

# Representation of Women in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, Emma, and Persuasion

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Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2014

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:316788>

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-01-23**



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Preddiplomski studij: Engleski jezik i književnost–Pedagogija

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**Representation of Women in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*,  
*Emma*, and *Persuasion***

Završni rad

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Osijek, 2014.



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## **Abstract**

Jane Austen is one of the most famous women writers of the nineteenth century. Her novels *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (1818) deal with the position of women and their social expectations, most of which are related to marriage. The protagonists of these novels represent a unique response to those expectations, which is a product of their way of thinking. Women in the nineteenth century did not have much choice when it came to their future. They could either get married or become governesses if they were educated enough. Their life was shaped mostly by their families which tried to find them a husband who would support them. Austen's heroines Elizabeth, Emma, and Anne are self-reliant and unconventional women who marry the men they love. The other characters, such as Lydia and Mrs. Bennet represent women whose ultimate goal in life is connected to marriage. Charlotte Lucas represents women who marry out of necessity and Jane Fairfax embodies the women who are strong and ready to do anything in the name of love. Accordingly, all those women represent different female responses to social norms and to their own position in the society.

Keywords: Jane Austen, *Emma*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Persuasion*, women writers, representation, marriage

## **Introduction**

Jane Austen was a British writer who was active during the Regency era. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is probably her most famous novel. It deals with the life of Elizabeth Bennet, who is the second of five daughters in the Bennet family. *Emma* (1815) tells the story of a young woman named Emma, who was born in a wealthy family. *Persuasion* (1818) deals with the life of Anne Elliot whose life is turned upside-down when the love of her life comes back from the war.

The purpose of this paper is to show that those characters represent a female response to certain social norms concerning their life. The first chapter of this paper describes women's life and position in the Regency England. Women's life revolved around getting married, preferably to a rich man, to secure their social position. The second chapter describes the personalities of Elizabeth, Lydia, and Mrs. Bennet, the characters from *Pride and Prejudice*. The third chapter describes Emma and Jane Fairfax, the characters from the novel *Emma*. The fourth chapter describes Anne Elliot and Mrs. Smith from *Persuasion*. The analysis focuses on the heroines' personalities and their social situation in order to show how their decisions and actions are shaped by their position in and their view on society.

## 1. An Overview of Women's Position and Behaviour in Regency England

The Regency is a period which started in 1811, when the Regency Act was passed and George, Prince of Wales became Prince Regent, replacing his father George III who was mentally ill. The period ended with the death of George III. During these years, many women established themselves as prominent writers. One of them was Jane Austen, who decided to depict traditional female roles during the Regency era. In those times it was hard to be a woman, especially a woman writer. Women's style of writing was considered to be inferior to men's writing style. The contempt for women writers that Austen faced throughout her career is clearly visible in her biography *A Memoir* whose author James Edward Austen-Leigh, Austen's nephew, expresses his concern about his aunt's writing, worried "that his aunt's letters will be seen as being too gossipy and discursive. He believes, like Henry Tilney, that women's letters do not contain enough full stops. He therefore imposes his own masculine definition of order and theme on what he takes to be the chaos of her writing" (Sales 8). It is evident that women were misjudged, mistreated, and discriminated by men. Imperfection became a synonym for women, even when it came to their writing style. Therefore, it is not surprising that women led submissive lives and they had to accept:

the symbolic authority of fathers and husbands, the self-sacrifices of motherhood and the burdensome responsibility for domestic servants, housekeeping and family consumption. The fact that these elements were so abiding perhaps accounts for the extent of acquiescence- rebelling against roles that appeared both prehistoric and preordained would profit nothing. (Vickery 278)

In other words, in Austen's time women thought that they could do nothing but what was expected from them; they were dominated by men. Marriages were arranged, mostly within the same social class. Even middle-class parents wanted their daughters well situated. Love was not important when it came to choosing a husband. Women did not have much choice; unmarried, older than twenty, women were considered to be a burden to their families and many women got married, so that society would not look down on them. They could become governesses; yet, that "was a position beneath the social rank and status of middle and upper class young women and was thus regarded as humiliating" (Swords). A woman's happiness depended entirely on her parents' approval until she got married: "women can be seen as oppressed victims of a patriarchal society, subordinate first to their fathers and, then, to their husbands who had, of course, been selected by their fathers" (Swords). Moreover, women could not inherit property.

