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**Comparison of Jane Austen Elizabeth Bennet and Charlotte
Brontë Jane Eyre**

Bachelor Thesis

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

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Abstract

The thesis focuses on the heroines from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The aim is to show that they made decisions of their own will and followed their own moral rules, even in complicated situations. The primary resources are the novels. To comprehend the heroines' actions, it is essential to scrutinize the regulations, customs, and legislation of English society during the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Introduction

This thesis analyses two literary characters, Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennet and Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. The former work was published in 1813, while the latter came out in 1847, marking a thirty-four year gap. British society underwent significant changes during these years, transitioning from an agricultural to an industrial centre. The number of citizens increased several times. The emerging factories began to offer job opportunities, people migrated to the cities seeking work. As the country was changing, so was literary production.

The heroines of the two novels vary significantly. To comprehend both women, it is necessary to identify the disparities in their environments. Jane's education greatly impacts her life. It is crucial to scrutinize the education of eighteenth and nineteenth-century women, and describe their social status and associated opportunities. Marriage plays a pivotal role in their lives. An exploration of the importance of marriage in their time period is essential.

The thesis aims to demonstrate the women's perseverance and unwavering moral character despite life's trials. In situations where a choice between comfort and security is necessary they both choose the more challenging option to preserve their self-esteem.

The initial chapter analyses the political climate in Britain and the second chapter describes the lives of the writers. The third chapter deals with reviews of their novels, spanning from their first publishing to the present day. Chapter four provides an account of the role of women in British society and their scope for self-improvement. Chapter five elaborates on the means through which women were able to attain education. Chapter six elucidates the significance of money and marriage, not only for the woman concerned but also for her family members. Chapters seven and eight centre on particular female protagonists with quotes from pivotal events in both novels.

The novels are the main sources. Moreover, the research incorporates social studies of English society during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Women's reminiscences of their families' approaches to educating their children provide insight into the evolution of the educational system. Laws regarding the redistribution of family fortunes and marriage regulations contribute to the contextualization of the significance of marriage.

1 The Political Situation

A chapter on history will help to understand the great changes that took place in England during the life and work of both writers.

Between 1775 and 1855, Great Britain was led by George III, George IV, William IV and Queen Victoria. It is significant to note the Regency period, which spanned from 1811 to 1820, during which time King George III was judged incapable of ruling and his son, George, served as Prince Regent in his stead. The Prince Regent acted as regent until 1820, when he assumed the name George IV and reigned until his own passing in 1830. The Regency era coincided with the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. (Knowles, 2011)

The country has experienced numerous international conflicts. In 1776, America declared its independence, which prompted Britain to engage in a struggle to maintain control over its colonies. Throughout this period, Britain and other European nations were forced to navigate significant political upheaval. In the meantime, the French Revolution erupted in 1789, leading to a war that lasted for twenty-three years. (Buckley, Robertson, 1891, p. 28–33)

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Britain underwent significant economic transformation termed the First Industrial Revolution. During this period, there were extensive advancements in technology including the steam engine, railway, textile machinery, and blast furnaces for steel production. Textile machinery received the greatest emphasis. Britain developed at an unprecedented rate and scale, earning the moniker "workshop of the world." (Crafts, 1998, p. 193–196).

The Industrial Revolution marked the shift from an agrarian to a production-driven economy, resulting in significant socio-economic transformations throughout Europe and beyond. Agriculture has receded to the background, as small farmers failed to earn enough money and were losing their land. This has caused a significant shift towards urbanisation, with people moving to cities in large numbers. Factories were perceived as superior locations for earning a livelihood. (Morton, p. 315–321, 330, 334)

The economic changes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century had a significant impact on the development of British society. The shift away from agriculture towards industry became the main sector, with consequential effects on the economy's dynamics and the social status of the population.

2 The Authors

This chapter will deal with the life of both writers. Each of them lived under different conditions.

2.1 The Biography of Jane Austen

The opening chapter discusses the transformations underway in Britain, but these developments were not captured in Jane Austen's novel. This may have been because Austen spent most of her life in her hometown (Stafford, 2017, p. 5).

Jane Austen was born in December 1775, the seventh child of the local minister George Austen and his wife Cassandra. Her parents nurtured their children's talents. George Austen, who was highly educated and passionate about literature, endeavoured to pass on his love for literature to his offspring. (Stafford, 2017, p. 13–19)

Austen's childhood was reportedly happy. However, she observed the varying life paths of individuals during that time. For example, her brother Edward was fortunate to have an easier life path as he was adopted by relatives. Meanwhile, her brother George faced more challenges and was fostered by another family, potentially due to his difficulties and lack of intelligence in comparison to the other Austen siblings. The various positions held by family members and the means by which they obtained them, were perceptible to her. (Stafford, 2017, p. 13–19)

Austen's cousin Eliza, whom she met during childhood, was a family member who had a notable influence on her work. Eliza spent her childhood in India. She moved in high society because her husband was an aristocrat, and her visits allowed her to expose the Austens to places, people, and events they had not previously experienced. (Stafford, 2017, p. 21–22)

One of Austen's significant figures was her sister Cassandra. Stafford reports her mother's comment suggesting that if Cassandra lost her head, Jane would lose hers too. Austen's niece, Anne Lefroy, makes a similar statement in her letters, as cited by Deidre Le Faye (1988, p. 417–420). Initially, the family proposed that only Cassandra would attend Oxford for further education. Due to the close bond between the two sisters, they decided to send the younger Jane with her. At the time of this decision, Jane was just seven years old. When questioned later about their education, the sisters jokingly remarked that they were grateful to have survived at all. This was due to the fact that teachers were inaccessible and the environment had been adversely impacted by a volcanic eruption in Iceland. When efforts were

made to relocate the girls to a more suitable environment, a typhus epidemic broke out in the area. (Stafford, 2017, p. 24–26)

Another educational establishment that girls attended in 1783 was the Abbey School for Girls in Reading. Students here focused on writing, spelling, and the basics of French and Italian. Additionally, drawing and embroidery were considered important skills for women of the era. Social interaction was also seen as a valuable experience. The students comprised of female individuals from both rural and urban areas, who possessed varying life experiences and viewpoints. They were capable of engaging in discussions and mutually enhancing one another's perspectives. (Stafford, 2017, p. 27)

Austen received only a brief formal education, but enough to nurture her talent and encourage her work. She produced some stories and poems at the age of twelve and began to take writing seriously from the age of fourteen, although she did not yet attempt any novel writing (janeausten.org, 2008).

Austen is admired for her ability to play with words. She could practise her skill by writing letters. At the age of seventeen, Austen was left with her parents as her siblings entered into matrimony or joined the military. Even her sister Cassandra became betrothed. The letters penned during this time constitute an integral part of her work today. (Stafford, 2017, p. 46–52)

In her letters to Cassandra, Jane mentioned a man with whom she fell in love; his name was Tom Lefroy (Stafford, 2017, p. 46). Their relationship was cut short by Lefroy's family as Austen's family did not have sufficient funds to support the couple while Tom was still studying (janeausten.org, 2008).

A marriage proposal was made to Austen whilst residing in Bath, where she had relocated with her family following her father's retirement. Initially accepting the offer, Austen later withdrew her consent the following day. Austen did not receive any further proposals of marriage. (janeausten.org, 2008)

When Austen's father passed away, she was thirty years old. As a result of his death, the female members of her family were left without a source of income or a permanent place to live, and were forced to frequently relocate. During that time Austen devoted a great deal of effort to her writing, resulting in the eventual success of her novels. It is noteworthy that Austen's works were not printed in the same sequence as they were written. Her writings ensured her financial security. However, in 1816, Austen's health deteriorated and she passed away on the 18th of July 1817. (janeausten.org, 2008)

After Austen passed away, her family members attempted to create a biography of her life. Utilizing various sources, including letters from her niece Anna Lefroy, it was said that Austen was a lively and imaginative woman. She was adored by children due to her eagerness to craft stories and develop plots with them. (Deidre Le Faye, 1988, p. 417–420)

Austen's life was undeniably challenging due to her family's financial constraints, which impacted her relationship with Mr Lefroy, and her educational experiences. Nevertheless, she was fortunate to have supportive parents who fostered their children's talents, potentially contributing to Austen's development of her abilities.

