

Vilnius University  
Faculty of Philology  
Department of English Philology

Anna Mashanienkova

The Intersections of Family, Marriage, and Social Mobility: An Analysis of the  
Bennet Family Dynamics in Jane Austen's Novel *Pride and Prejudice*

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of BA in English Philology

Supervisor: Dr. Linara Bartkuvienė

2024

## **Acknowledgments**

My heartfelt thanks to Vilnius University for the opportunity to continue my studies during such a difficult time and for the support provided along the way. Moreover, I wish to thank the University of Potsdam in Germany for the chance to complete my Erasmus exchange and for the high-quality education provided. Furthermore, I want to express my gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Linara Bartkuvienė for all the guidance and support throughout my studies and this work. I also want to thank all the professors of the English Philology program for all the assistance and encouragement.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	
1. Introduction.....	5
2. Theoretical Framework.....	10
3. The Bennet Family. Composition and Intersections .....	16
3.1 Mr. Bennet’s Detachment and Irony.....	16
3.2 Mrs. Bennet: Anxiety and Social Expectations.....	19
4. Marriage and Social Mobility.....	23
4.1 Impact of Sisterly Relationships.....	23
4.2 Lydia’s Elopement and Family Honor.....	25
4.3 Jane and Elizabeth’s Romantic Paths .....	26
5. Conclusions.....	29
References.....	30
Summary in Lithuanian.....	33

## Abstract

The focus of this BA paper is to examine the configurations of the Bennet family in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. The analysis centers on three main themes: parent-child relationship, sisterhood, and marriage. Firstly, the impact of parental upbringing on the daughters is pointed out. Furthermore, the way the sisterhood influences both their characters and their future in social standing is highlighted. Additionally, the role of marriage as a social contract, influenced by social and financial considerations is discussed. The theoretical basis of this paper employs the ideas utilized by Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) to get a better understanding of the challenges a female writer had to overcome and which might have influenced her works. Additionally, the text by Rory Muir *Love and Marriage in the Age of Jane Austen* (2024) offered a better understanding of the circumstances of women in the Regency era and detailed exploration of the marital customs in Austen's time. The analysis reveals that there is a strong influence of parents on the future of daughters. The father's passive approach ends up in one of the daughter's elopement, while the mother almost ruins two potential marriages of her children. Additionally, some sisterly relationships complement each other and help older sisters to get a better social standing, while the middle daughter isolates herself, losing any social prospects. The two youngest daughters share a toxic relationship, and only after one leaves does the other gain a chance for a better social future. Finally, marriage is found to be a way of social mobility for women which is why so many pressures were imposed on them about it. It was also a way to secure a better future and get protection.

## 1. Introduction

Jane Austen (1775-1817) was an English writer, who was one of the first to develop the critical novel of manners. In her works, the narrative often revolves around relationships, marriages, and interactions within a certain social circle. The characters are expected to behave in a certain way depending on their social status and the author provides a detailed and satirical description of traditions and manners. Joseph Peterman (1940: 2) states that Austen had a different view on novels: ‘She saw that the true novel must be based on real-life; for even romance must be founded on real life if it hopes to be true art’. Jane Austen was also an early feminist and an important social commentator, even though you will never find her openly condemning the social system, in her works, instead you can find criticism of the laws and conventions of the system. The author left an indelible mark in the history of English literature, her works influenced more than one generation of future writers.

Furthermore, Austen’s portrayal of feminism in her novels, although different from contemporary feminism, played an important role in becoming one of the impetuses for its further development. For example, Margaret Kirkham (1983: xiii) in her work *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* states that Austen believed that reason is a better guide than feeling, it was important for her to show that ‘<...women were no less capable of rational judgment than men’. The author continues by saying ‘the essential claim of Enlightenment feminism was that women, not having been denied powers of reason, must have the moral status appropriate to “rational beings” formed in the image of a rational God’ (Ibid: 4). The progressive ideas in Austen’s era are commonplace today, illustrating the developing nature of her feminism relative to contemporary standards. This evolution of Austen’s feminism also correlates with her innovative use of free indirect speech in her novels consistently (Pascal, 1977: 34). ‘Free Indirect Speech is a form of narration written in the third person while maintaining some essential elements of a first-person narrator’ by using this type of speech the author can describe the inner thoughts and emotions of the character while maintaining some distance (White, 2020). The cognitive psychologist Keith Oatley (2011:148, 114) states that by using this tool Austen provides a ‘<...cue to the reader to imagine himself or herself into the minds...>’ of her characters, encouraging ‘<...better abilities in empathy and theory of mind...>’. Angus Fletcher and Mike Benveniste (2013: 3) see Austen’s free indirect speech as an ethical tool. They say that with her novels the author turned free indirect speech ‘<... into a staple of English fiction...>’.

Besides, as it was mentioned, Jane Austen never criticized the social system directly, and as Marvin Mudrick (1953) explained, distance was one of the conditions for Austen’s writing. In this distance, she used irony as a tool to criticize the system and ‘avoid personal involvement’ (Mudrick,



happiness in marriage ‘but it [the novel] is also a remarkable leap into a new mood and a new way of looking at England’.

Lastly, *Susan* which became *Northanger Abbey* was published posthumously in 1817. It is a satire of the Gothic novel. Marilyn Butler (2011: xii-xiii) notes that the novel was finished in 1803 but was published only in 1817 and had not undergone the author’s final revision. Butler (Ibid: xvi) describes the novel as ‘<...an ambitious, innovative piece of work, quizzically intellectual about fiction itself’. Toby R. Benis (2015: 189-190) summarizes the novel by saying that it ties identity uncertainty to the disorientation in England’s expanding towns.

The novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) was originally published anonymously in three volumes. The main character is Elizabeth, the second child in the Bennet family, which consists of five girls. The exposition of the work is the arrival of the rich bachelor Mr. Bingley. He throws a ball and remains enchanted by Elizabeth’s older sister Jane. At the ball, we also meet Darcy, a bachelor twice as rich as Mr. Bingley, but extremely unpleasant, as decided by all the guests at the ball. Elizabeth disliked him even more because she heard him talking about her and he stated that she was not pretty enough to tempt him (Austen, 2003: 14). The feelings between the elder Bennet and Mr. Bingley grow, but at some point, he suddenly leaves Meryton with the company and has no plans to return. Jane is saddened by this but tries to live as if nothing happened, although Elizabeth knows that her sister is suffering. While one couple was developing real feelings, Elizabeth received a marriage proposal from her cousin, Mr. Collins. The feelings of this couple are built on the benefits that both parties receive, and of course, Elizabeth does not agree with this. Mr. Collins was not too heartbroken or upset, so he quickly found a new wife, Elizabeth’s friend. Also, the Bennet family meets the military officer Mr. Wickham, a very nice young man who makes many women fall in love with him. Elizabeth likes him too and when Mr. Wickham tells how Darcy ruined his life, she easily believes it. A few months later, the older sister goes to London to visit her relatives, and Elizabeth goes to visit her newlywed friend. There she accidentally meets Darcy and his cousin Mr. Fitzwilliam. He tells her the story of how Darcy recently saved his friend from an unwanted marriage and Elizabeth realizes that Darcy is the reason why Bingley and company left Meryton. Suddenly, after the service in the church, she meets Darcy and he confesses his feelings and asks for her hand to marry. It becomes the turning point in the novel. Considering all the stories about him and her sister’s broken heart, she rejects him and blames him for the misfortunes he has brought to other people. The next day, Darcy brings Elizabeth a letter explaining his actions and debunking Mr. Wickham’s deceptions. The letter partially changes her opinion of him, but when Elizabeth meets Darcy with her aunt and uncle several months later and sees how kind he is to them and her, it affects her even more. Suddenly, she receives bad news that her sister Lydia has run away with Mr.

Wickham. She is in despair, but upon returning home she learns that they have been found and they are to be married. When the young couple returns home and Lydia reveals that it was Darcy who found them and arranged their wedding, Elizabeth realizes that all her prejudices against him were wrong. The last straw is when Darcy's aunt and a very impudent Lady Catherine de Bourgh bursts into the Bennet family and asks Elizabeth for a promise that she will never marry Darcy. Later, Elizabeth meets Darcy, he asks for her hand to marry and she accepts it.