Once married, they lost control over both their possessions and their fate and became their husbands' property:

A married woman or *feme covert* was a dependent, like an underage child or a slave, and could not own property in her own name or control her own earnings, except under very specific circumstances. When a husband died, his wife could not be the guardian to their under-age children. Widows did have the right of "dower," a right to property they brought into the marriage as well as to life usage of one-third of their husbands' estate. ("Women and the Law")

Women were thus not independent; independency was associated with maleness. It is obvious that the only way a woman could attain fortune and independence was through her husband's death. Yet, even then, they were not safe because, just as daughters of well-to-do parents, they became victims of fortune-seeking men. Similarly, a woman whose parents did not possess a large fortune had a very narrow chance of finding a husband.

When it came to their education, women were either taught at home or in girls' schools and: "These studies were thought to be sufficient to provide a girl with the accomplishments necessary to attract a suitable husband" (Swords). It is evident that the sole aim of women's education was marriage. In their everyday life, women, especially those of higher class, attended and organized dinner parties, but even there women had to comply to rules such as: "The ladies sit a quarter of an hour longer, during which time sweet wines are sometimes served, then rise from the table. The men rise at the same time, one opens the door for them, and as soon as they are gone, draw closer together. . . . Every man is, however, at liberty to follow the ladies as soon as he likes. . ." (qtd. in Hughes 197). It is quite obvious that the same rules did not apply to men and to women; men had much more liberty. Furthermore, women, as much as men, enjoyed the country balls and assemblies: "Assemblies provided the opportunity for social advancement and were the perfect venue for matchmaking" (Hughes 201). Young unmarried women were introduced to society during these events. It was an excellent opportunity for them to meet men and find a perfect match but even when it came to happenings of this kind, there were rules of conduct for young women: "'Public balls are not much frequented by people of good society, except in watering places and country towns. Even there a young lady should not be seen at more than two or three in the year'" (Hughes 202). Accordingly, there were many constraints on women's freedom and way of living in Regency England, so it is no wonder that many writers of the time decided to explore this issue in their work and depict women's life.



## 2. Representation of Female Characters in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

The novel *Pride and Prejudice* deals with the life of the sisters from the Bennet family. It focuses on the life of Elizabeth, the main protagonist of the story. The Bennet family belongs to the middle class. Mr. Bennet does not have a male heir:

Very few people nowadays have any reason to understand the meaning of an estate's being entailed — it is, or was, a legal arrangement whereby the property could descend only to a male heir. If there was no direct male heir, as in the Bennets' case, then the next nearest male collateral descendant of the owner who had originally created the entail would inherit — in this case, Mr Bennet's distant cousin Mr Collins. (La Faye 184).

Fearing that her daughters will be left with nothing after their father's death and that they will depend on good will of his cousin, Mr. Collins, Elizabeth's mother, Mrs. Bennet, devotes her life to finding husbands for her daughters: "The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 5). Mrs. Bennet is a loving mother who wishes nothing but the best for her daughters and therefore she forces Mr. Bennet to introduce their daughters to Mr. Bingley, an unmarried young man with a handsome income who has just moved in the neighborhood: "If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield (a place where Mr. Bingley lives) . . . and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 9). However, there are times when her motherly love is overshadowed by her ambition concerning her daughters. For example, she makes Jane go on horseback to Netherfield because she knows that it will rain and that Jane will have to stay there. When Jane gets sick, Mrs. Bennet is not too worried. On the contrary, "she is very happy and satisfied because of this opportunity that her daughter is having to be there for more time and to be closer to Mr. Bingley" (Florentino Oliviera 16). Moreover, Mrs. Bingley is a woman who indulges in gossip and inappropriate social behaviour. She is described as not being a very smart person: "Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding; little information and uncertain temper. When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 5). Mrs. Bennet is a very loud person who states her opinion even when it is inappropriate. In a room full of people she talks to Lady Lucas "of nothing else but of her expectation that Jane would be soon married to Mr. Bingley. —It was an animating subject and Mrs. Bennet seemed incapable of fatigue while enumerating the advantages of the match" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 111). Mrs. Bennet does not understand that her behavior influences her daughter's destiny and that because of this conversation with

