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# HIDDEN FEMINISM IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

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I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

České Budějovice, 10. 5. 2021

……Eva Pečenková

**Anotace**

Cílem této práce je analýza skrytého feminismu v dílech Jane Austenové, a to v románech Pýcha a předsudek a Mansfieldské panství. Bakalářská práce je rozdělena do tří částí. První část se zabývá životními podmínkami žen ve vyšší střední třídě. Věnujeme se zde několika konkrétním aspektům jejich života a očekáváním spojeným s jejich společenským postavením. Ve druhé části se zaměříme na zobrazení těchto aspektů a jejich feministickou interpretaci v díle Pýcha a předsudek, a to především prostřednictvím jeho hlavní hrdinky, Elizabeth Bennetové, a situací, kterým čelí. Třetí část se soustředí na analýzu díla Mansfieldské panství, které popisuje složité postavení Fanny Priceové, hlavní hrdinky tohoto románu. Nakonec se práce zabývá faktory, které ukazují Fannyin seberozvoj a feminismus skrytý v tomto díle.

**Klíčová slova:** feminismus, Jane Austenová, regentská Anglie, *Pýcha a předsudek*, *Mansfieldské panství*, společnost

**Abstract**

The goal of this paper is the analysis of hidden feminism in the works of Jane Austen, namely her novels Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park. The bachelor thesis is divided into three parts. The first part addresses the living conditions of women in the upper middle class. We will pay attention to several specific aspects of their life and expectations connected to their social status. In the second part, we will concentrate on the display of these aspects and their feminist interpretation in the work Pride and Prejudice, namely through its main heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, and the situations she faces. The third part focuses on analysing of the work Mansfield Park, describing the difficult standing of Fanny Price, the main heroine of this novel. Finally, the thesis pays attention to factors which demonstrate Fanny's self-development and the feminism hidden in this novel.

**Keywords:** feminism, Jane Austen, Regency England, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, society

**Table of contents**

## Introduction

To this day, Jane Austen and her novels have an indispensable place in English literary canon. Even after two centuries, the author gains much popularity among readers from all around the world, and her novels have been brought into focus by many scholars, of both linguistic and literary sphere. In her work, Austen not only portrayed lives of young women and their route to marriage, but she also depicted the ways of society with all its follies. In this thesis, I want to concentrate on two of Austen's novels, Pride and Prejudice together with Mansfield Park. As marriage was practically the only respectable path a young woman of the upper middle class could take in the period of Regency England, it is no wonder that this theme plays a significant role in all Austen's novels, not excluding these two. The approach to this goal, however, is what makes her work so unique. Instead of passively accepting suitors whose only virtue is their eligibility, both Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price refuse men they do not truly want, and they defy contemporary norms in their own way. They refuse to conform to the societal expectations that a woman ought to marry just for the sake of being married, and instead, in the end they marry the men of their own choosing.

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first part depicts different aspects of women's life at the beginning of the 19$^{th}$ century. A woman in Regency England had barely any rights, and the only way to become valuable in society's eyes was to become a wealthy man's wife. Women's education was comprised of the so called "accomplishments"; meaning that they learnt how to sing, play, paint, and how to perform other skills of similar nature. Needless to say, women were not permitted to obtain the same kind of education that men did, for they were not considered to be on the same intellectual level as men. As far as money went, it was also unthinkable for a woman to gain financial stability by her own means. She could join the working force and become a governess, but this position was often little valued, both financially and socially. Although women authors were not unheard of, they were still scarce, since such occupation endangered their femininity in the eyes of society, and oftentimes, these earnings did not suffice for a living. This part of the thesis presents the reader with much needed context, for Austen's novels must be assessed with consideration to the heroines' background and opportunities. The aspects which are addressed in the first part will be examined in concrete instances in both Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield

Park respectively in the following parts. In the second part, feminist tendencies portrayed in Pride and Prejudice are examined, including the themes of education, marriage, and furthermore even Elizabeth's relationship with other women in the novel. The third and final part is concerned with the novel Mansfield Park and its heroine Fanny Price; focus is put on feminist interpretation of education, mentorship, and marriage in the novel, and differences between Fanny and her foil, Mary Crawford, are also established.

# 1 PART ONE

## 1.1 The Regency Era

First and foremost, it is necessary to introduce the period in which Jane Austen's characters experience their ups and downs. In this chapter, general context of Jane Austen's world will be provided, for its introduction presents a better understanding of the given novels' heroines, and the ways in which they present strong women characters. Firstly, I will describe women's social standing at the time, starting from their education and what it meant to be an 'accomplished woman'. Thereafter, I will proceed to address marriage and what this joining or lack thereof posed for women, as well as what women's financial situation looked like. In organizing the chapter in this way, my aim is to clarify the most important aspects of a woman's life.

The epoch in which Austen's novels take place is typically called Regency England, and it formally marks the period between 1811 and 1820; that is, the historical transition between Georgian and Victorian England. Nevertheless, it often refers to various stretches of time which may be much longer than the formal nine years. The Regency has got its name from the time during which George, Prince of Whales, reigned in the United Kingdom in the role of Regent, because his father King George III was deemed indisposed to rule due to his mental illness. The Prince continued to govern the country as Regent until his father's death in 1820. (Priestly 11) Afterwards, he took his place as the new king, in 1821 he was crowned, he assumed the title George the Fourth (257) and ruled until his own death in 1830. (Hibbert 335)

During the Regency period, the United Kingdom was engaged in many war conflicts, including but not limited to the Napoleonic Wars. However, despite these ongoing conflicts, it was an era of great development which helped to form and modify the structure of Britain's society as a whole. Among other things, the Regency Era was a period of significant social and cultural changes. There was a great increase in population, and a large number of significant artists, writers, and poets who enriched the cultural sphere have emerged. The Prince Regent himself became one of the greatest patrons of the arts and architecture in this period. His fine style and manners earned him the nickname of the "First Gentleman of Europe" (Petrie 262). George was responsible for the commission of John Nash to build the Royal Pavilion at Brighton, as well as remodel the Buckingham Palace from the Buckingham House. (Reilly 42) He was also

the one to assign another great architect of the Regency Era, Sir Jeffry Wyatville, the task of rebuilding the Windsor Castle. (Reilly 39) However, his irresponsible behaviour and dissolute way of life must also be taken into account; he had a reputation for being a chronic drinker, a notorious gambler, and he was also known for his scandalous love life. (Priestly 143) This resulted in the contempt of the people towards him, which had an impact on the prestige and trustworthiness of not only his own name, but of the monarchy as a whole.

### 1.2 Social standing of women in the Regency Era

The Regency Era is marked not only by its rich culture, flourish in arts, gentlemanly manners, or hosting afternoon tea parties; one must keep in mind that it remains a period during which women were forced to face a life of significant inequality to men. They possessed little to no civil rights and had to depend on men when it came to important matters such as law or finances. It was believed that women were not equal to men, and serious subjects like these were beyond their comprehension. There was a vast difference in access and approach to education of men and women, as well as clear ideas of how a proper woman ought to behave, what roles she could take, and which way of life was out of question. Austen's characters, just like the author herself, find themselves in the position of the gentry, which means somewhere in the middle of the social hierarchy. (Honan 29) Options for gentlewomen's future life were limited. Unless they decided to go down the route of becoming a governess and thus joining the working class, or unless they were lucky enough to inherit money from their relatives, the only reasonable thing they could do was to marry, for "without any private income for themselves, marriage [was] the only hope they [had] of acquiring their own homes and avoiding a rapid descent into crippling poverty." (Deidre 223) However, the act of marriage itself did not suffice; women were expected to also marry well in terms of economic gain and social standing.

### 1.3 Upper-class women's education

In order to attract their future husband and get married, women were supposed to be beautiful; however, if their physical attractiveness was lacking, education was the next aspect that women relied on. Education greatly influenced women's chances for a good marriage, and it was what made them valuable in society's eyes. Such education or

‘training’ meant that women were expected to be abundant in numerous skills. Needless to say, when it comes to educational growth in general, girls were not deemed worthy to attend the same kind of schools that boys did. That concerned both the prestigious public schools (like Eton) and universities (Oxford and Cambridge); simply put, facilities where Greek and Latin were taught. These classical languages were considered a privilege intended exclusively for men. Women were believed to differ from men not only physically, but most importantly intellectually. They were reduced to irrational creatures viewed “as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone.” (Wollstonecraft 4) Mary Wollstonecraft was a significant contemporary advocate of women’s rights who is best known for *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and according to her, women, just like men, should be treated as rational beings. She argues that they are not naturally inferior to men; they might only appear to be just because they lack education. Instead of giving them access to deepen their knowledge and broaden their mind, women are treated as simple beings whose practically only virtue is their beauty. “Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison.” (47) She believed that boys and girls should be educated in the same subjects. “But I still insist, that not only the virtue, but the *knowledge* of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree, and that women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, ought to endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the *same* means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of half being, one of Rousseau’s wild chimeras.” (41) If girls were given access to the same education as boys and were encouraged to focus less on shallow matters such as their physical appearance, they would believe that there is more that they could offer and then they could achieve great things. According to Wollstonecraft, once women receive proper education, they will become emancipated. “Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience.” (17)

There were several ways of how girls could receive education; their parents could hire a governess (if their finances allowed it) to take care of their daughters’ education, or the parents themselves could take care of their daughters’ education without any outside interference. “Most girls were educated at home, either by their parents or by a governess with the assistance of visiting tutors.” (Deirdre 87) When it came to girls

from a wealthy background, they were often educated right at home by their mothers with the optional help of masters from the sphere of music, languages, drawing, or dancing. The reason behind this arrangement was the fact that well-to-do families could afford to hire more servants to help with the house for women to have enough time to take care of their daughters' education, as well as hire a governess, who would take care of the girls' education in their mothers' stead. Another option, albeit not that frequent, was a private boarding school for girls. Next to being home-schooled, girls might be sent to a boarding school where they would finish their accomplishments, although such arrangements usually lasted only for a short period of time. Subjects which were taught at such schools consisted of topics of a non-academic character, or the so called 'accomplishments'.

