extrinsic value: a person's intrinsic worth versus his reputation*" (Miles, 2009, p. 116). In this aspect there was also a difference in the character of the two young people. When they met, Darcy noticed external values that stemmed from different social

origins. Elizabeth held intrinsic values, and therefore there was a clash not only based on the contrast between the middle class and the aristocracy, but also because of the different views and evaluations of the quality of life and other people.

After the fateful conflict, Darcy realizes that he has been aloof and begins to understand Elizabeth's mindset. By constantly reading Mr. Darcy's letter, the heroine, on the other hand, gets to know his values. It leads her to further mistakes and misunderstandings when they meet again (Miles, 2009, p. 115). She and her aunt and uncle happened to be near Pemberley Manor during their travels around England, and her relatives want to see it. Elizabeth thinks the master is not present. Her surprise is even greater when they all meet there. Elizabeth feels an inner tension, for she considers her arrival at Pemberley presumptuous. However, Darcy welcomes them generously and treats them warmly as long-time friends. Elizabeth entertained the hope that perhaps Darcy had changed because of her, but on the other hand, she was greatly troubled by the memory of the harsh reproaches she had thrust into his face during his declaration of love. While visiting the house in Pemberley, she sees the pomp and wealth she could be a part of. Thanks to the maid's laudatory narration and the influence of these external values, Elizabeth feels increasingly strong feelings for Darcy and reaches the stage of falling in love. So it may shock readers that the heroine they knew at the beginning of the story is now changing and coming to appreciate wealth, which will also ultimately affect her desire to marry the owner of Pemberley.

Elizabeth is also impressed by the fact that Darcy arranged for Wickham to marry Lydia, with whom he fled to London. She needs confirmation of Lydia's statements, so she writes a letter to her aunt Gardiner, who confirms this. A close relative understands the girls' feelings better than her own mother and does not hesitate to help them with their love problems. She admits to her niece that Mr. Darcy is not as bad as he is generally made out to be. Thanks to her aunt's input, Elizabeth gets to know his nature and feels immense gratitude for what he has done for her family. The couple must also overcome a social obstacle represented by Darcy's aunt Catherine de Bourgh, who wants to prevent their marriage. Elizabeth does not refuse the rich lady's nephew's second proposal, and so follows a happy denouement, when their changed personalities are understood in their deeper essence.

The heroine learns that not everything that appears to be bad in the first moments must in fact mean evil and a reason for condemnation, because it always depends on the point of view, which can be very subjective.

## 4.2. Emma – Emma Woodhouse

Towards the end of her life, Austen produced a highly regarded novel whose main character was a provocative individual for the time. She differs from heroines of the author's previous work in her origin, higher social status and personality that is considered unfavourable.

At the beginning of the story, Austen informs us about the perfect life of a girl who lacks nothing. Emma excels both physically and mentally. She has good social manners and wealth which means she doesn't have to deal with existential issues and financial distress like some of Austen's other heroines. She is a part of a respected family in the rural environment of Highbury, where she is not threatened by any danger and so her life flows at a calm pace without sorrows and troubles. Everything seems like a promising start to the idyllic life of the heroine, but as the sources claim: "*Austen establishes her as a complexion to be broken down*" (Kastan, 2006, p. 94). The author managed to capture the universally known fact that what at first glance shines with beauty and perfection may not at the same time bring only positive true values.

Society does not impose great restrictions on Emma as a source of difficulties and obstacles, since the heroine occupies an important position in it. However, in this novel, Austen turned the cause of the twists towards the main character. Emma hinders herself and those around her from happiness by her scheming behaviour, which stems from suppressing the voice of her conscience as an inner advisor. As a result of this fact, she does not reach important self-knowledge, but comes to wrong conclusions about the nature and motives of other people's actions.

The independence of Emma's nature, high self-esteem and lack of empathy for the experiences of her loved ones is partly influenced by her family environment. The heroine lacked a maternal role model, having lost her mother a long time ago, so she was raised by her father and housekeeper, Miss Taylor. However, no one else can replace the mother, so the relationship between the governess and the two Woodhouse

daughters developed into a strong bond of friendship. Emma relies on her own decisions and opinions even though she holds Miss Taylor in high esteem.