Lady Lucas Mr. Bingley will be separated from Jane. Mr. Bingley's friend, Mr. Darcy, and his sisters state that "with such a father and mother, and such low connections" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 40), the Bennet daughters have no chance of marrying rich. Thereupon, it is evident how much social connections and a family's reputation determine a woman's life and her future, a future which can be only secured through marriage.

Elizabeth "Lizzy" Bennet is the second daughter of the Bennets. She is twenty years old and is described as having "a lively, playful disposition which delighted in anything ridiculous" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 12). Because of her intelligence and observations, she is one of the most famous literary characters of all time: "For the first time in English literature, outside Shakespeare, we meet heroines who are credible, with minds, with the capacity to think for themselves, with ambition and wit" (qtd. in "Study Guide for *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen" 10). She is Mr. Bennet's favourite child. Describing his daughters, Mr. Bennet says that "they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 5). In contrast, she is the last dear to her mother because "she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good humored as Lydia" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 5). Yet, Elizabeth transcends her family members in her manners and understanding of life. Because of their behaviour at certain events, she: "blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 112). Moreover, Elizabeth states her opinion directly and has a sharp tongue, which often shocks those who believe that ladies cannot be allowed such freedom. During her conversation with Lady Catherine, who is a very powerful woman, she answers a lot of questions but with some reservation and asserts her opinion on the social norms:

But really, Ma'am, I think 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.- The last born has as good a right to the pleasures of youth as the first.- And to be kept back on *such* a motive!- I think it would not be very likely to promote sisterly affection or delicacy of mind. (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 187).

Lady Catherine is astonished by such an answer because Elizabeth openly challenges social norms regarding female behavior. When Lady Catherine finds out that the five daughters have been brought up without a governess, she is shocked because it is unimaginable that young women have not been taught necessary skills such as drawing and playing an instrument. Elizabeth finds it unimportant by stating: "Compared with some families, I believe we were; but

such of us as wished to learn, never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly might” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 186). In other words, reading is what feeds the mind and other skills that women are forced to learn are unnecessary.

Elizabeth's opinion is the product of common sense, not of social conventions. Elizabeth: “suspected herself to be the first creature who had ever dared to trifle with so much dignified impertinence” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 187), thus proving herself to be a modern woman who does not care about class and rank. In addition to this, even her attitude towards marriage is different. She wants to marry out of love, not just so that she would be financially secured. Her romantic values contrast those of society. Mr. Collins, the man who will inherit the property of Mr. Bennet after he dies, proposes to Elizabeth and she rejects his proposal. He believes that she pretends to be unattainable and that is when Elizabeth states her opinion:

I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal.—You could not make me happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make you so. (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 120)

Elizabeth understands the true purpose of marriage, something that neither her mother nor her sisters do. When she rejects Mr. Collins, her mother is furious because “society recommends that all women accept the marriage proposal they receive” (Reena 129). She even rejects Mr. Darcy’s first proposal because she believes him to be an immoral and evil man. He is very rich, richer than Mr. Bingley, but it means nothing to her because “Elizabeth sees that a loss of her personality in the name of security is worse than [being a] penniless spinster” (Reena 130). Her attitude towards marriage is visible from the way she speaks with Charlotte, her dearest friend, when she hears that Charlotte has accepted Mr. Collins’s proposal. Elizabeth thinks that “Charlotte, the wife of Mr. Collins, was a most humiliating picture!—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” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 141). She feels sorry for her friend because she knows that she and her future husband will never love each other. Moreover, Elizabeth’s judgments are sometimes irrational and blinded by her pride but, when this is the case, she is willing to admit that she is wrong. When she realizes that Wickham has deceived her and lied to her about Darcy’s nature, that Darcy is actually an exceptional man, she grows “absolutely ashamed of herself. – Of neither Darcy nor

Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd“ (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 230). She tries to be fair towards everyone and that is why she feels that she has done wrong to Darcy. Later on, when Lady Catherine confronts her because she believes that Elizabeth and Darcy will get married, Elizabeth shows that she is not afraid of her. Lady Catherine states that their marriage would be the most unsuitable match; yet, Elizabeth does not share that opinion: “In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter; so far we are equal” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 395). In other words, Elizabeth does not care about money and does not think of Mr. Darcy as her superior; she believes them to be of equal worth. When Lady Catherine asks that she refuse Darcy, Elizabeth dismisses her request instead by saying:

You have widely mistaken my character, if you think I can be worked on by such persuasions as these. How far your nephew might approve of your interference in his affairs, I cannot tell; but you have certainly no right to concern yourself in mine. I must beg, therefore, to be importuned no farther on the subject. (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 396)

Elizabeth is not a woman whom someone could easily scare and she fights for what she wants and believes in – and that is Mr. Darcy and her love for him. Again, Elizabeth proves to be an intelligent and independent woman who does not care about the opinion of others; she does what she thinks to be the best for her.

Jane Bennet is the eldest daughter in the family. She is 23 and is aware “that she has reached the age where it is beyond proper, rather necessary, for her to marry“ (Reena 128). She is the prettiest girl in the county; even Mr. Bingley states that. When people ask him who he thinks to be the prettiest woman around, he answers: “Oh! the eldest Miss Bennet without a doubt, there cannot be two opinions on that point” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 20). She is kind-hearted and always thinks the best of people, which makes her naïve in certain cases. For example, when she learns about Wickham’s true nature, Elizabeth describes her state of mind: “What a stroke was this for poor Jane! who would willingly have gone through the world without believing that so much wickedness existed in the whole race of mankind, as was here collected in one individual“ (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 249). Moreover, she has the best opinion of Mr. Bingley's sisters and believes them to approve of her. However, this is not the case. They do not see her as a suitable match to their brothers, so they take him away from the Netherfield. When they leave, Jane is broken, but she does not despair: ”He may live in my

memory as the most amiable man of my acquaintance, but that is all. I have nothing either to hope or fear, and nothing to reproach him with. Thank God! I have not *that* pain. A little time therefore.—I shall certainly try to get the better“ (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 236). Jane proves to be a strong woman who decides to conceal her pain. She is not interested in Mr. Bingley's fortune; she really loves him: “Jane loves and admires Mr. Bingley not for his yearly allotment, but for his person and character. Therefore, Jane Austen shows that the eldest Bennet sister is unimpressed by social status alone“ (Reena 128). Those feelings do not fade as the time goes by:

She still cherished a very tender affection for Bingley. Having never even fancied herself in love before, her regard had all the warmth of first attachment, and from her age and disposition, greater steadiness than first attachments often boast; and so fervently did she value his remembrance, and prefer him to every other man, that all her good sense, and all her attention to the feelings of her friends, were requisite to check the indulgence of those regrets, which must have been injurious to her own health and their tranquillity. (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 336)

Jane is the same as Elizabeth when it comes to love; she prefers love over financial security and, unlike her mother and other women, does not care about money.