*First Impressions* was the name of the first draft of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Judith Newton (1981: 62) refers to the feminism in the novel and argues that Elizabeth is seen as '<...an unmarried middle-class woman without a fortune...>' as '<...the most authentically powerful figure in the novel...>'. Elizabeth is not a revolutionary character as she is not fighting the whole institute of marriage rather, she finds that through the love union, she can find equality inside the marriage. Another critic Claudia Johnson (1988: xxiii) also explores feminism in the novel and highlights that Austen aimed to show women as capable of reason and responsible for their choices. A heroine such as Elizabeth Bennet, her rationality and responsibility for her choices is a truly radical concept back then (Ibid: xxiii). In 2019 BBC News listed Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* on its list of the 100 most influential novels that shaped our world. Meanwhile, earlier critics had different opinions on the novel. For example, after reading this book Sir Walter Scott reflected on Austen's understanding of human relationships and '<...the peculiar tact with which she presents characters that the reader cannot fail to recognize...>' (Brimley, 2009: 305). However, some other nineteenth-century critics were less favorable. Brontë (1848) criticized the novel for its confined settings, and Twain (2009: 177) wrote 'Everytime I read *Pride and Prejudice* I want to dig [Austen] up and beat her over the skull with her own shin-bone'. It was only later that Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* received the recognition merits.

In her novel, Austen brings up many important topics, but the one that interested me the most is the intersections of the Bennet family. To analyze it, I will be looking at the family configurations. The configurational perspective will help to look at families as not just their blood relationship but also analyze patterns of emotional, cognitive, and practical interdependencies among large numbers of family members (Widmer, 2010: 8). Due to the limitation and scope of my thesis, I will not be able to take all the family configurations in *Pride and Prejudice*, which is why I will focus only on parent-child relationships and sisterhood. These family relationships undoubtedly influence the marriage prospects of the family members, making it essential to analyze them as well. The theme of marriage will also help me inspect the social mobility in Bennet's family. Anthony Heath, and Yaojun Li (2023: 3) describe social mobility as '<...movement in social space, more specifically as movement between different positions in a society's system of social stratification'. Due to the limit of my undergraduate

work, I cannot analyze all the families such as Bingley, Fitzwilliam, Collins, and Gardiner. However, these families will appear in my work in the context of comparison with the main Bennet family.

My thesis aims to analyze the parenthood failure and absence of authority inside the family. Moreover, the novel shows the strong bond between sisters and the importance of sisterhood. In my work, I will focus on how the sisterhood could be affected by male-dominant society, and how with the help of the sisterhood women could overcome difficulties in life, marry happily, and move social ranks despite being brought up in an unhappy marriage. To do so I will draw on the work by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), which will help me understand the challenges under which Jane Austen was writing her works and the limitations she had to fit her works in the male-dominated society. Additionally, the text by Rory Muir *Love and Marriage in the Age of Jane Austen* (2024) will be used to understand the circumstances of society in the Regency era. Also, it will help to discover the theme of marriage as well as the steps that lead to it.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In this part of the BA paper key ideas developed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) will be discussed as they will be employed in the analysis part afterward. Firstly, the authors' discussion of the place of women in literature will be pointed out. Furthermore, the limitations imposed on women's ability to write will be reviewed, drawing parallels to Jane Austen's exploration of gender dynamics and societal expectations. This resonates deeply with the broader feminist critique put forth by Gilbert and Gubar. Additionally, the text by Rory Muir *Love and Marriage in the Age of Jane Austen* (2024) will also be analyzed to provide insight into the norms and practices of courtship and marriage during Austen's time. The text aligns with the principles of New Historicism. New Historicism is a literary theory that 'has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics' (Veese, 1989: ix). It 'seeks less limiting means to expose the manifold ways culture and society affect each other' (Ibid: xii). This will enhance the contextual understanding of the circumstances in which Austen wrote, offering insights into the social pressures that shaped the romantic decisions in her works.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979: 3) describe the Victorian era from a feminist perspective. They start by asking a question 'Is a pen a metaphorical penis?'. They introduce the notion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that 'male sexuality, in other words, is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power' (Ibid: 4). This patriarchal theory left no place for women in literature. 'If male sexuality is integrally associated with the assertive presence of literary power, female sexuality is associated with the absence of such power, with the idea-expressed' (Ibid: 8). Women have been simply reduced to be property, character, or image locked in patriarchal limitations. In this misogynistic approach, it means that if a woman is generated by a man she is his property, and '<...if a woman is man's property then he must have authored her, just as surely as they tell us that if he authored her she must be his property' (Ibid: 13). For women who felt that they could be more than just man's property arose a psychological problem of escaping this authority and being able to take a pen to write on their own. Another reason for the female's hesitation for writing was 'authored by a male God and by a godlike male, killed into a "perfect" image of herself, the female writer's self-contemplation may be said to have begun with a searching glance into the mirror of the male-inscribed literary text' (Ibid: 15). To start the journey of writing the woman must first go

*(...)through the looking glass toward literary autonomy, however, she must come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass, with, that is, those mythic masks male artists have fastened over her human face both to lessen their dread of her "inconstancy" and—by*

*identifying her with the “eternal type” they have themselves invented to possess her more thoroughly. (Gilbert&Gubar, 1979:17)*

The metaphor of the mirror is particularly striking. It highlights the initial phase of self-awareness and reflection women needed to undergo. This reflection is not totally introspective as it is heavily influenced by male perspectives. The mirror symbolizes the patriarchal literary tradition in which women see themselves as men have portrayed them, leading to a distorted self-image. Some female authors such as Austen and Dickinson managed to work seriously in a male-devised genre. The authors state that by reading them two striking facts can be noticed: ‘First, an extraordinary number of literary women either eschewed or grew beyond both female “modesty” and male mimicry’ (Ibid: 72). Female experiences play the main role in the text and is approached from a female perspective (Ibid: 72). ‘Second, the writing of these women often seems “odd” in relation to the predominantly male literary history defined by the standards of what we have called patriarchal poetics’ (Ibid: 72). The authors also suggest that women from Jane Austen and Mary Shelley to Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson managed to produce works which conceal deeper levels of meaning because they are less socially acceptable. ‘Thus these authors managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards’ (Ibid: 73). Interestingly, ‘even the most apparently conservative and decorous women writers obsessively create fiercely independent characters who seek to destroy all the patriarchal structures which both their authors and their authors’ submissive heroines seem to accept as inevitable’ (Ibid: 77-78). By doing this the authors can project their rage and anxiety in these characters. In the 19th century, the concept of the *madwoman* started to appear more and more in the female works. The madwoman is fiercely independent and tries to destroy all patriarchal standards. Through the course of a novel or a poem such a character is usually punished for such behavior. Such a character is different from a typical antagonist as a *madwoman* is usually a dramatized image of the author and her anxiety and rage (Ibid: 77-78).

