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**Heroines in Jane Austen's novels in comparison with female characters  
from L.M. Alcott's novel *Little Women***

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

V úvodní části práce bude podán stručný úvod do problematiky a přehled o postavení ženy ve viktoriánské Británii a charakteristika autorek. V hlavní části provede diplomandka porovnání vybraných postav z románů Jane Austenové a z románu Malé ženy od L.M. Alcottové. V závěrečné části budou pak poznatky shrnuty.

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## **Abstract**

The overall aim of this thesis is to compare female characters from the novels of the British author Jane Austen with the heroines from the novel *Little Women*, written by the American writer Louisa May Alcott. Although their works are separated by some 60 years, through this paper the similarities and differences of their heroines will be pointed out. At the beginning, the position of women in Victorian and pre-Victorian England will be depicted. Next, the thesis will focus specifically on Jane Austen and Louisa May Alcott, as regards their writings, sources of inspiration as well as their choices of topics. In the main part of the contents their heroines will be described on the background of five issues which are chosen as characteristic for both writers' works, and consequently, the findings will be compared. In the final part, the analysis will be thoroughly summarized.

### **Key words:**

Jane Austen, Louisa May Alcott, the position of women in Victorian England, social demands, *Little Women*.

## **Souhrn**

Cílem práce je porovnat představitelky z románů britské spisovatelky Jane Austenové s hrdinkami z knihy *Malé Ženy* od americké autorky Louisy May Alcottové. Přestože jejich tvorbu dělí přibližně 60 let, tato práce se zaměří na prezentaci rozdílů ale i podobností jejich hrdinek. U úvodu bude popsána pozice ženy ve společnosti v době viktoriánské a předviktoriánské Anglie. Dále budou představeny obě autorky a to z hlediska jejich díla, inspirace i volby témat. V hlavní části obsahu budou popsány hrdinky obou autorek a to na pozadí pěti témat vybraných jako charakteristická pro obě spisovatelky a získané poznatky budou následně porovnány. V závěrečné části bude celá analýza podrobně shrnuta.

### **Klíčová slova:**

Jane Austenová, Louisa May Alcottová, pozice ženy ve viktoriánské Anglii, požadavky společnosti na ženy, *Malé Ženy*.

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## 1. Introduction

The comparison of female characters of Jane Austen with L.M. Alcott's heroines from *Little Women* is the overall aim of this thesis. Though their creative periods were divided by some sixty years and one of them was English and the other one American, both the authoresses devoted their life to writing, and portrayed in their work women characters; which is the basis for this study.

The first part of this paper describes the period of Victorian England and deals with a woman's role in the society which was bound with patriarchal morals and values. Based on the findings, a model of a proper woman is presented with respect to social demands and requirements.

In the second part, both writers are introduced beginning with Jane Austen and her writing and sources of inspiration. Austen's themes and characters are then presented in connection with her life and interests; in addition her relation to the women's question is discussed, as well.

Consequently, Louisa May Alcott's life and her work are briefly portrayed emphasizing the two streams of her production, one being the official and authorized, whereas the other one being written anonymously or under a pseudonym. Then, the thesis is focused on defining Alcott's own attitudes towards her writing and these two different genres.

When reading the works of both writers five topics were chosen as rather significant and interesting to deal with when studying female characters, therefore in the last part of this paper they are analyzed and compared. Among the five themes belong: 1) Self and society, in which the issue of personal opinions and wishes are confronted with the social demands. 2) Education, Intellect and Self-realization are presented considering heroines' attitudes towards education and accomplishments, and their viewpoints as regards self-realization are studied. 3) Sisterhood is a common topic for both writers, since though differently, they both projected their life with sisters into their novels. 4) Marriage, which is based on one of the key life events of majority of women at those times. 5) Motherhood, presented as an affirmation of woman's identity, is finally depicted from Austen's as well as Alcott's viewpoints.

Ultimately, all findings are in detail summarized in the conclusion of this paper.



## **2. The position of women in Victorian England**

The nineteenth century was for England a time of great political, social and religious movements, literary and artistic styles thrived. Moreover, it was the era of imperial growth, industrialization, national wealth, however, predominantly, this century was connected with Queen Victoria, who was one of the longest ruling emperors in history. In addition, this time was also viewed in terms of prudishness and oppression. “Without a doubt, it was an extraordinarily complex age, which has sometimes been called the Second English Renaissance.” (Miller)

During the reign of Queen Victoria, woman was perceived as a kind of “icon” taking care of domestic affairs. “Home was regarded as a haven from the busy and chaotic public world of politics and business.” (bbc1) It was seen as a central point of private life of a family and woman was to take care of it and improve it. Those who were wealthy enough to afford it furnished their houses with luxury cloths, heavy curtains and costly furniture. Middle-class household mistresses also showed their respectability and orderliness by keeping servants, decorating rooms, organizing home leisure activities and taking care of proper clothing. (bbc6)

Apart from domesticity, there were other virtues expected and demanded from women, primarily, giving birth to children. Mother and her child were seen idyllic. Woman’s role as a mother had been idealised, to have a child was no longer seen in terms of reproduction, motherhood was comprehended as having symbolic meaning. Personal satisfaction and emotional fulfilment was the portrayal of motherhood and its implication for a woman. “[...] many middle-class women regarded motherhood and domestic life as a ‘sweet vocation’, a substitute for women’s productive role.” (bbc6)

Nevertheless, not only the mere fact of being a mother was a woman’s virtue, mothers tended to spend much more time with their children in order to provide them with education, play with them or integrate them into ordinary domestic life. As well, mothers were likely to breast-feed, since they perceived it as achieving true womanhood when being constantly emotionally and physically close to their children. “Motherhood was seen as an affirmation of their identity.” (bbc6)

When a woman became a mother, she was regarded to have entered the true virtue and fulfilment, in other words that she not only achieved maturity and respectability as when becoming married, yet she was seen as a complete and full-value

female. On the contrary, if a woman was childless the society thought of her as being a sort of “defective” and in some way unsatisfactory. Furthermore, provided that a woman was single, her empty life was pitied. Such woman was also often advised to at least become a nursery maid or governess, in order to somehow counterbalance her loss. (bbc6)

Queen Victoria herself was considered a “perfect” example of a female fulfilling her womanly duties and as such was an excellent model, and in fact an idol, for millions of English women.

Indeed, Victoria came to be seen as the very model of marital stability and domestic virtue. Her marriage to Albert represented the ideal of marital harmony. She was described as 'the mother of the nation', and she came to embody the idea of home as a cosy, domestic space. When Albert died in 1861 she retreated to her home and family in preference to public political engagements.

(bbc1)

Besides domesticity, marriage and motherhood, there were some other aspects that made a woman virtuous in society’s view. Middle-class women were often engaged in charitable work, since they understood it as a kind of “mission” they had to take part in actively. They so much believed in their “domestic morality” (bbc8) that transmission of their advice and instructions became their task. Frequently, they visited homes of working-class women, whom they lectured on proper care of children and household management, while at home having servants to “keep their own homes up to the required standards.”(bbc8) Finally, piety, practised according to evangelical beliefs belonged to the most valuable female virtues.

To sum up, the role of a woman in society was viewed merely in connection with her “success” as regards getting married, preferably to a rich gentleman, becoming a mother and taking care of family members as well as managing her household. Such occupation was regarded as a respectable and full-time duty of hers, not only for the family, but also for the country itself. Being good wife, caring mother and skilful home manager was an ideal for all women.

The domestic sphere was a cultural expression of the female world. Their fashions, etiquette, domestic furnishings, social engagements, religious devotion and charitable activity all served to delineate a universe within which women could demonstrate their power.

(bbc5)

### 3. Austen's writings, sources of inspiration, themes

Jane Austen, a novelist, could be categorized as a representative of a literary genre called "the novel of manners". Generally, the novel of manners is determined by the subject matter, the writer chooses to depict in a great detail a certain social world. The author tries to observe and convey his or her readers the customs, values, manners and way of life of a particular social class. The basis of the story is aimed at social conventions and to what degree the characters fit the demands of society. (Britannica2) In this respect, though creating her work in the time when Romanticism was a prevailing artistic tendency, Jane Austen, with her novels of manner, which were deliberately privileging sense to sensibility, is sometimes being thematically and according to the genre assigned to the authors of later period, the Victorian.

However, in other sources Austen's works are perceived as Domestic novels, since the genre depicts a life in a particular family portraying all events, characters, customs and manners in connection with the family. (ceskyjazyk) The subject matter of Jane Austen's work can be set relatively clearly. Austen decided to write about what was familiar to her, therefore she chose the life of country gentry in southern England. Such theme is somewhat problematic in the way Andrew H. Wright explains it in his book *A study in Structure*. According to his views, many of Austen's readers, both critics and fans, regard her choice of subject matter "a deliberate limitation, a smallness of range" (Wright, 22). He continues stating that those who appreciate her works uncover within its limitation important issues, whereas those who do not admire her and reprehend her choice base their opinions on the fact that there is nothing really groundbreaking and valuable about such a theme. (22)

Though living and writing in the period of Romanticism, great political changes, and Napoleonic wars, in which two of her brothers were engaged, she intentionally chose topics that could have possibly been written much earlier for they were not touched by any of those events or tendencies. Yet, Wright argues that her choice was deliberate.

[...], as some have contended, she might simply have held to the past, have rejected the present and its implications. Then the themes might reflect or embody the morality of her father's generation. (26).

Austen's work could be perceived as having three levels of meaning. The first is based on the local aspect; the novels portray the country life of upper-middle class in England during the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The second level can be seen as an allegorical depiction of virtues and vices such as pride, prejudice, sense, and others. And finally, the third level is the ironic level. (27)

As she was born in a family of a scholar and clergyman, who devoted all the rest of his time that was left from his parish duties to his books, Jane Austen grew up surrounded by literature. Especially, reading novels and history books pleased her and inspired in her work. Though brought up in the environment sustaining positive relation to literature and art in general, Austen spent almost the whole life in the country; she never joined any literary circles. In spite of it, writing was the true love of her life and brought her amusement from the early adolescence till the last days of her rather short life. Moreover, her novels have been pleasing and delighting across generations all over the world.

Austen started writing in early childhood. Elizabeth Jenkins, who has written a biography of Jane Austen, found in the correspondence of the family Austen's own remarks about her relation to writing in the times of her youth. "She practised the art with such unremitting enthusiasm that, on looking back, she said she wished she had written less and read more between the ages of twelve and sixteen." (Jenkins, 23) Austen's early works date back to years around 1787 and till 1793 she wrote plenty of plays, short novels, and verses. In general, it mostly contained works of sentimental fiction and they were preserved in the volumes called *Volume the First*, *Volume the Second*, *Volume the Third*. Of all of them *Love and Friendship*, a satirical novel, written by Austen at the age of fourteen, is commonly perceived the best work of her juvenile production. By writing a short novel in letters *Lady Susan*, she strayed to a bit different and more serious views of life. The work was written between the years 1793 to 1794, though it was not published till 1871. It is "a study of frustration and of woman's fate in a society that has no use for woman's stronger, more 'masculine,' talents." (Britannica1)

Jenkins in her study indicates that, according to her brother Henry, Jane was keen on reading *The Spectator*, a popular magazine at those times, [...], however, she took the biggest interest in reading novels. Particularly, those novels written by the masters of this genre: Henry Fielding, Lawrence Sterne, Samuel Richardson, as well as

women writers such as Ann Radcliffe and Fanny Burney. In her novels, Austen often mentioned some of the famous pieces. In *Northanger Abbey*, the author openly satirises the popular genre of those times, Gothic novel, which is in the book represented by Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Nevertheless, the writer who impressed her immensely was Samuel Richardson. Primarily, she was fond of his *Sir Charles Grandison*. Repeatedly, she referred to passages in the book, as stated by Jenkins, which was the evidence of her great impression of "Richardson's genius". Henry Austen declared that Jane remembered many details concerning particular episodes and dates from the text and was able to speak about them any time. (Jenkins, 31-34)

From the contemporary authors, she most enthusiastically read Fanny Burney and her novels *Evelina*, *Cecilia* and *Camilla*. Austen openly showed her affection for the novels in her work with numerous allusions. There are, for example, references to *Camilla* in Austen's *Sanditon*, a piece she wrote the same year she died, or in the famous passage from *Northanger Abbey*, defending female novelists.

Austen was constantly rewriting and renaming her works. Around the years 1795-1796 she completed the first versions of the novel *First Impressions*, later known as her masterpiece *Pride and Prejudice* and a novel in letters *Elinor and Marianne*, which was afterwards entitled *Sense and Sensibility*. Jane's father Reverend George Austen offered *First Impressions* to a publisher but the novel was rejected. Much as good the first version might have been, Jenkins asserts, that despite Austen's understandable disappointment caused by the declination, the gap between the first "draft" and mature perfection of its final form was probably to her own benefit. (46)

The earliest example of a completed novel was *Northanger Abbey* with its heroine Catherine Morland. Originally, the title was meant to be *Susan*, according to the name of its heroine, but Austen changed her name for Catherine and the title was supposed to be changed after her death, as well. Henry decided for the name *Northanger Abbey*. Ultimately, the work was published as one of the last novels of hers. (Britannica1)

Generally, Austen is known to have two prolific periods in her life with the first being the one in which she wrote *First Impressions*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*, and in the second one she re-wrote *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* and created *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*. Meanwhile, between the

two phases she engaged herself in altering her older pieces and began a story she never finished called *The Watsons*. (Jenkins, 105)

### 3.1 Austen's imagination vs. real life

It might be tempting to guess whether, and if so, to what extent, the real world Austen lived in displayed in the imaginary worlds of her fantasy. Whether she built her characters on the real people she knew, if she described in her books places she was familiar with. Often she herself is personalized with some of her characters.

Jenkins in the biography of Jane Austen deals with the issue of using real life experience in Austen's fiction. She claims that there is a relative certainty of her drawing on her experience, for instance, in the cases of visual descriptions such as: "the view from Mr. Darcy's drawing-room windows, the vast premises of Northanger Abbey, [...]." (Jenkins, 158) Further, she declares Austen might have created a few minor characters in her books according to some people she knew, which was reasserted by her own family members. Next, there is a considerable chance of her using reflections of real affectionate relations between people, which she then transferred in the pages of her novels. For instance, a very close relationship between Jane and Elizabeth Bennet provokes one's imagination concerning a possible parallel of Jane and Cassandra's relation, particularly in the passage like this:

'I was uncomfortable enough. I was very uncomfortable, I may say unhappy. And with no one to speak to of what I felt, no Jane to comfort me, and say that I had not been so very weak and vain and nonsensical as I knew I had! Oh! how I wanted you!'