2.2 The Biography of Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë was born on 21st of April 1816. She was the third child. Her father was a reverend. Her mother died soon after giving birth to her sixth child. (Cosmopolitan Art Journal, 1857, p. 158)

Charlotte Brontë's childhood was described by Margret Butchman (1994, p. 160–161) in the article *Teacher, Author, Book and Life: Charlotte Brontë*. Her father was described as a withdrawn man who, although physically present, did not devote his time to his children. The siblings formed a strong emotional bond with each other and also created their imaginary worlds together. Apart from the father, she also mentioned an aunt who acted as the female element in the widower's household.

The bond between Charlotte and her siblings was disrupted by the way the family approached the children's education. The girls were sent to a school for daughters of poor clergymen. Two older sisters became ill and when they returned home, both of them died. Charlotte was nine years old and became the oldest child in the family. (Buchmann, 1994, p. 161)

Infectious diseases such as typhus, tuberculosis, fever a typhoid fever were the most common cause of death at that time (Houston, 1986, p. 440).

Despite the terrible conditions at the school, Brontë believed that by sending her to this school her father had done the most he could for her. She saw her education as an opportunity for self-development and fulfillment. (Buchmann, 1994, p. 161)

The next school Brontë attended was Roe Head. Here she met a teacher who excelled at inspiring her pupils and making them feel valued. (Buchmann, 1994, p. 162–163) In addition, she formed a friendship with a girl that lasted a lifetime. Brontë later taught at the same school from 1835, even instructing her two sisters during the three years of her tenure. (Lewis, 2023)

In 1838 the school moved and exhausted Charlotte returned home to become a governess. However, she disliked the job because it made her feel like a maid. She returned home within a month. In 1839, she was offered marriage twice. One of the suitors was the brother of her former schoolmate. She rejected both proposals. (Lewis, 2023)

In 1842, Charlotte and Emily went to Brussels to get a higher education. The reason was to open their own school. (Lewis, 2023) Before she left for Brussels, she wrote a letter to a friend describing her desire to experience a new city, new places and learn something new. (Buchmann, 1994, p. 164)

After six months, they were offered the opportunity to stay and work as teachers to pay their tuition fees. But the two sisters returned home to share the family roles with their siblings, as their aunt who was in charge of the household had died in the meantime. All the siblings inherited part of her estate. Only Charlotte returned to Brussels. She probably fell in love with the headmaster, but her feelings were not reciprocated. *The Professor* was probably written as a reaction to Charlotte's feelings for him. By the end of the year she came back home, where she stayed. (Lewis, 2023)

In 1847, the novels of all three Brontë sisters were published. The first novel that Charlotte offered to the publisher was rejected. The next novel *Jane Eyre* was accepted and soon after the publication it met with success. It seemed that the Brontë family would succeed in their artistic endeavours. However, illness again intervened in their lives. All three of Charlotte's siblings died within a year. After their deaths, Charlotte republished and edited their works. In 1849 she travelled to London, where she met prominent literary figures, including William Makepeace Thackeray, Harriet Martineau, and Elizabeth Glaskell, with whom she maintained written contact. She again received an offer of marriage, which she again declined. (Lewis, 2023)

Arthur Bell Nicholls, her father chaplain asked for her hand in marriage. Charlotte's father did not agree and Charlotte refused the proposal. However, she secretly began to correspond with Nicholls and they married a year later. Their marriage lasted only for a year. She died in 1855. At first the cause of her death was given as tuberculosis. Today, it is thought to have been exhaustion from excessive pregnancy vomiting. (Lewis, 2023)

Brontë's life was probably not as entertaining as Austen's. Brontë's biography says nothing about balls and theatres. Rather, it speaks of the close bond between all the siblings and how they supported each other. There is not much evidence about the parents' support of the children and their talents. Moreover, her life was marked by many tragedies. First, it was the death of her mother and then the death of all her siblings.

3 The Novels

3.1 Pride and Prejudice

This chapter aims to present the impact of both novels on readers. References to contemporaneous reviews and subsequent analyses are included. The authors, who experienced diverse economic and social contexts, expressed their appreciation for women who asserted their independence.

In 1981 *The British Critic* published a review which was originally printed in 1813, the same year *Pride and Prejudice* was published. The author considered the story to be well described and the characters to be exceptionally well drawn. Elizabeth, according to the author, had no faults, which could not be said of Mr Darcy, who underwent a great transformation. Mr Collins was downright excellent. Elizabeth's father, Mr Bennet, though witty, quick-witted, and reserved, his bad qualities included a certain arrogance where he mocked the character weaknesses in those closest to him. At the same time he did nothing to help them or try to mitigate or even correct their faults. In conclusion, the author expressed his satisfaction with the work, which he had enjoyed reading.

“It is unnecessary to add, that we have perused these volumes with much satisfaction and amusement, and entertain very little doubt that their successful circulation will induce the author to similar exertions.” (Harris, 2007)

In another review published by *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, the author said that *Pride and Prejudice* was a witty description of the social atmosphere of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England.

“The novel is much more than a comedic love story, however; through Austen’s subtle and ironic style, it addresses economic, political, feminist, sociological, and philosophical themes, inspiring a great deal of diverse critical commentary on the meaning of the work.” (Whitaker, 2005, p. 1)

At the time, England was a patriarchal society where the economy and society was in the hands of men. Austen questioned the values and rules of English society. “Interested in the balance between pragmatism, or the necessity of securing a marriage, and idealism, particularly Elizabeth’s romanticism and individualism, Austen dramatizes her heroine’s struggle to find a place within the conservative social institution of marriage.” (Whitaker, 2005, p. 1)

The author doubted that the marriage of Mr Darcy and Elizabeth could be a happy one because of their different natures. “The precise nature of this balance is not necessarily clear, and despite what seems to be a happy marriage, it may be not entirely possible to reconcile Elizabeth’s independence and naturalness with Mr Darcy’s conservatism and conventionality.” (Whitaker, 2005, p. 1–2) However, he saw their union as an effort by Austen to find balance and reconciliation. (Whitaker, 2005, p. 1–2)

Margaret Kirkham (1997) focused on the comic part of Austen's work. There is much wit and some sarcasm in her work. Austen's heroines do not live extraordinary lives or have any extraordinary gifts. What makes them interesting is the way they deal with the difficulties they encounter. Kirkham finds Elizabeth the most attractive of all the characters Austen created. She was blessed with intelligence and amiability. She faulted her, however, for becoming too much like a real woman during her development.

“None of the Austen heroines is more attractive than Elizabeth Bennet, none more clearly possessed of intelligence and warm affections, but as she develops she effectively destroys the role she is supposed to play. The result is that she begins to look too much like a heroine without a part, a real-life character, not a creature in print,…” (Kirkham, 1997)

Deborah J. Knuth Klenck (2013) wrote an article in which she described how her view of the various characters in *Pride and Prejudice* changed. Even after years, she still viewed Elizabeth and Mr Darcy the same way. “My focus on that culture has changed over time, but Elizabeth and Darcy remain true to themselves.” (Klenck, 2013)

She devoted a large part of her article to the relationship between Elizabeth and Charlotte. In her opinion, Charlotte was a calculating person. “But Charlotte is not behaving as she does out of friendship at all: in fact, she has been taking the advice she once gave for Jane, to “shew more than she feels,” if indeed Charlotte feels anything whatever towards her Mr Collins.” (Klenck, 2013)

Elizabeth was a straightforward woman, unafraid to express her opinions, regardless of the social status of the person she was interviewing. One example was a discussion with Lady Catherine De Bourgh. She also described as unfair the accusation that Elizabeth had used manipulative techniques to attract men, which was made by Mr Bingley's sister, Caroline. “Caroline's catty back-biting is timelessly recognizable to any woman who finds herself on the dating scene in real life--or perhaps even in cyberspace.” (Klenck, 2013)

“Eliza Bennet [...] is one of those young ladies who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex, by undervaluing their own; and with many men, I dare say, it succeeds. But, in my opinion, it is a paltry device, a very mean art.” (Austen, p. 37)

The author defended Elizabeth, saying that she never used any methods to deliberately draw attention to herself. On the contrary, she highlighted the wit she used to speak to Mr Darcy during her evenings at Netherfield. She likened it to a game of chess. “Elizabeth seems to imagine that she and Darcy are playing chess, and she thinks several moves ahead [...]” (Klenck, 2013)

Finally, the author compared the book to her own life when she encountered the Bennet family's lax approach to their daughters' education. She wondered what she could be good at and successful at today if she had given enough attention to the activity in question. She also expressed her fears that she herself might one day become Lady Catherine De Bourgh. That is to say, the woman who knows best. Finally, she wondered whether she herself would one day be inclined to interfere with her offspring in choosing their life partner. “More to the point--and this is a real concern--will I try to control my children's choice of spouse?” (Klenck, 2013)

3.2 Jane Eyre

Just as *Pride and Prejudice* received criticism upon its release, so did *Jane Eyre*.