Charlotte Lucas is worth mentioning because she represents traditional women who are not interested in marrying out of love. She “finds herself with little to recommend her and even fewer options on the marriage front“ (Reena 130). She is 27 years old and considered to be a spinster. She accepts Mr. Collins's proposal: “Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want“ (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 222). It is obvious that she does not like him but she thinks that she cannot do better than him. She only thinks about the position that she will acquire once she is a married woman: “I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 224). Charlotte does not realize that her economic motivations deprive her of a chance to be happily married and emotionally attached to her husband. In the end, she pays the price for her choice as she becomes the same shallow person as he is. Accordingly, Austen's novel makes it clear that, according to the social standards of the time, dependent women have no chance of living a fulfilled life.

Lydia and Kitty are the youngest sisters in the Bennet family. Kitty is 17 and Lydia is 15. They are not so intelligent and behave like most of the teenagers. Mr. Bennet describes them as being “two of the silliest girls in the country” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 116). Their life revolves around balls and the military: “Every day added something to their knowledge of the officers’ names and connections. Their lodgings were not long a secret, and at length they began to know the officers themselves“ (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 116). They behave inappropriately and are not interested in anything except the soldiers. Lydia is much worse than Kitty, as she has “high animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence, which the attentions of the officers, to whom her uncle’s good dinners and her own easy manners recommended her, had increased into assurance“ (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 134). Her free spirits leads to the most shameful act of all. She runs away with Mr. Wickham, thus endangering the position of her sisters on the marriage market since no one would marry them if the news of her escape became public. Yet, Lydia does not care about that; she is happy to be a married woman:

Oh! mamma, do the people hereabouts know I am married to day? I was afraid they might not; and we overtook William Goulding in his curricule, so I was determined he should know it, and so I let down the side glass next to him, and took off my glove, and let my hand just rest upon the window frame, so that he might see the ring, and then I bowed and smiled like anything. (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 434)

Her reckless behavior shows how social norms regarding marriage make young women do foolish things and enter a marriage they will one day certainly regret.

### 3. Representation of Female Characters in Jane Austen's *Emma*

As is indicated by its title, the plot of Jane Austen's novel *Emma* revolves around the life of a young woman named Emma Woodhouse, a motherless child who has been raised by her governess Lady Taylor and her father who is strongly attached to her. While writing this novel, Jane Austen explained: "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like" (qtd. in Goodheart 1). The story opens with the description of Emma, as she is considered to be "handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her" (Austen, *Emma* 1). When it comes to her beauty, Mr. Weston, the husband of Emma's former governess, gives us a full description of her features: "Such an eye! – the true hazle eye – and so brilliant regular features, open countenance, with a complexion! Oh! What a bloom of full health, and such a pretty height and size; such a firm and upright figure. There is health, not merely in her bloom, but in her air, her head, her glance" (Austen, *Emma* 36). It is obvious that Emma has every desirable advantages and qualities that any man would want in a woman. She is a child of a wealthy landowner, which makes her a very privileged woman. Her position makes her independent of other people. Emma lives her life the way she wants to, without any desire to get married: "And I am not only, not going to be married, at present, but have very little intention of ever marrying at all" (Austen, *Emma* 84). She represents a modern and intelligent woman who does not see the purpose of her life in finding a husband. She is perfectly content with her present situation and only love would make her change her mind. Yet, she believes that she will never fall in love:

And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's. (Austen, *Emma* 84)

In other words, Emma wants attention and admiration for which she believes that she would never get anywhere else or with anyone else. What is more, Emma "seems unable to make satisfying and intelligent use of leisure" (Tamm 402). That is why she is into matchmaking; it is the only thing that can entertain her and occupy her time. But this inappropriate use of her leisure time can be explained through Emma's conversation with Harriet about the things that young

women could do. Her “response reveals that performing amateur art, such as drawing, music, and carpet-work, and reading literature are the main activities available to women and suggests these do not provide adequate interest for some women of leisure with active, busy minds” (Tamm 403).