(Austen 1991, 212)

One may as well suppose that during her life she experienced various states of mind and emotions, for example, love, despair, affection, fear, sorrow, joy; which helped her to be able to express them in her work. Yet, she disagrees with speculations regarding connections of characters or situations with people in Austen's real life or with Austen herself, as many people do when they compare Austen to Ann Elliot from *Persuasion*. They assert that it has to be her, unless she would not be able to know and express her feelings and emotions. (Jenkins, 63-65)

To conclude, perhaps, her real life, places she lived at or visited, her acquaintances, all of these were the sources of inspiration for her work, however, it

seems that Jenkins' opinions regarding this topic are more likely to be true than opinions of those who trace Austen's own life in her books.

### **3.2 A woman's role in the society – Heroines vs. Austen herself**

In general, Austen is considered a rather conventional writer as regards her judgements of a woman's and man's role in the society. Though, it is somewhat difficult to estimate her own opinions. She was not socially active, she was not a member of a particular group or circle contending social changes or pointing out unequal rights of the two sexes. It seems that although Austen secretly might not have been satisfied with her position in society, she never articulated herself in such a matter. In a similar way, she treated her heroines and other female characters in her novels. This view seems to be supported by the statement of Patricia Beer in her study of women characters in Jane Austen's novels.

She was in position to have read Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which was published in 1792, but appears neither to have done so nor to have thought at all along the same lines. She not only accepted the limitations of women's scope but seems in her own life to have found happiness within them, being content to see the males of the family winning their way upwards in exciting careers, developing her own talents at odd hours and in secret, taking it for granted that home and devoted ministrations to parents and siblings was a woman's portion, [...].  
(Beer, 25)

Some of Austen's female characters tend to act and express themselves in accordance with traditional values and ways of thinking, some of them occasionally display outbursts of feminist approaches. As for her heroines, the only one who seems to have reached the state of being capable of self-assertion is Anne Elliot. Her age, experience and mature mind enabled her to cope with social demands and formulate her own attitudes. For instance, in the passage where she is speaking with Captain Harville about inconstancy of female and male feelings; she openly disagrees with his belief that women are more likely to lose or change their affection than men are. Apparently, she uses this opportunity to prove her fidelity to nearby standing Captain Wentworth, however, her speech is daring and passionate. When trying to persuade Anne, Captain Harville supports his claims by turning to the numerous evidence of female faithlessness in literature, but without noticing it, he is playing in Anne's hand. She reasons against such argumentation with convincing and above all irrefutable statement.

She considers books not to be reliable evidence, since nearly all of them were written by men, men who were in advantage of having better education, men who presented the story from their point of view. (Austen 1968, 240)

Thus, Anne bravely pronounces her attitude which is built on the factual aspect of literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Majority of books written till that time had male authors. They expressed in their works opinions held by men and the books were often aimed at being read by men, since men were those who acquired higher education. For instance, only men could attend university courses. Therefore, according to Anne, literature sources do not reflect reality in an objective way.



#### 4. Introducing Louisa May Alcott

Louisa May was born on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1832 in Boston to a family of a Transcendentalist philosopher Amos Bronson Alcott and a politically liberal mother Abigail May Alcott. Louisa grew up in the household whose head was her mother and her father was never able to manage the role of a breadwinner. Therefore, they lived in an intellectual atmosphere but the family was rather poor. The education Louisa and her three sisters acquired was to a certain extent contradictory, since though brought up as real Transcendentalists and having intellectual background, they were taught by their parents that proper girls should be calm, mild-mannered and self-sacrificing.

“Clearly, her upbringing engendered within her the contradictory message that intellect was both a gift from God to be used properly and a burden to the proper woman. This conflict is mirrored in her work.”

(literatureonline)

During her childhood Alcott experienced a life in Concord, where she learned to admire Emerson and Thoreau, but also on the incitation of her father they tried living in an experimental utopian community called Fruitlands, which soon fragmented due to internal disputes. As a young adult she started to work at various teaching or domestic positions in order to contribute to family finances and when the Civil War broke out she volunteered as a Union nurse. (Hastings)

In the 1850s her first piece was published under the name *Flower Fables*. They were stories written for Emerson’s daughter Ellen, yet she firstly “reached prominence” with *Hospital Sketches* (1863) based on her wartime experience. (Hastings)

Alcott’s work can be basically divided into two fundamentally different genres. Firstly, they were Domestic novels, stories for children portraying the mid-nineteenth-century American life, which were written on the appeal of a publisher and aimed at guiding children, especially girls, through the period of adolescence and young adulthood. “Alcott's career, [...], was built on images of duty, self-reliance, and an intellectual and emotional engagement with 'real life' and the relationships entered upon by real women and men.” (literatureonline)

Secondly, they were sensational stories written anonymously or under a male pseudonym A.M. Barnard. “Barnard's [career] was concerned with the underbelly of respectability and with exposing the root causes of human misery: repression, lust, obsession, manipulation, abandonment, or desire.” (literatureonline)

Her biggest success was a novel *Little Women* published in 1868, intentionally written as a story for girls, which was to a great extent based on her childhood and life with her family. The story focuses on “a mother-centred family of daughters; Alcott's plot follows the paths of the sisters as they recreate a modern *Pilgrim's Progress* through the perils of female experience.” (literatureonline) This novel had several sequels written later in the similar way, as for instance, *Little Men: Life at Plumfield with Jo's Boys* (1871) or *Jo's Boys, and How They Turned Out* (1886).

Among her other important pieces belong a satirical story based on her father's failed utopia called *Transcendental Wild Oats* (1874) and *Work: A Story of Experience* (1873), where she explored the world of women's work and demonstrated the capability of women to work and limitations they had to face as regards the job offers and wages. Alcott was also a member of the New England Woman Suffrage Association; therefore it is clear that the position of women in the society was not indifferent to her.

“However, it is in her pseudonymous sensation fiction that Alcott most mischievously subverts the dichotomy of gender and challenges the expectations of society.” (literatureonline) They are the dark sides of a human nature that appear in her sensational stories, such as passionate love, jealousy, corruption, sexual relations or deceit. Among her most famous sensational stories belong *A Whisper in the Dark* (1863) or *Behind a Mask* (1866).

When she died on 6th March 1888, she was celebrated by the readers as “children's friend” who represented female duty, yet later she was criticized for the emphasis of woman's submission and self-sacrifice. Nowadays, Alcott is perceived as a complex writer who was deeply engaged in the theme of what it was like to be a woman in the 19th century America, and her popularity as well as literary appraisal come not only from her most famous piece *Little Women*, but also from her overall acquisition to American cultural heritage.

The biographical and bibliographical information was compiled from literatureonline websites and other sources cited in the Bibliography.

## 5. Self and society by Austen

The conflict of personal attitudes with the demands of society is a significant issue appearing in many works of female authors, since the right of women to manage their lives and be fully responsible for themselves was much repressed for a long time. Therefore, such topic became rather interesting to discuss on the pages of books and Jane Austen was one of the authors who set about the study. Obviously, as a writer of the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century the opinions and actions of her heroines are to a great extent consistent with the conformal society. Yet, there also may be found some hints of a different viewpoint. Probably in the best way Austen approached the issue in the novel *Persuasion*.

Ann Elliot is in many aspects one of the best examples of a character who throughout the novel has to deal with the social demands and confront them with her own wishes. She is much different from other Austen's heroines, which makes her in a way special. She is older, a few years ago, she has experienced an engagement which ended up unhappily, her family's property is decreasing dramatically; and neither of these facts give her hopes for a promising match. In this respect, it would be understandable for her to give up all her wishes and wed out of rational reasons, as Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice* does. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women were supposed to get married and devote their life to their husband and family. If they did not succeed in this kind of a "man-hunt" they were condemned either to be existentially dependent on a male member of their kinsfolk or to work as a teacher or a governess. Yet, Ann is not willing to submit to society's expectations and demands once again.

It is evident that the basic theme of the novel is the confrontation of society's demands with personal feelings and wishes. Austen clearly implies here that it is advisable for the reader to hold the opinion of preferring self to society. (Jones, 91) And throughout the book the heroine draws her attitudes to the same conclusion. This motif of conflict between personal desires and society's expectations is present in many of Austen's novels, however, only the last one, *Persuasion*, is written in a way that noticeably argues for hearing the call of one's heart.

Jones makes in her *How to study a Jane Austen novel* a similar point when comparing the marriage Ann could have entered eight years before with, for example,

the accomplished marriage of Elizabeth Bennett to Darcy. Elizabeth gains both love and material security, she is not in danger of having uncertain future neither for financial reasons nor for the possible loss of her social status, quite the contrary. Jones suggests that in her opinion, *Persuasion* seems to imply that taking the economic risks and marrying Captain Wentworth would have been worth the happiness Ann could gain. Moreover, risking the potential break of social code should not have worried her. (74-75)

In the first chapter, Ann is roughly described, mainly from the point of view of her father, Sir Walter Elliot. Although, he's been a father to three daughters, his favourite is Elizabeth, the oldest one. To her he gives all his attention and affection, with her he shares his values and manners. The character and appearance of Ann is depicted here through her father's eyes as an unimportant, uninteresting, fading beauty with lack of esteem. His youngest daughter, Mary, who was being disdained in the same way as Ann, obtained partial importance for him after becoming Mrs. Charles Musgrove. Considering this, it is evident that a pre-Victorian and Victorian woman gained certain significance only when married, preferably to a nobleman. According to the tone and vocabulary used it can be rather easily assumed whether a description of Ann is retold by somebody who feels for her or somebody to whom she is indifferent. The more it is obvious that her father and sister Elizabeth are uncaring to her, the more reader tends to sympathize with her. Apparently, this was Austen's aim for the reader to identify with her heroine.

The whole metamorphosis of Ann's attitudes and opinions towards preferring feelings to social demands began after her short engagement to a naval captain Frederick Wentworth. They fell in love, got engaged, however, Ann's father and her godmother Lady Russell, who has been a very dear friend and adviser to Ann, refused the match. From the speech of Lady Russell about the impropriety of such marriage arises that she considers Captain Wentworth to be of lower-class, not only because of his not being a nobleman and not having large property, but also because she despises of the naval profession itself.

Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind, to throw herself away at nineteen; involve herself at nineteen in engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connections to secure even his father rise in that profession; would be, indeed, a throwing away, which she grieved to think of! Ann Elliot, so young; to be snatched off by a stranger without alliance or fortune; or rather sunk by him into a state of most wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependence! It must not be, [...].

(Austen 1985, 55-56)

If the crucial words from the passage are considered, a clear judgement can be done as regards Lady Russell's feelings about Ann. She truly loves her and cares for her as she was a close friend of her mother. After Lady Elliot's death, she minded all the Elliot's sisters to maintain good manners and education which were impressed on them by their mother. She feels that being her godmother, therefore, a part of her family, enables her to express refusal, and simultaneously, to protect Ann from an uncertain future when both social status and material possession are regarded. Ann, a baronet's daughter, should according to established social rules marry somebody with the same or higher social status than hers, it should be a man with connections and financially secured. These are the facts that influenced Lady Russell's reasoning against the marriage. Nevertheless, the one before the last sentence of Lady Russell's discourse indicates discrepancy in then and today's attitudes towards a woman's dependence on her husband. From a modern point of view, a woman used to be dependent on her husband both when they were wealthy or poor. In either case the husband was the keeper of his wife's dowry and their property. Hence, Lady Russell's worries regarding being dependent might be for a contemporary woman rather odd reason for a disapproval of a match.

Ann, a temperate, gentle, dutiful young woman, yielded to the social pressure and above all, to Lady Russell's arguments, and let herself persuaded that the match would not end up successfully. As the title of the novel itself prompts, the word *persuasion* is crucial for this novel. At the beginning Ann was persuaded not to marry Wentworth. Yet, eight years later, her rediscovered feelings for the Captain, greater life experience and personal courage to face social expectations finally gave her strength to persuade Lady Russell that her attitude concerning Wentworth was wrong. While being young and suggestible she preferred duty to feelings, later she decided for the contrary.

In spite of that, there are apparent hints in the book which explain the major view on the issue of marriage and duty. For instance, in the speech of Mary Musgrove, Ann's sister, who is contemplating about the possible match of her sister-in-law Henrietta with Henrietta's cousin Charles Hayter.

'You know,' said she, 'I cannot think him at all a fit match for Henrietta; and considering the alliances which the Musgroves have made, she has no right to throw herself away. I do not think any young woman has a right to make a choice that may be disagreeable and inconvenient to the principal part of her family, and be giving bad connections to those who have not been used to them.'

(99)

On one hand, Mary disapproves of the match, since she despises Hayter family line and does not want Henrietta to marry Charles in order not to be related to a "lower-class". But more importantly, Mary mentions in the extract woman's duty to her family and kinsfolk. Most striking is the choice of vocabulary when speaking about the main part of the family, since probably, she meant the men members of family being the major part. If this discourse was delivered by a man, nobody would probably wonder he had such attitude, however, hearing this from a woman's mouth, it is obvious that, from a modern point of view such unequal and discriminating opinion was deeply rooted in the whole society. Woman was expected to follow her family's choice as regards her future husband and for sure, many of them did not even think about why it was so. Since disobedience was often rewarded with repudiation, young women usually accepted the man they were supposed to marry or gave up the one they wanted to marry. As well as Ann was persuaded by Lady Russell, who was like her second mother, she followed her advice, because she believed it to be right.

When considering the problem from the other side, Anne, at the age of 17, after rejecting the match, could have been accused of being too easily persuaded, having weak character, being timorous. When dealing with the situation she showed no strong-mindedness or resolution. Frederick Wentworth, the refused lover of Anne's, imputed all these "flaws" or even vices to her character. She broke his heart, harmed him and even after 8 years of not meeting each other he still feels pain though not consciously acknowledged. After seeing her for the first time he reacts in this way:

He had thought her wretchedly altered, and, in the first moment of appeal had spoken as he felt. He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity.

(86)

Wentworth's effusion might be regarded as hurt conceit as well as just anger. He compares their characters, his "decided, confident temper" with her "feebleness, weakness and timidity". He could not bear Anne's willingness to forego his love in order to satisfy her family. Although, trying not to admit them, it is evident that he still has feelings for Anne. Both are deeply moved by the fact they meet again, after so long time and old feelings retrieve their original strength. (Jones, 75-76)

Finally, there is one more example of the difference between preference of personal feelings to society and its values. In the example of the two sisters, Anne and Elizabeth Elliot, it is clear how dissimilar their sources of happiness are, when attending a concert in the Chapter 20. As they enter the concert hall, Elizabeth tingles with delight for being present at such a social event and meeting dowager Viscountess Dalrymple. This is all she dreams about, being seen in high public circles, being approved. Her happiness comes from feelings that she is significant, remarkable, and noble. Actually, vanity and snobbery leads the way to her happiness. On the contrary, Anne is contented and cheerful, yet she is not interested in the fancy of the room, equipment, party or gowns, for her only pleasure comes from a prospective meeting with her love, Captain Wentworth. (Austen 1985, 194)

The Elliots, specifically Walter Elliot and his daughter Elizabeth, are only concerned with social status and desire for social appreciation, which demonstrates in their vanity, profligacy and selfishness. Their contentment comes from the outside; it is the evidence of "selfish vanity", whereas Anne's happiness results from her own feelings, defined by the narrator herself as "generous attachment". (194). In addition, this again shows the difference between the "new" Anne and her family. She prefers self, whereas her father and sister live from a social appreciation.