George Henry Lewes (1847, p. 692–693) recommended acquiring a copy of the novel and reading it promptly. Despite the criticisms of the scenes involving Bertha Mason, Lewes' review ultimately remained positive. He contended that the governess's representation was the most effective way to achieve the novel's realism since it was “not just correct but also accurate from the governess's point of view”. Hence, this point suggested that *Jane Eyre* presented a fresh type of female consciousness in British literature. Additionally, He was delighted by the skill the characters were composed. He said that they were “drawn with unusual mastery.” Like other critics of the time, he stated that the novel was different from other works published at the time, announcing “The style of *Jane Eyre* is peculiar”.

Another analysis of *Jane Eyre* was published in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* in 2013. It said, that the novel, like many other novels of that time, ended with the main character getting married. The difference was in the way of entering the marriage. The heroine went through a personal development and made her own decisions. (Trudeau, 2013)

“Although *Jane Eyre*, like many Victorian novels, concludes with the marriage of the protagonist, Jane is an uncommonly independent heroine, and her marriage to Rochester depends more upon her personal development and consent than it does upon the vagaries of circumstance.” (Trudeau, 2013)

Jane acted in compliance with her moral convictions. She refused Mr Rochester's offer to live as his mistress, even though she loved him. She refused her cousin John's marriage proposal because she did not love him. In both cases, she was trying to save herself and her self-respect. Jane fought for her independence, love and marriage. She created a new heroine who achieved equality and fulfillment in her relationships. (Trudeau, 2013)

It followed the heroine from her childhood when her fate as an orphan was left in the hands of her relatives. The education she received when she was a girl improved her position in society in adulthood. “By the time she becomes a governess, Jane is educated and refined, but as an employee of Thornfield Hall, she occupies an ambiguous position in that, while she is permitted to form a social relationship with Rochester, her role in the household is still, economically, that of a servant.” (Trudeau, 2013)

The writer underlined the fact that positions of the two principal characters were equalised. “At the novel’s end, the marriage takes place after Jane has received her inheritance and Rochester has been disfigured in the fire; these developments reduce the inequalities between them by raising both Jane’s socioeconomic position and her relative capital with respect to physical appearance.” (Trudeau, 2013)

Neal Wyatt (2014) wrote, that *Jane Eyre* introduced to the world a strong and honest heroine. She struggled to make her own way in life. Her greatest weapon was her accurate comments. “Facing Mr Rochester, the brooding, secretive, ethically troubled master of Thornfield Hall, Jane parries wit against wit and wins. Against St. John Rivers, her officious and domineering cousin, she holds a line he is determined to cross. All the while, this famous orphan strives to find her own path and walk it in the ways she knows are best suited to her.” (Wyatt, 2014)

In all the analysis cited, the authors expressed admiration for both Elizabeth and Jane, regardless of when the texts were written. Reviews written shortly after the publication of both novels praised the heroines for their courage. Both authors were English, and there was only a thirty-four-year gap between the publication of the two novels. Despite this, the heroines, Elizabeth and Jane, were distinctly different from each other. One thing they shared in common was marriage.

The works have continued to attract new admirers, even two hundred years later. It could be an escape to the leisurely past of Elizabeth's time, where strolls, visits and balls were a part of the routine. It could be the empathy for an orphan's solitary struggle with life's obstacles. Jane may instill the courage in readers to confront their own difficulties. However, the fundamental issue may centre on the heroines' desire to preserve their self-respect and avoid being viewed as mere objects for exploitation.

4 Position of Women in Society

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the position of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

On the subject of women's position in society Houston (1986, p. 449) quoted from essays on *Women in English Society 1500–1800*, and the title *Life and Labour in England*. These essays declared that during the eighteenth century many women were employed. Two-thirds of housewives worked at home making lace or spinning. He mentioned that they were paid less than men. It was harder, but not impossible, for them to be economically independent of men. Later, women were excluded from the workforce.

Historians disagree about the consequences of women's exclusion from the workforce and the limitations of their work opportunities. Ivy Pinchbeck argued that excluding women from the workforce and relegating them to the home was beneficial for both women and society. Alice Clark disagreed with this view, arguing that the exclusion of women from the workforce limited their status. (Houston, 1986, p. 449)

Another author cited by Houston (1986, p. 449) was M. Prior and his text *Women and Urban Economy*. He mentioned that women did not have the right to vote and this made them weak.

In the mid-nineteenth century, middle-class women could spend all their leisure time as they pleased because they could afford servants to look after the house and household and a governess to look after the children. The position of the governess, was contradictory. The governess had to be a woman of sufficiently high calibre to be considered a suitable candidate for child-rearing. At the same time, she had to be poor enough to seek employment. These women were often put in this situation by the death of their father or by the economic decline of the family. Also, at that time many men worked on ships and sailed the seas. It lowered the chances of getting married because of the shortage of available grooms. Therefore, the number of unmarried women was growing. (Gilbert, 2015, p. 456)

The profession of governesses underwent a gradual expansion to include the daughters of farmers and merchants. Their parents provided them with education in an attempt to secure a better position in life. The arrival of these girls reduced the pay of governesses. (Gilbert, 2015, p. 457–459)

The governesses were perceived as suffering in their jobs because they had to leave home for economical security. However, there were also women who, despite their good position and comfortable life, wanted to be independent and volunteered to become governesses. One of them was Nelly Weeton, a middle-class woman who lived in the early nineteenth century. Some of the governesses used the experience they gained from their job to become writers. These included the sisters Anne and Charlotte Brontë. (Gilbert, 2015, p. 460–461)

In conclusion, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, women did not have any economical security as they were dependent on their fathers or husbands. If it happened that a woman had to provide for her livelihood, she could either earn her living by manual labour or use her education to work as a governess. The governess was on the same level as a servant. Brontë experienced that personally.

5 The Methods of Obtaining Education

This chapter will discuss the way in which girls were educated in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Before any individual information is given it is necessary to mention the fact of population growth in Britain, as population is closely related to this topic.

Mc. Keown, in his work *Modern Rise of Population*, stated that in 1701 England had a population of five point one million. A hundred years later in 1801 it was eight point seven million. The Industrial Revolution caused a huge increase in population. In 1871 the population had reached twenty-one point five million. (Houston, 1986, p. 440)

As the population increased, so did the number of students in schools. The Industrial Revolution was a period where child labour was common. Students left school because they were needed to go to work and help support the family. Employers during this time did not place importance on their workers' literacy skills. Rather, they sought individuals who were skilled in manual labour and obedient. (Houston, 1986, p. 444–445)

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the situation changed. The economy was improving and the middle class had better access to education. But there were still differences between villages and cities, men and women, the English part of the country and Scotland and Wales. (Houston, 1986, p. 446)

The evidence of the growing level of education was the number of published journals. Houston highlighted that fifty of different newspapers made the annual profit of thirteen million. He considered it as the evidence of the increasing number of people able to read. (Houston, 1986, p. 446)

The various women's magazines are discussed in more detail in *2 Educating Women, Patriotism and Public Life, 1770–1845* by Gerardine Meaney, Mary O'Dowd, Bernadette Whelan (2013, p. 55). One of the most popular magazines of the nineteenth century was *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. The publisher wrote in the first issue that it was a magazine for women who wanted a happy home. It offered housekeeping advice, fashion news and tips on how to style your clothes. Other titles included *Lady of the House* and *La Belle Asemblée*. The latter title dealt with women's fashion and included advertisements for furniture and silverware. It was aimed at middle-class housewives.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, members of the working class had the opportunity to attend Sunday schools, where they were taught thrift, obedience, hard work and piety. These schools mainly focused on teaching basic reading and writing skills. The initiative to educate these individuals did not come from either the state or the church. Instead, the importance of education was recognised by the people themselves who sought to obtain it. (Houston, 1986, p. 447)

