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**The Rules of Regency Society in Jane Austen's
Novels**

bakalářská práce

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Prohlášení

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Abstract

The main aim of the bachelor thesis is to present and analyse selected social rules and etiquette of the regency society in Jane Austen's novels. The thesis describes and presents examples from six Austen's books: *Emma*, *Mansfield Park*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice*. The main focus of my research is the role of a proper woman and rules related to the courtship of the upper-class society. In addition to the specific examples from the novels, the rules are also supported and illustrated by secondary sources and selective guides for women of higher circles, written and published by men in the 19th century.

Introduction

Jane Austen is considered to be one of the most influential British novelists and rightly so. Her work has been captivating people's hearts for decades not only because of her excellent writing or sharp satire but also due to an incredible number of characters whose complexity and temperaments could be recognized even in today's society. Multiple editions of all six novels and numerous film and TV adaptations are the evidence of her unfading popularity.

Regency England has remained popular through generations and still sparks an interest with its literature, music, architecture, and glamorous lifestyle full of balls, parties, and gossips so well known for the upper-class society. The Regency society is defined by rigid rules and etiquette which had to be obeyed by everyone, no matter their position or fortune. Everybody knew their place and those who tried to stand out, were outcasted from the better social circles. Thanks to Jane Austen's imagination and well carved out storylines, readers and scholars are able to identify and study those rules, based on the behaviour of her perfectly fleshed out characters.

The main aim of the thesis is to select and analyse typical social rules of the Regency society which occur most frequently in the Austen's novels; *Emma*, *Mansfield Park*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

The first part focuses on the author herself and the Regency society. Using secondary sources and examples of characters from the novels, the goal is to describe various social groups and their portrayal, especially those that are represented in the novels; aristocrats and the gentry. A special attention is given to the behaviour of upper-class members towards each other which depended purely on their title and wealth.

The second part deals with the social role of the Regency woman and selected social rules that are related to the courting among main female protagonists and their love interests. Austen's work is primarily targeted at women. The heroines have to struggle to meet all the necessary requirements to be considered proper, dutiful ladies and useful members of the society. The main goal in a young lady's life was to secure a wealthy man, this was the only way, besides education, rank, and proper attitude, to be seen as an accomplished lady of upper society. A lot of books, studies and research papers have been already written regarding the topic. Therefore, besides the novels, I chose to incorporate and analyse guides (written by men) that were dedicated to women to help them achieve the goal and make their place in the society

as beneficial as possible. The used handbooks are *The Young Woman's Companion; or, Female Instructor...* by J. A. Stewart and Dr. Gregory's personal letters to his daughters, published by his relative, as *A Fathers Legacy to His Daughters*.

1 Jane Austen

Jane Austen is one of the best British novelists that has been capturing people's hearts with her six novels for decades. Austen is well known and acknowledged by many for her satire and humour. Clever Elizabeth Bennet, strong Elinor Dashwood, or patient Anne Elliot are role models for many young girls, even today. Austen's masterfully developed characters could be seen everywhere around us, and this is one of the reasons for Austen's unfading success. The ability to create such a wide range of characters with different passions, personalities, and life difficulties from the same social rank, speaks about the young author herself. However, very little is known about her own life.

She was born on December 16th, 1775 at the Steventon Rectory in Hampshire. Her education was entirely in hands of her father, an Anglican clergyman, Re. George Austen. Austen's early literary pieces became a source of entertainment to her family. She was not able to find a publisher, because of that, first drafts of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility*, were put aside. All three novels were finished in 1798 (Mellor, Matlak, 1996, p. 766).

The family lived for a short time in Bath. There, Jane Austen had given up writing for a while. The reason for that, could be her unsuccessful sale of *Northanger Abbey* (Tytler, 1900, p. 21). Although, Jan Fergus in *The Cambridge companion to Jane Austen* mentions, that Austen used to publish on 'commission' which means that her novels went into print on her own expenses but they were distributed by the author for free (Fergus, 1997, p. 15). Either way, Austen was very young at that time and her family moved to one of the most favourite towns of the upper society. Unfortunately, her family did not possess the means to enjoy the city's balls and gatherings. There is no Austen novel where Bath would not be mentioned.

During 18th century, the number of women writers was heavily increasing every decade. Their works were usually published anonymously or by their husbands, fathers, or brothers as authors, for example Mary Shelley and Maria Edgeworth. Austen's contemporaries, such as her favourite author Ann Radcliffe or Elizabeth Inchbald were more successful. By publishing their novels, they exceeded the limits of what was considered being obedient and a just woman at that time. These ladies usually had the courage to go and find a publisher due to financial problems or just to support their families. Sadly, Austen's father was unsuccessful in trying to obtain a good publishing contract for his daughter and her novel *First Impressions* (Fergus, 1997, p. 13-15). Now, *Pride and Prejudice*, one of the best love stories ever written has been

an inspiration for many female writers around the world. Austen had a good supportive family and a great deal of courage to publish her own work. Her time just had not come yet.

In 1885, after her father's death, Austen, her mother, and sister Cassandra settled in a small country village of Chawton, in Hampshire. Working on her own, in the family sitting room of a little cottage, she picked up her pen again. Due to financial struggles, she rewrote her old work and wrote three more novels (Mellor, Matlak, 1996, p. 766). Throughout her own life, Austen's finances were not sufficient, and she was far from being secured. She struggled and tried to save on everything she could which is well documented in her letters (Hume, 2013, p. 290-299). Let us presume, that these circumstances might have inspired her to create heroines such as Fanny Price or Jane Fairfax.

Sense and Sensibility was published at her own expense in 1811. She managed to find a publisher for *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816) and the second edition of *Sense and Sensibility* and received a small amount of money for all of them. *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were published posthumously by her brother Henry. *Sanditon* remains unfinished. During the Victorian era and early twentieth century, she was finally acknowledged for her brilliant work (Mellor, Matlak, 1996, p. 766). Now, Austen is considered to be one of the best British novelists and largely celebrated for her literary work.

2 The Regency Era

The Regency period was under a big influence of one man – Prince Regent, later king George IV. This era full of extravagance and pomposity that reflected the monarch himself, began on February 5, 1811 with the appointment of Prince of Wales as a regent and ended on January 31 by his coronation. Although, ‘regency’, as a term, in the British historiography serves to mark the period between 1780 and 1830. George IV. was known for his hedonistic way of living, love for architecture, literature, music, and education which heavily influenced the whole society that desperately wanted to or at least tried to imitate the aristocratic lifestyle (Kloester, 2005, p. 20).

Education and arts were not the only areas of a sudden, big development. Sciences gained more attention, together with manufacturing industry. With the immense impact of the industrialization came many changes in the daily lives of everyone, no matter of the social rank. For example, steam power, gas lighting, electricity and many more discoveries changed the world as the people of the end of 18th century had known it (Smith, 1999, p. 133).

Regency is also defined by the end of the Napoleonic Wars. In her work, Austen does not pay much attention to historical events that shocked the society in the early nineteenth century. The only indication of the political situation at the time may be, in the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, the frequent presence of soldiers in the city or a brief mention of the restoration of peace (P&P, 2020, vol. I, p. 6). Other examples of a brief historical background could be given from *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*. Sir Thomas Bertram is an owner of a slave plantation in Antigua which was, sadly, common during the British imperialism. Captain Wentworth is a naval hero who earned around “less than twenty thousand pounds by war” (P, 2003, p. 70), presumably in the Napoleonic Wars.

3 The Regency Society

Half of the 18th century was marked by wars and economical struggles. Five percent of the population were in charge of almost one third of the country's wealth. Inheritance of property was the indicator of men's wealth. People could not vote, if they did not own some land and only men of a high standing, owning a land worth around £500 per annum, could inspire to become a MP (Grant, Kay, Kerrigan, Parker, 2011, p. 218).