## 5.1 Self and society by Alcott

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was an era of social changes in America, which showed in the form of child labour reforms, abolition of slavery or women's suffrage, yet, considering the last mentioned, it took much longer for women to obtain all rights and become in the society's view as worthwhile citizens as men were. Nonetheless, the Victorian era was still marked with inferiority and oppression of female sex. Women were suppressed in their actions, attitudes and even thoughts, since during their whole life society exposed them to the pressure of its requirements and demands.

During the process of becoming "little women" all four March girls encounter in some way the social requirements for a "true woman". Girls' experiences and reactions to such encounter are as different as the girls themselves.

Amy, the youngest one, may be seen as a conformist, since her desire and intention is to become a proper lady. In other words, she tries to fulfil the expectation as regards her role in the society. She indulges in adorning herself; she wears gloves, nice dresses, parasols, because according to her "women should learn to be agreeable, particularly poor ones, for they have no other way of repaying the kindnesses they receive." (Alcott, 329) Amy, especially, when she gets older, matches up to the conventional image of a lady who has polite manners, cheerful behaviour, sufficient amount of meekness and submissiveness, which is in concord with her agreeable appearance. Further, she is accomplished, pure and therefore predetermined to marry well and fit perfectly into the role of a wife. Greta Gaard is of the similar opinion when she says that "Amy is a pragmatist: she has observed that, in order to succeed, she must conform to her gendered role, and she is willing to do so to reap the benefits." (Gaard)

Gaard in her article deals with the issue of self-denial and suppressed anger, which, as she states, had to be substituted with cheerfulness and good mood, since a Victorian woman was not allowed to show her negative emotions, because it would negatively influence her in the eyes of society.

In *Little Women* mere self-denial is not enough; the little woman must not sulk, pout, complain, or in any other way express her anger while she denies her personal desires. The book's outcome shows that good little women who cheerfully practice self-denial will be loved by friends and family, and will be able to marry. (Gaard)

Evidently, Amy does to a great extent try to fit in this model and at the end she is "deservedly" rewarded.



Despite her tendency to conform, Amy often has to struggle with self-denial in order to show her virtuous character, for instance, in the excerpt where she takes part in the bazaar. She is supposed to attend the prominent art corner, for which she has prepared much craftwork, yet she is withdrawn from the place and changed for a daughter of the organizer. Though Amy feels aggrieved, she suppresses her anger and forswears herself to pay back the unfairness with kindness and generosity. Even if it does not seem from the beginning that her actions would pay her off, later with the help of her friends Amy's flower corner is the liveliest one in the room and all her craftwork is sold. She does doubt it at the beginning, but later Amy concludes the incident saying that "virtue was its own reward, after all." (Alcott, 340)

In this episode, one can easily find the evidence of Amy's effort to approach the ideal of a true ladyship, which is to Amy represented by Marmee, by self-denial and repression of her feelings. Not only she does it because of being a virtuous woman, however, here it can be seen that repression of anger and self-denial are often in the stories rewarded with society's approval and success, in order to give the positive example for other women and to be appreciated and loved by the woman's family. (Gaard)

The issue of holding back the emotions such as anger, rage, or even hatred is however mainly connected with the character of Jo. She is a girl, but longs to be a boy, for her actions and feelings are rather boyish. She does not care about girls, fashion, gossip and growing up as a lady. "Tomboy Jo is proud and rebellious, wants to be free, and has exalted ambitions, but she winds up married, [...], to the conventional and middle-aged Professor Bhaer." (Tuttleton)

"I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as a China aster! It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boys' games and work and manners! I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy; and it's worse than ever now, for I'm dying to go and fight with Papa, and I can only stay at home and knit, like a poky old woman!"

(Alcott, 3)

Jo's is often exposed to a considerable critique from her sisters' Amy and Meg as regards her manners and neglectful clothing. They try to change her standpoint, so that she would better fit into her predetermined role of a lady. Meg instructs Jo in being lady-like when telling her that she has to wear gloves, neat boots and handkerchief, she should not wink, shake hands, her shoulders must be straight and her steps short. (28)

As to this theme there is an interesting point of Greta Gaard who believes that Meg seems to be aware that a proper woman's body as well as her brains has to be "restricted", as she does when wearing shoes that are too small for her feet and curling her hair in order to show her "feminine beauty". (Gaard)

Yet, it is not only her manners and way of look Jo is forced to cope with so as to conform to the common norm. They are her emotions, primarily the negative ones, that she has to suppress and fight, for a proper young woman of those times had to be cheerful and virtuous, no expressions of anger or outrage were acceptable.

The topic of uncontrollable emotions and their repression is introduced in the chapter called *Jo meets Apollyon*, where Jo discusses with Marmee the consequences of her wild temper after the incident on the frozen river where Amy almost gets drowned. Jo explains that when her passions take over her, she is able to hurt people, to be wicked and enjoy it, and no power can conquer her mind at that moment, for it is turbid with rage and anger. To her surprise she finds out that even Marmee has been suppressing her anger for nearly forty years, and the reason for doing it is her husband. He explained her that she has to train all the virtues they wished their girls would have and therefore Marmee had to set them a good example. Mr. March used to remind his wife with a gesture and "very kind but sober face" to control her temper and not to burst out with hasty words. (Alcott, 88-89)

Suppressing passions here is to a great deal provoked by a paternal force and intention. Though Marmee is an exemplary representative of a virtuous woman and tries to educate her daughters in the same way, it is the father who they all long to please and be appreciated by. For he has been the teacher to her, she now feels the need to pass on her ability of self-denial to her girls.

Marmee knows it is her job to transform her girls into gendered females, but she is really only an instrument of the father. In the first chapter, the family reads a letter from the father, who urges them to "conquer themselves so beautifully, that when I come back to them I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women". The messages are clear: self-denial will make them into women, and their father will love them more. [...] The love of a good man depends on a woman's self-denial.

(Gaard)

Obviously, the topic of self-denial or on the contrary asserting one's attitudes in Alcott's book depends very much on the character of individual girls, for as much as

Amy tries to conform, Jo at the same time is a kind of “reformer”, who in spite of everybody’s expectations goes against the stream of conventionality and tries to keep her own identity, values and opinions.

## 5.2 Comparison

In the chapter called *Self and Society* the conflict is discussed between the demands and expectations of pre-Victorian society in England studied by Jane Austen and Alcott’s Victorian America during the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the personal attitudes and desires of their female characters.

Generally, it should be stated that both eras in both countries were associated with very similar ideas and principles based on the pre-Victorian and Victorian values. The only difference was that in Alcott’s time the society was more developed, various social movements were emerging and therefore, the position of a woman in the society was very slowly but gradually changing.

Whereas Austen’s heroine Anne Elliot presented in the chapter is almost a thirty year old woman, both Jo and Amy March are young girls growing up from childhood to adulthood. Anne is an interesting character for the reader, since once she has surrendered to the commands and orders of her relatives, yielded under their pressure and gave in her love in order to satisfy them. Such an unhappy love affair and gradually gained life’s experience change her into a different person, a person who knows what she wants from life and is not afraid to ask it. Further, when the time comes and she meets again her former lover, Anne is prepared to follow her heart’s choice no matter what. The whole book is presented by the author in a way that one should fulfil his own wishes and desires, and he or she should not let others to thwart them only because they may find them inappropriate.

However, the theme of self-denial and on contrary enforcement of one’s conviction is rather more developed in *Little Women*, since in *Persuasion* the topic is closely limited only to the issue of love, while in Alcott’s work it is more complex. There, the topic is connected with the overall conception of each protagonist and their identity, and best the conflict is depicted in the characters of Jo and Amy. Whilst Amy is a “conformist”, Jo is a kind of “reformer” or “firebrand”, though at the end she fits to the role of an exemplary housekeeper and educator, as well. Amy is from the very

beginning introduced as a wilful child whose only life's plan or intention is to become a proper lady and marry well. She disapproves of the people who stick out somehow and while being a poor girl she is of the opinion that such girls as she is have to "countenance things and people which [they] detest, merely because [they] are not belles and millionaires" (Alcott, 329-30) Amy thinks as well, that this is the way it is arranged in the world and she despises of the people who try to go against it, in other words she does not like "reformers". (330) On the other hand there is open-minded Jo who suffers from being a girl and having to fit into the society of rooted stereotypes. She wants to become an author, be independent and financially self-reliant; therefore, from a modern point of view, she approximates the idea of a modern independent woman, who is stuck in the patriarchal world bound with social conventions.

Amy and Jo represent in the book a sort of "antipoles". Amy tries to conform to the ideal of "true womanhood" based on the four desired virtues, and she herself symbolizes the conventionality of the society, for she chooses the "society" instead of "self" in order to be appreciated. Whereas Jo seeks contentment in acting according to her best conviction, she chooses "self", since she does not want to defraud her own identity and opinions so as to be appreciated by the society.

## 6. Education, Intellect, and Self-realization

Education, intellect and accomplishments are somewhat problematic issues when regarding the prose of Jane Austen. Her characters present various opinions and it seems that as for this matter Austen herself had ambivalent feelings and views, as well.

Taking in account a passage from *Emma* where she discusses the importance of intelligence in connection with getting married, such ambiguity arises, for the reader can notice contradiction in her reasoning. Generally, she regards herself an intelligent and bright woman, and as Patricia Beer states “she does not really wish to think that men prefer pretty, stupid, submissive girls.” (Beer, 49) Yet, in the following passage, she is not acting in the corresponding way. Emma is in the extract arguing with Mr. Knightley about Harriet Smith’s refusal of marriage proposed to her by Robert Martin, an action accomplished on the recommendations of Emma, herself. Mr. Knightley expresses his opinion as regards Harriet’s intelligence and experience concluding with a comment: “She is pretty, and she is good tempered, and that is all. “ (Austen 1964, 52) The remark leads to the following discussion:

‘I am very much mistaken if your sex in general would not think such beauty, and such temper, the highest claims a woman could possess.’

‘Upon my word, Emma, to hear you abusing the reason you have, is almost enough to make me think so too. Better be without sense than misapply it as you do.’

‘To be sure!’ cried she playfully. I know *that* is the feeling of you all. I know that such a girl as Harriet is exactly what every man delights in – what at once bewitches his senses and satisfies his judgement.’

(54-55)

In this way, Emma actually asserts that appearance and good nature of a woman is the most important and demanded quality she can offer to a suitor. An interesting point opens here considering Emma’s own intellect. Beer claims that Austen wanted readers to perceive Emma as a clever young lady as it is stated in the first paragraph of the book, yet Beer views Emma being a rather silly character. (Beer, 49-50)

Generally, Austen’s heroines demonstrate unclear attitudes when education and talents are to be presented. They tend to underrate or disclaim their knowledge. For instance, Anne Elliot intentionally undervalues her knowledge and abilities, as she does when pretending not to be a good scholar of Italian language, though she is able to translate an Italian song without any effort, which is followed by an assurance about her proficiency asserted by Mr. Elliot. (Austen 1985, 196) Beer considers this to be the

illustration of her need for male approval and the lack or weakness of self-judgment. (Beer, 51)

Given Jane Austen's own nervousness about intellect in women it is inevitable that she should sometimes make her heroines react in the same way, quite undermining her and their claims about attractiveness of mind. (50)

Elizabeth Bennet shows ambiguity in her relationship to knowledge and primarily to reading, as well. Although, she is fond of reading and carefully chooses the books she reads, when Miss Bingley calls her "a great reader" and remarks that Elizabeth "has no pleasure in anything else", she provokes a deprecatory reaction. Elizabeth cries that she is not a great reader and she has pleasure in many things. (Austen 1991, 33) It is not clear whether Miss Bingley by proclaiming Elizabeth "a great reader" wants to discredit her or praise her erudition. However, if their antipathy is considered and the fact that Elizabeth is seen in Caroline Bingley's eyes as a rival in love, she would certainly try to do her harm rather than improve her in Darcy's view. Therefore, one could conclude that accusing a woman of being "a great reader" is in this case regarded negatively, which seems to be supported by Elizabeth's passionate disapproval of such fact.

Beer appears to support this opinion by declaring Austen's vague view on reading in general. According to her, when Austen lived, quite the only possible way to improve one's mind and keep in touch, especially for women, was due to reading books. Yet, Austen does not seem to regard it really positive or necessary to be a keen reader. (Beer, 52) Moreover, reading is in her novels sometimes even ridiculed, as in the case of Mary Bennet, Elizabeth's sister. She looks foolish and boring to others when she often cites passages of books, but to say something meaningful or clever herself, she is unable. As it is proved in the passage, where Mary's father asks for her opinion on the forms of introduction. "'What say you, Mary? For you are a young lady of deep reflection I know, and read books, and make extracts.' Mary wished to say something very sensible, but knew not how." (Austen 1991, 5)

Going back to Anne Elliot and *Persuasion*, it should be stated that she is a keen reader, and, as Beer asserts, is not ashamed of it, since she is more mature than Elizabeth and books have provided her joy and relief she needed during the time she had suffered. (Beer, 53) Yet, according to Beer, Austen herself sometimes use her characters to reveal some of her opinions, which Beer illustrates on the case of Anne's

speech where she, in essence, laughs at people with “literary sentiment”. In her study she declares her certainty in perceiving this and some other passages a hint on Austen’s belief as regards “literary ladies” by considering them “splendid material for a laugh”. (Beer, 54-55) The situation takes place when Anne learns the news about Louisa Musgrove’s engagement to Captain Benwick.

She would learn to be an enthusiast for Scott and Lord Byron; nay, that was probably learnt already; of course they had fallen in love over poetry. The idea of Louisa Musgrove turned into a person of literary taste, and sentimental reflection was amusing, but she had no doubt of its being so. The day at Lyme, the fall from the Cobb, might influence her health, her nerves, her courage, her character to the end of life.

(Austen 1985, 178)

However, it is probable that a somewhat different view could be applicable in this situation; the opinion may be based on the assumption that Anne is not making fun of literary tastes themselves, but she may be laughing at the sudden change of interests, which occur in Louisa’s life when spending some time with a man keen on literature. In this regard, Anne would be making fun of Louisa, instead of ridiculing interest in literature. For this view, one may have support in the character of Anne herself, since she is obviously fond of literature and therefore, there is no sense for her to laugh at literary tastes in this way.