### 1.3.1 Women's 'accomplishments'

'Accomplishments' was the form that women's education took. It included needlework, drawing and painting, playing musical instruments, dancing, and other artistic abilities. It could be enriched with writing, history, geography, and other subjects of a more academic quality. Teachings at some boarding schools might even touch upon spheres like grace of movement or rhetoric. After acquiring these abilities, a young woman was regarded as accomplished and thus ready to enter society in her search for a husband for whom she could hope to be the perfect wife. Deep knowledge of music, working knowledge of modern languages, drawing; these are some of the many qualities that gentlewomen were expected to possess, at least according to Mr. Darcy and Miss Bingley who agreed that: "A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved." (Austen, "Pride and Prejudice" 43) Among this list of abilities, which had to exceed the norm by a great extent, women were unsurprisingly expected to master the rules of etiquette, which was distinguished by gentle demeanour, social charm or seemingly trivial matters such as accepting guests. Women were supposed to receive a training of practical nature for their domestic role as the lady of the house, as well as non-domestic accomplishments which included drawing, singing and other. Essentially, girls' 'training' was rooted in domesticity; after marriage, women were expected to run

the household, which included hiring and training of the staff, supplying or designing menu choices. Not surprisingly, it was a woman's responsibility to see to the proper upbringing and education of her children, whether the family could afford to hire a governess and nursery maids or whether the mistress of the house took care of these matters herself. Either way, this issue fell on a woman's shoulders. However, girls' accomplishments in the Regency were more centred on the less domestic sphere of education. Despite the domestic 'training' certainly having been more important for a married woman, they gradually started to be slightly overshadowed by its artistic counterparts. The imaginary list of skills that women were supposed to master was extended step by step by a number of 'accomplishments' which had already been introduced to readers by Miss Bingley: sewing, singing, playing a musical instrument (of course one sufficiently lady-like), moving in an elegant way, speaking French (possibly together with another modern language). These qualities demonstrated that a woman was not only able to run a household, but at the same time represent their husband as a respectable and graceful wife. While never having been openly stated, the purpose of such accomplishments was more often than not only to attract a husband. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that such skills tended to be neglected after marriage.

#### 1.3.1.1 Music

A key part of women's education was without any doubt music. Whether it was singing or playing an instrument (preferably both), it was considered a skill indispensable in a young lady. It is true even nowadays that when a person produces something beautiful, like music, they themselves become more attractive as a result. However, behind this particular ability lay also something of a more practical nature. Not only was it a suitable way to display her elegant bearing and proficiency, but musical skills also came in handy even after marriage; they could well be used for long evenings of entertaining both her husband and her guests. What is also worth mentioning is that while playing an instrument was highly desired in women, there was only a set of few instruments which were deemed appropriate for them. The German composer Carl Ludwig Junker established which instruments were fit for respectable women in his essay *Vom Kostüm des Frauenzimmer Spielens* from 1783. What is more, Junker also "issued a strict ban on women playing what he regarded as male instruments," (Stenstadvold 595) and according to Stenstadvold, that was most of the

instruments. When it came to society's view of musical performance, men were those who performed in public while women were merely supposed to entertain others in domestic circles. Therefore, women were also prohibited from playing orchestral instruments, intended for the public, because such instruments, as Stenstadvold states, "threatened the concept of her 'natural' subservient role and compromised her decorum." (596) One of the key qualities of playing is the emphasis of a woman's beauty, of her gracefulness. This could not be provided by just any musical instrument. It is enough to imagine a girl playing any kind of wind instrument, causing her to make unflattering facial expressions and a reddened face, and it is needless to say that people of the Regency would not find anything graceful about such an image, however skilled the girl might be. Young ladies were supposed to only play instruments in which they could keep an elegant and feminine posture. That was ensured by playing instruments which enabled women to keep their body in the same graceful pose while only moving their hands. Among the most suitable instruments belonged the harp, the more common harpsichord, which was gradually replaced by the piano in popularity, lute and zither. The lute and zither were later replaced by the guitar. It was an instrument, just like the piano or harp, which met both the main expectations of a woman's musical activity; it ensured their gentleness and beauty, and at the same time, critics described it as an instrument for "simple, unpretentious music, most of all in a subordinate role as an accompanying instrument." (Stenstadvold 596)

#### 1.3.1.2 Producing art

Artistic accomplishments, whether through drawing or painting, were very valued in women, and therefore such skills were highly encouraged. From a young age, girls were expected to engage in graphic arts; therefore, many young women did their best to spend big portions of their time drawing or painting. Women most frequently painted what they knew – flowers, gardens, interiors etc., landscapes and portraits being the most common of them. Sometimes, canvas was not the only possible material that could be used for women's artistic efforts; small chests, screens and trinkets often became the centre of adornment. Most girls learned how to draw and paint from masters either at home or in private boarding schools. Next to its artistic purpose, drawing and painting could also function as a kind of group entertainment, as the artist's friends and family might watch the girl during her efforts.

#### 1.3.1.3 Modern languages

Even though the United Kingdom was engaged in the Napoleonic wars against France, a practical knowledge of French was an area that a young woman could not underestimate; on the contrary, nothing less than conversational fluency was expected from a young lady. Next to French, women could also engage themselves in learning other modern languages, primarily Italian and German; however, there was no expectation for a proficiency as high as in French. These languages were considered useful when it came to singing and understanding sung performances, or for reading foreign books. However, it should be remembered that concerning the classical languages, Greek and Latin, women could be taught only a few commonly used words or phrases; otherwise, they were not considered worthy of such knowledge which was yielded to the sphere of men.

#### 1.3.1.4 Dancing

Not only did women have to be able to sing and play musical instruments, but they needed to be able to dance as well. Just as in the case of playing instruments, in dancing it was essential to display a woman's femininity and grace. "As dancing is the accomplishment most calculated to display a fine form, elegant taste, and graceful carriage, to advantage; so towards it, our regards must be particularly turned; and we shall find that when Beauty, in all her power, is to be set forth, she cannot choose a more effective exhibition." (A lady of distinction 136) The dance was the only place where girls could interact with their suitors in a more intimate way, away from the prying eyes of their chaperones. Not only were they able to hold a more private conversation, but they could also touch their partner, which was out of question under any other circumstances. As one would expect, the more skilled and graceful dancing partner, the more desirable. Young women with poor dancing skills could not expect to spend a lot of time dancing. Both men and women were taught how to dance from a young age and more often than not, they had dancing masters to help them bring their skills to perfection. The most popular dances of the time were country dances. Dances of this character tended to be lively and bouncy, consisting of long lines of couples progressing up and down the set, with steps including both simple skipping and complex ballet-style moves. As dancing was one of the key abilities as well as favourite pastimes of the youth, it comes as no surprise that balls presented a very popular form

of amusement. They were usually held in Assembly Rooms, but there was also the option of a private ball organized by local high society. At every ball, rules of etiquette were carefully observed. For example, if a lady refused to dance with one man, it was expected from her not to accept another invitation for the same dance. “If a gentleman offers to dance with a lady, she should not refuse, unless for some *particular* and *valid* reason, in which case she can accept the next offer. But if she has no further objection than a temporary dislike or a piece of coquetry, it is a direct insult to him to refuse him and accept the next offer; besides, it shows too marked a preference for the latter.” (Wells 92)

#### 1.3.1.5 Needlework

Needlework was one of the most practical subjects for women; contrary to some of its artistic companions, sewing was of a more domestic character. Every woman, whatever her standing might be, wore clothing which could need mending at any time. Not only could women repair their own clothes, but they could also refine them with new adornments. And not only clothes; women might even make ornamental pillowcases, purses and other household objects. It was common even for women of a wealthy background (and thus perfectly able to hire someone else to do it) to occupy themselves with sewing and embroidery, even while having guests. There was no need at all for needlework to be a solitary activity. On the contrary, women often brought their own sewing equipment on courtesy visits. Needless to say, fancy projects fit better for such occasions, during which women might display their skill in embroidery, cross stitch and more. As Deidre says, “fine sewing could be put to practical use, in making clothes for the family or for charitable recipients, but embroidery was more often merely a way of filling in the time on wet days.” (111)

### 1.4 Women’s financial situation

In the period of Regency England, women’s role in the world of finances was practically non-existent. There were no real ways for gentlewomen to be financially independent. By law, women had nearly no control over finances, because money, just like many other aspects of life, belonged to the sphere of men. Women’s possibilities for gaining some sort of economic stability counted only a few options, among which marriage, inheritance and some other ways belonged. A woman’s journey to inheritance

was more often than not extremely difficult if not downright impossible. It was generally the eldest son who inherited most of the property while his remaining brother(s) got the rest. Therefore, a woman could only inherit property if she had no brothers or when there were no other potential male heirs. If a woman possessed no wealth of her own, as in most cases, there were only few options for her. If she did not find herself a suitable husband, her only choice was either to be financially supported by her parents or brother, which also included living with his family (which was not always at their will), or she could join the working class as a governess, teacher or ladies' companion with a minimal salary in total dependency on her employers and little to no personal life. Once a gentlewoman entered the working force, her life was often filled with struggles that she would not have been exposed to as a married woman. It goes without saying that marriage was the easiest and most obvious solution for a woman of gaining financial stability and not becoming a burden to her family.

### 1.4.1 Marriage

Marriage counted as practically the only route a woman could take to gain economic security and at the best case even a higher social standing. Next to wealth and social class, marriage was primarily based on providing a way for families to consolidate privilege. Families of higher social classes sought economic prosperity and marriage was supposed to ensure new connections and business opportunities; therefore, it was established on the basis of its benefit. Daughters became a means for their family to improve their standing. Marriage was also the only socially acceptable role for a woman. In order to be as marriageable as possible, women of course needed to be attractive and accomplished, preferably both. However, the most important factor of a woman's marriageability was her dowry, that is the amount of money a woman would bring to her husband on their marriage. As might be expected, married women in the Regency era had no legal existence; they could not own property or sign contracts, and control over finances belonged to men. Therefore, once a gentlewoman got married, all her fortune became her husband's property. What is more, women could not seek a career or possess legal rights. It was a husband's responsibility to support his spouse and provide for her needs. Only few were in the position to be able to resist marriage. Therefore, a favourable marriage was indispensably important for a woman and it was a

matter of personal preference only for a minority of women; on the contrary, most women were forced to regard marriage as a financial transaction.