London was an economic and political centre of parties, commercial affairs, theatre, and sporting events. Wealthy men usually stayed there from April or May to the start of August. During a hunting season, they occupied their country residences. Another favourite places for social annual gatherings and gossips were the 'spa' towns. Bath was the most favourite for its possibilities and was a place full of balls and events where people of both genders could show off their new gowns, find a suitable partner or young ladies could display their talents, such as playing the instruments or sketching (Grant, Kay, Kerrigan, Parker, 2011, p. 218-219). For example, Mr. Tilney and Catherine are acquainted for the first time at a ball in Bath.

Sir Walter Elliot from *Persuasion* moves to Bath, due to his extensive financial spending. Although no longer a resident of Kellynch Hall, living in a house in town, he still benefits from his low-level aristocratic title and is favourite among town's members of the upper-class society. The town was also recommended to Mr. Woodhouse and Emma by Mrs. Elton for its health benefits and "advantages...to the young" that "are pretty generally understood" (E, 2020, p. 219). These are only a few examples of Bath's mentions in the novels and they support the town significance in the Regency and author's life. Other seaside towns, mentioned in Austen's novels are Weymouth in *Emma*, Lyme Regis in *Persuasion* and Brighton in *Pride and Prejudice* where Lydia got invited to accompany Mrs Forster.

Good transportation and development of cities meant that people became more mobile. Social classes started to intermix, thus creating more confusion among social ranks. Traditional careers such as navy officer were still in demand, but with the growing industrialization, options of employment grew. A new social class, distinguished by the well-off lifestyle, emerged from men working as lawyers, businessmen, merchants, doctors, or clergyman. Their residence was usually in towns since they did not own any land (Grant, Kay, Kerrigan, Parker, 2011, p. 219). Mr. Bingley could be given as a prime example of this 'new rich' class. He inherits a significant fortune from his father who worked in trade and intended buying an estate. His fortune carved

a way for all of his children to receive an education in private boarding-schools. Nevertheless, Mr. Bingley is still of a lesser rank than Mr. Darcy, whose fortune was twice as big.

Among members of the 'new rich' class could be included navy officers who gained their wealth through war. At the beginning of *Persuasion*, Frederick Wentworth is not considered to be a suitable match for the baronet's daughter, Anne Elliot. He had been refused, became a sailor and through his profession gained enough fortune that secured his position in the society, making him a desirable suitor. However, in Sir. Elliot's eyes, the profession of a navy officer is undesirable and according to his opinion, he "should be sorry to see any friend of his belonging to it" (P, 2003, p. 20). Money and land were significant indicators of a man's social rank, however, titles were as important. Having admiral Croft as a tenant of Kellynch Hall does not change his pride and contempt towards this profession.

Many young men chose a career of a clergyman which was not sufficient enough in Miss Crawford's eyes in *Mansfield Park*. She despised Edmund's idea to become a priest, saying that "clergyman has nothing to do but to be slovenly and selfish – read the newspaper, watch the weather, and quarrel with his wife. His curate does all the work, and business of his own life is to dine" (MP, 1998, p. 88). Austen was not particularly always kind to the clergy profession in her novels, besides Edmund from *Mansfield Park* or Henry Tilney from *Northanger Abbey*, whose witty personality stands out from all other male leads. On the other hand, Mr Collins from *Pride and Prejudice* is a prime example of a snobbish man that cannot wait to inherit Mr Bennet's household. From the novels, it is hard to guess if the profession of the clergyman was sought after. All three examples of characters were lucky to inherit their fortune or to be under a personage. However, Miss Crawford's opinion or Mr. Wickham's refusal to follow into his father's footsteps gives the impression of a lesser popularity of this career among young upper-class men.

Strict rules and rigid boundaries defined members of the upper classes that lived a life full of glamour, highest fashion, and etiquette. It was a very complex world that could be understood only by those, who were born into a wealthy or aristocratic family. The ton, from French le bon ton, sometimes also Polite Society or Upper Ten Thousand, whose members were characterized by a privileged life, stood on top of an imaginary ladder of society (Kloester, 2005, p. 2-3). Society's acceptance and behaviour were determined by a complex set of different rules, the flexibility of which varied according to a gender.

3. 1 The Social Ladder

Regency era is characterized by an inflexible social hierarchy; at the top was a monarch followed by royalty, aristocracy, gentry, middle classes, artisans and tradespeople, servants, labouring poor and at the very bottom paupers (Kloester, 2005, p. 2-3).

As mentioned before, the indicator of one's social class were birth, property, title, fortune, and profession. The lives of higher class were incomprehensible to the people of the middle class who lived day by day, working to secure their life being. Life full of balls, events, hunts, and very strict and distinctive etiquette must had been a total contrast to their daily life, burdened by struggles and worries (Kloester, 2005, p. 2-3). Many characters raised to a better position through marriage, profession, or a mere luck. Confusion about one's social rank had to be at balls or other social gathering cleared out by gossips, presence, or behaviour of the spoken individual.

On many occasions, characters raised to the rank. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen's more moral and truthful representation of the Regency society, one of the Ward sisters marries a baronet, Sir Thomas Bertram. Other sisters were not so lucky and one of them married a Lieutenant of Marines "without education, fortune or connections" (MP, 1998, p. 3), her decision had a direct consequence on her lifestyle. Miss Price led a busy life in town without any pleasures that her other sisters possessed. Even her daughter, Fanny Price who had been taken under the Bertram's wings, was considered to be of a lesser rank which was reminded to her throughout the whole story. She could not be out earlier than her cousins, occupied smaller rooms of Mansfield and did not own a horse as other Bertram's children.

A number of carriages and servants were another indicator of a gentleman's wealth. Mr Knightley sends his carriage for Miss Bates, Miss Fairfax, and Miss Smith so they do not have to walk to the dinner at the Coles which Emma finds very kind of him but at the same time laughs when she sees Mr. Knightly arriving on horseback. During the Regency period and Napoleonic wars, keeping a decent carriage, a coachman and its maintenance was not a cheap matter (Hume, 2013, p. 299). The gathering at Coles itself, is in Emma's eyes seen as an insult to all invited families. The Coles are "of low origin, in trade, and only moderately genteel" (E, 2000, p. 164). They came to their wealth through a trade and they were very respected among other families in Highbury, however, Emma seems to be eager for someone to point out that they were not in a position to send invitation for a dinner to other 'superior' families. Austen also mentions that the number of maids that the Coles kept was increased with their successful

business which supports the argument about the number of maids being an indicator of a man's fortune.

Austen's novels are about a specific social group. The majority of her characters are from landed gentry, for example Mr. Darcy or Sir. Thomas Bertram. A few numbers of characters are even from the aristocracy; the infamous noblewoman Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

Nevertheless, Austen's main characters are usually people that cannot be specifically assigned to any social group. Their education, connections and way of living were like the traditional gentry. However, they usually did not have a title or did not possess a high fortune. Critics tried to give a name to this emerging social group, for example, the 'lesser gentry' or a 'middle-class aristocracy' (Jones, 2020, p. 291). Austen herself, came from this social background. It is also important to mention again that her novels are concentrated around specific social ranks. Very rarely she mentions people who stood below gentry, besides maids, stable boys or coachmen. Only one example could be given and that is Harriet's encounter with gypsies in *Emma*.

The ultimate pass to higher society was given to those who were born with title, owned a land, dressed like a gentleman, had influential connections, multiple maids and carriages. Let us examine and focus more attention to the aristocracy and gentry, since the titles of those social ranks are possessed by many of Austen's key characters.