There were significant differences in the approach to education. Middle and upper class students received a higher quality and more comprehensive education than working-class students. This led to a widening cultural gap between them. (Houston, 1986, p. 447–448)

Limited access to education for women was identified as a contributing factor to their lower position in society. However, their situation gradually improved. As teaching subjects evolved, literature, history, anthropology, and politics were widely recognised as fundamental areas of study. (Houston 1986, p. 448)

The authors of *2 Educating Women, Patriotism, and Public Life, 1770–1845* gained insight into Caroline Hamilton's *Reminiscences*, written in 1820. Hamilton's memoir charts the shift in women's education during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The authors note that women born in this era were the first of middle and upper classes to receive education as a norm rather than an exception. (Meaney, O'Dowd, Whelan, 2013, p. 56)

There were paradoxical situations where women such as Lady Elizabeth Fowners, Caroline Hamilton's grandmother and daughter of an earl, gained literacy through self-education, yet also established schools for the poor. (Meaney, O'Dowd, Whelan, 2013, p. 56)

“My grandmother, though an earl's daughter, could write only short letter, containing a few kind sentences, in a very large hand, spelling very ignorantly, and yet she was considered a sensible woman, and had energy enough to establish a little school ...” (Meaney, O'Dowd, Whelan, 2013, p. 56)

Hamilton remembered her own education when her mother, Sarah, reading Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*, sent her sons to public school and hired governesses for the daughters. Sarah encouraged her daughters to develop their artistic talents without consideration for the costs involved. (Meaney, O'Dowd, Whelan, 2013, p. 57)

Theodosia, who was Hamilton's aunt, had a different approach to her daughter's education. She decided not to employ any governesses and instead sent her daughter to school. The inspiration for this approach came from the work of de Genlis *Adèle and Théodore*, which emphasized the importance of a mother's participation in her daughter's education. Theodosia encouraged her daughter to read and write in both French and Italian languages. Mary, the daughter of Theodosia, maintained a reading journal to record her observations and impressions. (Meaney, O'Dowd, Whelan, 2013, p. 56)

By the time Hamilton was getting her education, a governess was considered a necessary member of the household. But in her grandmother's time it was not. Reading skills were passed on by the old nurse and writing was taught by the parish clerk. If women wanted to expand their education through reading, their father's libraries were available to them. The range of books was limited mostly to romantic literature or those dealing with religion and history. Access to books and dedicated reading time enabled women to read without difficulty. Conversely, the ability to write was limited. As evidence of this phenomenon, the authors point to the copious correspondence between Anne Tennant, the wife of merchant, and her son. In her letters, Anna asked her son for various titles of novels to read. But only one of the letters was written by her. The authors concluded that the majority of the letters were written by someone else. (Meaney, O'Dowd, Whelan, 2013, p. 57–58)

As the Hamilton family underwent changes, a notable shift in the educational practices of the Tennant family can be observed. William Tennant, Anne Tennant's son, sent all his daughters to school and they spent several years there. The daughters demonstrated proficiency in writing, as is apparent in the letters they wrote to their father. (Meaney, O'Dowd, Whelan, 2013, p. 58)

The memories of Syndey Owenson and her sister provide evidence of the development of education and the administration of schools during the 1790s. They both attended a boarding school that aimed to produce well-educated women for society, following the guidelines of John Locke. The curriculum was split between academic study and physical exercise to promote healthy living. The school used to start at six o'clock in summers and at seven o'clock in winters. If favorable weather prevailed, students would be allowed to swim in the sea. Post the swim, the curriculum would proceed with lessons on English Grammar and Geography. Then the girls were given breakfast. Exercise and recreation followed. The classes would continue from twelve to three o'clock. At four o'clock, the evening meal was served. The girls were subsequently permitted to take a walk outdoors. Classes recommenced at seven o'clock and ended at nine o'clock. The girls were provided with a supper before retiring to bed.

On average, they dedicated seven hours a day to their studies. English grammar, writing, geography and history, arithmetic, and drawing were among the subjects studied. (Meaney, O'Dowd, Whelan, 2013, p. 59–60)

The establishment of universities was a significant development in the education system. In 1857, Queen's College, Harley Street was established with the aim of educating unmarried women who were interested in becoming teachers or governesses. A year later, Bedford College was founded. Many other colleges, such as London, Oxford, and Cambridge, were established in the following forty years. (Hill, 1987, p. 107)

The social class to which the person belonged was important. The subjects taught were determined accordingly. Preparation for their future occupation was a key consideration in their education. A factory worker's ability to read and follow instructions from their superiors was vital. The approach to education for women has evolved steadily over time, with a shift towards vocational subjects and away from manual labor. Women recognized that education was one of the few paths available to them for financial independence. The emergence of universities that admitted female students marked a significant turn in the pursuit of their aspirations.

6 The Money and the Marriage

This chapter will describe the role that marriage played in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It could influence the future not only for that particular woman, but also other family members.

E. P. Thompson (1976, p. 138) wrote an article called *Class Struggle without Class*. Thompson stated that money was very important. It could buy position, such as a seat in parliament or rank in the army. It could buy votes, protection from service in the army. Nobility was graded by wealth and not by lineage. Marriages in the upper class were arranged by the fathers of the families and their lawyers.

“This is the century in which money beareth all the stroke, in which liberties become properties, and use-rights are reified.” (Thompson, 1978, p. 138)

The Chancery was an office responsible for property affairs, which included the redistribution of property between generations through means such as marriage, death, i.e. via will, or by settlement. The aim of the Chancery was to maintain a balance between affluent parents and their children's interests. It required a responsible attitude, particularly on the part of fathers, towards their children, their maintenance and their education. Fathers were expected to ensure financial provision for all their children. (Hofri-Winogradow, 2012, p. 744)

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Britain played a crucial part in global commerce, resulting in increased wealth of merchants. Consequently, the amount of financial resources played a significant role in the formation of marriage unions. There were marriages that combined wealth and status. The wealthy classes feared “treasure hunters”. (Hart, 1988, p. 128)

The way in which marriages were contracted went through notable changes following the implementation of the *Clandestine Marriages Act* in 1753. The aim was to control and regulate marriage, with the intention of stopping clandestine marriages where individuals were from different social classes or were not yet of legal age. The legislation required fiancées to have parental consent to marry. The positive side of this law was that it brought order to the civil registry and made the system transparent. The negative was that marriage and fiancés became a commercial commodity. (Hofri-Winogradow, 2012, p. 742–743)

The state sought to gain a better understanding of the marriages performer enacting the *Clandestine Marriage Act*. It supposed to protect women and their children who were produced in marriages. Erica Hart cited the specific case of *Kennedy vs Campbell*. It involved two widows married to the same man. After his death there was a dispute as to which of them was the rightful wife and also the heir to his estate with a claim to a widow's annuity. (Hart, 1988, p. 127)

The law required that the marriage had to be announced in advance by so-called announcements and the parents had to agree to it. The marriage could be hastened by means of a licence or special licence. A priest had to conduct the ceremony and at least two witnesses had to be present. (Probert, 2005, p. 247–248)

Fiancés needed parental consent if they were under the age of twenty-one. After that, marriage could take place without consent. There were cases, when parents specified the conditions for their children's marriage in wills or settlements. This could be, for example, specifying the time or age at which the marriage could take place. (Probert, 2009, p. 416)

Hart (1998, p. 129) described the way in which wealth was redistributed within families. She noted that in the early eighteenth century families drew up so-called strict settlements which determined that property remained in the hands of the eldest son. At the same time, an amount of wealth was set aside for the younger siblings. In order to give his siblings the share to which they were entitled, the eldest son went into debt. The debts could become unbearable. It would appear that the *Hardwicke Act (Clandestine Marriage Act)* was a supplement to the strict settlement.