### 1.4.2 Women in the working force

With the exception of governesses, teachers and woman writers, such as Austen herself, women did not take up professional work. When they did, it meant joining the working class. In spite of the governesses' key role in contemporary society, that is training young girls to become desirable potential wives, they often lead a complicated life. A governess was not very esteemed in society, earned only little money, and she was forced to completely depend on her employers and their good opinion of her for future references. A significant issue lay in the fact that governesses had genteel origins which isolated them from the rest of the servants of lower social standing, but at the same time they were considered inferior to their employers.

Another of the few options of earning money that women of the middling or upper classes were in possession of was becoming a professional woman writer. However, as Fergus observes, the word *professional* is very tricky; professional writing, that is writing for profit, could be very dangerous for a woman's reputation and publishing her own writing could even threaten her social position. The reason behind this is the fact that 'proper' women were supposed to be above all modest, domestic and private; publicity is something that defies all these necessary qualities, and it may consequently result in the loss of women's femininity. For this very reason, most women authors published their books anonymously and "affixed their names to their works only when their excellent reputations as novelists were established." (Fergus 14) As Fergus discusses in his essay *The professional woman writer*, only situations of the highest despair could possibly excuse a woman's exposing herself to publicity to gain money; "preferably to support aged parents, a sick husband, or destitute children" (14) Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Jane Austen's brother, Henry Thomas Austen, took care to make it clear that at first, Austen hoped for neither fame nor profit. He "helped to create the long-standing myth of Austen as a 'genteel amateur, the spinster lady author who sketched her novels in moments of leisure'". (12) According to him, she was very modest, private, delicate and unprofessional. However, Jane Austen was very much aware of her sales and she wanted to increase her profits. She was a professional writer for whom writing was one of the most important things in her life.

However, it is necessary to point out that most women could not live on their earnings from publishing novels alone, so it was not sufficient for full support. (18)

# 2 PART TWO

## 2.1 Pride and Prejudice

Pride and Prejudice to this day most likely remains Austen's most popular novel. Due to its main focus seemingly being on a love story, Pride and Prejudice often tends to be automatically labelled as a strictly romantic novel. One must keep in mind, however, that apart from romantic novels, Jane Austen is the author of satire, albeit a gentle one, and Pride and Prejudice is no exception. She smoothly moves from a supposed romance to something far more realistic. Without displaying any kind of bitterness, but at the same time with a wit and irony of her own, Austen presents the reader with all the weaknesses and follies of the contemporary society. Not only does she condemn the unrelenting self-importance of high society often based on nothing but money and social rank, but most importantly, the gender inequality that was present in the society of Austen's time. She represents women's growing impatience with a social order which was primarily based on a woman's inferiority and dependence on men. In her novels, Austen creates modern heroines strong enough to act the way their own common-sense dictates, even if it goes against deep-rooted traditions. Pride and Prejudice combines all the themes concerning women as a part of both their class and society as a whole. The novel demonstrates the way that women had to be labelled as "accomplished" to become valuable in the eyes of society, as well as how they were often forced to marry in order to gain financial stability, and at the same time it reinforces Austen's belief that women should have the right to remain unmarried until they meet the man they truly want to marry, rather than being forced to settle for a loveless marriage in the pursuit of security.

## 2.2 Elizabeth Bennet and her inner "feminist"

In this part, I would like to focus on Elizabeth Bennet and the aspects that determine her as a subversive heroine. She is the main character of Pride and Prejudice and the story is presented to the reader from her point of view. She is the second oldest daughter in the Bennet family, as well as the favourite child of Mr Bennet with whom she shares her intelligence and sarcastic sense of humour. Elizabeth is described as the quick-witted and smartest of the daughters, with a sharp tongue and love for reading, and thanks to her honesty and sense of wit, she is able to overcome all the quirks and

misbehaviour of the surrounding society. Through Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Austen demonstrates that women are no less intelligent or capable than their men. “Jane Austen's heroines are not self-conscious feminists, yet they are all exemplary of the first claim of Enlightenment feminism: that women share the same moral nature as men, ought to share the same moral status, and exercise the same responsibility for their own conduct.” (Kirkham 84) It is important to note that when examining Elizabeth’s personality, one must understand that the feminism of her character cannot be understood in isolation, but only against the background of the era in which she lived, and in contrast to other women in her acquaintance. When one keeps in mind the societal norms and expectations that women faced in the nineteenth century, it shows Elizabeth as a brand-new character. Women were above all supposed to be demure, beautiful, soft-spoken and passive; the perfect representation of how a woman should behave in society’s eyes being Jane Bennet, Elizabeth’s most beloved sister. Elizabeth, on the other hand, challenges the societal stereotypes and creates a new, bolder idea of what it means to be a woman. Consequently, she is criticised by the Bingley sisters for her “conceited independence” (39), and even her mother urges her to “remember where [she] is” and “not run on in the wild manner that [she] [is] suffered to do at home” (46) when she discusses human characters with Mr. Bingley. Elizabeth never shies away from a debate, and right from the beginning of the novel, she makes clear the belief of her worth conditioned by nothing other than what she is in control of. Not only is Elizabeth bold, honest, and witty, but at the same time very caring and with a strong sense of justice. In Pride and Prejudice, Elizabeth presents a strong heroine who is confident enough to defy the unjust gender norms of the Regency Period. In the following sections, my aim is to look at different aspects of women’s life in the contemporary society, linked to the various situations that Elizabeth and other heroines encounter, and concentrate on Elizabeth’s character in order to explain her uniqueness in comparison to other women in the novel.

### 2.2.1 Education

One of the noticeable themes in Pride and Prejudice is education. Almost right from the beginning of the novel, the reader learns the extent of Elizabeth’s (and her sisters’) education, as well as her quite unusual approach to this subject for a woman of the gentry. It can be said that while having accomplished some basics expected from

women, she is not by any means excellent. Her performance is described as “pleasing” (27), yes, but nothing out of ordinary. However, in this regard she never shows any shame, let alone any feelings of insufficiency; in fact, she herself often point it out in jest, most frequently in the presence of Mr. Darcy, such as the event when Charlotte asks Elizabeth to play: „You are a very strange creature by way of a friend!—always wanting me to play and sing before any body and every body!—If my vanity had taken a musical turn, you would have been invaluable, but as it is, I would really rather not sit down before those who must be in the habit of hearing the very best performers.” (27) In this excerpt, the reader is witness to Elizabeth’s confidence and good humour which refuses to be threatened. What is more, she once again demonstrates her unwillingness to change herself in order to appeal to someone of a higher standing. What is also important to note is the fact that the lack of accomplishments in Elizabeth’s education does not by any means make her less intelligent or neglected. On the contrary, Elizabeth’s education, with all its scarcity of such sought-after accomplishments, in fact stems from a more modern point of view – it is most certainly influenced by the Enlightenment, under which Mary Wollstonecraft, an author who promoted change in women’s education, also wrote. Instead of gaining accomplishments to increase her chances to ger married, Elizabeth chooses to direct her focus on reading. It is extensive reading which enables her to improve her mind and enrich her spirit.

What should be paid special attention is the excerpt in which Miss Bingley does not omit to emphasize just what sort of qualities women must achieve in order to be considered “accomplished”. She lists a number of skills which she seems to believe to possess herself. No one can deny that these skills, used chiefly to benefit women on the “marriage market”, can hardly pose a challenge for the education of men in terms of profundity. At the same time, Miss Bingley’s and Mr. Darcy’s concept of an accomplished woman is far from realistic. Without any shyness, Elizabeth makes comments on the topic and with the intelligence of her own, she proves that women’s education should not be based only on ‘accomplishments’, that is singing, painting, or playing the pianoforte. After this topic arises during Elizabeth’s stay at Netherfield, she lets her point of view regarding this issue be known in front of the whole party; she expresses her disapproval of such high requirements to be seen as accomplished, and her opinion is not met with much understanding. Not only is she accused of being too

harsh to her own gender, but Miss Bingley goes as far as to claim that Elizabeth is "one of those young ladies who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex, by undervaluing their own". (43) In this moment, Mr Darcy expresses the fact that her words did not deceive him and even claims that "there is meanness in all the arts which ladies sometimes condescend to employ for captivation" (44), revealing Caroline Bingley as she is – a shallow woman always ready and willing to shape her views in order to make herself as appealing as possible. This particular exchange highlights the difference between Elizabeth and Caroline. It shows that Elizabeth, contrary to Miss Bingley, never adjusts her worldviews and opinions to make herself more likeable for other people.

The sphere of accomplishments is later brought up again in a conversation with Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who is in the best case surprised and in the worst case appalled by the Bennets' approach to the upbringing and education of their five daughters. None of them can draw, only few of them can play and sing, they never had a governess, and they younger sisters were introduced to society before the older ones got married; all of this does not show the Bennet family in the best light. The reader, however, finds out that, despite the unusual laxness of the Bennets about education, their daughters are by no means deprived of this particular need; on the contrary, as Elizabeth says, "such of [them] as wished to learn, never wanted the means." She also assures Lady Catherine that "[they] were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary." (43) The problem lies in the fact that although the Bennet sisters have access to education, they were never led to actively take advantage of this opportunity; everything depended only on their own willingness to educate themselves, and it comes as no surprise that not all of them fancied doing so of their own accord. The lax upbringing and approach to education results in the unpleasant fact that the Bennet sisters are, according to the requirements of some nobles, neglected and undesirable. This puts Elizabeth in the position where she herself may pose a partner of only little desirability for a potential husband, who may in the moment be inclined to court the favour of other young ladies with a higher quantity of both accomplishments and money. This fact, however, does not change Elizabeth's attitude.