4 Aristocracy

Aristocrats are not the main focus in Austen work; however, this thesis aims to present a comprehensive text about the social ranks that appear in the novels and, at least a little bit, influenced the lives of the main protagonists. Therefore, it is important to give a background to this social group as well.

In the novels, the image of the aristocracy is not particularly flattering. The monarch or aristocratic men with significant power in politics or economics, do not appear in any of Austen's major works. At a certain point, she was advised to dedicate *Emma* to the Prince Regent himself who loved literature, especially Walter Scott and Austen were his favourite among British writers (Smith, 1999, p. 132). Her approval was given, although she was not really pleased about it (Bradbury, 2007, p. 4). It might seem to be particularly comical, regarding the fact that the novel whose heroine is known for her pride and mean remarks towards people of a lesser importance, was dedicated to the Prince Regent who was far from Austen's perception of an ideal gentleman. Surely, some similarities between the character of Emma Woodhouse and the Prince Regent, might be, in someone's eyes, very noticeable.

At the end of the Regency, England had many dukes, marquises, earls, viscounts, and barons (Kloester, 2015, p. 9). However, in the books, there is no attention given to majority of these ranks, thus the brief introduction in the thesis will not be needed.

Austen chose a daughter of an earl as an antagonist of *Pride and Prejudice*. Lady Catherine de Bourgh is in Mr. Collins's letter introduced as Honourable Lady. Earls and their offspring were always called by this title, placed before their name (Kloester, 2015, p. 10). The passage, "Lady Catherine will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed. She likes to have the distinction of rank preserved" (P&P, 2020, vol. II, chap. 5), gives us the perfect glimpse of her temperament. Behaviour of Lady Catherine de Bourgh towards people of a lesser rank varies greatly and it certainly depends on whose point of view of the story the reader chooses to see her from. Mr Collins is constantly amazed by her and describes her character in shiny, beautiful colours. However, Mr. Collins should not be trusted in this regard since he is living under her patronage and influence. Other characters are constantly bowing whenever she and her daughter appear and carefully listen to her without any remarks which are not even expected to be given. Elizabeth Bennet's point of view is drastically different, since she is the "unfeeling, selfish girl" that will with a possible alliance with Catherine's nephew, Mr. Darcy, "pollute the shades of Pemberley" (P&P, 2020, vol. III, chap. 14). Elizabeth freely gives her

opinions, finds Miss de Bourgh's behaviour towards Charlotte 'rude' and is not blinded by the title and the glamorous de Bourgh estate. It is also very interesting and humorous to see how the whole party, besides Elizabeth, is nervous and on the edge of their seat in the de Bourgh presence. Catherine de Bourgh's extreme rudeness is also politely pardoned by Mrs Bennet. The noble lady came to the house without the invitation and proper ceremony, consciously offending the Bennet's with the remark about the size of their park. These matters are not taken into the consideration at all. Mrs Bennet is already flattered only by the noblewoman's visit.

The gap between the gentry and the aristocracy was great and it is very noticeable in Austen's work. On the other hand, Mr. Darcy, being related to the aristocracy and at the same time considered to be the member of the gentry, he is treated very politely and with a due respect by others. His fortune and birth played a big part in how he was perceived.

Another and at the same time the last aristocratic rank that appears in the novels, is the barony and it is not mentioned in a good light either. Baron Wildenhaim who is courting Julia Bertram, is definitely not considered as a good match for the baronet's daughter. "Take away his rants, and the poor Baron has nothing. What a difference a vowel makes – if his rents were but equal to his rants!" (MP, 1998, chap. 47) Title was certainly important but the fortune played a bigger part in the marital prospects.

The aristocratic titles certainly had its perks and came with many advantages in the Regency. However, in the novels, it did not bring its holder much luck. Wealthy noblewoman Catherine de Bough ends up bitter and disappointed by her nephew's decision to marry landowner's daughter. Barons could be seen as desirable partners but without land or fortune, the significance of this rank rapidly dropped.

5 Gentry

Through Austen's novels, readers can get a better look at lives of the gentry, especially landed gentry. Without a short introduction to the class, Austen's world, therefore the Regency society and its etiquette, cannot be fully understood since the majority of characters are members of this specific class.

Gentry is a term, known to British historiography since the Middle Ages. Many historians and sociologists have been trying to determine what the term actually means and what kind of people, considered to be a part of this social class, they were and how to describe them. Higher income, title, education, land, certain level of comfort and leisure time divided the gentry from the middle class. A large portion of their income came from the estate itself, investments, and property in towns. At the end of 18th century, English society was made up from rural communities, controlled by a member of the gentry or even better, aristocracy. Usually, they lived on their estates, far from towns in their social circle of acquaintances whose opinions mattered the most. The communities were closed and very private (Mingay, 1976, p. 1-11).

Among the gentry were wealthy landowners, baronets, knights, esquires and also gentlemen with property and good birth but no title (Kloester, 2005, p. 1-19). As mentioned before, there was a slight confusion in the Regency society, since any well-dressed person with distinctive manners and behaviour, could be considered a member of the gentry. One of the plot devices in *Emma* is the confusion of Harriet's origin. Nothing is known about her family till the end of the story where it is revealed that she is a daughter of a tradesman. Although, under Emma's influence, Harriet is persuaded to believe that she has higher claims and refuses a marriage proposal from Mr. Martin who is a farmer on Mr. Knightley's estate.

5.1 Wealthy landowners

The main focus of Austen novels is the landed gentry. The major difference between a landowner and merchant was that the latter had to earn his living. Whereas the landowner invested his fortune and got it back every year (Toran, 2015). They did not lead a life as easy as it seemed to look. With beautiful inherited estates, came a huge responsibility for the owner. Among his duties was a care of the holding and its servants and inhabitants that were under his protection (Mingay, 1976, p. 1-11).

Mr. Darcy is shown to us through Elizabeth's point of view. In the third volume of *Pride and Prejudice*, when his true character is revealed, Austen portrays him as "the best landlord, and the best master", his housekeeper praises the owner of Pemberley by saying that he is "just affable to the poor" (P&P, 2020, vol. III, chap. 1). Again, the Regency era was marked by the Napoleonic wars and with wars comes inflation which results in much worse living conditions of the poorest. Austen wants her readers, mainly women, to fall in love with Mr. Darcy by giving them an image of an extremely rich landowner who is also loved by those, who serve him.

One of the wealthiest landowners in Austen's world are Sir Thomas Bertram from *Mansfield Park* with his title of a baronet and "large income" (MP, 1998, chap. 1) and Mr. Darcy whose fortune was "ten thousand a year" (P&P, 2020, chap. 1). According to Toran's methodology, used in her article, with regard to purchasing power, Mr. Darcy was a millionaire and in terms of his social standing in the British society, he was a billionaire. The value of his fortune in modern times would range from \$19,725,520 to \$328,737,820¹ (Toran, 2015). And yet, Austen created another character whose income exceeded the fortune of Mr. Darcy; Mr. Rushworth with his "twelve thousand a year" (MP, 1998, chap. 4), that made him a desirable match for any young lady in *Mansfield Park*. John Dashwood from *Sense and Sensibility*, Mr. Knightly and Mr. Woodhouse from *Emma* could be also name as very rich among landed gentry.