The Clandestine Marriage Act of 1753 included control procedures to prove the legitimacy of marriages and the grounds for annulment. Marriages could still be challenged for fraud or non-compliance with the law. In 1823, Joseph Phillimore called for the *Act* to be altered by removing the clause on the possible annulment of marriages. The reason for this move was not to promote romantic love, but it was about money. Phillimore justified his reasons on the grounds that annulment of marriage attacked fundamental property rights. The children of these marriages were being deprived of property that was rightfully theirs. To enforce this amendment, he appealed to his colleagues that each of them could be threatened with the deprivation of property or the inability to enjoy the position they had acquired by marriage. He also insisted that marriages should be contracted with the consent of parents or guardians. (Hart, 1988, p. 132–133)

The families aimed to retain inherited property within the family. This was achieved by instructing their children on who to marry. In exchange for obedience, the children were granted a share of the property. If the parents disagreed with the choice of partner and the marriage still took place, there could be a disinheritance, called a gift over. In such cases, the property would be transferred to another member of the family. This occurrence was infrequent. The children generally concurred with their parents' perspectives and pursued relationships within their own social strata. (Hofri-Winogradow, 2012, p. 759)

At the end of the eighteenth century, the approach to marriages contracted without the consent of the family varied. Sometimes the father gave his daughter a share of the property even though he disapproved of her choice of a partner. At other times, the father conditioned the acquisition of the property only if the daughter did not marry at all. There were cases, when the daughter did not receive a share of the estate, but her children did. Property measures usually concerned daughters, but even sons were sanctioned. (Hofri-Winogradow, 2012, p. 762)

The main theme of both novels is marriage, highlighting the important role it played in people's lives. The selection of a compatible partner was an essential aspect. Marriage could either elevate or degrade one's social status and lead to financial success or ruin.

The Clandestine Marriage Act creators aimed to regulate an unorganized system and establish an accurate marriage registry. They responded to the escalating situation with rules designed in good faith that appeared to be both understandable and logical. Regrettably, well-meaning concepts are often misused, and the established regulations allowed for manipulation. The requirements in themselves were not particularly stringent. The issue lay in their implementation after the legislation was enacted. Joseph Philimore's request for the alteration of the *Act* can only elicit amusement. The manner in which he sought the support of his colleagues intimates that numerous legislators attained their positions through matrimonial connections with a suitable partner.

Society must have acknowledged that social status is determined not only by a noble title but also by an individual's wealth. As a result, an individual owning property became a desirable match, leading to marriages where both parties benefitted. One possessed money, the other the title.

7 The Character of Elizabeth Bennet

Elizabeth was one of five daughters. The family was regarded as part of the landed gentry based on the passage describing their financial situation.

“Mr Bennet’s property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year, which unfortunately for his daughters, was entailed, in default of heirs male, on a distant relation; and their mother’s fortune [...]. Her father had been an attorney in Meryton, and had left her four thousand pounds.” (Austen, p. 26)

The family was not considered wealthy, but they were independent and none of the daughters had to work. The book does not mention any obligatory tasks or responsibilities. Instead, the novel emphasizes each girl's interests. Elizabeth enjoyed reading, Mary played the piano, and Kitty and Lydia were inclined towards the army and shopping. Additionally, the girls frequently undertook lengthy visits to friends and relatives. Their financial means were significant enough to hire servants, as evidenced by the conversation between Mrs Bennet and Mr Collins during their first meeting.

“But here he was set right by Mrs Bennet, who assured him with some asperity that they were very well able to keep a good cook, and that her daughters had nothing to do in the kitchen.” (Austen, p. 62)

Elizabeth enjoyed a comfortable existence without concern for her survival. She had the freedom to choose her daily activities and leisure time. Her family provided her with a loving background. She shared a special bond with her sister Jane. Elizabeth did not hesitate to walk three miles to visit her when she was unwell at Mr Bingley's residence.

“The distance is nothing, when one has a motive; only three miles. I shall be back by dinner.” (Austen, p. 30)

But this apparent idyll was only temporary, as the house they lived in would not belong to any of them in the future. Without a suitable partners, their circumstances may have altered significantly. Daughters couldn't acquire anything. The property was inherited in the male line. The law stated that the eldest son was the heir to the family estate. The Bennet family consisted of only daughters. The legal heir to the estate was the nearest male representative in the family, who was their cousin, Mr Collins. All family members were acquainted with the situation. Mrs Bennet in particular was aware of the seriousness of the situation.

“I do think it is the hardest thing in the world that your estate should be entailed away from your own children;” [...] and she continued to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five daughters, in favour of a man whom nobody cared anything about.” (Austen, p. 59)

In the view of the law of that time, Mr Collins took it for granted that he would inherit property to which he had not contributed in any way. He felt this was unfair to the Bennet daughters. The gratitude expressed by his marriage to one of the daughters he considered sufficient.

“[...] he intended to marry; and in seeking a reconciliation with the Longbourn family he had a wife in view, as he meant to chuse one of the daughters, [...]. This was his plan of amends – of atonement – for inheriting their father’s estate; and he thought it an excellent one full of eligibility and suitableness, and excessively generous and disinterested on his own part.” (Austen, p. 67–68)

At first he wanted to propose to the beautiful Jane, but after an explanation that Jane would soon be engaged, he proposed to Elizabeth. When it came to marriage, Elizabeth displayed her independence and determination. She was a woman who was not afraid to express her opinion and she declined his offer.

“You are too hasty, sir, [...] You forget that I have made no answer. Let me do it without further loss of time. Accept my thanks for the compliment you are paying me. I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than to decline them.” (Austen, p. 102)

Mr Collins was so insistent that she had to go several times before he understood that Elizabeth was not really going to accept his offer. She refused to marry solely for achieving financial independence for herself and her family. Her mother was deeply displeased with this choice, driven by her primary motive of securing financial stability for all her daughters. The idea that the family would be secured and that there would be no loss of property was attractive. It may be understandable in the context of that time.

“But depend upon it, Mr Collins,” she added, “that Lizzy shall be brought to reason. I will speak to her about it myself directly. She is a very headstrong foolish girl and does not know her own interest; but I will make her know it.” (Austen, p. 106)

Elizabeth found support in her father, whose favourite she was.

“Your mother insists upon your accepting it. Is not it so, Mrs Bennet?”

“Yes, or I will never see her again.”

“An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr Collins, and I will never see you again if you do.” (Austen, p. 108)

The question remains why Mr Collins did not go on to other daughters. His behaviour did not suggest that he was seeking an emotional relationship. It was meant to be a kind of moral gesture, and it probably did not matter which of the daughters would become his wife.

It is not surprising that the father did not think about possible candidates for Mr Collins' wife among his remaining daughters. Mr Bennet was aware that he should have taken care of his daughters' financial security long ago. However, at crucial moments when he should have stepped in to help the assets stay in the family, he did nothing. All he cared about was his peace of mind in his library.

“I have two small favours to request. First, that you will allow me the free use of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly of my room. I shall beg leave to have the library to myself as soon as may be.” (Austen, p. 108)

We also find it rather strange that Mrs Bennet did not consider her other daughters to be suitable candidates for Mr Collins, knowing her eager attempts to marry her daughters off. We believe it could have been a crucial moment to secure family's fortune.

Elizabeth may not have been fully aware of the implications of her actions. She may have realised her position after a conversation with her friend Charlotte, who had decided to marry Collins for purely practical reasons. Elizabeth's courage in standing her ground deserves even more commendation.

“I am not romantic, you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr Collins's character, connexions, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state.” (Austen, p. 121)

At this juncture, the shocking realization occurs that Charlotte, who was previously perceived as a plain and unremarkable individual, shall inherit the entire Bennet wealth. Charlotte's motives are comprehensible as she was aware of her ordinariness and realised that she would not have many opportunities to marry. Nevertheless, the Bennets may have felt that

they should have tried harder to accommodate Mr Collins. The loss of the family fortune was evident, and a sensitive question that nobody dared to speak about aloud.

Charlotte's wedding may have damaged the relationship between the two friends. But Elizabeth proved to be a true friend by not allowing Charlotte's marriage to Collins to ruin their relationship. This was demonstrated by the invitation she received from Charlotte and accepted.

“Absence had increased her desire of seeing Charlotte again, and weakened her disgust of Mr Collins.” (Austen, p. 147)

The subject of inheritance in the male and female line was also addressed in the novel by Lady Catherine when she first met Elizabeth and Mr and Mrs Collins. We can get the impression from Lady Catherine's words that she was a progressive woman. It must be remembered that she herself had only a daughter.

“ ... I see no occasion for entailing estates from the female line. - It was not thought necessary in Sir Lewis de Bourgh's family.” (Austen, p. 159)

The Bennet sisters' situation was made all the more difficult by the fact that their parents had done nothing to provide for them financially.