The heroine also had a very positive relationship with her father. She cared for him patiently, though it was not always easy, for Mr. Woodhouse was often excessively anxious about the health and safety of himself and his friends. He did not like changes and unacceptable interventions in everyday life. Therefore, when Mrs. Taylor decided to get married, his selfishness and the aforementioned dislike of change showed, as he wished that everyone would stay together as it had always been. This negative character trait, under the influence of the father, was transferred to his younger daughter who held the same opinion. She decided that she would never marry and take care of her father carefully forever. She wishes to remain a good daughter. We could evaluate her resolution as a proof of admirable self-sacrifice, but Emma lacked nothing for satisfaction, or at least she did not realize it herself: *“And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's”* (Austen, 1997, p. 60).

Emma would only change her mind about getting married if she fell in love. At the same time, however, she believes that her greatest happiness can be provided by living alongside her father at Hartfield, where she has become the mistress of the house and her powers have increased. But she also realizes that her father will not be a sufficient companion for her for spirited conversations and fears the boredom of the days to come. Fortunately, the Woodhouse family maintains social contacts in the rural community, so they often organize evening gatherings. The most frequent visitor at Hartfield is Mr. Knightley, who has known Emma since an early age. His brother married Mr. Woodhouse's elder daughter. Knightley represents a moral authority for the girl and significantly influences her personality. He is the only person who warns Emma about her transgressions against the principles of proper behaviour.

The heroine is very eager to be admired by everyone and recognized for her merits. She tries to do good for society, helps the poor and the elderly. That's why she also takes on Harriet Smith, whom she meets. Emma likes the idea that she will move her up the social ladder and find her a groom. She delusionally believes that she can guess

which couples would be compatible. She suddenly finds a fun way to pass the time. However, Knightley is critical of her influence on Harriet. Emma does not teach her the necessary knowledge, but proves to her that she is a noble lady and should behave accordingly. Subsequently, she subtly forces her to reject a marriage proposal of rural peasant Robert Martin. Emma despises such a class of people, and therefore chooses the local vicar, Mr. Elton, as a suitable match for Harriet. She is completely wrong, because the mentioned gentleman has the impression all the time that Emma gives him encouragement and wants to become his partner. This greatly infuriates snobbish Emma: *“But, that he should talk of encouragement, should consider her as aware of his views, accepting his attentions, meaning, in short, to marry him - should suppose himself her equal in connection or mind”* (Austen, 1997, p. 97).

The heroine does not consider him her equal, but at the same time condemns the same in his behaviour when he despises poor Harriet. This time, Austen lets the main character strictly follow the social hierarchy, when she recognizes the traditional division and, on the basis of her higher position, assumes the right to interfere in love relationships in the circle of acquaintances. She likes to be the centre of attention, which is why she is also loved when Mr. Weston's (Mrs. Taylor's husband) son, Frank Churchill, arrived in Highbury, whom many associated with her and claimed that they could make a nice couple. Emma was preoccupied with her fabricated fantasies, which were further supported by the people around her, and therefore missed many of the strange coincidences that involved Frank and Jane Fairfax's relationship. Jane was gifted and people admired her calm nature. Emma was jealous of her because she couldn't stand anyone taking her prominent position in the Highbury social circle.

At first Frank is attracted to Emma and she tries to please him. This leads to them not being considerate of others. They behave the worst when there is a trip to Box Hill. During the picnic, the two make inappropriate jokes, and as a result, Emma rudely insults Miss Bates, Jane Fairfax's poor aunt who cares only for her mother. Knightley admonishes Emma for such a gross transgression against morality. Austen points out the difference in their understanding of character traits that do not depend on a person's importance in society, which the heroine also realizes and repents for what she has done.

Frank has to leave for town suddenly, and during that time Emma discovers that she doesn't miss his presence at all. She projects his supposed affection onto Harriet Smith

and plunges into further blunders. Meanwhile her young friend secretly admires Mr. Knightley. When she reveals the object of her love to Emma, the heroine is horrified, because she realizes who she really loved from the beginning and until then completely despised under the impression of an inseparable friendship. She is confused by this startling discovery and at the same time desperate. She was in danger of losing Knightley because she was being too unreasonable. At this point, Emma finally begins to recognize her true self: *“To understand, thoroughly understand her own heart, was the first endeavour”* (Austen, 1997, p. 297). Not only will she understand her inner world, but she will also understand how deeply she hurt Harriet and played with her feelings.