Coming back to education of women, there is a brilliant excerpt in *Pride and Prejudice*, which explains in a rather amusing way for a modern reader the concept of understanding desirable accomplishments in connection with women. Bingley in the passage remarks that he cannot imagine how young ladies learn to be so patient in order to acquire such accomplishments, which according to his speech appear to be the desired ones. Awhile later the reader finds out the talents and skills: painting tables, covering screens and net purses. “I scarcely know any one who cannot do all this, and I am sure I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished.” (Austen 1991, 35) From this comment it seems that these are the generally valued capabilities of women at those times. However, some of the people present, primarily Mr. Darcy, object to the accomplishments stated and list others which are in their view desirable and truly worthwhile. When the reader goes on reading he or she finds out that their concept of desired women skills and talents consist of: a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, knowing languages,

further “she must possess a certain something in her air and manners of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expression,[...]” Finally, Mr. Darcy concludes the list of women accomplishments by adding “extensive reading” being one of the most essential ones. (35-36)

Studying the issue in whole one can conclude that it is really difficult to trace Austen’s intentions as regards the presentation of women’s intellect and accomplishments in her novels, for many of the female characters constantly contradict their thoughts and attitudes regarding the matter and therefore support the ambiguity of such message.

### **6.1 Education, Intellect and Self-realization by Alcott**

As it has already been said the characters from the novel are to a significant extent autobiographical. Louisa’s own family background was highly intellectual; they belonged to the Transcendentalist group in Concord, USA, which was centred round such personages as Thoreau, Emerson or Hawthorn. Thanks to this Louisa was for those times very well educated woman and her love of knowledge, learning and reading projected in her book as well, first and foremost in her semiautobiographical heroine, Jo March.

From the very beginning of the book Jo is introduced as a tomboy who is fond of reading and satisfies her desires for literature in her Aunt March’s large, old library full of wonderful books.

The moment Aunt March took her nap, or was busy with company, Jo hurried to this place, and, curling herself up in the easy chair, devoured poetry, romance, history, travels, and pictures, like a regular bookworm.  
(Alcott, 41)

Obviously, Jo has an intensive affection for books, which leads to the first attempts of her written production. Jo tries writing plays, stories, poems and already in the second chapter the reader finds out about the dramatization of one of her plays called *Operatic Tragedy*. The girls are still too young to go often to the theatres therefore they perform plays on their own, in order to please themselves, their family and friends. Since having only little money they create the stage setting in a rather simple way but it is done with wits and creativity. The girls play all the parts themselves with Jo enjoying herself in as many male parts as possible. This may be seen as a kind



of compensation for her, because “not only does Jo long to be a boy, but her literary passions often allow her to play that role.” (Bernstein)

As far as her writing is concerned, Jo’s objective is to do something magnificent (Alcott, 41), since her wish and intention is to realize her dream and become an authoress, and chiefly she is a person whose self-content arises from independence as regards creativity, financial matters and primarily the opportunity to support her poor family. This is again a parallel to Alcott’s real life, her desire, but also the necessity to help her family with financial support.

It seems to Jo like a promise of good beginning of her career when one of her stories is finally published in the newspapers signed with her own name, “Miss Josephine March”. Such success becomes a driving force for her and she shuts herself in her attic room writing with enthusiasm, eagerness and rapture. “*Alcott’s* description of Jo’s writing process serves to announce the psychological complexity of her character in a way that seems to subvert nineteenth-century dictates of submissive womanhood.” (Bernstein)

During the process of writing her first novel Jo comes across a literary style called “sensational literature”. It is the kind of literature which makes money at the expense of quality, as it is stated in the book, and Jo has to deal with this dilemma from now on till she much later, and under the influence of Professor Bhaer, casts it aside.

Nevertheless, at the beginning she becomes excited about the idea of financial reward for a sensational story offered by newspapers which she finally gets. Mr. and Mrs. March, however, do not approve of such kind of production and though they wish Jo all the best they comment the story saying ““You can do better than this, Jo. Aim at the highest, and never mind the money.”” (Alcott, 298)

Sensational literature was a great issue even for Louisa May, since she wrote a great deal of this herself under the male pseudonym A. M. Barnard. From this fact arises an interesting contradiction in her actions, in her wishes, and chiefly how all this reflexes in the character of Jo March. Tuttleton in his article *The Sensational Miss Alcott* asserts some interesting points and information concerning Alcott’s view on her literary style.

When her friend LaSalle Corbell Pickett complimented her prose style as "befitting a quiet loving home circle;" Miss *Alcott* protested that her natural ambition was for "the lurid style": "I indulge in gorgeous fancies and wish that I dared inscribe them upon my pages and set them before the public?" She claimed that she could not write about her real interests because of what Mr. Emerson or her father might think of her.

(Tuttleton)

Clearly, Alcott took pleasure in writing sensational stories, which results from her statement, yet, she did it under a pseudonym which, on the contrary, strengthens the opinion that though famous among ordinary people, writers and thinkers from the artistic circle around her father and his friends did find such stories a "trash" and disapproved of them. This might be the reason why she did not authorize some of her work. Such kind of contradiction shows in the story of Marches as well. Jo considers writing sensational literature interesting, and firstly, for her it is a means of gaining independence and opportunity to provide her family with some money. Due to her own attitudes, she struggles with her parents' disapproval for a long time.

Despite the genre she still tries to add to her stories some moral content, but she soon finds out that it is entertainment what society demands most, they do not want to be sermonized or lectured on moral. (Alcott, 387) Further, it is evident from the author's way of telling the story that Alcott, concentrating on the theme of sensational literature, does herself lecture on the harmfulness of such genre, which is caused not only by reading it, yet in Jo's case even by studying the sources of her inspiration. In order to find an interesting material for her stories Jo seeks in the newspapers, libraries, old ancient works for reference concerning tragic events, accidents, incidents, murders. She scrutinizes people's faces on the streets, good and bad qualities of human character, all this to make her stories "original in plot, if not masterly in execution." (389) However, the very effort of hers to write such story makes her a different woman, since her innocence, as Alcott stresses, which is so required from a "true woman", gradually fades away.

She thought she was prospering finely, but unconsciously she was beginning to desecrate some of the womanliest attributes of a woman's character. She was living in bad society, and imaginary though it was, its influence affected her, for she was feeding heart and fancy on dangerous and unsubstantial food, and was fast brushing the innocent bloom from her nature by a premature acquaintance with the darker side of life.

(Alcott, 389)

Greta Gaard even sees in Jo's encounter with sensational literature a hint on the patriarchal society's fear of losing innocence and by this acquiring knowledge. (Gaard) For women were demanded to be pure, innocent, and untainted by often cruel reality. Moreover, Alcott admits that when Jo is examining the aspects of human characters and searching for the sources of people's passions, she consequently starts to think about her own character much more, which, according to Gaard, might have been potentially dangerous for patriarchal society.

Interesting, as it seems, is again the conflict of Alcott's own viewpoint as regards sensational literature with what she finds necessary to convey to her readers, since the demands of the society expected an author of children's literature to educate them in moral and manner.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most important aspect of Jo's writing in general is Alcott's demonstration of woman's capability of self-realization. Jo's inner life and the way in which she imprints it in her work is a manifestation of creative ardour, "a vortex", which naturally has to be conditioned with intellect and yearning to prove her potential. In this way, Jo seems to stand for the evidence of woman's independence, creativity and resolution to show the patriarchal society that women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were as capable of asserting themselves as men. Susan Bernstein even claims that "In asserting a *woman's* right to the freedom of an inner life, *Alcott* perhaps is hinting at the potentially subversive strengths of female-centered culture." (Bernstein) Whatever Alcott's real intentions might have been, it is certain, that thanks to Jo, Alcott highlighted the importance of woman's self-realization.

On the basis of this proposition, one may trace another discrepancy in Alcott's interpretation of women's self-realization. During most parts of the book Jo is shown as a passionate writer, who does not think about having husband or family, instead her only pleasure is her existing kinsfolk and her writing. In spite of this, she is willing to give it up for taking care of her husband and administrating a boarding school with him. The question why does she do it might then arise and the answer may be, that she ultimately yields to the demands of society as regards a woman's submissiveness and domesticity, for she has to prove her ability as a housekeeper and care person.

Greta Gaard explains her view as regards the vital aspect of "little womanhood" in this way:

This is the essential foundation of true little womanhood: cheerful self-denial. Quite approvingly, the narrator asks, "what could be harder for a restless, ambitious girl than to give up her own hopes, plans, and desires, and cheerfully live for others?"

(Gaard)

No matter how hard it is, Jo finally sacrifices one love for another which is a rather surprising completion of her career but Alcott's reason for doing it might have been the educational aspect.

## 6.2 Comparison

Considering the issue of education, intellect and self-realization there is to say that Jane Austen and L.M. Alcott presented in their works a substantially different views, since Alcott through her semi-autobiographical character Jo professes her love for knowledge, reading and primarily writing, whereas Austen's heroines, though often well educated, express a kind of ambivalent attitudes as regards the matter.

As it was already stated, the female characters in Austen's novels often tend to underrate or disclaim their intellect as in the case of Anne Elliot, who intentionally underestimates her knowledge of Italian language, as if she needed to be ensured by a man about her mastery. Further, there is Elizabeth Bennet who delights in reading books yet when called "a great reader" she acts as if she was offended. In Austen's works reading is sometimes even ridiculed, for instance when speaking about Mary Bennet whose interest in reading is exposed to several mocking comments.

On the contrary, Alcott put in Jo her own passion for knowledge and chiefly writing her own pieces. Jo is not ashamed of having such passion; she even considers it her possibility of self-realization, the way she can prove her talents, gain independence, money and support for her family. She writes stories, poems, plays and all the four girls love to dramatize them. She is probably the most accomplished of all of them, though Amy has an artistic talent and works hard on her skills to become a great artist.

As regards accomplishments of women, they are described in a quite amusing way in *Pride and Prejudice*. It seems that what men valued on a woman at the beginning of the 19th century was her ability to play a musical instrument, sing, dance, draw, speak languages and her overall manner; such woman was then considered very accomplished.

Going back to Jo and her literary production it is important to mention her encounter with sensational literature, which turns to a long conflict of her conscience and ambitions, for sensational stories give her opportunity to publish and earn; on the other hand, her parents try to discourage her from writing such things in order not to sell her talent for money and lose her innocence by examining bad society. Some critics perceive it as a patriarchal effort to prevent women from gaining knowledge.

However, what is the most important on Jo's writing is the process of self-realization of a woman who wants to be independent and self-supporting, prove her talent and realize her desires. This is something that cannot be found in any of Austen's novels.

## 7. Sisterhood by Austen

The novels of Jane Austen can be characterized as Domestic novels, the story usually takes place within home among the family members and therefore, their mutual relations are a significant issue when studying female characters. Except for Emma all of the heroines from *Persuasion*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* grow up in the households with their sisters with whom they either have a very close or a rather problematic relationship. For that reason “sisterhood” is so much appealing a topic to deal with in this thesis.

Considering the relationship of the Bennet sisters, one can easily estimate from the first few pages that there are significant differences as for the feelings and intimacy among the sisters. There are five sisters, Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty and Lydia; and, primarily, the distinction or resemblance of their characters, common or different interests, similar or unlike views, all this influences and affects what they feel for each other. The two oldest ones, Jane and Elizabeth are a great example of a true affection and intimacy sisters can achieve. When Jane falls ill while visiting the neighbouring manor, Elizabeth does not hesitate; she sets off for Netherfield House on foot, in order to find out information about sister’s health conditions and to nurse her. Her only concern is anxiety as regards her sister’s health. Though, by doing this, she comes in for a great deal of contempt of the ladies present.

‘I shall never forget her appearance this morning. She really looked almost wild.’

‘She did, indeed, Louisa. ... Why must she be scampering about the country, because her sister had a cold? Her hair, so untidy, so blowsy!’

(Austen 1991, 32)

Elizabeth and Jane often hold forth on various topics and reveal each other their opinions and secrets; they wish each other only the best. As in the excerpt when the ball at Netherfield takes place. For a couple of weeks already, Jane and the young owner of Netherfield House, Mr. Bingley, seem to have fondness for each other and when Elizabeth observes them and sees their happiness, it pleases her so much. The anticipation of Jane’s future felicity in marriage built on true affection delights Elizabeth enormously. (93-94)

They support each other in the moments of sorrow as well, for instance when their youngest sister Lydia escapes with her lover Wickham, as well as in the times of

joy, when Jane finds out about Elizabeth's relationship with Darcy and expresses her contentment for her sister's happiness.

‘Now I am quite happy,’ said she, ‘for you will be as happy as myself. I always had a value for him. Were it for nothing but his love of you, I must always have esteemed him; [...]’

( 354)

Obviously, the two oldest sisters have a true affection for each other, yet, they don't have such a close relationship to the other three sisters. Mary lives in her own world of books, Lydia and Kitty share a passionate interest in flirting with officers, in which they are supported by their dim-witted mother. Because of Lydia's undue and inconvenient behaviour, Elizabeth perceives it almost impossible for Darcy to ever establish any kind of relation between both families. All this leads to a discussion, where Elizabeth, being ashamed of Lydia, tries to appeal to their father to reprimand her. “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.” (217) Reflecting to this as well as other similar passages, it is evident that the feelings among the sisters Bennets are rather complicated, and they do not really have much in common except for their parents. It seems that precisely the parents might be one of the causes in the girls' not really close relationship. In the first place, it is their mother who does not educate them to esteem, love and feel for one another.

In the Elliot family from *Persuasion* the relationships are even more problematic. Three sisters, Elizabeth, Mary and Anne, growing up without mother's care, they are looked after by a father who is most interested in his social status, money spending and without a bit of bashfulness he favours the oldest daughter. The lack of maternal love and education appears to be the main reason for their debased relationships. For thirteen years Elizabeth has been a mistress of Kellynch Hall, obtaining her mother's rights and privilege, receiving honours that aroused from this position by their acquaintances and ordaining the domestic rules. Yet, not only this fact has set her aside from her sisters, Elizabeth shares her father's “feelings” for Anne and Mary, they do not mean anything to her. She declares it during a common breakfast after the arrival of Anne, who has for weeks been on the visit of Mary's family.

While Anne has been gone; Mrs. Clay Elizabeth's friend has accompanied the family in Bath.

On going down to breakfast the next morning, she found there had just been a decent pretence on the lady's side of meaning to leave them. She could imagine Mrs. Clay to have said, that 'now Miss Anne was come, she could not suppose herself at all wanted;' for Elizabeth was replying in a sort of whisper, 'That must not be any reason, indeed. I assure you I feel it none. She is nothing to me, compared with you;' [...].  
(Austen 1985, 158)

From this, one can conclude, that the other two sisters having been exposed to marginalization and unconcern from Elizabeth's side, could find in each other support and affection, yet, it isn't so. Though Mary being of a better character and not so disagreeable and unsisterly as Elizabeth, she is moody and lacks Anne's kindness and nature. Therefore, despite their rather good relationship, Mary is not Anne's soul mate. The only person who represents half a sister and half a mother to Ann is Mrs. Russell.