Landowners took care of their property so they could pass it on to future generation in the best condition as possible (Mingay, 1976, p. 1-11). Mansfield park was inherited by Sir Thomas Bertram's oldest son; Thomas Bertram. The second son, Edmund was destined for the church. If Miss Crawford's character was not despicable enough in the reader's eyes, Austen gives us a hint that she wished for a decline of Thomas's health so Edmund could inherit his father's fortune. Of course, if the father had other sons or nephews, daughters were not in the inheritance line. Mrs Bennet is not as stupid as many people seem to think with her chase after wealthy husbands for her daughters. Woman's main landmark in life was to secure a suitable partner and one of the responsibilities of a mother was to take her daughter to the places where they could find convenient acquaintances (Helen, 2017). In addition, as Hume points out in his essay, she is actually representing the 'reality' of the regency society in *Pride and Prejudice*, together

¹ All calculations were based on the possibility that Darcy would invest £200 000 yearly. The final numbers in modern dollars were calculated by Toran in 2015.

with Charlotte Lucas. If Mr. Bennet dies, his estate will be passed down to Mr. Collins and his daughters and wife would be homeless. What is even worst, he did not save any finances that would make his daughter's life much easier in the case of his sudden death (Hume, 2013, p. 307-310).

Relations between landowners were formed by visits, balls, dinners, hunting etc. and their behaviour and manners stood as an example for other, lesser classes (Mingay, 1976, p. 1-11). The proper rituals, such as leaving cards at neighbouring houses, wedding-visits, attending dinners and balls with other county residents, and keeping acquaintance, were strictly followed and there are shown throughout every Austen's novel.

5. 2 Baronets, knights, and esquires

Sir Walter Elliot and Sir Thomas Bertram are representatives of baronets in the Austen's world. Baronetcy was officially established by king James I in 1611 and it was passed down the male line. However, In Scotland, the title could be also passed down to a lady. Baronets were considered to be a head of gentry and were addressed by Sir, followed by their surname (Kloester, 2005, p. 11). Although, in some secondary sources, baronets were considered to be at "low level of the aristocracy" that did not have a right to sit in the House of Lords (Beer, 2003, p. 239).

Below the baronets were knights. This title could be traced all back to the Middle Ages and was bestowed for services to the Crown or State. Knighthood was non-hereditary, and its holder was called Sir. There is only one knight in Austen's novels; Sir William Lucas, a former tradesman who raised "to the honour of knighthood by an address to the King, during his mayoralty" (P&P, 2020, chap. 5). Austen writes that his former employment "gave him a disgust" so he removed to Meryton. This fact supports arguments that characters in the novels felt the distinction between the upper-class and the middle class very strongly and that the title was indeed very important. The knighthood was a lesser rank, but it still had its significance among the members of the gentry. The situation of Sir William Lucas also demonstrates how someone, rather easily, was able to rise up in the Regency society. If we take into consideration that merchants were seen as the middle class, lesser title and land were enough to consider Sir William Lucas as a member of the gentry.

The last title among the gentry that has to be mentioned is esquire. The title that lost its importance from medieval times, due to excessive number of men using it (Kloester, 2015, p. 11). Austen mentions the rank only once. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bennet talks about

marriage announcement in papers; “It was only said, ‘Lately, George Wickham, Esq. to Miss Lydia Bennet...’” (P&P, 2020, vol. III, chap. 12). Mr. Wickham, the antagonist of the novel, is a godson of the late Mr. Darcy (who was related to the aristocracy). He does not own any land and later joins the army due to his financial struggles and, in the papers, the title of esquire is attached to his name. It was very common for gentry men to attach the title to their names in official papers or letters in order to appear more respected (Kloester, 2015, p. 11).

Kloester suggests that baronets and knights could be seen as aristocrats, at least in their own eyes (Kloester, 2015, p. 11). When it comes to the Austen world, this assumption is difficult to rebut or confirm. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Sir William Lucas appears to be very nervous and behaves the same towards the nobility as other members of the party, consisting of the gentry. Other than that, he still appears to be very amiable to everyone around him. However, Sir Elliot’s pride and spoilt behaviour are felt very strongly throughout the whole plot of *Persuasion*.

The gentry, as a social group, started to develop in the Middle Ages. There was a big distinction between its members and the middle class; they did not have to work to earn their living. The gentry is the main focus of Austen’s novels, mostly the landed gentry. In Austen’s work, the gap between the gentry and aristocrats is very noticeable, however, in the end, one’s fortune and connections played a much greater part.

6 The Social Role of a Woman

“Men had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything.”, this quote by Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* perfectly sums up a woman’s history and the Regency period is definitely no exception. A woman was considered to be a lower human being in comparison with a man and had to obey him at any cost. At the end of the 18th century and throughout 19th century, many guides, companions, or manuals were published to help women from all over England to be properly accepted in the society. It is not a surprise that they were usually written by men.

The aim of these manuals was to prepare a woman to be a valuable social member. In most cases, the British female guides agreed on many points: a woman should be obedient, patient, innocent and completely subordinate to her husband. There was no place for her in the political debate, and her excessive interest in matters, concerning the male world, earned her only contempt. Nevertheless, exceptions could be found; for example, very intimate letters, written by Scottish Dr. John Gregory, for his unmarried daughters without a vision of publication. After his death, his son published the letters as a comprehensive guide for any woman.

Besides many secondary sources, the thesis tries to include popular (during the Regency) and multiply republished guides to young women to not only support the historical accuracy of the social rules, described in the novels, but also to support the argument of Austen’s characters being perfectly fleshed out and so far ahead of their time. Those characters were created by a lady whose brilliance and opinions of the society are imprinted in every one of them. The variety of characters is particularly large, many of them refuse to be limited and to obey to the society. On the other hand, more than a few match the perfect behaviour of a proper lady in Austen’s time. It would be foolish to think that majority of young ladies behaved exactly as Elizabeth Bennet, refusing marriage proposals made by very wealthy and secured men or going for walks alone whenever they pleased. The woman had to be always in the company of her acquaintances or chaperoned (Helen, 2017). If one wants to find the best representation of a proper lady of the Regency whose behaviour is in agreement with the ‘unwritten’ social rules, then Charlotte Lucas from *Pride and Prejudice*, Elinor Dashwood from *Sense and Sensibility* and many more, would be up to the task.

“The compiler has adapted his work to the humble, yet more respectable class of females; and everyone in that class, whether residing in the decent mansion or the rustic cottage...” (Stewart, 1808, p. 10). Stewart’s and Gregory’s companions are addressed to women that quite fits the description of the gentry or ‘newly-rich’ social class during the Regency. Therefore, they are perfect primary sources that can support some of the arguments of the thesis.

6. 1 Education

“A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern language, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved” (P&P, 2020, vol. I, chap. 9). The vision of a truly accomplished woman was quite severe in Miss Bingley’s and Mr. Darcy’s minds. In addition, she must improve “her mind by extensive reading” (P&P, 2020, vol. I, chap. 9). Austen’s heroines fit these requirements. All of them read extensively, sing, draw or play an instrument. For example, Jane Fairfax, and Marianne Dashwood are known for their impressive talent in playing the pianoforte. M. Roy in his essay emphasizes how important and valuable in the novels is if a lady is known to be a good pianoforte player. Frank Churchill secretly gives a pianoforte to Jane Fairfax which creates endless gossips throughout the whole plot of *Emma*. Pianoforte was a very expensive gift and one of the indicators of men’s wealth. Other than that, Jane Fairfax, an orphan, favourite for her musical talent, ends up marrying a man of a higher status (M. Roy, 2021). Certainly, her musical talent helped her gain Churchill’s attention.