“Mr Bennet had very often wished, before this period of his life, that, instead of spending his whole income, he had laid by an annual sum for better provision of his children, and of his wife, if she survived him.” (Austen, p. 296)

It is incomprehensible that the Bennet family did not take proactive steps to secure their estate, despite the legal mandate that only a male heir could inherit. With the couple having birthed five daughters and the likelihood of a son dwindling, the looming possibility of losing their property should have been apparent. It is probable that they relied on their daughters marrying into wealthy families. However, they neglected to engage in actions like offering a large dowry to lure potential suitors.

Apart from property or dowry, the woman had to meet other criteria to determine whether she had the right qualities to become a wife, capable of running a household and be sufficiently presentable in society. Such criteria included the level of education and skills needed to run a household. The Bennet family took a very benevolent approach to their daughters' education, which emerged from a conversation between Catherine de Bourgh and Elizabeth. The subject was her ability to play a musical instrument and to draw. It came as a great surprise to Catherine de Bourgh that Elizabeth had neither of these skills.

“No governess! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without a governess!”

[...]

“ We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly might.” (Austen, p. 159–160)

Women's education was a topic of discussion between Mr Bingley, Mr Darcy, Mr Bingley's sister - Caroline, and Elizabeth. Everyone involved admired the different abilities the woman must have had. Basic skills such as knitting and decorating were expected, as well as proficiency in dancing, singing and drawing. Additionally, a woman's appearance was of great importance. There had to be dignity in her walk, even the tone of her voice was an essential element. The only more significant element in a woman's education was the ability to speak foreign languages, which was mentioned by Caroline. (Austen, p. 36)

Mr Darcy might convince himself that Elizabeth did not meet his criteria and therefore would not be a suitable wife for him. He could send her a message about what was important to him in a woman and give her a reason to work on herself. He could also express his admiration for her by talking about reading, because he would see her reading during her visit.

“[...] and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.” (Austen, p. 36).

Elizabeth's directness showed itself again. She did not try to pander, as Caroline did. She was not afraid to express her opinion of the model of the perfect woman described by the interviewees.

“I never saw such a woman. I never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe, united.” (Austen, p. 37)

Active engagement in social life was deemed necessary for families to establish valuable connections, receive invitations to formal events, and expand their social circle. The family's social standing was favourable, evident in their attendance at social gatherings such as balls. The mother, in the company of her daughters, was a frequent visitor to the town, mingling with women of similar status. Balls, visits to relatives, and walks were among the important places where the novel's action took place. No opportunity was to be missed to impress a potential groom.

“It is truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.”

“However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.” (Austen, p. 1)

Hoping that one of her daughters would impress a rich groom, Mrs Bennet attended a ball to which Mr Bingley was also invited. Her wish was granted, for he took a fancy to Jane, the eldest daughter. Mr Bingley's friend Mr Darcy, on the other hand, showed no sympathy for the girls. He was later the cause of the break-up in the promising relationship between Jane and Bingley. For Darcy, the difference in social status between the two young people was insurmountable. He explained it in the letter for Elizabeth.

“We accordingly went – and there I readily engaged in the office of pointing out to my friend, the certain evils of such a choice. - I described, and enforced them earnestly.” (Austen, p. 192)

He had to deal with the issue of social difference himself, because he loved Elizabeth, but there were social norms and rules. He expressed his ambivalence in the proposal itself.

“In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.” (Austen, p. 183)

Mr Darcy is probably the most famous lover who deeply offended his beloved by the way in which he professed his love for her.

“He spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority – of its being a degradation – of the family obstacles [...]” (Austen, p. 183)

It is unclear whether rejecting Mr Darcy's proposal demonstrated bravery or foolishness. During a time when marriage was often solely based on financial gain, it was unthinkable to refuse a wealthy groom simply because he was unappealing. Furthermore, when he conveyed favourable sentiments towards her.

“In such cases as this, it is, I believe the established mode to express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned. It is natural that obligation should be felt, and if I could feel gratitude, I would now thank you. [...]” (Austen, p. 184)

Elizabeth's demands on her husband may have seemed excessive. She could have had more than other girls, like Charlotte. She would have been richer, and her husband would have loved her. Mr Collins and Charlotte's relationship was based only on a list of advantages and disadvantages. Elizabeth, like her parents, does not seem to have thought through the future consequences of her actions.

Conforming to societal norms was existentially crucial for the girls, as any violation of them could lead to severe consequences. Any transgression could have a negative impact on her future and the lives of those around her. Elizabeth expressed her opinions gracefully, even when they did not align with those promoted by society, without violating any conventions. She did not hesitate to challenge individuals who were older and of a higher social standing than her. An illustration of this is when she conversed with Catherine de Bourgh while visiting Charlotte.

“Upon my word,” said her ladyship, “you give your opinion very decidedly for so young a person. - Pray, what is your age?” (Austen, p. 160)

Elizabeth is likely to have inherited her intelligence from her father, however, her sister Lydia was less fortunate and exhibited traits more similar to those of their mother. Lydia demonstrated a free-spirited and liberated nature. Her lack of tact and diplomacy was apparent. Mr Bennet held a negative view of his youngest daughter's intelligence. However, unlike Elizabeth, he did not fully understand the severity of Lydia's behaviour. Elizabeth cautioned him about the potential risks associated with Lydia's unsuitable behaviour, but Mr Bennet neglected to take any preventative action.

“If you were aware,” said Elizabeth, “of the very great disadvantage to us all, which must arise from the public notice of Lydia's unguarded and imprudent manner; nay, which has already arisen from it, I am sure you would judge differently in the affair.” (Austen, p. 223–224)

Elizabeth's fears were realised, and she was frankly horrified at Lydia's escape with Wickham. Her sister Lydia had violated established social norms in a manner so significant that it could potentially unravel the entire family. If she did not marry, none of her sisters would have had a chance to find a husband. Their reputations would be ruined. Elizabeth bore the whole situation heavily and after the married Lydia arrived home for a visit, she was disgusted by her behaviour.

“Elizabeth was disgusted, and even Miss Bennet was shocked. Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless.” (Austen, p. 304)

Elizabeth had a special place in her family. Aware of the background, her affectionate father, and her supportive sister, she could afford to be eccentric and occasionally articulate opinions that diverged from others. She could express her opinion with wit and ease. She was conscious of her boundaries and knew that her excesses would be accepted or even praised.

Like her father, she loved all the members, even with their faults. But unlike him, she saw the risks inherent in them and tried to prevent them. The risk of living without finances did not frighten her. She was true to her opinions and did so to maintain her self-respect. At the same time, she could appear as selfish, because she did not take the opportunity to relieve her family's fears for the future and did not marry Mr Collins.

8 The Character of Jane Eyre

Whereas we met Elizabeth Bennet as a grown woman, the story of Jane Eyre began earlier, when she was ten years old. Jane missed out on experiencing a sense of security and the sheltering love of a family. The initial chapter details Mrs Reed's treatment of Jane, her niece. Despite being among adults and peers, Jane encountered rejection within her surroundings.

“Don't talk to me about her, John: I told you not to go near her; she is not worthy of notice; I do not choose that either you or your sisters should associate with her.” (Brontë, p. 31)

In an environment that did not give her a sense of love and security, she learned to express her opinions directly. Alternatively, it could be attributed to the fact that she felt there was no risk involved. Jane was aware that she did not and would not receive affection from her environment.

“My Uncle Reed is in heaven, and can see all you do and think; [...].“ (Brontë, p. 32)

Jane endured humiliation from a tender age, but it failed to weaken her resolve. Eventually, she found the courage to stand up for herself. Her position in the family was determined by the fact that she was not Mrs Reed's own child, but a niece, and an orphan.

“For one thing, I have no father or mother, brothers or sisters.” (Brontë, p. 27)

Jane knew that she was unwelcomed in Mrs Reed's residence, but she could not bear the thought of residing anywhere else. Even as a child, she noted the stark contrast between the affluent and the impoverished, as demonstrated by a discussion with Mr Lloyd, the apothecary who treated her after she was physically assaulted by her cousin. The infrequent visitor to the Reed estate seemed to comprehend Jane's living situation. He may have been implying that she was not entirely alone and that alternatives for living arrangements were available.

“I asked Aunt Reed once, and she said possibly I might have some poor, low relations called Eyre, but she knew nothing about them.” (Brontë, p. 28)

In the section where Jane considers the possibility of living elsewhere, Brontë details the alterations that have occurred in Britain.