Old grievances are settled and Emma finds what she really missed in her previous life. She breaks her vow never to marry and finds happiness in her marriage to Mr. Knightley, who has loved her for many years. Her relationship with him completely changed her. She grew from a snobbish girl into a humble woman who does not look down on the previously condemned lower classes with arrogance and superiority. She recognized herself and the strong power of love and friendship. For these reasons, Emma became Jane Austen's heroine, who undergoes perhaps the most extensive character transformation.

## 5. Conclusion

Despite the limitations of her geographic and social circumstances, Jane Austen was able to utilize her knowledge to become an unconventional and original figure in literature during her time. She used her familiarity with her surroundings to create a fictional world in her novels that highlighted the importance of money, power, challenging environments, and various experiences for achieving self-realization, happiness, and fame. However, Austen also recognized the significance of talent, courage, humility, and persistence, without which achieving goals may result in oblivion or condemnation. Fortunately, the society of the early 19th century did not solely prioritize material possessions, and exceptional individuals could still attain success despite social and gender biases. Jane Austen serves as a prime example of such an achievement.

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to depict the image of family and society in the author's novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. The historical context in which Jane Austen wrote her novels and the factors that influenced her creative genius are important to consider. While she may have been influenced by the feminist movement of her time, her works are not explicitly linked to it. Instead, Austen's critical perspective is expressed with a measured tone, incorporating her progressive views through the dialogues and actions of her characters. Her heroines exhibit remarkable independence, yet they also share a respect for traditional social institutions, reflecting Austen's own upbringing in a patriarchal society. Consequently, her endings tend to conform to literary conventions, with her heroines ultimately succumbing to their emotions and entering into marriage, a central theme in Austen's novels. Nevertheless, Austen's primary goal was to prompt readers to reflect on the emotional and rational aspects of marriage, encouraging them to consider which is more appropriate. While Austen herself valued love and emotion, her novels advocate for a balance between sensibility and reason.

Jane Austen's novels draw heavily on her personal experiences, as she crafts detailed family backgrounds and depicts individuals living with a single parent or being adopted by relatives. Through her writing, Austen vividly portrays the everyday life and cultural activities of her time, providing a glimpse into a typical family environment. Her protagonists grapple with conflicts between their personal moral principles and social

conventions, with their naive worldviews challenged by harsh realities as they mature and develop critical thinking skills. Austen's works thus offer a compelling account of personal growth and development as her characters undergo transformative experiences.

Her literary and real worlds are characterized by a sense of ordinariness, yet this very quality endows her works with a universal quality that imbues them with a timeless appeal.

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## **Resumé**

Bakalářská práce je zaměřena na zobrazení rodiny a společnosti v autorčiných románech *Pýcha a předsudek* a *Emma*. Je popsáno společenské postavení žen v době Austenové, počátky feminizmu a současné pohledy na feminizmus. Autorčino rodinné zázemí, vztahy a osobní zkušenosti jsou popsány a porovnány s životy jejích fiktivních postav. V následující části je analyzován vývoj hlavních hrdinek vybraných románů, ve kterých je bráno v potaz prostředí, ve kterém je zasazena jejich životní cesta a skrz které poznávají svět díky společenským setkáním.

## Anotace

Jméno a příjmení:	Klára Hluchá
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Rok obhajoby:	2023

Název práce:	Obraz rodiny a společnosti v románech Emma a Pýcha a předsudek Jane Austenové
Název práce v angličtině:	Family and Society in Jane Austen's <i>Emma</i> and <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>
Anotace práce:	Cílem této práce je analyzovat romány <i>Emma</i> a <i>Pýcha a předsudek</i> z hlediska rodiny a společnosti. Osobnost a dílo této autorky jsou zařazena do společensko-historického kontextu s ohledem na osobní zkušenosti. Pozornost je také věnována vývoji hlavních hrdinek ve vybraných dílech.
Klíčová slova:	Jane Austenová, rodina, společnost, <i>Emma</i> , <i>Pýcha a předsudek</i>
Anotace práce v angličtině	The aim of this thesis is to analyze novels <i>Emma</i> and <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> in terms of family and society. Personality and work of this author is put into socio-historical context with regard to her personal experiences. Attention is also paid to the development of heroines in the selected novels.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Jane Austen, family, society, <i>Emma</i> , <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>
Přílohy vázané v práci:	

Rozsah práce:	33
Jazyk práce:	Anglický