Mrs. Russell is the only one who thinks about Anne with affection and warmth, who tries to criticize Elizabeth and Sir Elliot for being unjust and heartless to Anne. For instance, in the case of their annual visits to London in which Anne is left at home while they go and enjoy entertainments offered by the city. (46)

Generally, neither sisters Bennets nor sisters Elliots represent contented siblings within a family circle, they do not all have fervent or hearty relationships among themselves and sometimes they even have no feelings for one another at all.

Therefore, sisters Dashwoods, the heroines in *Sense and Sensibility*, are true opposites as regards their bond. In spite of their different characters and temper Marianne and Elinor are really sisters who reflect the meaning of the word; they are close friends, confidants and siblings at the same time, eager to undergo each other's happiness as well as grief. Elinor, the older one, is a clever, bright young woman, possessing a little too much of the coolness of judgement and self-control. On the contrary, Marianne is passionate in all she does and experiences, not accepting her sister's moderation. Obviously, Elinor tries to temper her sister's actions, though very often she fails as in the passage where she tries to discourage Marianne from exposing her affections towards Willoughby at public.



Elinor could not be surprised at their attachment. She only wished that it were less openly shewn; and one or twice did venture to suggest the propriety of some self-command to Marianne. But Marianne abhorred all concealment where no real disgrace could attend unreserve; and to aim at the restraint of sentiments which were not in themselves illaudable, appeared to her not merely an unnecessary effort, but a disgraceful subjection of reason to common-place and mistaken notions.

(Austen 1990, 45)

Margaret Anne Doody, the author of introduction to *Sense and Sensibility*, suggests that Marianne as the younger of two sisters possessing musical talent and tastes in poetry strongly resembles Jane Austen, who according to her played a second fiddle in her relationship with the older sister Cassandra. Doody claims that Cassandra “seems to have been somewhat prim.” (Doody, xvii) and she “did not lack some elder-sisterly bossiness”(xvii). Marianne as well as Jane is the only one in the family who is able to play a musical instrument and on the contrary Elinor, like Cassandra, possesses painterly skills.

If to generalize all the pieces of knowledge regarding this topic, it can be concluded, that often Austen’s heroines have sisters, which must be inevitably based on her own experience from life. She projected her and her sister’s intimacy into some of her books and created for instance Elizabeth and Jane or Elinor and Marianne. Further it can be stated that some other sisters presented in her works are rather uncaring and indifferent and their relationships are somewhat problematic as Anne and Elizabeth’s from *Persuasion*.

### **7.1 Sisterhood by Alcott**

Family relations and primarily those among the four sisters are one of the most significant themes of the novel *Little Women*. Sisterhood is presented by Alcott as such a close relationship of an almost unearthly quality. Jo, in her poem *In the Garret* describes her feelings and memories on all of them, telling that sisterhood is a bond based on “love’s immortal power” which cannot be broken up or lessened by a death or marriage, for the sisters will always last “nearest and dearest evermore”. (Alcott, 534)

Obviously, the sisters are very close and represent a model family. However, already at the beginning of the book the reader can find that there are a few dissimilarities and parallels in the girls’ characters which contribute to a kind of special bonds among them. Amy has a confidante and advisor in the oldest Meg and “by some

strange attraction of opposites” wild Jo represents the same for shy Beth. The younger ones confide their thoughts and feelings to the older ones and Jo and Meg take over Amy and Beth in their own motherly way, so that they could guide and support them. (44-45)

Their close relationship is noticeable in various parts of the book but chiefly in the chapter called *Beth's secret*. When Jo takes feeble Beth on a trip to the sea shore, she confides to Jo about the presentiment of her soon death, fear of loneliness and worries about the meaningfulness of her existence. Beth's trust and affection to Jo is such that Jo becomes the only person in the family circle whom she is willing to reveal her inward feelings and concerns.

“I don't know how to express myself, and shouldn't try anyone but you, because I can't speak out except to my Jo. [...] I have a feeling that it never was intended I should live long. [...] I never made any plans about what I'd do when I grew up; I never thought of being married, as you all did. I couldn't seem to imagine myself anything but stupid little Beth, trotting about at home of no use anywhere but there. I never wanted to go away, and the hard part now is the leaving you all. I'm not afraid, but it seems as if I should be homesick for you even in heaven.”

(417)

Another example of warmth and loving care between these two is demonstrated when Beth falls ill with Scarlet fever. Jo nurses her and takes care of her for she is scared to death that her beloved Beth would die, and also she feels it is partly her fault. Jo lets Beth visit and help the poor Hummels' family, and from their child she got the fever. In the moment of despair she confides to Laurie about her fear of Beth's death and pronounces her feelings of forlornness in bearing the troublesome situation, for as she says, though Meg tries to be helpful, “she can't love Bethy as I do, and she won't miss her as I shall. Beth is my conscience, and I *can't* give her up. I can't. I can't .” (203)

Obviously, though very different in characters Jo loves her little Beth truly and deeply, and similar feelings bind Beth to Jo. Through Jo's wild temper, Beth tries to fight her inborn shyness and bashfulness, thanks to Beth Jo realizes her maternal feelings and caring. On account of Beth's last wish, Jo even gives up her writing and tries to substitute Beth in her actions and deeds at home and replace the dead child to their parents, yet, in spite of her enormous effort, Jo soon finds out that her life is lonesome and meaningless to her, since her character and temper is much different from

Beth's. Although only for a while, she again finds at least little comfort and joy in writing her stories and poems.

However, the girls' relationships are not only shown sun-drenched, because the different tempers of theirs contribute to the rare but still existing conflicts. For instance, the incident of Amy and Jo in the chapter called *Jo meets Apollyon*. Meg and Jo are supposed to go to the theatre with Laurie and Amy demands to go with them. After a grim and resentful banning from Jo, Amy decides to get her revenge in the form of secretly burning Jo's manuscript, which later emerges and Jo in an outburst of fury attacks Amy and promises a lifelong grievance against her. The incident's climax comes when Jo governed by wrath and unconcern almost let Amy drown in a river. Of course, after a while the girls reconcile again and everything comes to a good end. (Alcott, 79-90)

The event is important and interesting from the perspective regarding the influence of a temper on one's actions, where neither a very close familiar affinity plays the role of reconciliation. Jo's hot temper and Amy's call for attendance at the theatre play makes Jo be sharp-tongued at Amy, and Amy's childish stubbornness and malice induce her to burn Jo's beloved book, a piece she has been working on for a long time with enthusiasm and patience.

However, from a universal point of view the relationships among the four sisters are hearty and tender, since Alcott's aim, inspired by experiences from her own childhood spent with three sisters, seemed to be the emphasis on the support, solidarity and affection among the family members and the power of female fellowship.

## **7.2 Comparison**

There are some similar aspects on the concept of sisterhood in Austen's works and in *Little Women*, for both authoresses grew up with sisters. Alcott drew from this experience a lot and all her sisters were actually models for her characters, the March sisters.

Austen also imposed her familiarity with the relationship among sisters into some of her novels. However, it was more based on the emotional aspect than particular experiences that were her inspiration. Probably, Austen based the intimacy and affection

between Elizabeth and Jane Bennets or Marianne and Elinor Dashwoods on her own feelings to her sister Cassandra and their relationship.

On the contrary to March sisters, in Austen's works there are not only good and hearty relationships described when the issue of sisterhood is concerned. For example, in the case of Anne and Elizabeth Elliot there is a noticeable feeling of indifference, lack of concern and affection from Elizabeth's side. Or regarding all the five sisters Bennets, the relationships among them are far from ideal, which perhaps is due to their diverse characters and interests.

March sisters are on the first sight siblings who, no matter what, stick together and truly love one another. Jo herself, describes their bond in her poem as "love's immortal power", so it is clear that according to her such kind of love is eternal and strong.

Yet, there are special bonds among them. Meg and Jo, the oldest ones are soul mates, and for the two younger ones they represent advisors and confidants.

In spite of various minor problems which emerge during their life together, it seems that with these four sisters Alcott tried to emphasise the support and affection among siblings and family members generally, and also such union may have been intended to represent the power of female companionship.

## 8. Marriage by Austen

All the Austen's novels studied in this thesis finish with marriages. Each and every one is conceived as a happy-ending of the main couple. Marriage is the climax, to which many readers draw their attention, when they are getting familiar with the first pages of the books. However, this is only a part of the view on marriages which represent one of the most fundamental issues in Austen's prose and it would be too simple to depict them in such a narrow outlook.

To begin with the topic of marriages, one must not overlook probably the best passage from *Pride and Prejudice*, which accurately describes how society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century viewed a young, eligible man.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

(Austen 1991, 1)

It may be supposed that when the word "universally" is used in the first sentence, the reader can regard this opinion as a general truth. He or she may conclude that in those times, every young man owning a considerable material possession wanted to settle down and get married. But when the reader continues reading, he finds out that this seemingly common truth is introduced here from the viewpoint of the "surrounding families" mentioned awhile later. Therefore, it emerges that the man might not be at all interested in such a matter or he may not be questioned for his opinion in this regard, though, immediately after getting acquainted with his new home, he is considered a possible husband for many of local families' daughters. Moreover, the families look upon him as if he was legally owned by them. Thus, a close relation between marriage and possession appears at the very beginning of the novel which adumbrates one of the key issues in Austen's works; and as well, her sense of irony operates here.

As for the connection between marriage and possession, Vivian Jones comments on this subject with explanation of the situation of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She points out that in the time when Jane Austen lived and until 1870, according to the law, women who were married owned nothing. Their possession belonged to their husbands. In spite of that, the only way for women to get financial security was to marry a rich

man. Consequently, one can find traces of irony in the passage, where the neighbouring families consider the young man their “rightful property”, since the one who would be in charge when finance were considered would be the young man. In addition, the parents would in essence sell their daughter for financial provision. (Jones, 37)

### **8.1 Marriage with or without love**

It seems rather clear what Austen’s attitude towards marrying without love was. All of her heroines from already mentioned novels get married while having strong affection for their husbands. This may not be considered a really convincing argument, for one could rightly question the sameness of opinions of Austen herself and her characters. For that reason, it is necessary to find evidence in the relevant literature.

Margaret Llewelyn in her book *Jane Austen A Character Study* gives example on the speech of Emma in the Watsons, which is promptly associated with Austen’s own attitudes towards this topic.

“Poverty is a great Evil, but to a woman of Education & feeling it ought not, it cannot be the greatest. I would rather be Teacher at a school (and I can think of nothing worse) than marry a Man I did not like.”  
(Llewelyn, 43)

Llewelyn alleges that Austen had reasons for loaning Emma her opinion. Two years before writing this book, Jane refused a proposal of a well-off man who would secure her life and make her a mistress of a nice house in the country. Yet, as it was stated before, she turned his offer down, and even years later she was glad it finished like that, which was confirmed by her own words in the personal correspondence she was engaged in. ““Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection.”” (Llewelyn, 43-44) As another proof of her putting a great emphasis on the issue of affection may be the capital letter at the beginning of the word.

Nevertheless, this thesis is primarily aimed at the viewpoints of characters on the topic and there is a rather wide choice of approaches that can be examined. Perhaps the best examples are Jane and in the first place Elizabeth Bennet. Throughout the book, Elizabeth advances to the reader her opinions as regards marriage and love many times.

For instance, when she rejects Mr. Collins’ proposal, she tells him several times and rather explicitly that she would not be happy with him nor would he be happy with her. She knows what kind of person Mr Collins is and therefore, though their marriage

would bring relief to her mother in the unpleasant patrimonial affair of their family, she does not hesitate a second in refusing his proposal. For her, the happiness in marriage can only be achieved with strong affection between the woman and man. There is a somewhat funny aspect of the conversation between Elizabeth and Mr. Collins. Due to his foolishness, pride and self-conceit, Mr. Collins is not willing to accept Elizabeth's refusal; he does not consider it to be possible at all for her to refuse such a "favourable" match, particularly when no other may occur in the future owing to her insignificant dowry. Moreover, he attributes the rejection to a way of flirting with him, which is according to his assumptions a usual means of many young ladies, how to increase a suitor's longing for his lady. Though, Elizabeth insists on her opinion and claims:

'Upon my word, sir,' cried Elizabeth, 'your hope is rather an extraordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal.'

(Austen 1991, 102)

Elizabeth is a kind of a person who is not afraid to convey her attitudes and opinions however unpleasing or daring they might be for the listener, and especially dealing with people she finds foolish or prideful does not stop her from being honest. Therefore, she doesn't take much effort in declining Mr. Collins' proposal. The reader finds out throughout the book that his offer is acquisitive and his feelings for Elizabeth are somewhat inconstant, since he proposes a few days later to her best friend Charlotte Lucas.

The case of Charlotte and her acceptance of marriage is substantially different, primarily, due to her own views and beliefs as regards marriage. She belongs to women who prefer security and material comfort in their life to romance and feelings. At the age of twenty-seven, she finds herself too old and not really attractive to bank on a miraculous appearance of a "prince on a white horse". At least, this is the way she thinks about herself and her ambitions for life.

She is not naive as for her future husband and his feelings for her. Mr. Collins' company is not at all pleasant for her, he is not a wise man and he surely does not love Charlotte. Yet, she knows about it and submits to it. She does not really want a husband or marriage, unfortunately that is according to her the only way how to be financially secured when lacking a huge dowry. (117) Naturally, Elizabeth is shocked by her

friend's decision and disappointed as well, since she cannot understand why Charlotte sells herself out, why she exchanges true feelings for property. Here, the difference between their attitudes and principles is clearly visible. On one hand, Charlotte can be considered pragmatic, sensible person, whilst Elizabeth may be seen too romantic and idealistic. Regarding her age, property and above all her chances to get a better or indeed any other proposal, Charlotte thinks about her situation from a realistic point of view, and for this reason, she accepts Mr. Collins' offer, though by this act, she consciously resigns on love and affection in her marital life. On the other hand, one could accuse Charlotte of being opportunist and on the contrary, Elizabeth might be proclaimed sincere and high-principled. Such judgement is difficult to make and even if the author's attitude is known, there are always two sides of a coin.

Vivian Jones perceives the views of marriage of both young women in the terms of key words used by the author in the Chapter 22. Elizabeth sees Charlotte's interest in a "comfortable home" as a "worldly advantage", whereas her own opinion as regards marriage is connected with harmony of individual characters and warmth, which Charlotte associates with the word "romantic". Consequently, Elizabeth's response to the situation arises from imagining Charlotte as Mrs. Collins, which is for her a "humiliating picture", in her eyes her best friend would descend. (Jones 1997, 42)

The picture of Bennet sisters might be as well perceived from Jane's exclamation as regards Elizabeth's future marriage. "Oh, Lizzy! do any thing rather than marry without affection." (Austen 1991, 353) From all this one can conclude that affection and loving feelings are the crucial aspects for both sisters when considering a marriage, yet, it is not true completely.