“I reflected. Poverty looks grim to grown people; still more so to children: they have not much idea of industrious, working, respectable poverty; they think of the word only as connected with ragged clothes, scanty food, fireless grates, rude manners, and debasing vices: poverty for me was synonymous with degradation.” (Brontë, p. 28)

The little girl was gripped by fear. She could not imagine living in poorer conditions, and the poverty she saw around her when she visited the village was appalling.

“I shook my head: I could not see how poor people had the means of being kind; and then to learn to speak like them, to adopt their manners, to be uneducated, to grow up like one of the poor women I saw sometimes nursing their children or washing their clothes at the cottage doors of the village of Gateshead: no, I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste.” (Brontë, p. 28)

Mr Lloyd was evidently attempting to lighten Jane's situation by continuing to suggest the possibility of living with other relatives. However, Jane was misled by Mrs Reed, who gave Jane incorrect information regarding her other relatives, including their social standing and financial situation.

“But are your relatives so very poor? Are they working people?”

“I cannot tell; Aunt Reed says if I have any, they must be a beggarly set: I should not like to go a-begging.” (Brontë, p. 28–29)

The strength of the hatred that Mrs Reed felt towards Jane stems from her decision to claim that Jane was no longer alive. Although she had the option to entrust Jane to affluent relatives, her emotions of anger or envy obstructed her from doing so.

“I tell you I could not forget it; and I took my revenge: for you to be adopted by your uncle, and placed in a state of ease and comfort, was what I could not endure. I wrote to him; I said I was sorry for his disappointment, but Jane Eyre was dead: she had died of typhus fever at Lowood.” (Brontë, p. 268)

Jane forgave her aunt for all the wrongs she had done. Although the idea of how much easier her life would have been must have crossed her mind.

“Love me, then, or hate me, as you will,” I said at last, “you have my full and free forgiveness: ask now for God’s, and be at peace.” (Brontë, p. 268)

Apart from a brief reference to relatives who later became significant characters, the story revealed information about Jane's educational level. The conflict between the children arose from a book reading, indicating that Jane had the ability to read, even though she did not attend school.

“I scarcely knew what school was: Bessie sometimes spoke of it [...]“ (Brontë, p. 29)

The school system was divided by social class, as evidenced by a remark in a conversation between Mrs Reed and Mr Brocklehurst.

“I may then depend upon this child being received as a pupil at Lowood, and there being trained in conformity to her position and prospects?” (Brontë, p. 40)

Jane was told about the type of school she was in by her classmate and later great friend Helena.

“It is partly a charity-school: you and I, and all the rest of us, are charity children. I suppose you are an orphan: are not either your father or your mother dead?” (Brontë, p. 57)

Upon entering a boarding school, it became apparent that the pupils were not regarded as equal members of society. Brontë's description of the clothing worn by the schoolgirls on their Sundays walks to and from church gives this impression.

“Our clothing was insufficient to protect us from the severe cold: we had no boots, the snow got into our shoes and melted there: our ungloved hands became numbed and covered with chilblains, as were our feet: [...]” (Brontë, p. 68)

The girls at Lowood have to get used to inadequate physical and hygienic conditions, hunger and humiliation that put their character to the test and created an environment conducive to bullying.

“Than the scanty supply of food was distressing: with the keen appetites of growing children, we had scarcely sufficient to keep alive a delicate invalid. From this deficiency of nourishment resulted an abuse, [...]” (Brontë, p. 68)

Some of the educators and teachers who were responsible for protecting and providing care for them frequently treated them cruelly. The principal Mr Brockehurst was an example of the harshness of the world. One of the primary reasons for Jane's enrolment in school was her alleged dishonesty, although it is merely a proxy reason. The impact of this accusation on her was significant and offensive. Jane frequently revisited this accusation and deemed it unjust. The methods employed to discipline students for minor infractions must have been even more humiliating for her.

“There was I, then, mounted aloft; I, who had said I could not bear the shame of tanding on my natural feet in the middle of the room, was now exposed to general view on a pedestal of infamy.” (Brontë, p. 76)

Jane's resilience may have been influenced by the actions of her relatives towards her. However, her character was definitely strengthened at Lowood. Here, she may have learned to value independence. She also recognized that inappropriate behaviour can adversely affect an individual's character. Throughout the novel, Jane never displays superiority or condescension towards others.

Jane, along with her classmates, was isolated from the rest of society. They resided in a single building and were not permitted to leave unaccompanied. Their only interaction with the outside world occurred during mandatory church attendance.

“I had had no communication by letter or message with the outer world: school-rules, school-duties, school-habits and notions, and voices, and faces, and phrases, and costumes, and preferences, and antipathies – such was what I knew of existence.” (Brontë, p. 97)

Although being isolated from the outside world, Jane demonstrated a notable level of independence when she was able to advertise and secure employment on her own. As a child who was fearful of venturing beyond familiar surroundings, she matured into a woman who, despite her lack of knowledge about the wider world, found the determination to seek work elsewhere. With the benefit of her education, she successfully applied for a position as a governess, which was essentially the only job available to an educated woman at that time.

Jane acquired knowledge and skills, which would enable her to be self-sufficient in the future. Having no money or dowry, she had no worth in the marriage market, relying solely on her abilities and self-belief. The education she received earned her the esteem of those around her. After showcasing her expertise and abilities, she attained the status of a respected member of society. Jane likely experienced satisfaction when her Lowood-acquired knowledge and skills were appreciated.

“Oh, you are quite a lady, Miss Jane” (Brontë, p. 104)

It is plausible that Jane may have been delighted when the woman employed by her aunt Reed paid her a visit unprompted. This could imply that there were individuals who had affection for her during her youth. Regrettably, Jane was incapable of identifying subtle acts of kindness as displays of warmth. The maids had to demonstrate such approaches with care, as they had to be loyal to their employer. Bessie informed Jane that the information provided by Mrs Reed regarding Jane's relatives was likely incorrect.

“Well, you know Missis always said they were poor and quite despicable: and they may be poor; but I believe they are as much gentry as the Reeds are; [...]” (Brontë, p. 104–105)

Jane discovered that a relative was searching for her but did not attempt to find him. The geographic separation may have posed a challenge as she learned that he likely lived on the island of Madeira. It could also have been her past interactions with familial acquaintances that led her to trust in her own capabilities whilst pursuing the job she secured.

“And the little girl – my pupil!”

“She is Mr Rochester’s ward; he commissioned me to find a governess for her. He intended to have her brought up in – shire, I believe.” (Brontë, p. 114)

Even after Jane became an adult and found work outside the institution, her situation remained unchanged. Despite her education and ability to earn money independently, those around her did not recognize her as an equal. Although she was a member of the rich household and she could socialise among the upper classes, she was often rendered invisible and made aware of her place. This was evident during the discussion among the ladies at Mr Rochester's party.

“Then, in a lower tone, but still loud enough for me to hear, “I noticed her; I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class.” (Brontë, p. 198)

Jane was aware of her abilities and her power that she could no longer be hurt by such comments. She did not believe that the social situation would change and her position would become more respectable. But she could despise the people uttering insults and ignore them as well.

The dialogue between Jane and Mr Rochester about an ailing aunt illustrated the insignificance of making consistent payments to the employees. It was not considered necessary to pay wages regularly. From the employer's point of view, Jane may have had everything she needed, such as a place to live and food.

“Well, you must have some money; [...]. I have given you no salary yet. How much have you in the world, Jane?” he asked, smiling. (Brontë, p. 251)

Jane's strength of character was demonstrated when she refused Mr Rochester's offer of additional money, requesting only what had been previously agreed upon.

“Here,” said he, offering me a note; it was fifty pounds, and he owed me but fifteen. I told him I had no change. [...] I declined accepting more than was my due.” (Brontë p. 251)

Jane was content in her new role, but she experienced a sense of isolation and detachment from her surroundings and lifestyle. There was no mention of social gatherings or interactions with neighbouring families. Additionally, Jane lacked a same-aged confidante. It could have led her to develop romantic feelings for the only available person, a significantly older individual whom she admired. She may have considered him a role model for having been absent from her life until that point, similar to her father. Jane seemed to be seeking support and protection, as evidenced by her response to Mr Rochester's request for her hand in marriage. In her testimony she spoke of gratitude.