When addressing the subject of education in Pride and Prejudice, one may not exclude one of Elizabeth's sisters, Mary Bennet. In the few instances Mary is mentioned

in the novel, she is presented as the one who is the most devoted to education of all Bennet sisters. Nonetheless, despite this seemingly admirable trait she is treated favourably neither by other characters, nor by the narrator. She is merely tolerated by both her parents and sisters; even Jane, who is goodness itself, makes no real effort to indulge Mary. As the middle child and "the only plain one in the family" (27), Mary feels a constant need to impress people with her knowledge and hours spent practising on the pianoforte. She is determined to make up for what she lacks in looks and talent with ambition and strong work ethic. The fact of the matter, however, is that while Mary is a dedicated learner, her pursuit of validation and wisdom makes her self-righteous with a "pedantic air and conceited manner" (25). In her hopes to "say something very sensible" (7), her commentary, often delivered at inappropriate moments, may be even insensitive. Such example can be seen in the instance when Elizabeth decides to go look after Jane to Netherfield, and Mary tells her that "every impulse of feeling should be guided by reason; and […] exertion should always be in proportion to what is required." (35) That way, Mary implies that her own sister is not worth the trouble. Although Mary spends several hours every day reading and memorising her new findings, she lacks true understanding of given topics. Instead, she "collects trite aphorisms and pompous cliches from all those limited handbooks on moral philosophy, history, and biography" (Brown 330). As Brown discusses in *Jane Austen and the Feminist Tradition*, "Mary Bennet's intellectual pretensions are absurd precisely because she lacks that strong understanding which Wollstonecraft attributes to a sound education." Through Mary Bennet, Austen demonstrates the importance of the ability not only to memorise others' ideas, but above all to create opinions and worldviews based on their own comprehension.

When it comes to Elizabeth's education, her accomplishments are average at best. As readers, we perceive her unconcern about the given imperfection, and at the same time conviction that many of the education requirements are excessive. She condemns such high expectations which eventually come in vain; as has already been discussed in the first part of this thesis, these accomplishments more often than not only serve the purpose of obtaining a husband, but in marriage there is little use for most of them. Elizabeth's approach to education, her preference of rationality and books to a set

of shallow accomplishments, shows her refusal to conform to the expectations imposed on women of the time.

### 2.2.2 Elizabeth and marriage

The theme that is stressed throughout the whole novel is marriage. Elizabeth makes it clear right from the beginning that her belief is in a marriage with one's equal; marriage of individuals who do not have to equal one another in terms of social standing, but rather in inner strength, character, and love. She is determined to marry for love only and does not approve of marriages of convenience. Keeping this in mind, it comes as no surprise when Elizabeth rejects the marriage proposal of both Mr Collins and Mr Darcy, two men who are very eligible when it comes to wealth and social connections but deemed unsuitable by Elizabeth for marital happiness. In the following part, I will address the feminist elements hidden behind Elizabeth's actions.

#### 2.2.2.1 The proposal of Mr. Collins

When Mr. Collins, the Bennets' cousin who is to inherit the family estate once Mr. Bennet dies, comes to Longbourn, it is with one goal – to marry one of his "fair cousins" and in the process ease his conscience regarding the entailment, according to which none of the Bennet sisters have the right to inherit Longbourn, and instead, the oldest male relative, that is Mr. Collins, will be the next owner. After he had chosen Elizabeth to be his bride (right after learning that Jane is not available), who has barely been able to tolerate him since the moment of his arrival, it is evident to the reader (contrary to Mr. Collins) that no such marriage will take place. As has already been mentioned, Elizabeth would rather remain unmarried than settle for a loveless marriage, let alone with a man she considers "conceited, pompous, narrow-minded [and] silly". (153-154) Therefore, it comes as no surprise that she politely, but decidedly rejects his offer.

Such rejection is something completely incomprehensible for most of the contemporary society; even though Mr. Collins is not exactly abundant in fortune, he still has an income high enough for a comfortable living, as well as a patroness of great importance, which makes him an altogether satisfactory partner. As readers, we must keep in mind the period in which Elizabeth lives; although she is considered pretty, "a reputed beauty" (299) even, she can hardly afford to be choosy. Upon looking at the

proposal itself, many important things are brought into attention; the reader is witness to how Mr. Collins for a long time refuses to take seriously anything Elizabeth has to say on that matter, resulting in a comical but helpless situation when Elizabeth struggles to have her rejection of Mr. Collins accepted, whereas until the last moment, the man himself does not have any doubts about the positive outcome of his proposal, and even after Elizabeth's clear rejection, he does not cease to "hope to lead [her] to the altar ere long." (120) It is very much obvious that Mr. Collins does not deem Elizabeth (or any other woman for that matter) a reasonable human being but rather a "young lady" behind whose rejection he sees nothing other than "[her] wish of increasing [his] love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females." (122) It takes several attempts until Elizabeth is successful in convincing Mr. Collins of having no intention to marry him. It is also important to note that Elizabeth insists on rather being considered a "rational creature" than an "elegant female" (122), when she is trying to make Mr. Collins understand her refusal to marry him. In this particular situation, the reader is once again witness to a general approach to women as creatures who are no match to men in intellect, and whose behaviour is based solely on their effort to become somebody's wife, because in the end, matrimony is the only respectable future for a young woman of the gentry.

As a perfect regency wife ought to be demure and passive, Mr. Collins starts to doubt that Elizabeth could ever be a good match for him once Mrs Bennet calls Elizabeth "headstrong" and "foolish" (123); suddenly, all Mr. Collins's "love" starts wearing off, and he doubts whether "she would altogether be a very desirable wife". (123) He does not care for a woman who would oppose him with her own opinions; that is, after all, made clear even before he proposes; namely when Elizabeth discourages him from introducing himself to Mr. Darcy and he says that he "consider[s] [himself] more fitted by education and habitual study to decide on what is right than a young lady like [herself]." (109) Mr. Collins's proposal once again demonstrates the shameful attitude of the society of the time towards matrimony and women in general, whilst Elizabeth's reaction shows her moral strength and subversive determination to decide for herself what to do with her own life. It shows the reader that Elizabeth is willing to break away from societal norms and expectations imposed on women. She makes her

own choices regardless of what is expected of her, which puts her in control of her own life.

#### 2.2.2.2 The proposal of Mr. Darcy

The next man who makes Elizabeth a marriage proposal is Mr. Darcy. Despite Mr. Darcy's promising expectations, he fares the same as Mr. Collins; he asks for Elizabeth's hand and is refused. In this case, the rejection is even more revolutionary; not only has she turned down a second proposal (most would not dare to refuse even the first one), but more importantly, from a man of far above Elizabeth's social standing, who himself does not omit to make a remark about "his sense of her inferiority". (211) One would expect that a young woman in Elizabeth's position would not dream of such an honour; after all, that is what Mr. Darcy anticipated. His proposal is to a great extent motivated by his pride, when he is convinced that he is doing Elizabeth a favour, even that she must have been waiting for such offer and will fall into his arms filled with gratitude. What a surprise for him, when not only is his offer rejected, but Elizabeth also makes sure to reproach him for all the things that make her think ill of him. In the process of his proposal, Mr. Darcy manages to insult essentially her whole family including herself, making sure that she is well aware of how much beneath him they all are. However, Elizabeth does not tolerate this behaviour and corrects his attitude right away; she goes as far as to let him know that he is "the last man in the world whom [she] could ever be prevailed on to marry." (215)

Despite Darcy's proposal being far from flattering, its outcome is still quite shocking; refusing a man of Darcy's importance, a grandson of an earl, is something unheard of. Remembering the reaction of Mrs Bennet upon Elizabeth turning down Mr. Collins, we can only imagine what her response would be after finding out that her daughter rejected a man with ten thousand per annum. The fact that she rejects Darcy, moreover while not in exactly in a position to afford doing so, once again proves Elizabeth's unwillingness to accept the social norms and pressures that would lead her to marry someone not worthy of her. It could be argued that whilst Elizabeth at first turned Darcy's proposal down, in the end she still proceeded to marry him. When not understood well enough, it could be viewed as the confirmation of contemporary expectations that a woman's role and fulfilment in life is marriage. However, this time Elizabeth marries Darcy on her own terms; she marries for love. In the novel,

Elizabeth's happy ending reveals a belief that women should not have to marry for convenience but that it is worth to marry because they wish to.

### 2.2.3 Elizabeth's influence on Darcy

The development of the Pride and Prejudice's storyline is dependent on Elizabeth's influence on Mr. Darcy. It all begins when despite Elizabeth's lower social standing and his objections to her improper family, Darcy cannot help but fall in love with her. He is enchanted by her "easy playfulness" (26) and "liveliness of [her] mind" (421); Mr. Darcy is well used to women like Miss Bingley who are grovelling for his approval; young ladies who adjust their opinions to match his own to consequently increase their chances of marrying him, while only caring about his wealth and social standing. Elizabeth's behaviour towards him is something he is not used to, and he quickly starts to realize the "danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention." (64) After Mr. Darcy's failed proposal and Elizabeth's accusations regarding his character, Darcy's world and self-image are shaken, and the encounter threatens his pride and ego. Elizabeth Bennet makes it clear; while Mr. Darcy may be a great match in terms of marriage, his character and behaviour make him highly undesirable for her. However, instead of acting as the villain Elizabeth perceives him to be, Darcy takes her words to heart, and gradually, he is inspired by Elizabeth to become a better person. He recognizes the need to improve, and in order to redeem himself, win Elizabeth's love and eventually take her hand in marriage, he lets go of his pride and contempt for people 'beneath him'. What was once a gentleman presented to the reader as a person overly conscious of his wealth and social standing, who treated people whom he did not deem the same level as him with arrogance, and who seemed unapproachable and disagreeable to most people, later in the novel becomes a man who tries his best to gain the approval of Elizabeth's relatives (who would before hardly be worth of his attention), even saves Lydia, although it means cooperating with his worst enemy, and ultimately, he becomes a man that Elizabeth loves; he must work on himself to become worthy of her.

Elizabeth is a heroine who speaks her mind and stands up for her values, and that way, she fights the stereotypical behaviour of her contemporary companions. While other women often shape their views in order to increase their chances to marry, Elizabeth relentlessly refuses to be anything other than herself, and through her strong

personality and values, she helps to form Mr. Darcy's moral character so that it matches her own. As Darcy tells Elizabeth, "by [her], [he] was properly humbled" and "[she] shewed [him] how insufficient were all [his] pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased." (410) Instead of conforming to the traditional societal norms like other woman characters, Elizabeth challenges these stereotypes, and that way, she challenges gender inequality in her own way.