Emma’s interest in matchmaking is revealed when her friend Harriet, whom Emma takes under her wing, is proposed by Mr. Martin. Emma urges Harriet to refuse him because he is a farmer, a person of lower social standing (Austin 51). Emma thus proves to be a quite snobbish person who sees poor people as inferior to her and who does not care about other people’s feelings as long as she gets what she wants. Mr. Martin truly loves Harriet, who is ready to accept him until Emma comes along. She does not realize that Harriet, a girl with lower social connections whose parents’ identity is unknown, does not have any chance of marrying someone who is prosperous. Moreover, Emma convinces Harriet that Mr. Elliot, a handsome local vicar, is in love with her while he is actually interested in Emma because of her fortune: “Emma in fact is a perfect illustration of how will or desire or preconception may determine interpretation” (Goodheart 590). Emma’s false beliefs lead to Harriet’s heartbreak when she learns the truth. However, Emma shows true regret because of what she has done to Harriet and finally learns that she should not interfere in other people’s lives: “The first error and the worst lay at her door. It was foolish, it was wrong to take so active a part in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be simple. She was quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such thing no more” (Austen, *Emma* 137).

Another example of Emma’s inconsiderable behavior is her attitude towards Miss Bates, a poor and eccentric spinster. Emma openly tells her, in front of her kith and kin, that she is not allowed to tell more than three foolish things at once. She intends it as a joke but Miss Bates is deeply offended. Mr. Knightley, Emma’s closest friend, scolds her because of that. That is when everything changes. Emma becomes more mature. She feels deeply sorry for hurting Miss Bates: “. . . Emma felt the tears running down her cheeks almost all the way home, without being at one trouble to check them, extraordinary as they were” (Austen, *Emma* 385). In that moment, Emma tries to be a better person; she finally realizes her mistakes.

When it comes to Mr. Knightley, Emma’s preoccupation with other people’s lives leads to negligence of her own feelings. Even though she tries to be an independent woman and does not believe that she is capable of loving in a romantic sense, she finds herself to be in love with Mr. Knightley. That happens when Harriet informs her that she has certain feelings for Mr.



Knightsley and that she thinks that her feelings are returned. Emma realizes how much damage she has done to Harriet by not letting her marry Mr. Martin. According to Emma, Harriet's social position is not good enough for a gentleman such as Mr. Knightsley. Just as the reader might think that she has finally changed, her thoughts reveal the opposite: "What makes Emma [a] particularly interesting character is the way in which seriousness and vanity are so intertwined in her thoughts and behavior" (Goodheart 593). Even though she thinks that Harriet is "her superior in all the charm and all the felicity it gives" (Austen, *Emma* 273), Emma does not see her as Mr. Knightsley's equal. Emma is strong-headed and the real question is whether she will ever truly change. Emma, in her manners and vanity, represents higher society, which still believes that people of unequal social class are unlikely to mix together. Furthermore, when it comes to her attitude towards marriage, it changes in the end. She realizes that her only place is by Mr. Knightsley's side and accepts his proposal. Some critics "have complained about Austen's complicity with patriarchy in upholding the institution of marriage, especially given the submissive role the woman is supposed to play in the marriage" (Goodheart 602). However, Emma does not marry Knightsley because of economic security as she is wealthy already. She marries him because she loves him, thus showing that the only reason why any woman should marry is because she is in love.

Jane Fairfax is Miss Bates' niece. She is an orphan who was raised by the wealthy Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, who pay for her education because her aunt is poor. She is considered to be a kind-hearted and very well educated woman: "Living constantly with right-minded and well-informed people, her heart and understanding had received every advantage of discipline and culture; and Col. Campbell's residence being in London, every lighter talent had been done full justice to, by the attendance of first-rate masters" (Austen, *Emma* 165). In addition to her talents, Jane Fairfax is a beautiful woman but a very reserved one. When Mr. Knightsley talks about her, he says: "She has not the open temper which a man would wish for in a woman" (Austen, *Emma* 292). Her behavior can be ascribed to her secret relationship with Frank Churchill, Mr. Weston's son who has been raised by the Churchills after his mother's death. Frank's aunt, Mrs. Churchill, would not approve of his relationship with Jane, and that is why they keep it secret. Jane despairs as Frank Churchill shows signs of being in love with Emma. She eventually applies for the job of the governess in order to support herself, as it is the only way for a young woman to make money. In the end, Mrs. Churchill dies, Frank proposes to Jane, and she accepts the proposal, even though she has suffered so much because of him. On the one hand, she proves to be a strong woman who puts up with his mockery of her while he pretends that she means nothing to