The authors continue by talking about Jane Austen and her art. They suggest that she was very modest about her works and put herself into limitations calling her art an accomplishment ‘by a lady’ (Ibid: 108). Gilbert and Gubar (108) stated that ‘...Austen attempted through self-imposed novelistic limitations to define a secure place, even as she seemed to admit the impossibility of actually inhabiting such a small space with any degree of comfort’. It underscores the vulnerability of women in the Regency era, who had to navigate a world that offered limited opportunities for independence and self-expression. These limitations are what critics both praised and blamed. ‘...in other words, Austen was placed in the double bind she would so convincingly dramatize in her novels, for when not rejected as artificial and convention-bound, she was condemned as natural and therefore a writer

almost in spite of herself' (Gilbert&Gubar, 1979: 110). Austen became a symbol of culture, but she managed to criticize this culture. However, she was well aware from the beginning of her tight place as a woman in the patriarchal world. In her early works, Austen ridicules dangerously falsifying expectations, but also reveals her '<...awareness that such conventions have inalterably shaped women's lives' (Ibid: 114). The authors also mention how Austen ridicules different expectations towards love stories:

*Such novelistic clichés as love at first sight, the primacy of passion over all other emotions and/ or duties, the chivalric exploits of the hero, the vulnerable sensitivity of the heroine, the lovers" proclaimed indifference to financial considerations, and the cruel crudity of parents are all shown to be at best improbable; at worst they are shown to provide manipulative roles and hypocritical jargon which mask materialistic and libidinal egoism. (Gilbert&Gubar, 1979: 115)*

It is also mentioned that Jane Austen was aware of the conventions she inherited, but she chose to show her disagreement with them through parody, therefore to stay rather ambiguous. Additionally, the authors add that Austen draws attention to ineffective mothers whose fault is that children cannot find the inner resources needed for a satisfying life inside a family. As a result, these figuratively motherless daughters in Jane Austen novels need to look to men for security and escape home. Furthermore, Austen is well aware of male superiority and she often mentions it in terms of economic, social, and political power and she dramatizes how women's fates depend on gaining recognition and protection from men. 'All the heroines who reject inadequate fathers are engaged in a search for better, more sensitive men who are, nevertheless, still the representatives of authority' (Ibid: 154). For Austen, the happy ending in the novel is when the heroine finds an older and wiser man who can be her teacher and advisor and give her *shelter* from her parents and outside of the world. In her novels, we can see these *shelters* at Henry Tilney's Woodston, Delaford, Pemberley, Donwell, and Thorson Lacy (Ibid: 154). 'Whereas becoming a man means proving or testing oneself or earning a vocation, becoming a woman means relinquishing achievement and accommodating oneself to men and the spaces they provide' (Ibid: 154). Even though it can be seen that even the most rebellious women find their happy endings in being submissive we can see Austen herself performing under this cover story. As Virginia Woolf (1925)said Austen always stimulates her readers 'to supply what is not there'. Gilbert and Gubar propose that Austen was well aware of how she needed to manage her ladylike submission and be a masculine writer at the same time. For this reason, she dramatizes her dilemma of being both a writer and a woman, but also her heroines '<...caught in the contradiction between their status as human beings and their vocation females' (Ibid: 155).

Furthermore, the work by Rory Muir *Love and Marriage in the Age of Jane Austen* (2024) will be reviewed. The first theme the author touches upon is the moment when future lovers first meet. For young women, the transition from a child to a woman was usually happening at the age of fifteen/sixteen. (Muir, 2024: 18-19) ‘Once a young woman made her debut into society she was regarded as a finished article (...) and she was as likely to marry at eighteen as at twenty-two or any other age’ (Ibid: 22). But men aged eighteen were considered rather too young for marriage. First, they needed to establish themselves and get the income to be able to provide for a family. Most men ‘<...could not responsibly contemplate marriage until they had sufficiently advanced in their profession to have an income that could support a wife and family’(Ibid: 22). ‘They were most unlikely to reach this point until they were in their mid-twenties at the very earliest: they were frequently much older’ (Ibid: 22-23). There were many different ways to meet a future spouse: at home through the friends or associates of your parents in town, friends and relatives could visit each other with a potential partner, the friends of siblings might have visited, a total stranger could come to the town to look for a wife, men who were a part of the army could come to the town together with his district. There were also many activities through which the future couple could meet. One of these activities was balls, private ones were more desirable than public ones in order not to fall in love with a person of unsuitable background. As age played a very important role, particularly for women, if she was in the marriage market in her middle or late twenties ‘she might become anxious at a lack of suitors and look to the future with apprehension’ (Ibid: 29). For this reason many single women of that age were ready to accept any marriage proposal. There were many other reasons for anxiety for example their financial state. As married women relied on their husbands for money, spinsters did not have such a possibility. ‘Most spinsters who continued to live with their family were less well off financially than their nearest male relative, and many – although not all – must have felt that they were to some extent subordinate to him’(Ibid: 152). Meanwhile, men did not have such pressure to marry early as their careers were more important during their youth. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were still couples who got married through an arranged marriage. ‘Such orchestrated marriages seem to have been most common in the higher ranks of the aristocracy, and, by and large, they do not appear to have produced much happiness or fidelity’ (Ibid: 32). Closer to the 19<sup>th</sup> century such type of marriages were becoming less popular as marriage based on love was becoming more desirable. ‘For both men and women the ideal marriage encompassed both romantic love and affection, together with respect, esteem and companionship’(Ibid: 33). Muir continues exploring the theme of attraction. ‘<...most courtships fed on a growing confidence in reciprocal admiration and attraction, young ladies were meant to be very cautious in signalling their interest, and certainly never take the initiative’(Ibid: 40). Women needed to be careful not to show feelings but also not to be very restricted. Men were the ones who were making the moves and who were expected to show attraction

openly (Muir, 2024: 40). ‘Personal qualities and mutual attraction were not all that counted in making a marriage: the other party had to be “suitable”’ (Ibid: 42). The most important criteria for suitability were money and social status. Even though aristocrats had a tendency to marry each other, there were many cases when one of the partners was less financially secure. ‘<...purely mercenary marriages were generally viewed with disapproval, and almost any marriage where there was a very marked disparity of fortune or social position might be viewed with some skepticism...>’ (Ibid: 44). However, to ignore the financial status completely would be foolish as having a big family without enough income would be seen as ‘irresponsible and reckless’ (Ibid: 44). If potential spouses suited each other in terms of money and social status then the next important criteria was their age. A husband should have been older than his wife or not too much younger. Courtship is the next theme explored by Muir. There have been cases when proposals have been made very quickly after the first meeting but mostly it was considered to be irresponsible and couples needed to take some time to get to know each other. However, there were also rules that prevented couples from getting to know each other well, for example at the ball woman was not supposed to dance with one gentleman more than twice (Ibid: 56). Even though, there were many other ways of interaction and ‘<...a gentleman with easy manners could pay a young woman many socially acceptable attentions: placing a shawl round her shoulders, handing her into a carriage and the like, that one who was more awkward might easily miss’ (Ibid: 56). Getting to know the character traits was very important and Muir highlights that for Austen the very important aspect of a happy marriage was mutual respect (Ibid: 61). Once all the criteria suited each party a man needed to take courage to propose. The theme of the proposal is the next discussed by Muir. To make a proposal a man had several rules and conventions to follow. Quiet and privacy were desirable for a marriage talk but a woman could not be left unchaperoned alone with the man unless he had already got a blessing from her parents. Other suitable places for proposal were at home, during walking, or in the corner at the ball. Some men also chose to express their feelings and offer marriage in the letter. After that woman was the one to decide whether to accept, reject, or something in between. Mostly proposals were welcomed as they were the result of some previous flirting or interaction but some were made because of a man’s will to marry for status rather than for love. Such types of marriage when the man’s attraction was in question were mostly unwelcome. Additionally, not all the proposals followed by flirting were always accepted and in that case, men needed to go through the path of acceptance or rejection. ‘Wherever possible the disappointed suitor would take his leave and keep away from the former object of his attachment, at least until time had a chance to lessen the embarrassment, and ease the wounded feelings...>’ (Ibid: 88). Other men could accept it with sorrow, anger, or if the man was very romantic he could even commit a suicide that is why women tried to be very careful with the words used for rejection. Even though, the most common reaction was continuing to love the object of desire and hoping for a change

of circumstances for a second or third proposal (Muir, 2024: 88). Even after accepting a marriage offer women still had a possibility of breaking. Jane Austen did that herself with Harris Bigg-Wither after she accepted a marriage proposal and withdrew her consent the following morning. After the acceptance women could also impose some conditions, the most common was getting acceptance from the parents but there could be some additional. Most parents followed the choice of their daughters 'fathers in particular were thought to be susceptible to the persuasion of their daughters, unable or unwilling to withstand tearful pleas and domestic scenes - and perhaps also aware that if they refused their permission, their daughter and her lover might elope to Scotland' (Ibid: 92). One more there regarding marriage which is mentioned by Muir is elopement. The word elopement had multiple meanings at that time for example 'it might refer to a young couple running away together in order to get married without the consent of one or both sets of parents; but it might also refer to a married woman going off with a lover and even, although less commonly, to a debtor escaping his creditors or an apprentice leaving his master' (Ibid: 122). Most parents accepted this type of marriage if it was too late and even forgave their child. Muir also mentions that not all elopements ended in marriage and such a behavior was considered to be very foolish. Young women from a less privileged background were more commonly trapped in this as they have been seduced and then abandoned. Another theme that interested me in Muir's work is children. The responsibility of taking care of children mostly fell on mothers with the additional help from maids or servants. 'Most mothers appear to have been fully engaged, physically, emotionally and intellectually, with their children. Fathers varied more in the way they related to their offspring' (Ibid: 242). Whether children were boys or girls they were loved but there were cases when parents desired to have an heir. 'Good parents treated each child as an individual, recognising their strengths and weaknesses and, in the case of the boys, seeking to find a career that would suit them, rather than forcing them into a predetermined path' (Ibid: 244).