However, some of them did not even receive a proper education from a governess. Lady Catherine de Bourgh is negatively shocked upon hearing that the Bennet sisters did not have a governess, nor did they go to London every spring to receive the education from the masters. During the Regency, the education from music teachers was given in the town (Strafford, 2020, p. 313). Upper-class ladies could visit seminars that were usually established in private houses of older, educated well-bred women. Besides languages or music, proper behaviour and etiquette were part of a training as well (Kloester, 2005, p. 68-69). The Bennet sisters were educated privately by their father and this might be one of the many reasons of Lydia’s and Kitty’s improper behaviour and in the case of the first one, bad development of the character in *Pride and Prejudice*. However, not every female in Austen’s novels was considered to be well educated by the society, despite having a governess. Julia Bertram was popular among the young ladies because of her title; being a daughter of a baronet, but soon they felt ‘offended’ by what they termed “airs – for as she neither played on the pianoforte nor wore fine pelisses,

they could, on farther observation, admit no right of superiority” (MP, 1998, chap. 40). Julia later eloped to Scotland, whereas Elizabeth and Jane Benet turned out to be well behaved and sought after. Perhaps, it is a small reference to the author herself, as mentioned before, Austen’s education was also entirely in the hands of her father.

Education was an indicator if the lady was accomplished or not. *The Young Woman’s Companion; or, Female Instructor* by J. A. Stewart, even consists of chapters specialized in English grammar, arithmetic, letter writing etc. It was common for upper-class ladies to be educated privately at their home with a governess. In addition, there was a valuable opportunity for them to visit private seminars in the town and receive even better education by specialists. Austen’s heroines could be in most cases considered to be very well educated, even though some of them did not have governess to look after their studies.

6. 2 Coming out into society

Coming out into the society was very important step in young girl’s life. It meant that the girl was prepared and old enough for marriage (Strafford, 2020, p. 311). Only one of the Austen’s main characters comes out into the society; Fanny Price. Her introduction was made at a ball. As the only female, presented at Mansfield, was persuaded by her uncle to open the ball herself which had a big impact of Fanny’s mood. The only thought on her mind was to find a dance partner as soon as possible, otherwise she would be exposed to ridicule.

Specific, appropriate age when the lady should be out is not revealed in the Austen novels. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth admits to the noble woman that her youngest sister has been out before reaching sixteen years and before her older sister’s marriage. The noblewomen’s reaction to that; “Very odd! – And you only the second. – The younger ones out before the elder are married!” (P&P, 2020, vol. II, chap. 6), gives the reader an idea what was the proper age of the introduction. Kloester considers the age of seventeen for girls to be able to attend small dinner parties and events in popular cities such as Bath. However, they cannot go to bigger social assemblies in the town (London). This was allowed only after their introduction to the society (Kloester, 2005, p. 70).

“Has she been presented? I do not remember her name among the ladies at court” (P&P, 2020, volume I, chap. 14). Mrs Benet is quite puzzled upon realizing, that a noblewoman Catherine de Bourgh has a daughter she did not know anything about. If a lady was a member of nobility, she was presented at the court and could attend gatherings, hosted by royalty (Kloester, 2005, p. 70).

Maria Crawford gives her opinion on how a lady, not being out yet, should behave in the society. In addition, she makes known that “one does not like to see a girl of eighteen or nineteen so immediately up to everything” (MP, 1998, chap. 5). Let us presume that the proper age of coming out was indeed at least sixteen years old.

“A girl not out, has always the same sort of dress; a close bonnet for instance, looks very demure, and never says a word. You may smile – but it is so I assure you – and except that it is sometimes carried a little too far, it is all very proper. Girls should be quiet and modest. The most objectionable part is, that the alternation of manners on being introduced into company is frequently too sudden” (MP, 1998, chap. 5).

Thomas Bertram responds with his own story about the time when he misjudged which Anderson sister was out. The younger sister did not behave according to proper rules and was acting as she was already out, instead of her older sister. Thomas’s actions and affections towards the girl that has not been out yet, offended the whole family.

Coming out is not among major themes that are more explored in the novels. Despite of being a major landmark in lives of young ladies in the Regency, Fanny Price is the only main protagonist whose entrance into the society is presented to the readers. Once out, the lady could be courted by any single gentleman. Daughters of aristocrats were usually introduced at court. There were harsh demands that had to be met by a girl who was not part of the society yet and every gentleman had to be aware of the position of every lady he was acquainted with. If the gentleman started to pay affection to the lady before her coming out, it was seen as an offence to the family, as it happened in Thomas Bertram’s situation.

6. 3 A proper behaviour

Austen always emphasizes how a gentleman’s daughter should behave, especially when she is out of her home. Their reputation was always in a danger. Any misstep, for example being seen alone with a gentleman, evoked endless gossips, among others. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine is begged by Isabela to join the party so she will not be alone in a company of two men, even though one of them is her own brother. She presents it as a ‘improper thing’ which she should not be ever able to do (NA, 2000, chap. 13). Later, she does exactly the opposite. As an engaged woman, she dances and flirts with captain Tilney at a ball, pretending that she does not notice Catherine’s hints (NA, 2000, chap. 13). Austen presents even worse situation of improper behaviour of an engaged woman. In *Mansfield Park*, Maria Bertram, who

is engaged to a wealthy landowner Mr. Rushford, goes alone to the forest with Henry Crawford (MP, 1998, chap. 10). Not only that, she wants to perform a scene with him in a private play. The private play in *Mansfield Park* and the whole plot about it gives us the perfect view on the perception of engaged woman in the Regency. Maria's situation was very delicate and Edmund, one of the characters whose moral values are particularly strict, firmly disagrees with Maria's participation in the play at first.

In *Northanger Abbey*, uncomfortable conversation between Catherine and Mr. Allen takes place as he warns her about the behaviour of the party that she belongs to. "Young men and woman driving about the country in open carriages! Now and then it is very well; but going to inns and public places together! It is not right..." (NA, 2000, chap. 13). In the Austen world, it was perfectly fine to go for walks or attend balls in mixed parties but apparently, visiting pubs and travelling around in open carriages was not acceptable at all. There is only one scene in all of the novels, where ladies are presented at inn; the Benet sisters stop at a nearest inn for dinner before their travel back home. They visited the inn together without any male acquaintance.

As Dr. Gregory advises in the letters for his daughters; "If you love him, let me advice you never to discover to him the full extent of your love; no, not although you marry him..." (Gregory, 1806, p. 98) Charlotte Lucas might disagree a little bit. She confesses to Elizabeth, her worries about Jane not giving enough signs of attention to Mr. Bingley. The plots of all six novels could be very different indeed, if the opposite genders were able to talk to each other privately, although the miscommunication between lovers is the main plot device of Austen. The readers are not presented with a scene made only of male characters; they are always told from woman's perspective.

A lady could not be left alone at the social gatherings and the most improper and rudest behaviour in the novels, would be letting a woman travel alone. Lady Catherine de Bourgh demands Mr. Collins to send a servant to accompany the party at Rosings, saying; "... I cannot bear the idea of two young women travelling post by themselves. It is highly improper" (P&P, 2020, vol. II, chap. 14). General Tilney is presented as a main antagonist in *Northanger Abbey*. After his realization that Catherine is not as wealthy as he imagined, he lets her travel back home without any company and money for the journey (NA, 2000, chap. 28).

Every girl had to be careful about her behaviour during the Regency era. Every misstep such as being seen alone with a man or driving around in an open carriage and visiting pubs and inn, was, according to the society of the time, inexcusable and females in the novels are

consistently aware of that. Nevertheless, some of them choose to not to obey these unwritten rules of behaviour. Especially ill-mannered (for the Regency lady) attitude is demonstrated by Maria Bertram, engaged lady whose story does not end up well. Engaged women were in a delicate position and were observed by the ton more than the usual lady from the upper-class.

6. 4 Marriable age

This topic is widely represented in every novel. Characters freely give their opinions of a right age for woman to seek after a marriage. Marianne represents the sense in *Sense and Sensibility*; therefore, she gives her opinions of Edward Ferrars and the age of Colonel Brandon very lightly and she speaks what she feels. Her mother warns her that she, a girl who has not yet reached the age of seventeen, cannot think of a marriage yet. (S&S, 2010, chap. 3) Marianne's different judgement and temperament results later on in an unhappy romance with John Willoughby and improper behaviour in the society by both of them. If the woman reached the age of twenty-one, as Maria Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, she "was beginning to think matrimony a duty" (MP, 1998, chap. 4).