him. On the other hand, Jane proves to be weak because she forgives him so easily. She may be intelligent but “the intrigue she is involved in . . . leaves her passive and enigmatic” (qtd. in “Novels for Students” 28). She is the perfect example of a young woman who was seduced by a rich and handsome man who behaves badly towards her. Jane allows him to treat her like nothing because she believes that she has no control over her life and destiny.

#### 4. Representation of Female Characters in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

Anne Elliot is the central character in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. She is the second daughter of Mr. Elliot, a nobleman whose lifestyle forces him to sell his property and move to Bath. She is 28, which means that she is considered to be a spinster and a burden to her family. She has two older sisters, who are unsympathetic towards her, and a vain father who does not care about her because she is not pretty enough: "A few years before, Anne Elliot had been a very pretty girl, but her bloom had vanished early; and as even in its height, her father had found little to admire in her, (so totally different were her delicate features and mild dark eyes from his own), there could be nothing in them, now that she was faded and thin, to excite his esteem" (Austen, *Persuasion* 3). She has been brought up by Lady Russel, who is also her best friend. Anne is a shy girl and "utterly isolated psychologically, often detached physically, and, most surprisingly from the pen which also created the likes of Elizabeth Bennet, silent, particularly in crowded, enclosed or confined spaces" (Posusta 79). Unlike most of Austen's heroines, who are loud and direct, Anne is quiet or speaks very little during many gatherings. She is the most mysterious of all Austen's characters. Life has made her that way. Her mother died when Anne was just fourteen. At the age of nineteen, she fell in love with Mr. Wentworth, a poor but intelligent man, who loved her more than anything in the world. They got engaged but she was persuaded to leave him because her father "thought it a very degrading alliance; and Lady Russell, though with more tempered and pardonable pride, received it as a most unfortunate one" (Austen, *Persuasion* 13). She allowed herself to be manipulated and she regrets it even eight years later, especially now that Wentworth is back. Interestingly, Anne refused Charles Musgrove's marriage proposal a few years ago because she knew that she would never fall in love with him, even though her family had advised her to accept him. Thus, she proves to an independent woman who decides that she will never be persuaded again into something she does not want to do. Concerning Captain Wentworth, since his return, most of her thoughts have revolved around him because she still loves him, now even more than ever. Yet, she believes him to be in love with Louisa Musgrove, a young girl whose brother is married to Anne's sister Mary. Anne, being big-hearted and kind, does not hate Louisa; she adores both Louisa and her sister Henrietta, although "she would not have given up her own more elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments; and envied them nothing but that seemingly perfect good understanding and agreement together, that good-humoured mutual affection, of which she had known so little herself with either of her sisters" (Austen, *Persuasion* 20). She does not get in their way in spite of her suffering. Furthermore, in every difficult situation Anne seems to be the

most reasonable person of all. When her niece falls out of a tree, her sister Mary is angry because she cannot go to a dinner with her husband, and Anne offers to stay with him although she knows that Captain Wentworth will be there. Accordingly, she is a self-sacrificing person who always puts someone else's happiness in front of her own. When Luisa Musgrove is injured, Anne manages to console and calm anyone while nursing her: "Anne thinks quickly, resourcefully, and intelligently, making herself the effective temporary commander of this floundering human ship" (qtd. in Yee). Anne shows how a woman's intelligence and mental development is useful in hard times and that women are equal, sometimes even superior, to men because they know how to deal with difficult situations. Everyone is grateful to her; Anne is favorite among the Musgroves: "While Anne Elliot does not marry into the Musgrove family itself—although she could have, once—she gravitates toward it early in the novel, comes to prefer it to her own family, and does earn enough respect to become the moral focus of its extending and adapting family" (Griffin 178). Anne is the proof that a loving and reasonable woman finds her place everywhere and is accepted by everyone. Moreover, there are instances in which Anne proves to be a really sharp woman. When her cousin Mr. Elliot, who has not been on good terms with her family for many years, shows a sudden interest in them, she suspects that something is wrong: "Still, however, she had the sensation of there being something more than immediately appeared, in Mr Elliot's wishing, after an interval of so many years, to be well received by them" (Austen, *Persuasion* 67).