### 2.2.4 Elizabeth's relationship with other women

One of the key principles of feminism is a positive relationship with other women. In *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, Rich deals with the issue of 'male-identification', that is "the act whereby women place men above women, including themselves, in credibility, status, and importance in most situations, regardless of the comparative quality the women may bring to the situation." (646) Therefore, true feminism is based on creating supportive relationships with other women, because it defies this concept and shows that women are not inferior to men, and bonds with men do not possess the most important role in a woman's life. Women should be encouraged to support each other and build each other up. In this part of the thesis, I will investigate Elizabeth's relationships with other selected heroines presented in the novel, and how these bonds reflect on her as a woman.

#### 2.2.4.1 Jane Bennet Bingley

As is well-known, Jane is Elizabeth's favourite sister. Throughout the whole novel, the reader is witness to tender sisterly love which is never tainted by negative feelings; despite having been compared to Jane and found inadequate in comparison by her own mother, as well as her future husband (though this opinion of his, unbeknownst to Elizabeth, is short-lived), there has never been any hint of jealousy or competition. She truly and ingenuously wishes the best for Jane; she delights in any attention to her sister from Mr. Bingley and calls Jane "about five times as pretty as every other woman". (15) Her deep sisterly love is fully expressed when Jane falls ill and is forced to stay at Netherfield. Without Jane having said a single word, Elizabeth feels such a strong connection to her that she is able to tell Jane wishes her to be by her side. Elizabeth is so worried about her that she proceeds to walk several miles on foot and in dirt just to be a support to her. Upon Mrs. Bennet's horror that after such journey in the

mud “[she] will not be fit to be seen when [she] get[s] there”, without hesitance Elizabeth replies that “[she] shall be very fit to see Jane—which is all [she] want[s].” (35) She cares only about seeing Jane and making sure that she is well enough. Her appearance before the occupants of Netherfield is of little concern to her; after all, Mr. Bingley does not pay attention to her “almost wild” (39) look, and she does not care for the opinion of the rest. At Netherfield, Elizabeth spends most of her time attending to Jane a taking care of her in her illness. Another display of Elizabeth’s deep affection for her older sister is further demonstrated when Mr. Darcy asks for Elizabeth’s hand. One of the key reasons, if not the main one, is the fact that in Elizabeth’s eyes, Darcy is the person “who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister”. (213) This quote further proves the depth of Elizabeth’s loyalty to her sister. What is more, together they form a pair of the oldest and at the same time the most sensible of the Bennet sisters, and they often try to tame Kitty’s and Lydia’s whims.

#### 2.2.4.2 The other sisters

When it comes to the youngest Bennet sisters, Elizabeth and Jane try to step in and guide them to improvement. By joint efforts they try to repair the damage done by their own parents, namely their mother’s careless supervision and their father’s indifference, his unwillingness to correct their behaviour and inclination but rather laugh at them. Throughout the novel, it is evident that while Elizabeth loves her father, she is not blind to his faults, and she criticizes him for his failed role as a father figure to the younger sisters. It could be said that Elizabeth and Jane take the role of Kitty’s and Lydia’s mother when they make an effort to discipline the two youngest sisters. “Elizabeth had frequently united with Jane in an endeavour to check the imprudence of Catherine and Lydia”. (236) When their attitude is inappropriate, chiefly in Lydia’s case, who Elizabeth considers “always unguarded and often uncivil” (142), the oldest sisters are quick to reprimand them. The reader may notice this for example in the instance when Lydia interrupts Mr. Collins’s reading, and she is “bid by her two eldest sisters to hold her tongue.” (77) However, as Elizabeth herself acknowledges, there is little use to her and Jane’s effort with their parents’ questionable attitude, for “while they were supported by their mother’s indulgence, what chance could there be of improvement?” (236) This situation escalates when the regiment moves from Meryton

to Brighton, and Lydia is invited to accompany Mrs. Forster, her friend and wife to Colonel Forster at the same time. Elizabeth secretly advises their father not to let Lydia go, listing all Lydia's shortcomings, the dangers of what may become of her, as well as her own fears for the consequent reputation of both Kitty and Lydia, as well as the rest of the sisters, for she does believe that Lydia will disgrace herself and her sisters with her unrestrained flirting, and they will all be "censured and despised wherever they are known". (257) However, despite Elizabeth's warning (which in the end comes true), justified protests and well-founded arguments, Mr. Bennet gives, just like he has done for his whole life, preference to non-intervention and sends his youngest daughter to Brighton. After Lydia elopes with Wickham, and only thanks to the help of Mr. Darcy she together with her family narrowly escapes the irreparable loss of good name, after all the misery that she brought on them, the reader is together with Elizabeth witness to Lydia's complete disregard for it; she returns home as intolerable as ever, and even has the audacity to boast about her new husband. This situation shows that Lydia is beyond help; however, there is still hope for Kitty, hope that both Elizabeth and Jane make use of and do everything in their power to improve her. After Lydia leaves to live with her new husband and Kitty is removed from her influence, Mr. Bennet finally learns from his mistakes and starts correcting Kitty's character and behaviour. Although Lydia keeps inviting Kitty to visit her in her new home with a promise of balls and men, her father never lets her go, and she spends most of her time with one of her older sisters instead. Under their guidance, Kitty becomes "less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid". (428)

It is important to point out, however, that Elizabeth's relationship with her sisters is not solely based on her effort to keep their poor manners under control, which would make her, despite her good intentions, not seem like the kindest sibling, but Elizabeth without any doubt truly cares about her sisters' well-being. She even voices her quite bold view to Lady Catherine that she thinks that "it would be very hard upon younger sisters, that they should not have their share of society and amusement because the elder may not have the means or inclination to marry early." (187) Moreover, when Mr. Bennet refuses to receive the Wickham couple at Longbourn after Lydia's marriage, both Elizabeth and Jane, "who agreed in wishing, for the sake of their sister's feelings and consequence, that she should be noticed on her marriage by her parents" (346),

convince him to change his mind and allow Lydia and Wickham to the house. Even though Elizabeth disapproves of Lydia's behaviour and attitude, she refuses to leave her stranded, and with Mr. Darcy they financially support her and Wickham.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that Elizabeth does not challenge the view that a woman's mistake should determine her whole life, and that of her family. While women's errors had an impact of catastrophic proportions, and their reputation once damaged could not be restored, men did not have to worry about such consequences. One must look no further than at the scandal of Maria Rushworth and Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*. After the predicament results in Maria's divorce, and Henry refuses to marry her, she is forced to leave home and live with her aunt in a foreign country. Henry, on the other hand, faces no real consequences other than regret, for he has "so requited hospitality, so injured family peace, so forfeited his best, most estimable and endeared acquaintance, and so lost the woman whom he had rationally, as well as passionately loved." (Austen, "Mansfield Park" 542) The fact that Elizabeth does not question such an oppressive system shows the reader that despite her presenting a strong woman character who defies many societal norms, she still exists within an era full of inequality, and it will take some more time before these disparities are challenged. It provides the reader with a realistic view of the contemporary society and its unjust opinions.

#### 2.2.4.3 Charlotte Lucas Collins

Charlotte Lucas is the closest friend of Elizabeth and she confides in her almost as much as in Jane. Just like Elizabeth, she is described as a sensible and intelligent young woman; however, her and Elizabeth's views significantly differ when it comes to marriage. While Elizabeth holds the view that marriage should be only for love, Charlotte regards the matter from a more practical point of view. Relatively soon into the story, it becomes obvious what opinion Charlotte has of matrimony during a conversation with Elizabeth when she expresses the idea that "when [Jane] is secure of [Mr. Bingley], there will be leisure for falling in love as much as she chuses" (24), while Elizabeth replies that such a plan is only good when a woman wants to secure a rich husband. In this excerpt, the reader for the first time notices this contrast in Charlotte's and Elizabeth's views, which in the end results in the marriage of Charlotte and Mr. Collins.

On the verge of spinsterhood and being burden to her family, she agrees to marry him when the opportunity presents itself. This decision, however, provides subversion of a different kind. Charlotte is well aware of her situation and prospects; she knows that this may be her last and only chance for matrimony. Therefore, she makes a conscious choice to become Mr. Collins's wife. After Elizabeth rejects his proposal, Charlotte lends him a sympathetic ear and manages to steer him in her direction. This action is preceded by careful reflection and is based on a purely rational point of view. She understands that the opportunity to marry Mr. Collins is most likely her biggest certainty to be taken care of in the future.

Elizabeth is initially shaken by Charlotte's decision and their relationship suffers a blow. She thinks that Charlotte has sunk herself for marrying a fool, as is very disappointed by her decision, convinced that Charlotte can never be happy with such a man. "And to the pang of a friend disgracing herself and sunk in her esteem, was added the distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen." (141) However, when she visits the Collins couple in Hunsford and is witness to Charlotte's contentment with her new home, she is obliged to change her view of the situation, and their friendship is repaired. As Elizabeth notices, her friend "wisely [does] not hear" (177) whenever her husband says something humiliating, she encourages him to work in the garden as much as possible, and overall, she arranges their life together to the satisfaction of all. Elizabeth even admits that "in a prudential light, it is certainly a very good match for her." (200) Charlotte presents a life lesson for Elizabeth when she helps her realize that not everyone has to live the same sort of life, making her a better person in result.

#### 2.2.4.4 Georgiana Darcy

Georgiana is Darcy's younger sister who has all the prerequisites to be a very proud young lady, which is also the way Wickham describes her to Elizabeth. Upon seeing her in person, however, Elizabeth realizes it to be another of his lies, for Georgiana is anything but proud; in fact, Elizabeth finds her to be "exceedingly shy" (288), and "her manners [to be] perfectly unassuming and gentle." (288) She lacks confidence to be sure in her behaviour and has a strong fear of doing wrong, caring too much about what other people think. After Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy get married, Georgiana comes to live with them at Pemberley, and to Darcy's delight, both young

women develop sisterly attachment towards each other. Elizabeth influences Georgiana to become more assertive as she helps her to see her brother's flaws and tease him, "though at first she often listened with an astonishment bordering on alarm, at her lively, sportive, manner of talking to her brother." (430) The reader also learns that "by Elizabeth's instructions she began to comprehend that a woman may take liberties with her husband, which a brother will not always allow in a sister more than ten years younger than himself." (430) Elizabeth is the perfect influence for a young woman of Georgiana's disposition, and with her guidance, there is no doubt that Georgiana will mature into a livelier and chiefly more confident version of herself.