To conclude, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's exploration of a woman as a writer in the Victorian era and the patriarchal obstacles that may have affected the writing will be useful for the next part of the BA paper. Rory Muir's work provides a detailed exploration of the social norms and customs of marriage during Austen's time. By examining aspects such as courtship, suitability criteria, and the complexities of marriage proposals, Muir's work enhances the understanding of the social context in which Austen's characters navigate their romantic relationship. The analysis will be guided through the intellectual tools discussed in the theoretical framework.

### 3. The Bennet Family: Composition and Intersections

The following section of this BA thesis will analyze the intersections of Bennet's family as well as family interaction in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. The main focus is going to be the older generation of Bennets Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. The father's lack of parenthood and moral detachment will be discussed. His vices will be reviewed. To sum up Mr. Bennet's character his positive traits will be emphasized too. Additionally, I will show that both parents are very complex characters, they are not perfect but they are also not the worst ones. For this reason, Mrs. Bennet's positive and negative traits will be highlighted. Moreover, in these two characters, it can be seen that they are shown from a female perspective, and as a result, there are some limitations and some traits in character that go against the patriarchal rules of the 19<sup>th</sup> century about which Sandra Gilbert Susan Gubar were talking in their work.

#### 3.1 Mr. Bennet's Detachment and Irony

Mr. Bennet is a complex character in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, whose intelligence and sarcasm mask his failures as a father and husband. This part of the analysis will focus on Mr. Bennet's character, his relationship, and his role within the family using critical perspectives to point out the nuances of his personality.

To start with, I will analyze Mr. Bennet's relationship with his wife as many reasons for his behavior are coming from the unhappiness of the marriage. Mr. Bennet is an intelligent but lazy man, who chooses to spend most of his time in the library as if hiding from the world to escape his family's demands. He is the father of five daughters and the only man in the family. Sir Walter Scott described him as '<...father whose good abilities lay hid under such a load of indolence and insensibility, that he had become contented to make the foibles and follies of his wife and daughters the subject of dry and humorous sarcasm, rather than of admonition, or restraint' (Williams, 1968: 165). The first time he appears in the novel he is doing what brings him a lot of joy – making fun of his wife. Mr. Bennet refused to do what his wife asked him but in fact, he had already had in mind to do it before. Mr. Bennet is described to be '<...so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character' (Austen, 2003:3). His amusement of making fun of his wife is shown as a certain coping mechanism with her persistent nagging. Moreover, it is proof of his egoism and passivity as well as his failure in married life. Unfortunately for Mr. Bennet, he could not achieve a happy marriage and lost respect not only for his wife but also for himself. Mr. Bennet's marital unhappiness left him without any will to fulfill his duties as a father. Their marriage can be characterized by significant differences in temperament and intellect which lead to many misunderstandings between them. While

Mr. Bennet is intelligent, sarcastic, and often passive, Mrs. Bennet is more concerned with social standing and her daughters' future. His passive approach can be seen throughout the novel. He does not provide a partnership relationship for his wife, instead, he creates a mockery environment. Mr. Bennet's sarcasm provides him with a sense of superiority but it also helps him to distance himself. Mr. Bennet's sarcasm often targets the institution of marriage and the societal expectations surrounding it. His dry remarks about Mr. Collins and the desperation of marriage prospects for his daughters criticize the economic and social pressures that dictated marriage choices, rather than personal affection. This aligns with Gilbert and Gubar's exploration of the constraints imposed on women, as well as Muir's detailed analysis of marriage as a social contract heavily influenced by economic and status considerations. Moreover, Mr. Bennet's retreat into his library is a symbolic act of withdrawal from social expectations. This detachment can be seen as a form of passive resistance against the expectations of his role as a father. This also illustrates how little space men who were critical of the social norms had, and how it parallels with the limited literary spaces available to female writers. Gilbert and Gubar (1979: 108) mentioned that '<... Austen attempted through self-imposed novelistic limitations to define a secure place even as she seemed to admit the impossibility of actually inhabiting such a small space with any degree of comfort'...>. Not being able to criticize the social norms through Mr. Bennet's character is this impossible 'secure place' for Austen.

The dysfunctional relationship between parents also badly influences the dynamics of the family in terms of discipline and emotional support. Mr. Bennet's passivity forces Mrs. Bennet to take a more dominant approach, which often results in some bad decisions, such as when she refuses to provide a carriage for Jane to visit Bingleys and she falls ill. This imbalance leaves daughters without a consistent parental presence, which results in them being very vulnerable in society. Additionally, it is important to mention how Gilbert and Gubar's work helps to see Mr. Bennet's character. It was mentioned that Jane Austen ironized the cliché of parents being presented either as the best ones or the manipulative and the worst ones. Mr. Bennet is a very complex character through whom Austen managed to conform and subvert patriarchal literary standards (Gilbert&Gubar, 1979: 73). Knowing the limitations Austen could purposely skip some parts for readers to make up for what is missing (Woolf, 1925). That is why such assumptions of subverting literary standards are possible. Mr. Bennet acts as a man of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and shows his superiority in the independence of thought. At the same time, he allows his wife to make decisions regarding his daughters and is not always ready to take authority.

In the next part of analyzing Mr. Bennet's character, I would like to point out his parenting style. It can be seen that many decisions regarding his daughters are made by his wife without his consent or disapproval. This is a bad side of Mr. Bennet but also Jane Austen's subverting of patriarchal literary standards as the majority of women back then were simply reduced to be a

‘property’, ‘<...if a woman is man’s property then he must have authored her, just as surely as they tell us that if he authored her she must be his property’ (Gilbert&Gubar, 1979: 17). Women did not have so much authority to make such decisions on their own. Mr. Bennet’s passive approach to parenting and it may be seen in his reluctance to participate in the decision regarding his daughters’ well-being. He is indifferent to the authority he has as a man in the family and lets his wife decide. Mr. Bennet does not care how these decisions may affect the well-being of his daughters. Additionally, Mr. Bennet’s interactions with his daughters at the Netherfield’s ball, particularly his mockery of Mary as he said ‘that will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long enough. Let the other young ladies have time to exhibit’ (Austen, 2003: 71). This displays once again his detachment and passivity. The other two daughters Lydia and Kitty spent the evening flirting and running around soldiers. There is no indication that Mr. Bennet witnessed their behavior, nor is there any mention of him attempting to intervene. Although, these episodes show once again Mr. Bennet’s neglect of responsibilities. Mr. Bennet’s inability to assert authority makes his daughters undisciplined not just at home but also in society. Once again it shows not a typical man for a Regency era and portrays a man who is not always ready to acknowledge authority.