Mrs. Benet does not hide the fact that her oldest daughter is her favourite, calling her the most beautiful girl from whole ball and trying to secure for her a wealthy husband first out of her all five daughters. However, she says; "Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost three and twenty! Lord, how ashamed I should be of not being married before three and twenty!" (P&P, 2020, vol. II, chap. 16)

Even worst situation comes to a light when a lady is twenty-seven years old. With this age, the lady is in Austen novels, a lost individual. Austen mentions this terrible fate that could wait for her female characters in three of her works; *Sense and Sensibility*, *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Marianne's opinion is expectedly the harshest of them all, she declares that the lady should "submit to the offices of a nurse" (S&S, 2015, chap. 8) and if she is lucky and in the end draws someone's attention, it would seem to her as "only a commercial exchange, in which each wished to be benefited at the expense of the other" (S&S, 2015, chap. 8). Marianne's judgment actually becomes a reality for Charlotte Lucas, throughout the novel, she is very well aware of her being a burden for the Lucas family. The solution to her misery was to accept a proposal from Mr. Collins, whose character was not exactly likable. The author later in the story hints that their marriage was not the happiest.

Anne Elliot is the only main heroine who actually is twenty-six or twenty-seven years old. The whole novel is about her sadness which is coming from her refusal of Captain

Wentworth at a young age. At a certain point, Anne compares herself with a situation of Captain Benwick whose two years younger and lost his fiancée, nevertheless, she still has hopes for his future, not for hers.

According to Stewart's handbook, only a married woman can be happy and helpful member of the society² (Stewart, 1815, p. 120) The Regency society was very harsh towards unmarried women in their twenties and to the certain extent, it transcends into the Austen work as well. From Marianne's judgment to Charlottes' decision to marry a man whose character she is not inclined to, reminds us that marriage was usually the major goal of every young lady, certainly the goal of their mothers and if the lady is over twenty-seven, she should start getting used to the life of an old maiden. However, through Anne Elliot, Austen gave her older readers a hope that nothing had been lost yet.

6. 5 Fallen women

It might have seemed that Austen novels are fairy tales where each character is able to go through their redemption. Of course, it is not true, at all. Let us put aside for a moment male characters who could be viewed as the prototypes of men that Stewart warns about, to be specific; "The man of pleasure is as much to be avoided as the illiterate clown; how agreeable soever he may appear to you abroad, he never can be long so at home..." (Stewart, 1808, p. 146) The novels explore this type of men greatly and almost every time, the lost reputation and consequences are much visible and harsher for the lady, not for her 'partner in crime'.

The woman who has the door into a good society permanently closed in Austen world, is the one who escaped with her lover, without being married to him. In 1754, the Marriage Act became the law and changed the British society forever. The law fought for example against polygamy, rushed and unreasonable marriages, seduction of wealthy widows etc. Before the marriage could be viewed as legal, the couple must have been married with a parental consent for minors and banns or license. The event had to be recorded in the Marriage Register and it

² His exact words about unmarried women, generally accepted by the Regency society; "It is generally received opinion, founded in fact, that females may attain a superior degree of happiness in a married state to what they can possibly find in the other. What a forlorn and unprotected situation is that of an old maid! What chagrin and peevishness are apt to infect their tempers; and how great is the difficulty of making a transition, with dignity and cheerfulness, from the period of youth and beauty, admiration and respect, into the calm, silent, unnoticed retreat of declining years! A married state, if entered into from proper motives of esteem and affection, is certainly the happiest; it will make you most respectable in the world, and the most useful members of society" (Stewart, 1815, p. 120).

required witnesses' presence, together with a clergyman who certified the marriage (Bannet, 1997, p. 234). As Eve Tavor Bavor Bannet points out, the couple must have met all the requirements that are nowadays considered to be a norm. Other than that, the couple had to live at least three weeks in the parish of their wedding. The law was not passed for Scotland (Strafford, 2020, p. 318) and Lydia Benet and Julia Bertram were very aware of it.

Lydia Benet and Julia Bertram escaped both to Scotland and it is interesting to compare their endings. Austen decided to strip Lydia of a good ending. Her temperament stays exactly the same, she ends up poor, having no proper home and constantly moving around with her husband. Julia's situation is much better, even though she disappointed Sir Thomas Bertram, she "was more pardonable than Maria..." (MP, 1998, chap. 47).

Some people from 21st century, might laugh at the Benet's extensive reaction to Lydia's elopement but they had a right to worry. If the gossips about it spread around the county, not only Lydia's but also all of the sister's reputation would be ruined. Same situation happens in *Mansfield Park*, the true character of Mary Crawford is revealed to Edmund Bertram, due to her proposals and ideas about how both families, could recover from Maria's and Henry's escape; "In some circles, we know, she would never be admitted..." (MP, 2007, chap. 47). Henry's reputation is not as ruined as Maria's and in the novel, Austen does not even give the space to it, she is only concerned with Maria's situation.

Maria Bertram was an engaged woman who left her house with another man. Her fate is perhaps the most miserable of all characters. Her elopement resulted in divorce and even worse; a public shame since it was published in newspapers. Only initials were printed out but being a wife of a very wealthy men, probably everyone among higher circles, could guess whose affair it is. Because of a possible "so great an insult to the neighbourhood" (MP, 1998, chap. 47), she was not admitted back to Mansfield. What is even more devastating, is that the whole situation could had been prevented if her father, Sir Bertram, offered to dissolve the engagement.

Lydia and Maria serve as bad examples of women that young female readers of Austen should differ from at any cost. Austen warns through them her readers of the consequences that may fall upon a girl that goes astray.

7 Courtship

Austen's novels are the perfect sources for studying the rules of courting in the Regency. As mentioned before, because of the wide variety of the upper-class characters with different temperament and morals which, in some cases, were not exactly appropriate, according to the social codex or etiquette, readers are left with many examples of courting.

Gentlemen had many ways to show their affection to the potential fiancée by paying them attention, dancing or writing letters. Some demonstrations of love, such as taking a lock of lover's hair or receiving expensive gifts (horse, pianoforte, necklace...) might seem now as very odd even comical occurrence but in the Regency period, it was a possible sign for their acquaintances that the couple might be engaged.

Since Austen's work is primarily targeted for ladies, the courtship plays a big role in it. Through her characters, namely (for the purposes of this chapter) Marianne Dashwood from *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen tries to demonstrate to the gentle sex how to behave properly in a man's presence and which male's attention to be aware of. The thesis will present only a few scenes that were carefully chosen to represent particular and most distinctive rules of courting.

7.1 Paying Attention

Even the slightest hint of affection between male and female characters could be understood by others as a straightforward indication that the couple had taken a liking to each other. Jane Bennet, due to her shy nature, does not show enough attention to Mr. Bingley which results in one of the reasons (although a minor one) why he stops courting her and leaves his estate. Her excessive careful attitude is to some extent understandable, a woman could not properly show her interest. Usually a male family member or friend played a role of a matchmaker (Helen, 2017). A gentleman, leaving his occupation for a while because of the unrequited love, is a common scene in the novels. Captain Wentworth starts to show small interest in both Musgrove sisters. All involved are bewildered by his behaviour and quite rightfully so, as Admiral Croft notes; "He has been running after them, too, long enough... If it were war, now he would have settled it long ago" (P, 2003, vol. I, chap. 10). Very lately, Wentworth he finds out "that he entangled himself" (P, 2003, vol. II, chap. 11), knowing that he actually does not fancy neither of two ladies involved, he quits Lyme immediately.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor and her mother try to find out if Marianne and Mr. Willoughby are indeed an engaged couple. One of the Elinor's clues is that she hears Mr.