### 2.3 Elizabeth's manner of speech

The last aspect of Pride and Prejudice's hidden feminism I want to address shortly is Elizabeth's manner of speech. It is no secret that Elizabeth assertively puts forward her own views and never shies away from a discussion. Not only does she express her opinions without fear, but she is also bold enough to openly challenge the opinions of people superior to her in social standing. She gets the upper hand in most of her conversations, no matter who she is speaking to. The reader may notice this every time she speaks with Mr. Darcy, or in her confrontation with Lady Catherine. When they first meet, and Elizabeth expresses her opinions in front of her, Lady Catherine is surprised that "[she] give[s] [her] opinion very decidedly for so young a person" (187), and when Elizabeth initially refuses to tell Lady Catherine her age, she "seem[s] quite astonished at not receiving a direct answer". (187) Elizabeth, just like her father, often makes sarcastic comments which have the opposite meaning; for example, when she says that "perhaps, if [she] [has] very good luck, [she] may meet with another Mr. Collins in time." (388), or when she calls Mr. Darcy "all politeness" (29) while the memory of his rudeness must still be fresh in her mind. If not ironic, Elizabeth is almost always direct. When we look again at Mr. Collins's failed proposal, it is necessary to once more point out his persistence that Elizabeth is only refusing him out of coyness, as is "usual with young ladies." (120) His refusal to take her rejection seriously is, next to his opinion of Elizabeth's low chances of wedding, based on deep-rooted language use of contemporary women. Elizabeth does not waver in her rejection and expresses herself in a way that defies gender norms when she urges him to "not consider [her] now as an elegant female intending to plague [him], but as a rational creature speaking the truth

from her heart." (120) As is well-known, rationality was something reserved exclusively for men, since women were not considered capable of possessing the same mental capacity as men to be rational. Through Elizabeth Bennet, Austen challenges this fallacious view, and demonstrates that women can be just as intelligent, rational, and assertive as men.

# 3 PART THREE

## 3.1 Mansfield Park

Mansfield Park is the third published novel of Jane Austen, and it is simultaneously viewed as one of her least beloved books. The principal character is Fanny Price who, just like the novel itself, does not usually belong among the readers' favourites. Reportedly, even Austen's own mother described Fanny Price as "insipid", and Kingsley Amis called her "a monster of complacency and pride" with "a cloak of cringing self-abasement" (Amis 16). In comparison with other women portrayed in Austen's novels, Fanny is often seen as too timid, uptight, and even prudish. However, after one fully considers Fanny's circumstances, it becomes far easier to empathise with her. Having been born into an impoverished family and brought to live with her rich relatives as a little girl, she experiences first-hand the inequality between herself and of those higher on the imaginary social ladder. That way, Fanny Price offers a more realistic portrait of a woman's life in Regency England. In Mansfield Park, Austen more than ever before demonstrates the harsh reality many a woman struggled with or was endangered by. After all, one must not forget that Jane Austen herself financially depended on her family at some points in her life. Neither she, nor her sister Cassandra married, therefore they had to rely either on their father, or after his death hospitality of their brothers. (Todd 4-8)

While Pride and Prejudice, which is Austen's considerably more popular novel, acknowledges several serious matters, including the law of entailment and the Bennet sisters' danger of ending up houseless because of it, these dangers remain rather on the imaginary side, and Elizabeth stays relatively safe throughout the whole novel. Even the issue of Lydia's elopement with Wickham – which threatened the honour of the whole Bennet family – is resolved before it can really be of any consequence. However, dangers that evade Elizabeth pose something far more realistic for Fanny; something that might become true whenever her relatives would wish it. The author increasingly emphasizes the issues of social status and money. In many ways, the novel presents a story with more serious circumstances, and contrary to the more optimistic Pride and Prejudice, readers of Mansfield Park are exposed to more severe realities of what it meant to be part of the contemporary society.

As readers, we may only contemplate how other Austen's heroines would fare if they had the same conditions as Fanny. Such knowledge makes it all the more important to focus not only on the time and context of the novel, as in the case of Elizabeth Bennet, but also to concentrate on Fanny's background, which is not nearly as favourable. In this chapter, I aim to show Fanny as a woman who endures the hardships of her status and upbringing to find her inner strength and become the woman she is meant to be.

### 3.2 Fanny Price and her inner "feminist"

At first glance, Fanny, who is shy, insecure and reluctant to defend herself, seems to be a very unlikely image of a feminist heroine. With her prudishness and sometimes disproportionate sensitivity, many readers find it difficult to empathise with Fanny. On the other hand, if one looks at Elizabeth Bennet, Austen's much more popular protagonist who was discussed in the previous chapter, and compares her with Fanny Price, there is a stark contrast between them. While Elizabeth is subversive with the confidence in her own opinions, with her honesty and playful nature, Fanny is often seen as bland and priggish in comparison. Needless to say, Fanny Price is no Elizabeth Bennet; that does not necessarily mean, however, that she cannot be a good feminist role model. When one looks closely at certain themes portrayed in the novel, and considers Fanny from a different point of view, they will find that not only does she not deserve so much censure, but that she may even present an important feminist figure. It is crucial to keep in mind that Fanny, contrary to other Austen's heroines, experiences more difficult realities and cannot afford to be bold. There has been much discussion about her passivity, but Fanny simply has no power to act for herself. After all, she is a poor relation who is sent away at a young age and raised by her rich relatives who secure her education and upbringing. In this context, Fanny is continuously being reminded of her social inferiority and certainly of not being one of her cousins' equals, for "their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different" (Austen, "Mansfield Park" 12). Since her arrival at Mansfield Park, she has been called dull and inadequate in comparison to her cousins, and these labels that Fanny herself regrettably believes result in her "foolishness and awkwardness" (29). Elizabeth, contrary to Fanny, has her rightful place in the family as well as local society, and she has grown up as the

favourite daughter of her father, who is there to support her when it is needed. She can take some risks.

Fanny's future, however, is directly dependent on her relatives' good opinion of her. Since as early as her arrival at the residence, she must have endured being constantly belittled by Mrs. Norris, who never has any kind word or sympathy for her niece. At the beginning of the novel, Fanny's youngest cousins, Julia and Maria Bertram, "could not but hold her cheap on finding that she had but two sashes, and had never learnt French" (15), "Miss Lee wondered at her ignorance, and the maidservants sneered at her clothes". (16) With the exception of Edmund Bertram, everyone shows disregard for Fanny's feelings, and other family members treat her practically as a servant who is always willing to be useful to them; she will run errands for them or cut the roses on a hot day (84). Since childhood, Fanny has been incessantly reminded of her opinions' insignificance and of being unworthy of the same treatment as her relatives. She is tolerated, but not generally admired. As it is Fanny's nature to be timid and modest, she can hardly accept anything other than what has been imposed on her since a young age. In such conditions, it would have been easy for her to grow up as a bitter and hateful victim, and yet she becomes a kind, considerate and insightful woman. This demonstrates her immense strength of character. What is more, despite growing up mostly among people who display blatant disregard for her as a human being, Fanny still has enough courage to defy everyone and do what she deems right.

Anna Despotopoulou focuses on Fanny's feminine power in *Fanny's Gaze and the Construction of Feminine Space in "Mansfield Park"*. In this article, the author even concludes that despite Fanny's timidity and passiveness, that "Fanny's 'success' is much more significant and groundbreaking than that of Elizabeth Bennet, Emma, or other Austen heroines", for she defines herself independently of male expectations and authority (570). Fanny does not possess the same kind of official authority like Lady Bertram or Mrs. Norris; however, as Despotopoulou suggests, "what seems to endow women with authority is the potentiality for a purely feminine self-development." (570-571) The undeniable qualities of Fanny's character are coming into light in the course of the whole novel, perhaps the greatest one being that of her integrity. There is not another character in the novel who is like her in this sense. She remains true to herself in spite of all the obstacles in her path, especially societal norms and expectations from her

social betters. Her deeply rooted moral principles, which not even her self-doubt can overcome, are impossible not to draw attention to. Fanny relies on her own judgement and stands up for what she believes is right. With her determined refusal to let go of her morals and instead hold on to her decisions, she demonstrates great inner strength, which is shaken neither by her beloved Edmund, nor by her terrifying uncle. As the Austen biographer Claire Tomalin argues in *Jane Austen: A Life*, "it is in rejecting obedience in favour of the higher dictate of remaining true to her own conscience that Fanny rises to her moment of heroism." (Tomalin 233) She rejects the obedience that she has been taught to submit to as a woman, and instead, she lets herself be guided by her own conscience. Fanny matures into a person who maintains her principles and ideals, and she makes the best of her situation. She believes that "we have all a better guide in ourselves, if we would attend to it, than any other person can be." (478) She endures everything in her life with grace, she stays true to what she believes, and in the end, she is not just vindicated; she is made better for it.

### 3.2.1 Education

One of the most prominent and significant themes in Mansfield Park is education. At the beginning of the novel, Julia and Maria Bertram are bewildered by Fanny's gaps in this sphere, for "Fanny could read, work, and write, but she had been taught nothing more" and "they thought her prodigiously stupid." (20) Their aunt, Mrs. Norris, not only does not explain the delicacy of Fanny's situation and therefore the consequent reason for her lack of knowledge, but moreover, she confirms their opinion of Fanny with an explanation that "it is very bad, but [they] must not expect every body to be as forward and quick at learning as [themselves]." (20) Mrs. Norris refuses to even consider the fact that Fanny is not stupid, but that she had lived in different conditions which did not allow her to acquire proper education, and instead, she convinces her two nieces of their own superiority and at the same time Fanny's inadequacy. Shortly afterwards, however, the reader finds that not all members of the household share the same opinion of Fanny; Edmund soon realizes that Fanny is bright and full of potential. "He knew her to be clever, to have a quick apprehension as well as good sense, and a fondness for reading, which, properly directed, must be an education in itself." (24-25) In that moment, it becomes apparent that Fanny's education will further develop.