The next big failure of Mr. Bennet was letting Lydia travel to Brighton with Colonel and Mrs. Forster despite Elizabeth’s explanation of why Lydia should not be allowed to go. Interestingly, even though many important decisions regarding Mr. Bennet’s daughters were made by Mrs. Bennet as the one with the carriage for example this one was dependent on the answer of the father and he was the one to decide. Perhaps, this was one of the limitations that Austen faced as she could not create a male character who completely did not show his authority in making decisions towards his daughters. Even though this decision has brought a lot of misfortunes to the family. Mr. Bennet showed a failure in disciplining and guiding his daughter which ended up as a big mistake that almost ruined the family's reputation after he tried to do it so late. His traditional role of a father as a moral authority figure has already been long lost. While describing Lydia’s character Elizabeth mentions that ‘our importance, our respectability in the world must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia’s character’(Austen, 2003: 161) and the fact that before nobody paid enough attention to Lydia’s vices is also the fault of Mr. Bennet shared with Mrs. Bennet. Another bad aspect of Mr. Bennet is that he pays more attention to his two eldest daughters and makes them feel his love more. At the same time, he can make fun of the smaller ones. Talking to Elizabeth he once said ‘Do not make yourself uneasy, my love. Wherever you and Jane are known you must be respected and valued; and you will not appear to less advantage for having a couple of—or I may say, three—very silly sisters’ (Austen, 2003: 161). Mocking your own children due to their lack of etiquette, which is ultimately the reflection of their upbringing – thus, a fault of Mr. Bennet, is a very irresponsible and immature act.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning Mr. Bennet's financial planning. It was a man who was responsible for managing a state and income and as a result, it is known that his five daughters did not have the dowry they could boast with. Meanwhile, Mrs. Bennet's father was an ordinary attorney in Meryton and he managed to leave four thousand pounds for his daughter all of this money became a shared dowry of her daughters and nothing was added by their father through the years. In traditional gender roles, fathers were expected not just to show authority but also to protect and provide. In failing to assert authority Mr. Bennet has also failed to protect his family. In the traditional gender roles man was supposed to be a teacher and a guide but as it can be seen Mr. Bennet failed in both. For this reason, his daughters needed to find this protection in other men. The lack of intervention and guidance has made his family very vulnerable in public as well as undermined their well-being.

It was mentioned that Jane Austen ironized clichés of parents being the best or worst ones. That is why it is important to mention some positive traits of Mr. Bennet. Despite many of his flaws, there are moments when he shows genuine care for his daughters, particularly Elizabeth and Jane. It is hard for me to say whether he loves his younger daughters but he pays attention to them as he knows their strengths and weaknesses. Mr. Bennet has also shown his care for Elizabeth in defending her from the unwanted marriage with Mr. Collins in front of her mother. He was the reason why Mrs. Bennet could not influence Elizabeth anymore. Furthermore, Mr. Bennet acted as a father after taking responsibility for Lydia's runaway. He was the one who immediately went to look for her in London, felt ashamed getting help from Mr. Gardiner and most importantly blamed himself for his daughter's runaway. He said to Elizabeth 'Who should suffer but myself? It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it' (Ibid: 207). At the point of such a failure, he is not afraid to take responsibility for his actions. Moreover, this was one of the turning points for him to realize the consequences of his passive upbringing.

To conclude, Mr. Bennet is a complex character who uses his wit to cope with and criticize the norms of his time, especially around marriage and the role of a father. His approach shows the challenges and flaws of the social and family expectations of the Regency era. Mr. Bennet is a character who does not follow the patriarchal standards of the time and is very multi-dimensional. Through this character, Jane Austen managed to criticize the limitations of the patriarchal authority. Mr. Bennet is not a traditional perfect strong father figure. He is a father with many vices who goes through the way of self-discovery and who pays for the mistakes he made as a father. His journey in the novel shows not only his personal growth but also sheds light on the broader social values and pressures of his era.

### **3.2 Mrs. Bennet: Anxiety and Social Expectations**

Mrs. Bennet is a mother of five daughters, she is described to be '<... a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper' (Austen, 2003: 3). From the beginning of the

novel the reader can understand that the goal of Mrs. Bennet's life is for her daughters to marry well. Her other goal and one of her favorite pastimes is gossiping: 'The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news' (Ibid: 3). Moreover, Mrs. Bennet was a very beautiful woman when she was young and it was the first thing that attracted Mr. Bennet to her. Nowadays, she believes that all the beauty her daughters inherited from her 'I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now' (Austen, 2003: 2). Throughout the novel, Mrs. Bennet numerous mentions her 'poor nerves'. She seems to use it as a shield from Mr. Bennet's mocking of her or the reason not to do anything while the majority of her family is looking for her daughter who run away. To prove that Mrs. Bennet is also a very complex character who is not the best parent nor the worst one, I will point out her positive and negative traits.

Looking at her from a positive perspective I would say that she is determined. She genuinely wants her daughters to marry well and she wants to achieve it no matter what. Mrs. Bennet has a very strong sense of duty, she is a very active matchmaker for her daughters. Even though it may seem as if it is overparenting and too much caring the realities of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were mentioned above it does seem unreasonable to wish your daughter an independent life with enough of everything to survive. As it was mentioned by Rory Muir (2024: 22), in the Regency era, men were the ones who were responsible '<...to have an income that could support a wife and family' and not the other way. Mrs. Bennet as a woman herself could not know less how important men are in women's lives. She knew that once her daughters marry the responsibility for them would be on their husbands. Also, Mrs. Bennet is very supportive and forgiving, she was the first one to forgive Lydia for her running away and was the happiest person in the family for her marriage. Even though, the reason for such happiness is more about the fact that from the moment of marriage, Mrs. Bennet should stop thinking about who is going to provide for her daughter if her husband dies tomorrow. That is why, she was the one who supported her daughter's not-the-best marriage while the rest of the house was not so much happy with that union.

Even though it is important to mention Mrs. Bennet's bad sides, she is badly mannered and lacks tact. She was one of the reasons why Mr. Darcy took away Mr. Bingley as during the ball she was boasting of her eldest daughter's marriage while the proposal had not even happened yet. She was also very fond of insulting people in front of them as it happened with Mr. Darcy or behind their backs at home. After coming from the first ball she described Mr. Darcy as 'he is a most disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing. So high and so conceited that there was no enduring him!' (Austen, 2003: 8). After Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins's proposal, it can be seen that Mrs. Bennet is manipulative. She insists on Lizzy changing her mind and says 'yes, or I will never see her again'(Ibid: 79). Mrs. Bennet is also self-centered, in marrying all of her daughters she also sees

personal validation and social recognition, rather than the happiness of her daughters. In this case, she is an example of a parent who takes ‘manipulative roles and hypocritical jargon which mask materialistic and libidinal egoism’ (Gilbert&Gubar, 1979: 115). Jane Sturrock (2013: 25) says that ‘<...at various points in the novel it looked as if two of those daughters would remain unhappily unmarried and the third end up as a prostitute - largely because of their mother's over-eagerness’. Finally, despite all of Mrs. Bennet’s tries to help her daughters, she is ineffective as a mother. She does not provide her children with proper guidance, emotional support, and stability. She makes them more vulnerable to society and does not prepare them for marriage. Gilbert and Gubar(1979: 24) mentioned that the woman should be ‘<...her husband’s holy refuge from the blood...>’ and as it can be seen Mrs. Bennet has failed with this. As it has been mentioned in the previous part of my work Mrs. Bennet was one more reason why Mr. Bennet was looking for holy refuge and it was not near his wife, but rather as far as possible from her. It is also hard to call Mrs. Bennet man-pleasing as the majority of men in the novel are more disappointed with her than satisfied starting from Mr. Bennet to Mr. Darcy.

Overall, Mrs. Bennet can be manipulative, which masks her egoism and self-recognition, but she may also be a loving mother. She was one of the reasons why her two older daughters almost lost their future husbands but until the end of the novel, it is clear that her actions do not influence the outcome and the daughters find their happiness despite her actions. There is no doubt that she is a very complex character and many of her bad traits come from the anxiety of being a woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this character, Jane Austen showed many of her personal concerns as many challenges that women needed to face are introduced to the reader through Mrs. Bennet. She is a character who constantly reminds about them throughout the novel.

To get deeper into the character of Mrs. Bennet I want to point out one of the reasons which makes her act in a certain way and it is anxiety for her daughters as women in a male-dominated society. She was well aware that to secure a good life her children should have used all the other ways than hoping that potential husbands would be attracted by their dowries.