“How can I do that? If you are true, and your offer real, my only feelings to you must be gratitude and devotion – they cannot torture.” (Brontë, p. 268)

Mr Rochester consistently reassured her that her social status or financial situation did not pose any obstacles to their marriage.

“And your will shall decide your destiny,” he said: “I offer you my hand, my heart, and a share of all my possessions.” (Brontë, p. 284–285)

Jane's happiness was unsettled by the revelation that Rochester was already married. The difficult decision arose when she was forced to choose between the romantic love she had long craved and her moral convictions. Yet, she found the strength to end the relationship.

“I am no bird and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you.” (Brontë, p. 284)

Bertha, Mr Rochester's wife, was unknown to almost everyone. Jane could have stayed with him, enjoying financial security and contentment. She chose to leave in order to maintain her self-respect. Her pride, respect for the law, and desire for independence were so strong that she was willing to risk poverty.

“Sir, your wife is living: that is a fact acknowledged this morning by yourself. If I lived with you as you desire, I should then be your mistress: to say otherwise is sophistical – is false.” (Brontë, p. 340)

Then followed a phase where she became a pariah, with no earnings, reliant on the goodwill of others. The period that Jane spent with the Rivers siblings, where she was brought by chance, was seemingly a happy one. Within this environment, Jane was surrounded by love and she was able to finally make friends. However, even in this supportive space, Jane found herself facing a difficult decision. She was put under pressure and had to decide whether to remain true to her principles or to give in and conform to the expectations that were placed on her. She received another marriage proposal. This time, the relationship was founded on societal norms and conventions, with neither partner feeling any love towards the other.

“God and nature intended you for a missionary's wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love.” (Brontë, p. 451)

Jane had to navigate life by herself without the support of those close to her. The root cause of all her adversities was linked to her lack of financial resources. However, despite the hardships she has endured, Jane remained honest and took pride in being self-sufficient. She was able to earn her own living and even share her inherited possessions. After the death of her uncle, Jane rightfully allocated a portion of her inheritance to her family members despite being

the primary beneficiary. Perhaps she could express her gratitude for having her life saved and for the assistance provided by the asylum by offering an appropriate amount of compensation.

“Now the wealth did not weigh on me: now it was not a mere bequest of coin – it was a legacy of life, hope, enjoyment.” (Brontë, p. 432)

The novel claims that Jane heard the call and decided to return to Thornfield. This could have been the moment when emotion overwhelmed reason. She was unaware that Mr Rochester's wife, Bertha, had passed away, that Thornfield had been destroyed, and that his health had been severely impacted. It is unclear whether her visit was intended to be brief or if she planned to stay with him long-term. A woman who consistently upheld her beliefs and took pride in handling the difficult situations in her life would no longer be so honest. Jane was already on her way to Thornfield because she was following the voice of her heart, but she wondered if she was doing the right thing. She must have been aware that she was at risk of humiliation.

“[...] you have nothing to do with him: you dare not speak to him or seek his presence. You have lost your labour – you had better go no farther,” urged the monitor.” (Brontë, p. 474)

Brontë opted to conclude the novel contentedly without any further tribulations for the protagonist. Jane was spared any further challenging decisions when Mr Rochester's wife, Bertha, burnt Thornfield. She chose to marry Mr Rochester, despite his handicap and despite being aware of his financial constraints and limited social engagements.

“Reader, I married him. A quiet wedding we had: he and I, the parson and clerk, were alone present.” (Brontë, p. 503)

Jane's life experiences had fortified her with a certain resilience and unwavering spirit. She believed profusely that she was as worthy a person as her cousins Reed and that she had equal rights as the ladies in high society. At a crossroads in her life, she was faced with a choice between her honour and a comfortable life near her loved one, and she chose to uphold her honour. Perhaps she chose that path due to a prolonged solitary existence, allowing her to remain true to her morals and beliefs.

Conclusion

Both Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë were English writers who addressed women's position in society as a theme in their works. The age gap between the writers was forty-one years, a period in which considerable change took place in Britain. Although some areas experienced modifications, society remained to be patriarchal in nature. Sons held a greater value than daughters as they were the heirs to the estate, ensuring it remained within the family. Women were entirely reliant on the male figures in their lives, from their fathers to their husbands. Young girls were trained to fulfill their designated role of a wife, mother and homemaker. Marriage was not entered into because of mutual emotional attraction, but rather to improve social status and ensure financial security. Women had restricted prospects of owning anything and, in fact, became the legal property of their husbands. They held minimal power over the use of the property they brought into the marriage.

The objective of this thesis was to show that it took great courage to challenge established norms and thus achieve a high moral status. The focal point was to showcase the heroines' determination to assert autonomy over their lives, refusing to be coerced into undesirable situations.

Elizabeth's circumstances exemplify this struggle as she was expected to acquiesce to her family's wishes and enter into a marriage with Mr Collins for the sake of familial obligation. Elizabeth declined to marry him despite the prospect of impoverishment. Her parents were unwilling to acknowledge their responsibility for their family's predicament. While cognizant of their lack of a son and possession of daughters, they neglected to set funds aside for their daughters' dowries. Furthermore, Elizabeth rejected the initial proposal from Mr Darcy, a wealthy man who held affection for her. Her grounds were rooted in disapproval of him. At that time, her decision must have seemed incomprehensible.

Jane, having gained experience in her childhood while staying with Mrs Reed and spending years at Lowood, was already aware of her ability to cope with challenging situations in life. The prospect of living in poverty need not have frightened her so much as she had already experienced it. Additionally, she knew that she was capable of taking care of herself. Despite her low salary and maid status, she remained confident. She possessed only her courage and self-respect. However, she did not wish to sacrifice her identity by marrying the affluent yet married Mr Rochester or the deceitful John Rivers. If she were to accept their proposals, she would compromise her self-esteem.

After evaluating the factors that impacted the heroines' lives, such as their various family backgrounds, educational opportunities, social standings, and financial situations, and analyzing the challenges they encountered and how they responded to them, it can be inferred that despite their disagreement with the societal norms, they still obeyed them and lived in a manner that preserved their dignity and hopefully garnered the respect of those around them.

I believe that ability to convey honest opinions without causing harm to others is a significant factor in attracting new readers. Additionally, the romantic elements are undoubtedly influential, with both novels concluding happily and resolving the heroines' conflicts.

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Resumé

Bakalářská práce je zaměřena na hlavní hrdinky románů *Pýcha a předsudek* Jane Austenové a *Jana Eyrové* Charlotte Brontëové. Byly porovnávány situace, kterými procházely a způsob, jak na ně reagovaly. Aby bylo možné hodnotit jejich chování, bylo zapotřebí obeznámit se s pravidly, normami a zákony anglické společnosti v osmnáctém a devatenáctém století.

V první části byla popsána politická situace v Británii za dobu života obou spisovatelek. Poté byly vykresleny jejich životopisy. Následovala část, která se věnovala reakcím na obě knihy od okamžiku jejich vydání až dodnes. Čtvrtá kapitola se zabývala pozicí žen ve společnosti a jejich možnosti uplatnění na trhu práce. V páté části byly vyjmenovány možnosti získání vzdělání. Šestá část, která se zabývala otázkou manželství a majetku pomohla pochopit, proč bylo manželství pro obě ženy tak zásadní. V sedmé části byly citovány důležité okamžiky a situace v životě obou hrdinek.

Práce rozebírá obě díla, postoje a činy hlavních hrdinek. Sleduje jejich snahu zůstat samy sebou. Chtěly, aby jejich názory byly respektovány. Nechtěly se stát jen figurkami bez duše ve světě mužů.

Práce měla napomoci porozumět obtížné situace žen v osmnáctém a devatenáctém století. Pochopit, kolik odvahy musely prokázat při vyjadřování svých názorů a jak silné musely být, aby od nich neustoupily.

ANNOTATION

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Abstract: This thesis focuses on the analysis of heroines in the
novels written by Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë. The
aim of this thesis is to compare the female protagonists as
feminist heroines and describe their effort to be
independent and maintain their self-esteem.

ANOTACE

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Abstrakt:	Bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou hrdinek v románech napsaných Jane Austenovou a Charlotte Brontëovou. Cílem práce je porovnat hlavní aktérky jako feministické hrdinky a popsat jejich snahu být nezávislé a zachovat si svou sebeúctu.