#### 3.2.1.1 Fanny's educational growth

In this part, I would like to discuss Fanny's educational development. As is obvious to the reader, at the beginning of the novel Fanny is hopelessly 'unaccomplished'. She has no knowledge of history or geography, and her cousins make fun of her for her inability to put the map of Europe together (20), as well as other shameful flaws, such as "not know[ing] the difference between water-colours and crayons" (20). Needless to say, Fanny cannot even play any instrument or sing, and she has no drawing or painting skills. Fanny is quite skilful with a needle, as her aunt Lady Bertram is often in need of her help, but nothing more of much consequence. In her native home, Fanny has been taught how to „read, work, and write" (20), meaning that she can do needlework and thus make and repair clothes; her education is that of a lower-class woman (644). When one considers Fanny's conditions, it is evident that there would be no need for further learning had Fanny stayed at home with her parents and siblings. After Fanny's relocation to Mansfield Park, however, the reader is met with a striking difference of two disparate worlds, and Fanny is not exactly shown in the best light. In her new home, others deem her stupid and ignorant, and what is worse, she seems to believe it herself. However, Edmund soon starts to realize that such view is far from true. In Fanny, he sees a potential which can be realized through reading books. "Miss Lee taught her French, and heard her read the daily portion of History; but he recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours" (25). Just like in the case of Elizabeth, we may notice that when it comes to the matter of education, Austen once again puts the emphasis on reading books and through them, enriching one's spirit and broadening one's horizons. Fanny's future educational growth is not based on learning how to paint and play the pianoforte to finally become the proper accomplished woman, but built on acquiring knowledge and making her own opinions in the process.

#### 3.2.1.2 The theme of mentorship

The theme of education is closely linked to that of mentorship. Hints of Fanny's role as a mentor go as far as to her early childhood in the Price household. As the second oldest child and at the same time the oldest daughter, Fanny to a certain extent automatically assumes maternal responsibility for her brothers and sisters. Just as Elizabeth and Jane Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, Fanny takes care of her younger siblings and fulfils the role of a "play-fellow, instructress, and nurse" (16). Even before

Fanny takes on the role of her sister's mentor towards the end of the novel, the reader may notice another instance of Fanny's mentorship during the times of the private theatricals at Mansfield Park. When Mr. Rushworth is unable to remember his lines, Fanny does her best to help him by "giving him all the helps and directions in her power, trying to make an artificial memory for him, and learning every word of his part herself". (194) Although the reader is witness to Fanny's efforts being in vain, it is impossible to doubt her amiable intentions and predisposition to become a good teacher. Neither does Fanny's kindliness escape others' notice; as Mr. Crawford claims, "[Mr. Rushworth] might not have sense enough himself to estimate [her] kindness, but [he] may venture to say that it had honour from all the rest of the party" (262).

When Fanny is visiting her family in Portsmouth for the first time since she left home, it poses a rather devastating experience for her; William soon leaves, Fanny is barely acknowledged by her parents, and the household is full of neglect and chaos. Fanny, however, does not despair, and instead, she finds a purpose in mentoring her younger sister Susan. Upon first encountering Susan, it soon becomes evident to the reader that while Susan has good intentions and always tries to be useful, her efforts end up in vain because unfortunately, she approaches problematic situations unsuitably. What is more, Susan constantly quarrels with another of Fanny's sisters, Betsy, who keeps stealing Susan's most valuable possession, a silver knife given to her by their dead sister. Fanny settles the quarrel between Susan and Betsy by buying the latter a new silver knife; afterwards, they grow even closer, and Susan starts looking up to Fanny for guidance. "The deed thoroughly answered; a source of domestic altercation was entirely done away, and it was the means of opening Susan's heart to her" (459-460). Only through the guidance of someone like Fanny can her essential goodness be realized. Fanny sees potential in her and on that account undertakes to improve Susan's education. Thus, not only is Fanny unyielding in her convictions, but it is also her warm relationship with her sister Susan that makes her a feminist heroine, as well as Susan's mentorship which Fanny takes charge of. That way, Susan's character slowly but surely starts to develop. Not only Susan, but also Fanny starts to grow as a person thanks to this new development, and her mentoring of Susan demonstrates her essential worth as a role model.

### 3.2.2 Marriage

Another topic of great weight in Mansfield Park is marriage. Marriage, as has already been discussed in previous chapters, was practically the only respectable way for a young gentlewoman to take, and it was also the easiest. Fanny may have been born into poorer conditions than her better situated cousins, but when Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram take charge of her, they simultaneously exert certain expectations upon her. In their point of view, thanks to their magnanimous interference, Fanny will grow up to be a respectable young woman and someone to represent their generosity and nobility. Thanks to their care, Fanny will be able to secure a respectable enough husband and make her family proud, and with that, their mission will be complete. However, when such opportunity arises for Fanny, and she is, just like Elizabeth, offered marriage which is considered very flattering in the eyes of society, she resolutely rejects this proposal, for "she is Jane Austen's, which means that she has to earn respect on her own merits and not because an attractive man with a good estate has fallen in love with her. For, housed within the 'bewitching little body', lurking behind the 'soft light eyes', is a clear, critical, rationally-judging adult mind." (Kirkham 105)

#### 3.2.2.1 Mr. Crawford' proposal

No one is more surprised than Fanny after she is offered marriage by none other than Mr. Crawford; a man whose greatest amusement is making young women fall in love with him, playing with their feelings and abandoning them afterwards. At first, Crawford only wants to amuse himself by winning over Fanny's heart, as it does not suffice for him to torment 'only' Maria and Julia. He "cannot be satisfied without Fanny Price, without making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart" (267), the woman who poses an exercise for his mind (267), both a distraction from idleness and a welcome challenge, for he cannot fathom Fanny's displeasure with himself. In the end, however, it is the other way around; Henry Crawford is the one who falls in love with Fanny. Afterwards, he decides that Fanny will be his wife, and he does not doubt his success for one second.

Fanny, however, spends a significant part of the story observing Crawford and his behaviour towards others; therefore, she forms her own picture of him. She condemns his immoral and cruel behaviour towards other women, namely her cousins, whom he both made fall in love in him, including even the already engaged Maria, and

ended up driving a wedge between the sisters. Fanny is convinced that it is a person's behaviour that they should be taken for and therefore, she does not blindly believe his empty words, but watches the way he behaves instead. He has been expressing what kind of person he is through his manners, and Fanny is sensible enough to perceive it and come to the conclusion that she "cannot think well of a man who sports with any woman's feelings; and there may often be a great deal more suffered than a stander-by can judge of." (419)

After Fanny's brother William has been promoted to a lieutenant through the influence of Mr. Crawford's uncle, she expresses joy and gratitude for Henry's involvement, and Crawford proposes to Fanny right then and there. Henry also brings a letter from his sister in which Mary congratulates Fanny on her supposed engagement. Knowing what she knows, Fanny decidedly rejects Mr. Crawford's marriage proposal when it is presented and writes a brief reply to Mary where she rebuts such notions. After considering not only Fanny's social status and the circumstances associated with it, but also her cautious and submissive nature, everyone is shocked by her unexpected reaction. When Fanny refuses to marry Henry Crawford, even her beloved Edmund is trying to persuade her to marry him. He claims that he agrees with her rejection of Henry Crawford, for "[she] did not love him—nothing could have justified [her] accepting him" (401), but simultaneously he urges her to rethink her decision. When Fanny and Edmund discuss the situation, Fanny becomes quite passionate. She does not want Mr. Crawford and nothing that anyone can say will not convince her otherwise, although everyone in the novel tries to. She believes that "it ought not to be set down as certain, that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may happen to like himself." (408) Although her life would be easier if she accepted Crawford's offer, she sticks to her morals. Fanny is a woman who would rather accept the possibility of not only becoming a spinster, but most importantly the risk of finding herself destitute; rather that than marry a man whom she not only feels no love for, but whom she at the same time cannot consider a moral man. For her refusal of Mr. Crawford's proposal, Fanny Price needs no reason other than the simple dislike she has of him and her strong belief that they could never be compatible. She does not care for Crawford's wealth and social status. They are not well-suited, and she does not approve of his prior behaviour.

If Fanny were the weak character that some people accuse her of being, she would have just accepted Henry Crawford's proposal; however, she even tells her uncle, a man who has terrified her since childhood, that she cannot marry him. Sir Thomas is pleased with Henry's attentions to Fanny, and when he is notified of her rejection, he does not understand why Fanny is refusing a man of Crawford's calibre. Fanny has a difficult time opposing her uncle's wishes, and she does not want to tell him the main reason behind her action, that is Crawford's flirtation with both Maria and Julia, for she is soft-hearted and feels that it would be inconsiderate of her to expose her cousins. Even though Henry's role in William's promotion is a reminder of what Fanny owes to Mr. Crawford, her uncle accuses her of selfishness and ungratefulness (368) and thereby hurts her feelings, she insists on not accepting Henry's proposal. Fanny has no allies or defenders in this matter, and she is completely dependent on her uncle's good will. Yet, she defies him in this crucial moment, and holds on to her own beliefs and principles. In that moment it becomes evident that she is a woman of character. When Fanny still refuses to budge, Sir Thomas tells her that he will respect her wishes. Fanny's misery, however, does not end with that. Mrs. Norris and Lady Bertram are informed of the proposal; the former barely speaks to Fanny and is "bitterly angry; but she was more angry with Fanny for having received such an offer, than for refusing it" (383), and the latter tells her that "it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer" (384).

Hoping to change her mind, Sir Thomas sends her to see her parents on William's way back. He believes that the poverty of the Prices' situation will make Henry's wealth appear more attractive, and at the same time, this act hides in itself an unspoken threat that this is what Fanny may come back to if she loses his good opinion. Fanny may be shaken by the situation in her biological parents' home, but she does not alter her decision. Even though Fanny feels gratitude towards Crawford, she does not let herself be swayed by it. She is not obliged to marry Mr. Crawford. Fanny is more than aware that the two of them do not share the same values the way she and Edmund do. Despite the changes in his behaviour, Fanny does not truly believe in the change of his character, and in the end, it turns out that she has been right all along; as soon as such opportunity arises, Mr. Crawford falls back into his old habits and commits adultery with Maria. Afterwards, it is made obvious that Fanny has made the right decision in

rejecting him, although except her, no one else seemed to believe it. This fact is the proof that despite being pressured from all sides, she stands up for herself when it matters most, that is where her entire future is in question, and refuses to make a decision that would go against her conviction. Inside, Fanny is far stronger than any other character in the novel, for she remains true to her principles even after pressure from all sides. She knows what she wants and what not, and in the end, she marries Edmund, the man whom she has loved the whole time. For choosing her own path in life and refusing to abandon her principles, she is rewarded with the love of her own choosing.