Moreover, Mrs. Bennet knows that only a husband with good fortune can secure not just one daughter’s well-being but the whole family as the closest male heir to inherit their state was Mr. Collins. The gentleman himself reasons the marriage with one of the Bennet daughters by saying ‘<...as I am, to inherit this estate after the death of your honoured father (who, however, may live many years longer), I could not satisfy myself without resolving to choose a wife from among his daughters, that the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the melancholy event takes place...>’ (Austem, 2003: 75-76). Additionally, Mrs. Bennet realizes that marriage is a way of social

mobility for women and that is what she tries to achieve for her daughters. Although all of these reasons are not a secret to society and they are well aware of that so when Mr. Collins is proposing to Elizabeth he says:

*To fortune I am perfectly indifferent, and shall make no demand of that nature on your father, since I am well aware that it could not be complied with; and that one thousand pounds in the four per cents, which will not be yours till after your mother's decease, is all that you may ever be entitled to. On that head, therefore, I shall be uniformly silent; and you may assure yourself that no ungenerous reproach shall ever pass my lips when we are married. (Austen, 2003: 76).*

Mr. Collins is an exception as for the majority of people the dowry was important if not a necessity. Most probably his position as a clergyman influenced his mindset on this but still, he mentions the role of dowry as it can be seen in the quote above. Moreover, after Mrs. Bennet understands there is no way her daughter would agree to Mr. Collins's marriage proposal she says: 'But I tell you, Miss Lizzy—if you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer of marriage in this way, you will never get a husband at all—and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead' (Austen, 2003: 80). In this quote Mrs. Bennet's anxiety can be seen and she is sharing it to her daughter to remember on whom she depends in the male-dominated society. Gilbert and Gubar (1979: 154) mentioned in their work how Jane Austen was aware of male superiority and knew that women's fates depended on the recognition and protection of men. This mindset can be seen in Mrs. Bennet's actions. Same as for Austen Mrs. Bennet sees a happy ending for her daughters in finding a man whose house can be a *shelter* from outside of the world and who can protect her from any financial troubles.

To conclude, Mrs. Bennet sees marriage for her daughters as a way to protect themselves and secure a better life not just for themselves but for the whole family. Moreover, it is a chance to move into social classes and get a better position in society. The marriage is a tool to find happiness and peace. That is why the importance of marriage in the novel can not be overlooked and the anxiety Mrs. Bennet has about it is validated. In the next part of my thesis, I will go deeper into the theme of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* and the types of it in the novel.

#### **4. Marriage and Social Mobility**

In this part of my BA thesis, I will analyze the marriage prospects and social mobility of the Bennet sisters. The way their relationship with each other influences their characters and social standings will be discussed. Additionally, the consequences of Lydia's scandalous elopement will be analyzed, contrasted it with the more conventional courtships of Jane and Elizabeth, and how these personal narratives reflect broader societal critiques. Each sister's story will be reviewed as it offers unique insights into the challenges and expectations faced by women of their time. It also shows Austen's critical perspective on the social and economic factors that shape their lives and relationships.

##### **4.1 Impact of Sisterly Relationships**

The family was an important factor in forming girls as it was mentioned by Muir (2024: 18-19). until the age of fifteen/sixteen, they went into society. That is why the upbringing but also the relationship among siblings were crucial as they formed the character of each of the sisters and guided them into society. The family was the one to teach values as well as the proper interaction with other people. With five children there are many different dynamics between siblings, some have a stronger bond and others choose to isolate. For this reason, I will explore the relationship between sisters and how it reflected their characters and positions in society. I will focus on how these relationships illuminate their character and social standings.

Two older sisters share the strongest bond, their relationship is the image of the perfect relationship between sisters. They understand, support, and help each other. Elizabeth and Jane have very different characters. The older sister is sweet and gentle and tries to see the best in everyone, meanwhile, Elizabeth is more perceptive, quick to judge people, and tries to discover people for who they really are. In this difference they complement and help each other, when one criticizes, the other softens it. Elizabeth was quick to see Mrs. Bingley's fake friendship and warned her sister about that 'but to be candid without ostentation or design—to take the good of everybody's character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad—belongs to you alone. And so you like this man's sisters, too, do you? Their manners are not equal to his' (Austen, 2003: 9). Jane was the one who was not so quick to form a bad opinion about Mr. Darcy and tried to find good sides of him and show them to her sister. In their relationship, they help each other to understand people around them better and they end up in the higher social standing with husbands who genuinely love them. Through their relationship, it can be seen that the novel was written from a female perspective (Gilbert&Gubar, 1979: 72). Only a woman could be able to create such a strong relationship where sisters were bound by patriarchal limitations that were imposed upon them. This portrayal highlights Austen's nuanced

understanding of the subtle forms of resistance and solidarity that women can exhibit within a restrictive society.

The next sister to whom I want to draw attention is Mary. She is described to be plain ‘<...worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display’ (Austen 2003: 16). She seems to have good ideas but she is unable to put them into words which is why people are making fun of her and looks more like a caricature. Mary lacks social abilities and beauty and tries to compensate for it in an intellectual way but it does not seem to help her a lot. She chooses to isolate herself from the society and her family as well. Mary is the problem in the novel as she does not fit into the society. She does not dream of getting married like her other sisters. She does not have any strong relationship with her sisters as the strongest bonds she shares with books rather than people. This does not help her to feel good in society as there is no one to help her and guide her. Mary represents the isolation that comes from failing to conform to societal expectations of femininity and marriageability. Her intellectual pursuits and lack of social abilities position her outside the traditional marriage market, reflecting Gilbert and Gubar’s concept of the *madwoman* who does not fit into societal norms. The *madwoman* tries to destroy all patriarchal standards, in the case of Mary she does not dream of marriage (Gilbert&Gubar, 1979: 77). Such a character is different from a typical antagonist as a madwoman is usually a dramatized image of the author and her anxiety and rage (Ibid: 78).

Kitty and Lydia are two younger sisters. They seem to be very close to each other but they do not complement each other as Elizabeth and Jane do. I would call this a more harmful relationship. Lydia is the older sister and Kitty is her complete shadow. She tries to behave like Lydia and in society, she spends time doing what her sister does. For example in the Netherfield ball sisters were flirting with men together, after getting to know that officers are coming to the town Kitty was as happy as Lydia was. Through the novel, it can be learned that Lydia is not the perfect image of an older sister and this influence badly on Kitty. Lydia ends up almost ruining her family’s image and Kitty knew about it through the letters but did not dare to stop her sister. After Lydia’s leave, Kitty started to change and think for herself rather than be a mirror of her older sister. ‘<...improvement was great. She was not of so ungovernable a temper as Lydia; and, removed from the influence of Lydia’s example, she became, by proper attention and management, less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid’ (Ibid: 271). Lydia’s marriage was a lucky thing for Kitty as she managed to leave the harmful influence of her sister and got a chance to look better in the eyes of society.

To conclude, the relationship between sisters differs a lot. Throughout the novel, it can be seen that their interactions with siblings directly influence the type of person they are in society and determine their future. Older sisters have a great relationship and it helps them to move to the higher social rank. The middle sister isolates from the family and the same way she isolates from society.

Two younger sisters share a toxic relationship. After one has left the youngest gets a chance for a better future in society as she has left the harmful influence.

#### **4.2 Lydia's Elopement and Family Honor**

Lydia is a character in the novel who gets the least advantageous marriage. Looking at Mr. Wickham and Lydia's union from the economic and social position it may appear that they are well matched. However, if to consider marriage's circumstances and the traits of their characters there are many doubts that they will end up happy. Lydia's elopement is the most scandalous event of the book and the influence of it is great. In this runaway, Jane Austen criticizes the social expectations towards women and men as well as shows the importance of financial affairs for some men.