Willoughby calling her sister by the Christian name; "... she instantly saw an intimacy so dedicated, a meaning so direct, as marked a perfect agreement between them. From that moment she doubted not of their being engaged to each other" (S&S, 2015, chap. 12). Calling each other by Christian names was in this case seen as a sign of a serious intimacy. In the novels, only family members have this privilege. Although Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park* uses this privilege and calls Fanny by her Christian name, their situation could be understood as an exception because they are cousins and basically grew up together.

7. 1. 1 Unrequired Suitor

Fanny Price makes sure that she does not support any Henry Crawford's attentions with her behaviour. She is very aware of his intentions, therefore tries to be as modest as possible and appears to be uninterested in his future plans. However, she does not always succeed; "... for the shawl... was seized by Mr. Crawford's quicker hand, and she was obliged to be indebted to his more prominent attention" (MP, 1998, chap. 25) If the lady did not return her feelings towards the suitor, she had to act as decently as possible. Dr. Gregory warns his daughters to not find a pleasure in playing with man's feelings and recommends; "... the greatest kindness you can show him if you are determined not to listen to his addresses, is to let him know it as soon as possible" (Gregory, 1808, p. 104). Fanny's behaviour could be considered as a prime example of a well-behaved single lady whose reputation was always determined by her attitude (Kloester, 2005, p. 65).

Not always did an Austen's gentlemen take a rejection from a lady as a final decision. As mentioned before, after the Marriage Act was passed, the parental consent was needed. Henry Crawford, although politely rejected by Fanny, requires a visit with Sir Thomas Bertram, Fanny's uncle "who seemed to stand in the place of her parents" (MP, 1998, chap. 32), believing that he will use his authority over Fanny and persuades her into the marriage. When it comes to fortune and social standing, Henry was indeed a very suitable match, therefore everyone's reactions to her refusal are at least little bit justified. Fanny is considered to be ungrateful, even a bitter disappointment by her aunt and uncle because of the rejection. Quite an opposite example is presented in *Pride and Prejudice*. Mr. Bennet adores his second born daughter so much that he decides not to take into account all the benefits that a marriage to Mr. Collins would bring to the whole family and does not try to convince Elizabeth to change her opinion as her mother does. At the end of each novel, every main couple tries to secure the parental consent before the wedding.

7. 1. 2 Gifts

One of the ways to win a lady's heart was to give her expensive presents which were on many occasions way different from the presents that women receive today. From the point of view of some characters in the novels, it was strictly forbidden for a courting man to give gifts to the opposite gender, if they were not engaged. Of course, many of Austen's male leads do not comply with the 'unwritten' rule.

Edmund Bertram gives Fanny a little chain for her brother's cross, although at that part of the novel, only as a "token of the love of one of your oldest friends" (MP, 1998, chap. 27). Later, Fanny chooses to wear a necklace that Maria first gave her because she does not want to dishonour her friend. However, the necklace had been purchased by Henry who proposed to his sister to lend it to Fanny. The importance of wearing or having a gift from someone is very well demonstrated in this case. Henry and Maria take Fanny's acceptance of the necklace almost as acceptance of Henry's future gallantry and flirts towards Fanny. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor thinks it would be very inappropriate for Marianne to accept a horse from Mr. Willoughby; "Elinor then ventured to doubt the propriety of her receiving such a present from a man so little, or at least so lately known to her. This was too much" (S&S, 2015, chap. 12). At this part of the novel, Marianne's acquaintance with Mr. Willoughby was not even seven days long.

Sometimes, the couple had to be separated for a while due to many reasons. In these cases, they gave each other a lock of hair or small picture as a sign that they have a piece of themselves, therefore they are still together and remain devoted to each other. Elinor is devastated when she learns about Edward's secret marriage to Lucy Ferrars. Lucy's reveals to her that she has "a comfort in his picture" (S&S, 2015, chap. 22). In return, Edward wears a lock of Lucy's hair in his ring which, cannot substitute (at least in Lucy's opinion) the comfort of having someone's portrait. In *Emma*, Mr. Elton wants a picture of Harriet but certainly not because of the model herself as Emma imagines. The picture was drawn by Emma, whose attention he was unsuccessfully seeking in the first half of the novel.

Austen in her work uses gifts as a major indicator of a couple's intimacy as well as minor plot devices for characters to get more information about others. Emma is excited from the realization that Mr. Elton wants Harriet's picture and Elinor gradually loses every hope of a possible engagement to Edward and completely believes Lucy's revelation of her secret marriage to him. Therefore, having in possession someone's lock of hair was in Austen's novels, a definitive sign of a couple's marriage.

The simple fact that the opposite genders could not speak privately with each other in the novels (therefore in the Regency) and had to watch their attitude, usually lead to big miscommunications between the characters. The readers are kept in oblivion till the end and have to pay a close attention to the behaviour of each character. Because of the close intimacy and privacy, some characters unconsciously become unreliable sources of information (Elinor Dashwood from *Sense and Sensibility*), although sometimes the bad etiquette of some individuals is to blame. Wanting a picture of the lover or a lock of hair as amulets, calling each other by the Christian name or giving each other expensive gifts, were seen as signs of serious couples' dedication. Women had to be always on guard and behave as nicely and appropriately as possible. If they were not interested and did not return their affection, the suitor had to be rejected with the greatest respect. In the novels, their possible rejection has not always been taken easily into account.

7. 2 Dancing

Balls were perfect places where young couples could get to know each other better. Through dance, the pair got some privacy, a space for conversation only between four eyes (Jones, 2020, p. 296). This was the only occasion when a woman was not with her chaperone, family, or friends (Helen, 2017), although she was still closely observed by them. Other than that, even slight touches between the opposite genders were prohibited, except for dancing. Strict rules had to be followed as well. Everyone had to wear a pair of gloves (Helen, 2017). Polka, quadrille, and waltz were very popular and common dances at Regency balls. Waltz originated in Germany and came to England in 1814 and at first, was not favoured among upper-class society due to many spins and turns (Hughes, 1998, p. 205). One of the reasons of waltz's gained popularity in the 19th century, was the increase of a physical contact between the partners (Jones, 2020, p. 296).

If a lady promised a dance to a man, she was obliged to fulfil her engagement. Gentlemen could ask their desired partners a permission to dance even days before the actual ball; "I firmly believe you were engaged to me ever since Monday" (NA, 2000, chap. 10) In *Northanger Abbey*, Mr. Thorpe lies to Catherine about her supposed obligation to dance with him, so she is not seen dancing with another men during the ball. This is his strategy in getting hers and others attention so he could be seen as a possible suitor of hers.

Not changing partners and dancing the whole night with only one partner was a significant indicator that the couple was engaged. The families of Mr. Rushworth and Maria Bertram make

sure that the couple is seen dancing only with each other on every ball in the county. In *Northanger Abbey*, Isabella Thorps reminds Catherine's brother that they cannot dance together again so soon for it would be "most improper thing, and entirely against the rules" (NA, 2007, chap. 8). Her concerns, though in her case pretended, are entirely justified. People around payed attention and made sure that nothing that might be worth of gossiping about, misses them. Mrs. Bennet gave an exact and lengthy report to her husband about Mr. Bingley's dancing partners (P&P, 2020, vol I, p. 10).