Not only affection, but also harmony of individual characters is so much important for Elizabeth, for she supposes that a relation built on mere physical attraction may not last long happily. Thus, she compares her possible relationship with Fitzpatrick Darcy and her sister's marriage with Wickham.



She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from his judgement, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance. [...] How Wickham and Lydia were to be supported in tolerable independence, she could not imagine. But how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtues, she could easily conjecture.

(293)

Such contemplation shows Elizabeth's mature view of a relationship of a woman and man. She perceives it as a "union", a kind of agreement, which is based on tolerance, independence and harmony of both partners, therefore, her attitude is a rather modern and progressive one, as regards the era this was stated in. She sees a husband and a wife as independent individuals, who mutually enrich their lives with their talents and qualities. On the contrary, the relationship of Lydia and Wickham is according to Elizabeth based on sexual attraction, apparently, much more from Lydia's side.

Wickham's affection for Lydia was just what Elizabeth had expected to find it; not equal to Lydia's for him. [...] Lydia was exceedingly fond of him. He was her dear Wickham on every occasion; no one was to be put in competition with him.

(298-299)

Therefore, Elizabeth perceives it rather impossible to last long time. Furthermore, she regards such a relationship not to be able to provide them with opportunity for acting independently.

The marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet is another example of a problematic relationship of two people, probably; in this case, a more suitable word would be "coexistence" than a relationship. In Elizabeth's view, her parents are not a content and happy couple. She is aware that from their example, one could not gain anything positive nor she could perceive it an opportunity for inspiration. As a young man, her father was enchanted by her mother's youth, beauty and ostensible kindness. Yet, after a while Mrs. Bennet's real character revealed feeble intelligence and bigotry which suppressed her husband's affection and he adhered to the country life and books. The contentment from his marriage is gone, and his wife makes him laugh only due to her foolishness. However, Mrs. Bennet is not the only one to blame, since her husband exposes her to ridicule by her own children, this is what Elizabeth disapproves of and

feels sad about. In conclusion, she considers the marriage of her parents unequal, which puts their daughters into an inconvenient position and does not enable them to respect their mother in the way it would be appropriate. (222-223)

However, not all marriages presented in the novels written by Jane Austen can be regarded as unhappy or unsuccessful. The naval couple Crofts from *Persuasion* are a good example of a functioning and loving relationship of two people. Admiral Croft is a navy man and spends most of his life travelling round the world and his wife often accompanies him on his voyages. Apparently, from the very first moment of their introduction in the book, they are perceived as a contented couple, both partners giving each other opportunity to be independent and come out with what they have talents and abilities for; Admiral in his professional career and his wife in what could be called “managing their life”. This is clearly visible in the Chapter 3, where Mr. Shephard, a lawyer, informs Sir Walter Elliot about possible tenants of his House, the Crofts.

He had seen Mrs. Croft, too; she was at Taunton with the admiral, and had been present almost all the time they were talking the matter over. ‘And a very well-spoken, genteel, shrewd lady, she seemed to be,’ continued he; ‘asked more questions about the house, and terms, and taxes, than the admiral himself, and seemed more conversant with business.

(Austen 1985, 52)

Later in the book Anne Eliot is surprised and amused with their a little unusual ride in the carriage she takes part in, and realizes that in their style of driving, where Mrs. Croft takes over the reins in order not to topple or crash into another vehicle, is represented “general guidance of their affairs”. (114)

In other words, their relationship functions on the basis of mutual tolerance and understanding of one’s own strengths, which are supported rather than suppressed. Moreover, it is interesting to see that Mr. Croft reckons his wife as an equal individual capable of managing relatively serious matters, such as renting a house. This is rather unusual for a man of those times; presumably, it should manifest Austen’s awareness of such a relationship to be desirable and beneficial for the whole family.

Patricia Beer summons the portrayal of marriages in Austen’s novels as following: She believes that when an unhappy marriage is depicted as, for instance, the one of Bennets, it is shown “humorously or summarily”; she thinks that the reader is not supposed to deal with its failure. On the contrary, a happy marriage, such as the relationship of Crofts, is looked on with sentimentality and joy. (Beer, 80)

## 8.2 Marriage by Alcott

During the Victorian era marriage was an essential and crucial point in a woman's life. All the efforts of her parents led to the negotiation of a good match, which would secure the young lady a comfortable life under the protective wing of her husband. After the marriage she started a completely new period of life beginning with the loss of her innocence, followed with the birth of children and a lifelong care for her family and household.

For some of the "little women", specifically for Meg and Amy, marriage is a quite important issue, frequently discussed and thought about; on the contrary Jo's plans for life during the most part of the story do not take into account having a husband or children. And as for Beth, before she can reach an age when girls start to think about getting married she dies, therefore it can be stated that not all young ladies Alcott writes about in her famous piece long to have a husband and family, rather they dream and hope for achievement as regards their self-realization and independence.

When getting back to the wishes of parents for their girls there is an excellent illustration of the various attitudes towards the subject in which Alcott tried to contrast the wealthy Moffat family and their way of thinking with much poorer but kind-hearted Marches. In chapter 9, *Meg Goes to Vanity Fair*, Meg spends a fortnight at her acquaintance's house. Moffats are a well-off family, frequently discussed by March girls who sometimes cannot fight off their envy when they regret that they do not have such beautiful clothes and house as Moffats do. At a party Meg secretly overhears a conversation of Mrs. Moffat with one of her friends discussing Laurie, the grandson of a March's neighbour, Mr. Laurence.

"How old is he?"

"Sixteen or seventeen, I should say," replied another voice.

"It would be a grand thing for one of those girls, wouldn't it? Sallie says they are very intimate now, and the old man quite dotes on them."

"Mrs. M. has made her plans, I dare say, and will play her cards well, early as it is. The girl evidently doesn't think of it yet," said Mrs. Moffat.

(Alcott, 96)

Meg really has never thought about marrying Laurie and such idea that her mother would plan a marriage for either her or any of her sisters just because of acquisitive reasons is shocking for her. Yet, the reader can realize that for Mrs. Moffat or her company such financially advantageous match would be highly desirable.

Moreover, when Meg accepts John Brooke's proposal, her Aunt March falls out with her, because as she says, it is Meg's duty to marry a wealthy man and help her poor family, since a match like his would ruin the rest of her life. (254)

Though, this is not the case of Mrs. March, since her plans for Meg and all her other children are based on spiritual values rather than material, which is reflected in Marmee's speech.

“I want my daughters to be beautiful, accomplished, and good; to be admired, loved, and respected; [...] To be loved and chosen by a good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman, and I sincerely hope my girls may know this beautiful experience.”

(Alcott 107)

As for their plans and reality there is a significant difference between these when speaking about Jo, Meg, and Amy as well. Jo is a tomboy of the story, a girl whose ideas are often quite non-conformal and they are unconventional even as regards marriage. Although she has an exemplary marriage of the times at home with her mother and father being the models, she does not think of herself as a person suitable for a marriage. She prefers to be an old maid, devote her time to reading and primarily writing and being independent, so that she could provide her kinsfolk with financial support. Jo is an unusual character in many ways, she is not a typical Victorian female heroine, she is not a typical female either, Jo's unconventionality makes her therefore difficult to accept the traditional values and common ideas concerning a woman's lot. That is probably the reason why Alcott decided not to let Jo marry Laurie, the male hero of the book, who happens to be a neighbour of Marches and becomes a dear friend to all four girls, but most of all to Jo.

In fact, Laurie and Amy's marriage was the correct ending for Alcott's book, not because Alcott was a feminist as many critics suggest but because she was a romantic. Both she and her autobiographical character, Jo March, were raised on the sentimental and pseudo-chivalric novels of the early nineteenth century. These novels dictated that the ideal hero never marry the flawed heroine.

(Sands-O'Connor)

In other words, Alcott would have to change Jo's character completely, so that she would fit into the model female character who usually marries the perfect young hero, instead, Alcott engaged Jo to a professor Bhaer, a man of mature years and placid temper, because as Sands-O'Connor asserts “only happy marriages were acceptable in

women's fiction, and she had accepted that "difficult" heroines needed steady, fatherly spouses rather than "ideal" types such as Theodore Laurence." (Sands-O'Connor)

With Meg and Amy the situation is much different. They always complained about their poverty and dreamt of marrying a well-off gentleman and living in a noble society. Amy even seriously thinks about marrying her suitor Fred, with whom she spends some time during her travels around Europe. It is rather interesting that she does not pretend to be in love with him and honestly admits in her letter to her family that the match would be calculated and for material reasons. Amy supports her opinion with her claim that she cannot stand poverty any longer than it would be necessary. In addition, she concludes her speech with a resolute attitude: "One of us *must* marry well; Meg didn't, Jo won't, Beth can't yet, so I shall, and make everything cozy all round." (Alcott 354-355)

Obviously, her plans are aimed not only at her financial provision, but she wants to take care of her family as well, nonetheless, Amy's intentions as regards her marriage are clearly opportunistic, although she later makes up her mind. This Alcott's heroine undergoes a rather fundamental change of character, which transforms her from a vain, egoistic child to an accomplished, well-bread young lady, an "ideal wife" for an "ideal hero". She falls in love with Laurie, a young gentleman, who happens to be wealthy, so Amy's childhood's wish to marry a rich man eventually comes true. It is also necessary to mention that what Jo wishes Laurie after she refuses his proposal, comes true eventually, though she cannot know at this time that she is talking about her sister Amy. "You'll get over this after a while, and find some lovely, accomplished girl, who will adore you, and make a fine mistress for your fine house." (406)

After all it is Laurie who sums up the situation when speaking to Jo about his relationship to both girls: "You both got into your right places." (496); "right, that is for the structure of Alcott's novel. Amy needed to be a bride, because she represented the good-girl character and Jo the flawed one." (Sands- O'Connor)

Megs intentions as regards marriage are quite similar to those of Amy, yet, she falls in love with Mr. Brooke, Lauries teacher and mentor, and she accepts his proposal knowing that her life will be meagre but she is willing to give up a possibility of a luxurious life for a true love. As a newlywed young wife Meg tries to conform to the "attributes of True Womanhood", essentially, they are the four qualities – domesticity,

submission, purity and piety, according to which the society and her husband assess a woman. (Welter) Meg decides to be a perfect housekeeper, so that their home would be a happy little haven for John with a caring wife who never loses the smile on her face.

This proposition reflexes in Barbara Welter's essay, where she says that women were expected to sustain "the values of stability, morality, and democracy" when making their homes unique places, comfortable shelters which would enable men to escape from the outer world of money, business, hard work and constant rivalry. (Lavender)

Her determination to be an ideal housewife may be easily demonstrated on her opinion as regards visitors in their house.

"My husband shall always feel free to bring a friend home whenever he likes. I shall always be prepared; there shall be no flurry, no scolding, no discomfort, but a neat house, a cheerful wife, and a good dinner. John, dear, never stop to ask my leave, invite whom you please, and be sure of a welcome from me."

(Alcott, 305)

Yet, the plans not always meet the reality and Meg falls out with her husband and tries to find help at her mother's. There is a significant moment of the book, since Marmee in her recommendation bids Meg to submit to John's will and accept his viewpoint without anger or exasperation. Further, Marmee advises her not to "deceive him by look or word" and emphasizes the importance of not arousing his rage against herself, because "peace and happiness depend on keeping his respect". Moreover, she reminds her of always coming with apologise as the first when going wrong. (310)

Marmee's attitude is based on the most important virtue of "true women", submissiveness. Women ought to suppress their anger, their opinions or wishes in order to submit to men's will. A true woman knew that she was inferior to a man, she needed his advice and protection and this arrangement was established according to God's command, therefore it was undoubtful. "Men were to be movers, and doers--the actors in life. Women were to be passive bystanders, submitting to fate, to duty, to God, and to men." (Lavender)

When trying to conform to the social demands and expectations, Meg takes over the rooted standards of a coexistence of a husband and wife. She tries to cope with her anger and discontent considering various aspects of her relationship, because she is

advised that she is expected to do so, in order to possess the most important virtue of a true woman and therefore maintain a happy and contented marriage.

### 8.3 Comparison

In both Austen's works and *Little Women* marriage is a significant issue. It used to be expected that a woman should get married, marriage was perceived as her life's goal and obviously, the richer the suitor was the better. Both Austen and Alcott refer to a woman's future as either being married or spending the rest of life as an old maid, which brings in her life financial worries; in essence such a woman is dependent on the kindnesses of her kin or has to work, usually as a governess or teacher.

Generally, in Austen's works a marriage is presented as a kind of business contract between the parents and the future husband of their daughter. For majority of parents introduced in her stories it is their fundamental task to find a suitable husband for their daughter and many of them, as for example Mrs. Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*, do it with enormous effort and concern. In *Little Women* such an attitude appears in connection with the wealthy Moffat family and their acquaintances at the ball, where they attribute to Mrs. March acquisitive intentions and plots as regards Meg's and Laurie's relationship.

Both in Austen's books and *Little Women* there is a considerable difference in how the reasons for a marriage are perceived from the heroines' point of view. In *Pride and Prejudice* the reader meets Elizabeth and Jane Bennets, whose intentions are to marry men they would love and respect, and if this would not be possible, they prefer being old maids to getting married without affection. However, it is not only love what Elizabeth seeks in a relationship. She seems to have rather mature requirements as regards a man of her life, for she considers mutual respect, tolerance and harmony in the marital bond as important as sexual attraction.

On the other hand, the reader is in the story introduced to another female character, Charlotte Lucas, who is either a practical, realistic woman who knows her possibilities, or an opportunist, whose only desire is to financially secure herself by an advantageous marriage. The opinion on Charlotte's decision to marry Mr. Collins depends very much on each reader's viewpoint. Nonetheless, Charlotte in her

materialistic attitude towards a marriage resembles Amy March, for she is also determined to marry well in order to gain financial security.

Amy's sister, Jo March is an exceptional woman not only as regards her attempts of self-realization, and desire to be independent. She has much different ideas about her life, she wants to be a writer, to be independent, and she does not really think about having a family and a husband. Despite her life's plans she ends up married to a German professor, administrates a boarding school for boys and gives up her literary ambitions.

Jane Austen as well L.M. Alcott give in their works examples of happy and problematic marriages, for instance, Bennets and Crofts with the first being a discontented couple, where Mr. Bennet ridicules his wife for her silliness and indelicate manners, and on contrary with the latter, introducing a naval admiral and his wife, who constitute an unusual pair of people. They profess in their matrimony values such as independence and acknowledgement of their strengths and talents, which is for that time exceptional and uncommon.