Rory Muir mentions that in the Regency era, there were several meanings of the word elopement: 'it might refer to a young couple running away together in order to get married without the consent of one or both sets of parents; but it might also refer to a married woman going off with a lover and even, although less commonly, to a debtor escaping his creditors or an apprentice leaving his master' (Muir, 2024: 122). Lydia's elopement was not in order to get married as Elizabeth stated in the book (Austen, 2003: 193). It seems that without Mr. Darcy's interference that would have never happened. More likely that Mr. Wickham was running away from his creditors together with a woman whom he seduced. After Lydia's runaway, it can be seen how much it influenced her life and the life of her family. Elizabeth's description was 'Lydia—the humiliation, the misery she was bringing on them all' (Ibid: 192). She destroyed herself and was about to destroy the family's reputation as it was a matter of time before the public knew. The way Mrs. Bennet saw how the situation would finish was 'And now here's Mr. Bennet gone away, and I know he will fight Wickham, wherever he meets him and then he will be killed, and what is to become of us all? The Collinses will turn us out before he is cold in his grave, and if you are not kind to us, brother, I do not know what we shall do' (Ibid: 199). In case of finding Mr. Wickham and Lydia not married, Mr. Bennet would need to duel him and as he is older and Mr. Wickham is a soldier the head of the family would most probably be dead. As it can be seen there were not many positive outcomes for Bennet's in case the couple was not married to what they did not hope. But the question arises about Mr. Wickham and how this influenced him. Simply saying he got more good than bad things as he got away from his gambling debts and had the power to leave Lydia at any moment. The fact that nobody discusses it but everyone knows about it is one of the 'supply what not there'(Woolf: 1925). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that after Bennets discovered the elopement Mr. Bennet and Mr. Gardiner took some time looking for them in London until the families lost any hope to be able to discover them. Mr. Darcy, a man from a higher rank who was not the part of family was the one who was able to discover them and make them get married. Once again it shows how important and powerful were social ranks and why people wanted to get a higher one.

It is known that it was not the first time Wickham had tried to run away with a woman. The first time it was Mr. Darcy's sister Georgiana. Interestingly, the motives for both were about money. In the first case Mr. Wickham hoped to get Georgiana's dowry and in the second to get away from debts. Additionally, the marriage was also settled with the help of money from Mr. Darcy's and Mr. Bennet's sides. Men had the power to easily ruin women's lives and reputations absorbed by the power of money they wanted to achieve.

To conclude, in the event of the elopement, Jane Austen criticizes the social norms of the Regency era and expectations towards women and men. The author uses this scandal to highlight the precarious societal position of women and the impact of irresponsible behavior on a family's reputation. Mr. Darcy's intervention emphasizes how wealth and social status were crucial in managing such crises. Moreover, Austen shows the power men held to ruin women's lives for their own financial benefit. This subplot not only advances the narrative but also deepens Austen's critique of the social norms of her era.

### **4.3 Jane and Elizabeth's Romantic Paths**

It can be seen through the novel that the two oldest sisters have the strongest bond among siblings. They share almost everything with each other starting from their opinion on the behavior of others to their love interest. Elizabeth and Jane are certainly fond of each other very much, despite being so different in their characters. While Elizabeth is witty, lively, and hotheaded, she forms her opinion of people very quickly, Jane is calm and modest, she sees something positive in everyone and it takes a lot of time to ruin her good opinion about people. This difference can also be seen in their love interests and approaches to them.

A comparison of the two sisters I would like to start from the theme of attraction and work by Rory Muir will be a great help. The sisters met their future husband at the same time and from the very first moment the approaches were very different. Jane and Mr. Bingley got along very well, Mr. Bingley clearly showed how much he liked Jane and they enjoyed each other's company. This can be called an ideal development of events from Muir's perspective (Ibid: 40). The first thing Mr. Bingley said about Jane was 'She is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld!' (Austen, 2003: 7). The first comment Jane gives about Mr. Bingley is 'He is just what a young man ought to be (...)sensible, good-humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy manners!—so much ease, with such perfect good breeding!' (Ibid: 9). It can be learned from the novel that Mr. Bingley spent two dances with Jane and it was the maximum amount of dances a lady could spend with one gentleman (Muir, 2024: 56). The fact that they danced twice together after the first meeting means that Mr. Bingley showed his attraction immediately and Jane reciprocated it by accepting two dances. She was careful not to show feelings but did not stay restricted as women in the Regency era were supposed to (Muir, 1979: 40). Meanwhile, the story of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy was very different. The first thing the gentleman

said about the lady was ‘She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me..>’ (Ibid: 7). After such words Elizabeth was left ‘<...with no very cordial feelings toward him’ (Ibid: 7). As it can be seen based on the first interaction of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy it seems that their relationship started from dislike rather than any feeling of like. The way two of the relationships proceed is also very different. Jane liked Mr. Bingley more and more with each interaction while Elizabeth’s prejudice and hate towards Mr. Darcy seemed to become bigger. Later, two couples go through the breaking point as the first one is getting separated and the other gets a marriage proposal. Such a difference happened because Jane and Mr. Bingley are the types of people who listen and take into consideration the opinions of others more than their own. Mr. Darcy easily persuaded Mr. Bingley that Jane was just flirting with him for amusement as she does not show any true feelings towards him. Jane easily believed Mrs. Bingley that her brother was in love with somebody else. Even though, both Mr. Darcy and Mrs. Bingley were wrong, for believing others the couple paid with suffering and separation. At the same time, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are the types of people who put their opinions higher than anybody else, and that is why their attraction to each other develops only by learning more about another person.

At the same time, both couples share a lot of similarities. Muir mentions that one of the most important criteria for marriage is money and social status (Muir, 2024: 42). Elizabeth and Jane are the same here and both gentlemen are richer and coming from a higher rank. Both sisters see a happy marriage being filled with love and respect for each other. In this Austen’s view on marriage can clearly be seen (Ibid: 61). Elizabeth criticizes her friend Charlotte for getting married just to be financially secure and her pragmatic approach as she believes that the aim of marriage is more about genuine feelings than material comfort. Moreover, she was not alone in this as ‘<...purely mercenary marriages were generally viewed with disapproval...> (Ibid: 44). However, being indifferent to financial status was considered to be ‘irresponsible and reckless (Ibid: 44). Most likely Jane and Elizabeth also took this fact into consideration and were content with that. At some points, both couples got separated. After the rejection of the proposal or separation in the case of Jane and Mr. Bingley, some men continued to love the object of their desires and this is what happened in *Pride and Prejudice* (Ibid: 88). Both couples grew their affection towards each other for one it resulted in marriage proposal with acceptance and for Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy it resulted in the second proposal which also got accepted. Additionally, Gilbert and Gubar (1979: 154) mentioned the term *shelters* and both Elizabeth and Jane in the end find their place of refuge from their families and outside of the world in the houses of their husbands.

To conclude, the relationships of Elizabeth and Jane illustrate their different approaches to love and marriage within the context of Regency-era norms, as discussed by Rory Muir, and economic considerations highlighted by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. While Jane and Bingley experience a

straightforward romance that aligns with societal expectations, Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship evolves from misunderstanding to a profound understanding, challenging both societal norms and personal biases. In the end, both sisters achieve marriages that balance romantic love with pragmatic concerns, embodying Jane Austen's nuanced depiction of marriage as both a personal and social union. These relationships reflect Austen's critique of the pressures surrounding marriage during her time

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this BA thesis aimed to examine the intersections of the Bennet family and the family configuration in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. The family relationship which has been analyzed in my work were parent-child relationships and sisterhood. Additionally, the theme of marriage has been reviewed as family intersections directly influence the marriage prospects of children. Through each of these topics, Jane Austen managed to criticize the social expectations and patriarchal limitations imposed on her. The thesis also explored the obstacles Jane Austen faced as a female writer, which are reflected in the anxieties of various characters in the novel. Moreover, it suggests that Austen subtly included deeper meanings within her work, and in this case, readers should fill in what might seem missing considering the limitations placed on female writers of her time. This approach gives us a fuller picture of the hidden depths in Austen's writing, suggesting she was both constrained by and creatively responding to her cultural context.

The first discussed topic was parents and their influence on their children. The analysis of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet highlighted the consequences of their parenting on the destinies of their daughters. Mr. Bennet turned out to be a complex character, who is both a product of and a commentator on patriarchal society. His personal growth through the novel shows the broader social criticism and pressures on him as a man in the Regency era. Mr. Bennet chose a passive resistance to the societal expectations that have been put on him. Additionally, he uses this detachment to avoid the responsibilities of raising his children. Meanwhile, Mrs. Bennet turns out to be a character who constantly reminds readers throughout the novel about the patriarchal expectations set on women at that time. Through this character Jane Austen's personal anxieties as a woman can be seen. She sees marriage for her daughters as a way to protect themselves and the whole family which is why she is so enthusiastic about it. Her concerns over her children's marriage are validated. Even though, knowing the difficulties women faced she does not help her daughters, on the contrary, she almost ruins two potential marriages. Although, both characters have some good things they create a bad influence on their children and have a dysfunctional relationship with them.