"Harriet had no partner – the only young lady sitting down; and so equal had been hitherto the number of dancers..." (E, 2000, chap. 3), this was considered to be the biggest misfortune that could happen to a lady in a room, full of couples ready to dance. In this case, the host of the ball or dinner usually asks a potential partner to invite the lady. Harriet's situation is particularly important because it reveals Mr. Elton's true character. He refuses to dance with her, makes excuses and at the same time prefers asking another lady. In Austen's time, Mr. Elton's attitude was in the society's eyes extremely ill-mannered. Fortunately, Mr. Knightly invites Harriet to dance, preventing her from a possible embarrassment. On the other hand, if there was a situation where the woman herself refused the offer to dance, as in Elizabeth Bennet's situation, it was not considered impolite, at least in the novel. Surprisingly, her resistance makes her even more appealing in Mr. Darcy's eyes. As Emma Woodhouse points out to Mr. Frank Churchill; "It is always the lady's right to decide on the degree of acquaintance" (E, 2000, chap. 24), in the novels, it is always up to the lady's decision if she accepts man's dance offer or attentions.

Dancing at country, private balls or dinners was seen as the most intimate act between two genders in the novels. The lady was during a dance entirely on her own, without the party or chaperone, therefore it was the best opportunity to have a private conversation among each other. It could also serve as a public 'revelation' of a future married-to-be couple. As any social act, it had its rules and it was carefully observed by others.

7. 3 Letters

Letters were the most significant mean of communication in the past and the Regency era is of course, no exception. Austen's characters correspond among each other very often and due to this major plot element, the readers can get more information about minor character's thoughts or events that the protagonists were not presented at.

Judging by Elinor's reaction to Marianne's correspondence with Mr. Willoughby, if there was no engagement or obligation between young lady and gentleman, they could not correspond under any circumstances. Colonel Brandon considers Mr. Willoughby and Marianne engaged, based on the rumours and their open correspondence. Despite all the clues of their courtship (mentioned above), Elinor still remains unconvinced, confiding to her mother; "If we find they correspond, every fear of mine will be removed" (S&S, 2015, chap. 15). Later, it is revealed that Marianne sent three letters to Mr. Willoughby. To Elinor's shock Marianne responds; "... could that be wrong after all that had passed?" (S&S, 2010, chap. 29). She was in love with Mr. Willoughby and because of his affections and behaviour towards her, Marianne thought that there was a certain level of intimacy between them which at least a little explains why she even wrote to him at the first place. However, this is not an excuse for Marianne's behaviour, as Amy Helen points out, woman from the Regency period, could not show any interest (Helen, 2017) and based on the scene from *Sense and Sensibility*, not even through letters.

Stewart gives practical advice to his female readers on how to write a proper letter. One of the presented examples is a letter, through a lady can refuse gentleman's attentions, expressed in his letter (Stewart, 1815, p. 136). In *Persuasion*, Captain Wentworth chooses a letter as the form of the declaration of love and he does not require Anne's written response. Instead, he proposes to her to reveal her feelings by behaviour in next public occasion.

Mr. Willoughby did not send any response to Marianne nor did Elizabeth to Mr. Darcy's letter which was written in attempt to clear his reputation after their conversation and Elizabeth's rejection. This and Mr. Wentworth love letter are two examples of three, where a single young man writes to a lady in the novels. In *Mansfield Park*, Edmund occasionally writes to Fanny to inform her of his pursuit of Mary Crawford and her, being wanted back at Mansfield as soon as possible.

In the novels, letters were very rarely used in courting. Open correspondence between a lady and gentleman meant that there was some obligation, or the couple was engaged. If the one party did not respond or was not interested, it was reasonable to stop the correspondence. Love letters were common during Austen's time, as demonstrated by Mr. Wentworth in *Persuasion*. As the ladies' reputation was very fragile, it was not reasonable to initiate the correspondence with a young single bachelor.

Conclusion

The Regency era is through Austen's work, remembered as a period full of glamour, balls, tea-parties, hunts, and proper attitude of those who stood at the top of the imaginary social ladder. Her novels, to a certain extent explore a life of the nobility, although the main focus is on wealthy landowners, members of the gentry. Surely, titles were significant, and brought appropriate prestige and status to their holders.

On the other hand, with an emerging industrial revolution came a new social class, by many scholars called 'new-rich', who did not need to have a title attached to their names to be invited into upper social circles. Austen's brilliant storytelling gives the readers the opportunity to study the behaviour of the majority of social ranks and their attitude towards each other. Many of the character's storylines emphasize the importance of how crucial was to own an estate or be lucky to be born with a title, already attached to their name, to be treated properly and with a due respect. Not all of them knew their place on every occasion which is understandable due to the fact that every well-dressed man was seen as a gentleman.

Women of upper classes had to earn their place by right behaviour, proper and sufficient education. At the same time, they had to submit to the patriarchy and not express their opinions and beliefs too freely. In conclusion, the image of a timid, beautiful, well dressed lady was a desirable match for any young bachelor. Contemporary guides and handbooks, written and published by men to help women achieve this desired image and reach the unattainable standard, support the idea of young girls, trying to obey strict rules as much as possible. Among Austen's heroines could be found prime examples of girls that behaved exactly according the Regency etiquette. However, characters like Marianne Dashwood or Elizabeth Bennet are not afraid to express their true feelings and thoughts, therefore they are appealing even to today's society.

Being introduced into society, the main goal of a teenage girl was to find a suitable match to secure her position. Many characters are obsessed with fulfilling the duty, therefore the hunt for aspiring bachelors is one of the main plot themes of the novels. Courtship was a very risky business for both genders and if anything went wrong, endless gossips, even becoming the outcasts were typical outcomes of paying too much attention to a wrong person. Through Maria Bertram, Lydia Bennet and Isabella Thorpe, Austen tries to illustrate a life that waits for young misbehaving girls.

Many studies had already been made regarding the topic. However, the limitations are not yet outdated. There is still a space for potential research that could provide a different view from which the topic could be studied. Regarding the major target audiences of Austen's work, the thesis bases its arguments, besides the novels and secondary sources, on guides for women. It would be beneficial and very interesting to see an opposite outcome and research handbooks, dedicated to the proper behaviour of the Regency gentleman.

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Resumé

Hlavním cílem bakalářské práce je prostřednictvím tvorby britské spisovatelky Jane Austenové a sekundární literatury představit a analyzovat vybraná pravidla a etiku tehdejší anglické společnosti, která byla pod vlivem prince regenta Jiřího, budoucího krále Jiřího IV. Práce popisuje a uvádí příklady z šesti knih: *Emma*, *Mansfieldské panství*, *Opatství Northanger*, *Pýcha a Předsudek*, *Pýcha a Přemlouvání* a *Rozum a cit*, přičemž hlavní zaměření této práce je postavení ženy a dvoření románových představitelů z vyšších kruhů společnosti, přesněji dvoření nižší šlechty. Jednotlivá pravidla jsou ilustrována na příkladech z knih a následně podpořena sekundární literaturou a příručkami pro anglické ženy z vyšších kruhů, vydanými v 19. století.

ANOTACE

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Název práce:	Pravidla regentské společnosti v románech Jane Austenové
Název v angličtině:	The Rules of Regency Society in Jane Austen's Novels
Anotace práce:	Bakalářská práce analyzuje vybraná pravidla regentské společnosti v románech Jane Austenové. Zaměřuje se především na etiketu a dvoření nižší šlechty a tehdejší postavení ženy z vyšší třídy ve společnosti.
Klíčová slova:	Jane Austenová, regentská společnost, nižší šlechta, společenská pravidla, role ženy z vyšší třídy v regentské společnosti, dvoření
Anotace v angličtině:	The bachelor's thesis analyses selected rules of the Regency society in Jane Austen's novels. It focuses mainly on the etiquette and courtship of the upper classes and the role of an upper-class woman in the Regency period.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Jane Austen, Regency society, social rules, gentry, social role of an upper-class woman, courtship
Přílohy vázané v práci:	žádné
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