On contrary, Alcott in her book deals more with the ideas and reality considering married life. As in the case of Meg, who as a young girl dreams about a life in luxury with a charming man at her side, but she marries a poor teacher, whom she loves. More or less her married life is connected with getting accustomed to the life in a couple and acquiring the virtues of "true womanhood", especially, submissiveness, for she is advised that submitting to her husband will ensure her a contented marriage.



## 9. Motherhood by Austen

Motherhood, though not on the first sight, is one of the themes in Austen's novels. When carefully reading, one can reveal Austen's interest in the influence of mothers upon her heroines. Yet, not only heroines' mothers are the representatives of this theme. The novel *Sense and Sensibility* is a great example of depiction of motherhood in its various forms and through a range of female characters.

For instance, there is Mrs. Jennings, who is both mother and grandmother. A few times she hints at her daughter's pregnancy and she helps her after the childbirth, too. Doody asserts that with Charlotte's pregnancy Austen tried to remind the physical aspect of motherhood, yet at the same time, Charlotte's foolishness is a hint at the fact that not all mothers are wise and capable of educating their children. (Doody, xxii) Though Mrs. Jennings is viewed by the reader with fondness, as a mother she was not really successful. Charlotte is "ever smiling", yet her actions and attitudes give evidence of her simplicity and dim-wittedness. Mrs. Jennings's hearty and sincere relationship to both Dashwood girls reveals her kindness and good nature, but she is not able to fulfil her role of a care person and "surrogate" mother, when having both young ladies at her home for visit.

Their good friend saw that Marianne was unhappy, and felt that every thing was due to her which might make her at all less so. She treated her therefore, with all the indulgent fondness of a parent towards a favourite child on the last day of its holidays. Marianne was to have the best place by the fire, was to be tempted to eat by every delicacy in the house, and to be amused by the relation of all the news of the day.

(Austen 1990, 16)

While Marianne is undergoing a tremendous love disappointment Mrs. Jennings tries to improve her mood with food, gossip and place by the fire not realizing that such privileges can hardly soothe a broken heart.

Lady Middleton, a wife of Mrs. Dashwood's cousin, Sir John, who offers the three unlucky ladies a house on his estate, is probably even more interesting a character as regards the theme of motherhood. Lady Middleton defines herself as mother, this is her most important social role and she is totally satisfied within such limited scope of self-realization. As Doody implies "she never feels as important to herself as when she is visibly being motherly, and she can act the mother best when her children are creating scenes in which she can figure." (Doody, xxiii) Yet, her motherly acting is in the book

described in the way that one can easily reveal her mistake in perceiving herself a good mother, since instead of educating her children she is spoiling them with indulgences, uncritical admiration and lack of parental authority.

This is obvious, for instance, in the scene, when the Dashwood girls and the Steel girls visit Lady Middleton in her residence. Both her sons hassle and ill-treat the young ladies and afterwards they are exposed to a crying scene of little Annamaria, who self-consciously takes advantage of the ladies' attention, caused by a petty wound. The Steel girls and Lady Middleton try to calm her down with sugar plums, caresses, lavender water and unflagging attention; however, "With such a reward for her tears, the child was too wise to cease crying." (Austen 1990, 104) Doody concludes that "It would not require knowledge of Rousseau's *Émile* or Mary Wollstonecraft's strictures on the education of girls to see why Lady Middleton's behaviour is mistaken." (Doody, xxii) Annamaria is in such an early age capable of gaining emotional power over her mother without her ever noticing or acknowledging it. She spoils her children without being aware of it and considers herself a devoted and superior mother, since the very aim of her existence and self-realization is dependent on the fact that she is a mother.

In *Pride and Prejudice* one can find another dysfunctional mother, Mrs. Bennet. Primarily, her problematic influence upon her daughters is a result of her own manners and opinions by which she presents herself to society. She manifests her hysteria, foolishness, and awkwardness, which is highly embarrassing for the two daughters. Especially Elizabeth realizes that her mother's behaviour is a disgrace for the whole family and people of exquisite manners or higher social status despise of her. Mrs. Bennet's greatest interest is to wed all her children, preferably to noble, wealthy men; however, her actions and manner counteract her efforts.

The endeavour of hers is the cause of many of her embarrassing addresses and scenes, such as in the passage when the dinner at Netherfield takes place. Mrs. Bennet sits next to her neighbour Mrs. Lucas and she boasts about her wishes as regards Jane and Mr. Bingley's early marriage. This thrilling topic of conversation causes that she is unstoppable in her speech in which she indefatigably lists all the advantages of this union. Not only she trumpets a fact which is not true, yet she does it with enormous effort and loudness, therefore Mr. Darcy, Bingley's friend, cannot overhear this conversation and after a while Elizabeth can notice a clear expression of deep contempt

on his face. (Austen 1991, 95) In the novel, Mrs. Bennet's behaviour is the source of both disdain and entertainment, yet the very aspects of motherhood, such as providing children with loving care, education, experience and wisdom, becoming a model of proper manners and conduct, those are the qualities Mrs. Bennet tremendously lacks. Therefore, she inevitably fails in her motherly role and being a frequent target of her husband's ridicule she obviously fails in Mr. Bennet's eyes in her role of a wife and living partner, as well.

In this respect, one may think whether there is any woman who does or could substitute Mrs. Bennet's role of a mother. Gilbert and Gubar in their famous feminist study of the nineteenth century women writers, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, come to a relatively daring belief that the striking resemblance of the two women makes Lady Catherine a suitable mother to Elizabeth Bennet. However extraordinary this statement might seem, Gilbert and Gubar supports their claim by comparing the similarities in their characters.

Both speak authoritatively of matters on which neither is an authority. Both are sarcastic and certain in their assessment of people. Elizabeth describes herself to Darcy by asserting, "There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others" (II, chap.8), and in this respect too she resembles Lady Catherine, whose courage is indomitable. Finally, these are the only two women in the novel capable of feeling and expressing genuine anger, [...].

(Gilbert, 173)

However, the resemblance of their characters does not necessarily predetermine Lady Catherine to be a suitable mother for Elizabeth, since the very similarity could be the cause of never-ending dissensions, moreover, her character qualities do not secure being a good mother either. Therefore, this hypothesis seems a rather peculiar.

### **9.1 Motherhood by Alcott**

Louisa May Alcott devoted one of a few major themes of the book *Little Women* to motherhood. Though Louisa herself did not have children the story is based on the relationships among the female members of March family and a great emphasis is laid on the role of a mother in a family and the influence upon her children. As well as some other characters in the book, the protagonist of the mother was partly based on Louisa's own family member, her mother Abigail May Alcott.

Motherhood is in Alcott's book personified in the character of Marmee, a devoted mother of four daughters, a loving wife of an army chaplain, an exemplary Christian, and a diligent housewife. She represents all the qualities valued on an American woman of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Marmee is a support to her husband and a model for her children, who long to conform to her in the character qualities she possesses. She tries to educate her daughters to piety, mutual love and support, diligence and morality. Marmee is in the book presented as a perfect mother who always has an advice or moral to give, she is full of understanding and she guides her girls through their adolescence and early adulthood, the period in which the story catches the March daughters.

However, Marmee is not only a mother, but at least during a certain period of time, when her husband Mr. March serves in the army during the Civil War, she is a goodwife of the March family. The father though present in the conversations of the five women or reminded when a letter from him arrives, is somehow absent during the story, and even when he comes back from the war, his presence is evidently hold back. This is again a parallel to Alcott's own experience with her father, a Transcendentalist philosopher, Amos Bronson Alcott. He was a thinker, a scholar, a Utopian, but rarely a breadwinner, therefore Abigail had to take care of all the family matters and everyday concerns and let her husband philosophize. (literatureonline)

Marmee represents for her girls an example of morality, purity and piety, to which she leads them by frequent lectures and sermons. She encourages them to fight their vices and to be good Christians. For instance, in the scene, where she reminds them of the times they used to play Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan's religious allegory. Marmee used to prepare for them bundles to carry through the house as a representation of a human burden one has to bear during his whole life until he finally reaches the Celestial City. Each girl reveals her weaknesses and faults to others and then Marmee bids them to start again with the play, but this time for real, since "we never are too old for this, [...], because it is a play we are playing all the time in one way or another. Our burdens are here, our road before us, [...]." (Alcott, 11)

Barbara Welter in her famous essay *The Cult of True Womanhood* explains why piety was appreciated so much in the society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

One reason religion was valued was that it did not take a woman away from her "proper sphere," her home. Unlike participation in other societies or movements, church work would not make her less domestic or submissive [...].

(Welter)

Although Marmee does not want to tie her girls down and keep them away from their self-realization, she still emphasises the importance of faith and behaviour according to religious texts.

Even so, not only lecturing is a part of Marmee's way of education, for she often proves her sympathy and desire to be useful by helping the poor and the ill ones. As when she suggests to give their Christmas breakfast to a poor family with many children who are starving and freezing, because they do not have fire in their indigent house. After a short moment of surprise, girls agree and later they realize that though still being hungry they had a marvellous breakfast, since they relieved the sorrow of the people in need by helping them, and at the same time fought their vices when giving up what was theirs, in order to help. (Alcott, 15-16)

However, sometimes even Marmee resigns on her loving exhortation or education by example and lets girls find out for themselves her opinions and attitudes. As, for instance, about work.

“Work is wholesome, and there is plenty for everyone; it keeps us from ennui and mischief, is good for health and spirits, and gives us a sense of power and independence better than money or fashion.”

(129)

In this respect, when piety being the first virtue mentioned in this chapter, Marmee here shows another of the four virtues a proper Victorian woman in America should have had, domesticity.

In the home women were not only the highest adornment of civilization, but they were supposed to keep busy at morally uplifting tasks. Fortunately most of housework, if looked at in true womanly fashion, could be regarded as uplifting.

(Welter)

Domesticity and work at home was perceived a woman's sphere of self-realization. Home was her kingdom and taking care of husband, children and household was woman's "sweetest vocation".(Welter) Therefore, Marmee kindly makes her daughters to do all the house work without complaining and cheerfully, and prepares them for the role of a housewife.

Nevertheless, motherhood is in the book presented not only through a “perfect” Marmee, but also through Meg, her eldest daughter, who is learning to be a mother and wife after her marriage to John Brooke. As many other young mothers, Meg feels that it is her duty to take care of the twins and she does it with enormous concern and devotion which engages all her time and energy. With this she employs one of the greatest prejudices of young mothers, that taking care of children is only their responsibility and fathers’ job is merely to support the family financially.

As a consequence of this “division” of duties, however, John starts to feel neglected and finds company and entertainment at their neighbours’ house and his constant absence from home makes Meg feel forlorn and uncared for. Fortunately for Meg, her good Marmee has always an advice to follow. She suggests Meg not to “neglect husband for children”, but on the contrary, let him help her, for it would be beneficial for them parents, as well as, for their children, as “his place is there” next to hers. (Alcott, 436)

From a modern point of view this is a rather progressive idea for a Victorian woman, that the responsibility for education of children belongs to both parents, since it gives a woman more time for other concerns of hers, and also it introduces the opinion that fatherly care is as important for a child as motherly care.

## **9.2 Comparison**

There seem to be a vital difference in the presentation of motherhood by Austen and Alcott in a way that in Austen’s novels the mother is either missing or in most cases she is incompetent and a rather foolish character, whereas Alcott in her Marmee seems to present the contrary, in essence, the “ideal mother” of the times.

Except of describing the mothers Austen seems to be interested in the influence of such mothers on their daughters, as for example, Mrs. Bennet, who avowedly bids her younger daughters to spend time with army officers, which turns out to be a disgrace for the whole family, or she tactlessly and foolishly tries to match her daughters to any wealthy, unmarried man in the neighbourhood. Austen as well depicts motherhood through a range of characters. For instance, in *Sense and Sensibility*, there is the kind-hearted but quite incapable Mrs. Jennings, who tries to relieve Marianne’s broken heart with food or gossip. Next, in the same novel, Lady Middleton is introduced

as a kind of “professional mother” who thinks about herself only in terms of being a mother and all the time she tries to be visibly motherly, since for her her whole existence is based on the fact that she is a mother. Yet, in real, she does not educate her children; instead she spoils them with indulgences. Mrs. Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice* is another example of a mother who tremendously lacks all the motherly qualities and is an object of ridicule and disdain of her own family as well as their acquaintances.

Alcott drew her inspiration for the creation of Marmee from her mother, therefore, Marmee is a semiautobiographical character. Not only is she a model mother of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also a representative of “true womanhood”, who tries to educate her daughters to acquire the same values. She is very traditional, bids her children to piety, mutual love and respect, care for people in need and devoted domestic work. However, she also professes the idea of a “fatherly care”, which is for children as important as mother’s care.

Generally, it could be stated that sometimes Austen in her works pictures heroines without mothers, who then very much suffer from their absence, but often have an older female acquaintance who in a way substitutes the role of a mother, as in *Emma* or *Persuasion*. If the mother is present in the novel, she often lacks her motherly qualities completely. On the contrary, Alcott created in Marmee an “ideal mother” who is an exemplary woman of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for she possesses all the virtues a proper woman should had.

## 10. Conclusion

To summarize, the nineteenth century both in England and America was an era of fundamental changes in the social sector as well as politics, industry or arts. In England this period was connected with Queen Victoria, whose reign was one of the longest ever, and whose name is forever bound with the times of imperial growth, national wealth but also with terms such as “prudishness” and “oppression”.

Victorian era was also marked with a set of values professed by the society and these were connected with the position of women as well. A woman was seen as a kind of “icon” whose place was at home taking care of family affairs. Home was perceived a haven from busy world outside and a woman was to take care of it and glorify it. Domesticity was valued as one of the most important female virtues. Except of domesticity, women were expected to be virtuous and fulfil their role in the society in other areas as well. From the very beginning of a woman’s life she was being prepared for becoming a wife, therefore marriage was seen as a starting point of her fulfilment of her female role. Being a wife and becoming a mother was idealized and all women who could not from various reasons achieve it were pitied and considered a sort of “defective” or “insufficient”. Motherhood was comprehended as an affirmation of female identity and a woman’s emotional fulfilment.

Generally, a woman was idealized in terms of her virtues and she was at her best when she got married, gave birth to children, was a perfect housewife and a devoted mother, then she was highly valued, however, her existence was totally dependent on a man.

In America the nineteenth century was jotted with social movements, uprisings, economical growth as well as with the Civil war. People who were living in America and coming to America mostly came from European countries, often from England, therefore the society professed very similar values as in England. A woman was regarded according to her virtues as well, and there were the four virtues, domesticity, purity, piety and most importantly submission, which were demanded and expected. Yet, no matter how virtuous they were, women were perceived inferior to men in their abilities, intellect, physical appearance and their lives were again absolutely dependent on men’s will.