Moreover, Anne does not feel contempt for the lower classes, unlike the rest of her family. When she comes to Bath, she visits Mrs. Smith, a poor widow whose deceased husband has left her in debts, in spite of her father's strong objection. Anne does not care about his opinion; she is grateful to Mrs. Smith for comforting her when she was at her worst after her mother's death. When it comes to Anne's relationship with Captain Wentworth, her kind spirit and intelligence make Captain Wentworth realize that he is in love with her even more than ever. They get married; even Lady Russell cannot do anything about it anymore. Anne finally takes her destiny in her own hands. Accordingly, she represents the women who are liberated by marriage because they find men who will adore them and do everything to make them happy.

Although she appears in a small part of the novel, Mrs. Smith is a very important character. She is a widow whose once wealthy husband left her with nothing after his death. Yet, that is not all:

She had had difficulties of every sort to contend with, and in addition to these distresses had been afflicted with a severe rheumatic fever, which, finally settling in her legs, had made her for the present a cripple. She had come to Bath on that

account, and was now in lodgings near the hot baths, living in a very humble way, unable even to afford herself the comfort of a servant, and of course almost excluded from society. (Austen, *Persuasion* 74)

Mrs. Smith is described as a woman who is very cheerful and in high spirits in spite of all difficulties that befall her (Austen 75). In that way, she proves to be a strong woman, especially by surviving on her own. She learns how to knit as a means for supporting herself. When it comes to knitting, some people see it as a “function . . . in which the product is less important than the activity itself, is as a means of discipline” (qtd. in Jones). Yet, here it is something more to it; knitting is some sort of a distraction that helps Mrs. Smith to deal with everyday life. She wants to be useful and to prove that she is capable of living on her own. At the end of the story, Captain Wentworth helps Mrs. Smith to retrieve her husband's property in the West Indies. This can be seen as a reward for all the suffering that she has had to endure. It is evident that she represents a woman of property whose strong spirit helps her to overcome all difficulties and to get what she deserves, which is her independence in the material sense. She becomes equal to all those people who ignored her while she was poor.

## Conclusion

To conclude, female characters in Jane Austen's famous novels *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* represent their heroines' unconventional attitude toward marriage and everyday life. Even though these characters vary in spirit and state of mind, there are some similarities between them. Each one of them is defined by her economic and social position. Some minor characters, such as Lydia and Mrs. Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*, represent women who see marriage as something of a great importance in their lives. Both of them are reckless in their actions, believing that everything they do will lead to a better life, either their own or the life of those who are closest to them. Other characters, such as Elizabeth, Emma, Jane, and Anne, represent women who are intelligent and independent in their actions. They do not get married because of necessity; on the contrary, they see marriage as an act of love. Each one of them is a strong woman who thinks with her own head. While Emma seems to be the most immature, she is not stupid. Charlotte Lucas represents women who are desperate to get married and who do not care about love. There is also Jane Fairfax who represents strong women who are capable of putting up with anything in the name of love. Mrs. Elliot also represents strong women who overcome different difficulties and women of property who become equal to men because of their spirit and intelligence. By focusing on social relations and the women characters, Austin's novels reveal what it was like to be a woman in early nineteenth century England. Yet, even though they depict many restrictions regarding women's life and freedom, they also pave the way to women's emancipation and liberation, portraying characters who refuse to get married in order to ensure their future and financial stability, but instead challenge social norms through their determination to marry the men that they love.

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