Sisterhood and its influence not only on their characters but also on their social standing has been another discussed topic in my work. The two older sisters share the strongest bond and complement each other's characters which helps them later to get higher social ranks and achieve happiness in the marriage. These relationships, rooted in mutual support against societal pressures, underscore Austen's nuanced portrayal of sisterhood as a source of strength and support. At the same time, Mary isolates herself from any family relationship, and in the same way, she isolates herself from society and becomes more of a caricature in the novel. Meanwhile, the two younger sisters share

a very toxic relationship in which Lydia harmfully influences her younger sister Kitty, who wants to be more like an older sister and keeps following her around. Even though they might share a bond, it ruins all of Kitty's chances of a good image in society. The youngest sister gets hope for a better future in society only after Lydia leaves and stops influencing the sister.

The other discussed topic was the marriage prospects of the Bennet sisters, which helped to see the ways of social mobility for women during the Regency era. It was learned how much pressure was put on women to get married and in case they did not want it as Mary they would be considered as a *madwoman* who does not fit into the norms. With Lydia's elopement, Jane Austen criticized the social norms and reminded the readers about the power men from higher ranks had. She has also shown the authority men had to ruin women's lives because of their financial desires. The marriages of Jane and Elizabeth serve as an example of different approaches towards marriage. Their unions are the perfect example of happy personal and social unions. Their marriages are balanced with love and pragmatic concerns and their husbands fully fulfill the role of providers who are ready to protect their wives in their *shelters*.

In summary, this BA thesis has discussed the family intersections and marriage themes in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* by shedding light on social and personal challenges faced by the Bennet family. Through family relationships, the work highlights how these familial ties shape personal identities and social opportunities in the patriarchal society. Moreover, the exploration of the marriage theme showed that it was a means of social mobility and personal security for women in the Regency era.

## References

Primary source:

Austen, J. 2003. *Pride and Prejudice*. London: Penguin Classics.

Secondary sources:

Austen, J. 2011. *Northanger Abbey*. Introduction and Notes by Marilyn Butler. London: Penguin Classics.

Austen-Leigh, J. E. 1967. *A Memoir of Jane Austen*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Benis, T. R. 2015. *The Neighborhoods of "Northanger Abbey"*. *The Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 56, No. 2, Special Issue: Jane Austen and Her Contemporaries. Accessed on 13 March 2024. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24575162>.

Brimley, E. J. 2009. Famous Rewiews. Cornell: Cornell University Library.

Brontë, C. 1848. *Letter to G.H. Lewes, January 12, 1848*. Accessed on 13 March 2024.

Available at: <https://classicalbookworm.wordpress.com/2010/04/18/charlotte-bronte-on-jane-austen/>.

Fletcher, A. & M. Benveniste. 2013. A Scientific Justification for Literature: Jane Austen's Free Indirect Style as Ethical Tool. *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory*. 43/1: 1-18.

Gilbert, S. & S. Gubar. 1979. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. New Heaven and London: Yale University Press.

Hayes, E. N. 1949. "Emma": A Dissenting Opinion. *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 40/1: 1-20

Heath, A. & Y. Li. 2023. *Social Mobility*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

Irvine, R. P. 2005. *Jane Austen*. London: Routledge.

Johnson, C. 1988. *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Kirkham, M. 1983. *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*. Sussex: Harvester.

Morgan, S. 1976. Polite Lies: The Veiled Heroine of Sense and Sensibility. *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 31/2: 188-205.

Moses, C. 2003. Jane Austen and Elizabeth Bennet: the limits of irony. *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal*. 25: 155-164.

Mudrick, M. 1953. Jane Austen. Irony as Defense and Discovery. *Modern Language Notes*. 68/4: 258-262.

Muir, R. 2024. *Love and Marriage in the Age of Jane Austen*. New Heaven and London: Yale University Press.

Newman, J. H. & Mozley, A. 1890. *Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman during his time in the English Church*. London and New York : Longmans, Green.

Oatley, K. 2011. *Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

- Pascal, R. 1977. *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and Its Functioning in the Nineteenth-century European Novel*. Frankfurt: Manchester University Press.
- Peterman, A. J, 1940. *Jane Austen and the Critical Novel of Manners*. Chicago: Loyola University Chicago.
- Said, E. W. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Southam, B. C. 1968. Learning Experience and Change, in Garis, R. (ed.) *Critical Essays on Jane Austen*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group. 31-41.
- Sturrock, J. 2013 *Jane Austen's Families*. London: Anthem Press.
- The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1975. The Trouble with Mansfield Park, in Halperin, J. (ed.) *Studies in the Novel*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 6-23.
- Tomalin, C. 1997. *Jane Austen: A Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Tucker, G. H. 1995. *Jane Austen the Woman: Some Biographical Insights*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Twain, M. 2009. *Who Is Mark Twain?* New York: Harper.
- Veesser, A. H. 1989. *The New Historicism*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.
- White, E. 2020. *What is Free Indirect Speech*, accessed on 17 March 2024, available from: <https://janeausten.co.uk/blogs/jane-austens-work/what-is-free-indirect-discourse>.
- Weinsheimer, J. C. 1974. *Mansfield Park: Three Problems*. *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 29/2: 185-205.
- Weiss, D. 2013. Sense and Sensibility: Uncertain Knowledge and the Ethics of Everyday Life. *Studies in Romanticism*, 52/2: 253-273.
- Widmer, E. D. 2010. *Family Configurations: A Structural Approach to Family Diversity*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Williams, J. 1968. *Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Woolf, V. 1925. *Jane Austen*. Accessed on 12 April 2024. Available at: <https://monadnock.net/woolf/austen.html>.

## Summary in Lithuanian

Šio bakalauro darbo tikslas - išnagrinėti Bennetų šeimos konfigūracijas Jane Austen knygoje "Puikybė ir prietarai". Analizė sutelkta į tris pagrindines temas: tėvų ir vaikų santykius, seserystę ir santuoką. Analizė atskleidžia, kad dukterų likimams didelę įtaką daro auklėjimas. Pasyvus tėvo požiūris baigiasi vienos iš dukterų pabėgimu, o motina beveik sugriauna dvi potencialias savo vaikų santuokas. Be to, seserų santykiai daro įtaką ne tik seserų charakteriams, bet ir jų ateities socialinei padėčiai. Dvi vyresnes seseris sieja stipriausias ryšys ir jos papildo viena kitos charakterius, o tai padeda joms vėliau užimti aukštesnes socialines pozicijas ir pasiekti laimę santuokoje. Vidurinioji duktė Marija izoliuojasi nuo bet kokių šeimyninių santykių, lygiai taip pat ji atsiriboja nuo visuomenės ir romane tampa veikiau karikatūra. Tuo tarpu dvi jaunesnes seseris sieja labai toksiški santykiai, kuriuose Lidija daro žalingą įtaką jaunesniajai seseriai Kitty, kuri nori būti panašesnė į vyresniąją seserį ir tik Lidijai išvykus įgyja viltį dėl tešlos ateities. Be to, paaiškėja, kad santuokos vaidmuo yra socialinė sutartis, kuriai įtakos turi socialiniai ir finansiniai sumetimai. Teorinis šio darbo pagrindas - Susan Gubar ir Sandros Gilbert knygoje "The Madwoman in the Attic" (1979) panaudotos idėjos, kad geriau suprastume, kokius iššūkius turėjo įveikti moteris rašytoja ir kas galėjo turėti įtakos jos kūrybai. Be to, Rory Muir tekstas "Love and Marriage in the Age of Jane Austen" (2024) leido geriau suprasti moterų padėtį Regentų epochoje ir išsamiai išnagrinėti Austen laikų santuokos papročius.