#### 3.2.2.2 Marriage to Edmund

For nearly the course of the whole novel, the reader is witness to Edmund's blind love for Mary Crawford and Fanny's hidden love for Edmund. Just like everyone else but Fanny, Edmund has fallen under Mary's spell, and he intends to marry her for the better part of the novel. Even though certain weaknesses of her person do not escape him, his love enables him to excuse every one of them. Almost until the very end of the book, Edmund remains ignorant of Mary's not so agreeable qualities that are so obvious to Fanny. It is not until Henry causes a scandal together with Maria that Edmund realizes his foolishness. He is horrified when Mary defends their actions and when she, just like Mrs. Norris, blames Fanny for refusing Henry's proposal and causing the situation. This instance opens Edmund's eyes, and he says goodbye to Mary. Before marrying Fanny, Edmund must finish his own sort of education, that is to not let himself succumb to superficial appeals and appreciate Fanny for her deep feelings and companionship. The marriage of Fanny and Edmund presents the ideal connection of intellectual and emotional relationship. They are essentially similar to each other as people and share the same values. Fanny loves Edmund because he is the first person who has shown kindness to her in an unfriendly environment, he is always nice to her, and he is her most important friend and confidant. As Kirkham states, "Austen manages to create a few brief oases where men and women experience equal relationships with one another" (83) And that is exactly what Edmund and Fanny are – equals.

### 3.2.3 Fanny Price and Mary Crawford

When searching for the foil, or anti-heroine, to Fanny's heroine, one must look no further than Mary Crawford. Looking at these two characters, a sharp contrast can be seen. These women differ from one another perhaps in all possible ways. Essentially, Mary's role in the novel as an anti-heroine is to highlight Fanny's qualities as a character. Through Fanny's eyes, the reader is witness to Mary's less amiable qualities, which show her in not such a positive light as other characters, chiefly Edmund, see her in. When Austen presents Mary Crawford, she masterfully makes her a seeming embodiment of many admirable qualities, and contrary to Fanny, she can easily appeal to everyone. Austen makes Mary Crawford a captivating presence, so that not only Edmund but the reader as well cannot help but be enraptured by her. She is a character who easily gain favour of other people thanks to her charms.

In certain respects, Mary Crawford may resemble Austen's popular heroine Elizabeth Bennet, and it may seem that Mary is the one who should be the heroine of Mansfield Park instead of Fanny. Just like Elizabeth, Mary is witty, intelligent, bold and lively. She also likes to laugh at people and situations; however, it is necessary to remember that while Elizabeth mocks others for their unpleasantness, their "follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies" (Austen, "Pride and Prejudice" 62), Mary Crawford makes no such distinction and freely ridicules whoever she pleases, which only proves her arrogance. Mary convinces others of her good-heartedness; for example, she treats Fanny with kindness and as the only one acknowledges Fanny's feelings when the rest of the party, particularly Tom and Mrs. Norris, blackmail her emotionally to participate in playing the theatre play. However, Mary's supposed kindness stems mostly from her efforts to make a good impression and achieve her goal; that is, to gain control over Edmund.

Mary's and Fanny's shared affection for Edmund is probably the only thing that these two have in common. However, while Fanny's love is pure and genuine, Mary's feelings are tainted by her efforts to transform Edmund to suit her own needs. When she finds out that Edmund has not let go of his intention to take orders and he does not plan to strive for wealth for her sake, she becomes "very angry with him" (266). After Tom falls ill, Mary writes a letter to Fanny where she indicates that Tom's death would benefit her because there would be "two poor young men less in the world; and […] that

wealth and consequence could fall into no hands more deserving of them.” (502) Fanny is disgusted by the letter’s content and distressed by the image Edmund's life as the husband of such a woman who "had only learnt to think nothing of consequence but money." (505) While Fanny does not value money enough to sacrifice her morals for it, Mary does not really object to such possibility, and she even goes as far as to wish for Tom’s death to improve her financial situation with Edmund. She wishes that Henry and Fanny marry not because she believes that Henry will make Fanny happy but because she realizes the benefits such match would bring; she and Edmund would keep in touch thanks to frequent family gatherings, and then she could easily secure him.

Mary is quite willing to let her brother play with Fanny’s feelings while lavishing friendship on her. Mary is caring and amiable when it suits her needs, but she holds no true regard for Fanny’s well-being. In the end, Mary is not an admirable heroine; throughout the novel, she displays flexibility when it comes to morals and uses manipulation to achieve her goals. Mary does not possess the empathy that can be found in Fanny. After Henry commits adultery with Maria, Mary, rather than being horrified by their scandalous behaviour, thinks of it as mere “folly”. (525) She is most upset that Henry got caught, not by the offence itself. What is more, she blames Fanny for Henry’s crimes: “Why would not she have him? It is all her fault. […] Had she accepted him as she ought, they might now have been on the point of marriage, and Henry would have been too happy and too busy to want any other object.” (527) Only then can Edmund no longer deny the darker side of Mary’s personality, and he realizes how unsuitable she is for him. Fanny, on the other hand, is naturally kind and caring, and with her “affectionate heart, and a strong desire of doing right” (18), Fanny is full of empathy and sympathises with anybody who is not treated right; even her cousin Maria after Mr. Crawford toys with her affections, although she has never been kind to Fanny and has been hurting her fiancé with the unconcealed flirtatious behaviour towards the gentleman. These character traits lead her to lend a helping hand to Mr. Rushworth when he is not able to remember his two and forty lines and no one else is willing to rehearse with him. Even though Mary acts affably and warmly towards Fanny, the latter does not believe in her sincerity; nevertheless, she does not treat her unkindly or disrespectfully. She does not try to defame her in front of Edmund, and she lets him discover Mary’s true character and intentions on his own. Although Fanny knows what

is right, she does not try and inflict her view on other people; she lets people work it out for themselves.

## Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was the analysis of hidden feminism in Jane Austen's novels. In the first part, the reader was familiarised with social standing of contemporary genteel women. After having given a brief introduction of the period itself, the author proceeded to pay attention to women's education and the form it took, that is the form of 'accomplishments'. In this section, individual accomplishments were characterised. Afterwards, the author moved to another aspect of women's social circumstances, and that was their financial situation. Women in this period had no legal standing, and they were not permitted to sign contracts or seek a career. In simple terms, women had no means of becoming financially independent. The only way for women to gain at least economic stability was to marry. The theme of marriage is very important in every Austen's book and the two novels chosen for this work are no exception. Marriage was more often than not viewed as a mere financial transaction, based on the amount of the bride's dowry, level of accomplishment, and personal charm. Remaining unmarried earned women an unflattering title of a spinster, and such women were forced to depend on their relatives' good will. With the exception of governesses, teachers and women writers, women did not take up professions, because becoming a professional threatened the very idea of what roles women could take in order to preserve their femininity.

These themes were discussed in the first part, and thereby, the conception of what it meant to be a woman in Regency England was established and ready to be examined in the novels. The second and third part respectively discussed feminist features in Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park. Both novels chosen for this thesis share many similar features; they take place in the English countryside at the beginning of the 19$^{th}$ century, and they follow the stories of young women and their place in the contemporary society. To conclude this thesis's findings, the main heroines of both novels were examined with respect to their individual backgrounds. The author described the instances that show Elizabeth as a feminist heroine using the findings acquired in the first part. When it comes to Elizabeth's education, it is certainly lacking in the contemporary view of what an accomplished woman should master. However, instead of gaining accomplishments to increase her chances of getting married, Elizabeth chooses to direct her attention to reading. It is extensive reading which

enables her to improve her mind and enrich her spirit, as was promoted by Mary Wollstonecraft. Marriage was another topic that the thesis did not omit. In the novel, Elizabeth rejects two marriage proposal; she turns down Mr. Collins because she cannot respect him, and she does not believe that they could ever be happy together, and she refuses Mr. Darcy, because she does not consider him a good man, he has insulted her and her family, and ruined her most beloved sister's happiness. By rejecting not only one, but two marriage proposals, Elizabeth demonstrates her unyielding determination to either marry on her own terms, or not marry at all. That way, she defies societal expectations and shows great strength of character. Because of Elizabeth's harsh rejection, Mr. Darcy comes to recognize the need to improve his character, and thanks to Elizabeth's influence, he becomes a better man who eventually wins her heart. What also makes Elizabeth a good feminist role model are her relationships with other women, namely her sisters. Together with her favourite sister, Jane Bennet, she tries to guide her youngest sisters to improvement and repair the damage done by their parents. Among others, she is also supportive of her young sister-in-law, Georgiana Darcy, who is growing more confident under Elizabeth's influence. All these aspects prove Elizabeth to be not only bold, honest, and witty, but at the same time very caring and with a strong sense of justice. Above all, she is a strong heroine who is confident enough to defy the unjust gender norms of the Regency period.

Mansfield Park offers a different kind of heroine to the reader; different, but no less strong. After having introduced Fanny as a feminist figure, a discussion on her education was provided. At the beginning of the novel, Fanny's education is seriously inadequate; not only does she not play any musical instrument or speak a foreign language, but she also lacks basic knowledge. Once again, this issue is rectified through intense reading. The theme of education was extended by the mentorship of Fanny's younger sister Susan, which demonstrates Fanny's essential worth as a role model. When it comes to marriage, Fanny just like Elizabeth presents the reader with great inner strength when she rejects a man who is superior to her in social standing. However, Fanny does not love the man, and she condemns his immoral and cruel behaviour towards other women. Nothing can change her mind in this regard, not even the risk of destitution. She is completely dependent on her uncle's good will and yet, she defies him in this crucial moment, and holds on to her own beliefs and principles.

That way, she demonstrates her unwillingness to let herself be guided by anything other than her own conscience. Finally, Fanny's character was compared to that of Mary Crawford's, who provides Fanny's foil in the novel. Through this comparison, Fanny's qualities were highlighted, and the author has shown Fanny's uniqueness.

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