During the century a few female writers appeared on the literary scene with Jane Austen among them. Until today she belongs to the most famous British authors. Though she lived in the times of pre-Victorian England, due to her work, she is often connected with the Victorian era. Austen's novels are generally characterized as the novels of manner, since they picture the life in a certain social class with respect to the people's customs, values, manners, their way of life, and how they conform to the demands of society. The majority of the characters appearing in her works are women and the basic themes are nearly similar in all of them. All of her heroines are portrayed in the search, more or less enthusiastic, for a husband.

Austen wrote about the life she knew, about things which were familiar to her, that is to say she wrote about the country gentry in the southern England. Her choice of the subject matter is regarded by some critics as very limited, but others argue that she chose this theme intentionally.

Louisa May Alcott, an American writer, is also valued for her extensive contribution to American literature; nonetheless, her fame is built upon one novel, *Little Women*. The daughter of a Transcendentalist philosopher was brought up in the intellectual and liberal atmosphere. She gained her reputation by writing books aimed at younger readers, especially girls. Books inspired by her own childhood were written on the demands of a publisher and market to educate, guide and entertain children. Further, an extensive part of her production comprised sensation stories written anonymously or under the male pseudonym A.M. Barnard for financial reward and literary experience.

The piece *Little Women*, to which study is this paper partly aimed at, was written on the autobiographical experiences of the writer herself. The story tells about a mother-centred family with four daughters, with these female characters being the basis for comparison with Austen's heroines.

As this paper was aimed at the comparison of selected female characters from Austen's novels with heroines from *Little Women*, it was necessary to concentrate on particular issues which could be found in Austen's works as well as in Alcott's novel. Based on the aspects of a woman's role in the society and at home as well as her self-assertion, five issues emerged as rather significant and interesting to deal with: Self and Society; Education, Intellect and Self-realization; Sisterhood; Marriage and Motherhood.

Self and Society, is the first of the five chapters introduced in this paper and it concentrated on the inner conflict of heroines between the social demands expected from them and their self, that is to say their own attitudes, opinions, wishes. What is probably the main difference between Austen's Anne Elliot chosen as a model character for this topic and Alcott's Jo and Amy is the depth to which they examine the issue. Whereas Austen sets about the topic in connection with love, Alcott conceives it as a more complex theme based on the overall conception of each character and their identity. Anne Elliot is a heroine once persuaded to give up her lover, to submit to the social pressure. Her youth, inexperience and feeling of duty to her family were the reasons for her to obey the requests; however, during the course of time she realizes her mistake and starts to be self-confident as regards her attitudes and concerns. Concerning *Little Women*, the issue is connected with the characters themselves and how they do or do not conform to the expectations of the society. On one hand, there is Jo, a "rebel" who dislikes being a girl and having to fulfil her role of a proper woman, she is lively, does not care about fashion or marriage, her only contentment is her writing and family. On the other hand, there is Amy who is a "conformist", her aim is to become a proper lady, in essence to conform to the ideal of "true womanhood". To conform meant self-denial, submission, so Amy represented the example or model for the female readers of the times.

As regards Education, Intellect and Self-realization, the difference between Austen's and Alcott's characters is even more crucial. Austen's heroines are often well educated and they like reading, however, they appear as if they were ashamed of such accomplishments and interests. They tend to underestimate and belittle their skills; and all this shows a rather ambiguous relationship of Austen as regards knowledge. Alcott, on the contrary, projects her delight in reading and writing into Jo, a wild tomboy who explores through writing her skills, knowledge and imagination; moreover, thanks to her production she gains great acquisition in terms of independence, self-realization, financial reward and chiefly the feeling of satisfaction. That is the essential disparity between Alcott and Austen, since Austen's characters never experience such feelings from their accomplishments.

Both Jane Austen and Louisa May Alcott grew up with sisters and this fact influenced them in their work. Whereas Alcott based her March sisters on her own

family, on her own sisters and herself, Austen projected in some of her works rather the emotional aspect of sisterhood than particular people or experiences. This is obvious in the case of the oldest Bennet sisters whose relationship is very intimate. Yet, sisterhood is in her works also pictured in terms of indifference and coldness, too. Conversely, Alcott seemed to express in her *Little Women* an appeal on cohesion in the family and the power of female fellowship.

When reading Austen's novels the reader quite easily detects the principal issue dealt by majority of female characters present, that is to say the issue of marriage. Austen interestingly depicts the true nature of a marriage of those times as a kind of a contract between the bride's parents and her future husband. She also examines various views of young women as regards the matter and their reasons for being either "idealistic" or "pragmatic" in all possible meanings of the words. Alcott in her novel deals more with the youthful ideas and the reality which comes after the wedding, specifically in the case of Meg March who explores the delights as well as sorrows of a married life and the social expectations as regards her submissiveness, which turns out to be the essential condition of a contented husband and family.

Motherhood is another significant theme primarily in *Little Women*. Marmee is here introduced as an exemplary mother who serves as a model for her daughters. She is virtuous, self-sacrificing, devoted, pious, in other words, she is presented as the ideal of "true womanhood". On the contrary, Austen portrayed in her works rather different mothers. Often they are incompetent or foolish characters, who totally lack their motherly qualities. In Lady Middleton from *Sense and Sensibility* the reader can even realize a woman who conditions her identity with the fact of being a mother; she tries to be visibly motherly, without realizing her own incapability. Therefore, it is obvious, that Austen and Alcott expressed in their works vitally different presentations of motherhood.

To conclude, both writers chose in their works to write mainly about female characters, which of course means as regards to the period they lived in similar topics they dealt with, yet, each depicted them from a different viewpoint; therefore their heroines are original and unexchangeable, although they may resemble one another in particular aspects of their character or acting. Eventually, both Jane Austen and Louisa

May Alcott contributed to the portrayal of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and their perception by the society.

## 11. Resumé

V Anglii, stejně jako v Americe, bylo 19. století obdobím zásadních změn jak ve společnosti tak v politice, průmyslu či umění. Tato doba byla pro Anglii především spjata s vládou královny Viktorie, která byla jednou z nejdéle vládnoucích panovníků na světě a její éra je navždy považována za období druhé renesance v této zemi. To bylo charakterizováno značným rozrůstáním impéria, v důsledku toho i vzrůstajícím světovým významem pro Anglii, získáváním bohatství, ale i s termíny jako „prudérnost“ či „útlak“.

Viktoriánská doba byla také ve znamení hodnot vyznávaných tehdejší společností, které se mimo jiné také týkaly postavení žen ve společnosti. Žena byla považována za jakousi „ikonu“, jejíž místo bylo v domácnosti a jejím údělem byla péče o ni a o rodinu. Domov pro lidi představoval útočiště před světem plným spěchu, těžké práce a konkurenčního boje a žena o něj měla pečovat a zvelebovat jej. Udržování rodinného života v teple krbu byla jedna z nejoceňovanějších ženských ctností. Kromě této ctnosti, ženy byly vedeny i k získávání a udržování dalších ctností, čímž měly naplnit svou roli ve společnosti. Již odmalička byly ženy připravovány na svou roli manželky a hospodyně, proto se svatba považovala za jakýsi prvopočátek jejich snahy o splnění ženské role. Být manželkou a poté matkou bylo ideálem, který se stal pro ženy povinností a pokud některá z jakýchkoliv důvodů nemohla nebo nechtěla tohoto ideálu dosáhnout, byla považována za nedostatečnou a necelou ženu. Mnohé takto „postižené“ ženy byly vystaveny veřejné lítosti a někdy i odsouzení. Mateřství bylo považováno za potvrzení ženské identity a její emocionální naplnění. Žena byla tedy ceněna v souladu s jejími ctnostmi a její životní náplní bylo pečovat o domov a rodinu, nicméně existenčně byla naprosto závislá na muži.

Společenská situace v Americe v průběhu devatenáctého století byla značně poznamenána hnutími za práva občanů, povstáními, ekonomickým růstem, ale i občanskou válkou. Američtí občané a lidé přicházející do Ameriky měli kořeny v evropských zemích. Mnozí lidé přišli do Ameriky přímo z Anglie, proto vyznávali podobné či stejné hodnoty a podobně i žili. I zde byla žena ceněna podle svých ctností a mezi jinými to byly především rodinný život, mravní čistota, zbožnost a poslušnost, které byly od ženy nejvíce vyžadovány. A také zde byly ženy vnímány jako méněcenné bytosti, fyzicky i intelektově, jejichž život je závislý na mužském vedení a rozhodování.

Během 19.století se na literární scéně objevilo několik ženských spisovatelek a mezi nimi i Jane Austenová. Tato autorka patří sice do doby předviktoriánské, ale svou tvorbou se někdy řadí k viktoriánským autorům. Rodinné romány Austenové zpodobňují vždy určitou sociální vrstvu a přesvědčivě zachycují zvyky, hodnoty, mravy a celkově způsob života těchto lidí. Většinu postav v jejích románech tvoří ženy a jejich svět a vycházejí vždy z tématicky podobného základu. Vypráví tedy příběh o hrdinkách, které jsou vydány napospas námluvám a hledání příhodného životního partnera.

Austenová se pro svou tvorbu inspirovala tam, kde jí to bylo blízké a známé, psala o životě nižší šlechty na jihoanglickém venkově. Někteří kritici označili výběr jejích témat za značně omezený, ale jiní jej vidí jako autorčin záměr, který byl cílený - nikoliv takřkajíc z nutnosti.

Louisa May Alcottová, americká spisovatelka, patří ke klasickým autorům americké literatury, jejíž věhlas je založený především na oblibě jednoho z jejích děl, knihy *Malé Ženy*. Alcottová pochází z rodiny stoupence transcendentalismu, byla proto liberálně vychovávána a vyrůstala v atmosféře podporující intelekt a svobodomyslnost. Autorka se prosadila rodinnými romány zaměřenými na dívky. Ty byly psány na objednávku nakladatelství za účelem výchovným, a při jejich psaní čerpala inspiraci z vlastního dětství. Další část její tvorby tvoří příběhy popisující lidské vášně, nectnosti a dobrodružství, které byly psány buď anonymně nebo pod mužským pseudonymem A.M. Barnard za účelem vydělku a získání literárních zkušeností.

Tato práce byla částečně zaměřena na studii autorčina již zmíněného nejznámějšího díla, které je postaveno na autobiografických zážitcích, a vypráví příběh rodiny Marchových. Matka, čtyři dcery a jejich osudy se staly základem pro porovnání s hrdinkami Jane Austenové.

Jak již bylo řečeno, tato práce byla zaměřena na porovnání vybraných postav z románů Jane Austenové s hrdinkami z knihy *Malé Ženy*, proto bylo nutné zaměřit se na společná témata, která lze najít u obou autorek: společnost a já, vzdělání a seberealizace, sesterství, manželství a mateřství.

První kapitola se věnovala konfliktu mezi společností a vlastním já, konkrétně byla zaměřena na zkoumání vnitřních rozporů u jednotlivých hrdinek, které se musely vyrovnávat se společenskými požadavky a vyjádřením vlastních názorů, postojů či přání. Zásadním rozdílem mezi Annou Elliotovou, hlavní hrdinkou knihy s anglickým

názvem *Persuasion*, a Jo a Amy Marchovými je hloubka, se kterou se autorky ponořily do daného tématu. Austenová se věnuje tomuto problému víceméně pouze ve spojení s milostnými city, kdežto Alcottová se pouští do hlubšího zkoumání a vztahuje jej na celkové pojetí hrdinky a její vlastní identitu.

Anna Elliotová se jako mladá dívka vzdala své lásky na nátlak své rodiny, protože poslušnost a poddajnost byla od dívky vyžadována a ona musela tomuto tlaku vyhovět. Během let ale získává životní zkušenosti a sebejistotu, která jí dává odvahu jednat podle svých názorů a představ. V knize *Malé Ženy* je téma rozšířeno o celkové pojetí postav a jejich tendence podléhat či naopak vzdorovat společenským požadavkům na ženu žijící v 19. století. Hrdinky Amy a Jo jsou v knize prezentovány jako naprosté protipóly. Jo, živel, který se těžko smíruje s identitou ženy jako takové, která jí není blízká, se o to hůře vyrovnává s požadavky na příkladné ženství a není ochotna stát se dámou, protože by tím ztratila samu sebe. Naopak nejmladší Amy je konformistka, protože odmala touží být příkladnou dámou a dělá tedy vše, aby v očích společnosti vyhověla jejím požadavkům a představám. Dá se také říci, že narozdíl od komplikované Jo, sloužila Amy jako příklad pro tehdejší mladé čtenářky jak uspět na své cestě k „pravému ženství“.

Co se týká tématu vzdělání a seberealizace, rozdíly mezi hrdinkami Austenové a Alcottové jsou ještě zásadnější. Hrdinky v knihách Austenové bývají vzdělané a sečtělé, ale jakoby se za své znalosti a schopnosti styděly, protože mají tendenci se podceňovat a své znalosti bagatelizovat. To vrhá nejasné světlo na samotnou Austenovou a její názor na vzdělání a schopnosti u ženy. Naopak Alcottová vložila do postavy Jo všechnu svou lásku k literatuře a psaní. Divoška Jo vkládá do své tvorby své znalosti, schopnosti a fantazii a díky ní se také stává nezávislejší, snaží se realizovat svůj sen, vydělávat peníze a podporovat svou rodinu. Takovéto pocity seberealizace a naplnění z vlastní tvorby nebo umění není možné vidět u žádné hrdinky z vybraných děl Jane Austenové.

Jane Austenová i Louisa May Alcottová vyrůstaly společně se svými sestrami a tento fakt též do jisté míry ovlivnil jejich tvorbu. L.M. Alcottová postavila svůj příběh na autobiografických zážitcích ze svého dětství a postavy Joiných sester Meg, Beth a Amy jsou do značné míry inspirované právě jejími vlastními sestrami. Naopak Austenová vložila do svých příběhů spíše než konkrétní lidi a zážitky své emoce a pocity charakterizující její vztah se sestrou Cassandrou. Tato citová blízkost a vřocnost

se například objevuje ve vztahu nejstarších sester Bennetových. Nicméně sesterský vztah bývá v jejich knihách zpodobněn i jako naprostý citový chlad a lhostejnost, jako v případě Anny Elliotové a její sestry Elizabeth. Jak se zdá, Alcottová chtěla naopak ve svém románu poukázat na rodinnou soudržnost a sílu ženského přátelství.

Manželství a hledání příhodného partnera pro život je zásadním tématem v díle Austenové. Autorka zajímavě líčí pravou povahu sňatku jako jakousi obchodní dohodu mezi rodiči nevěsty a budoucím manželem. Dále se zabývá různými úhly pohledu na danou věc z hlediska mladých žen, které jsou právě ve věku na vdávání a nechává na čtenáři zda bude jejich idealismus považovat za naivitu či zásadovost a naopak pragmatismus v pohledu na manželství za vypočítavost nebo realistické zvážení svých možností. Naopak hrdinky Alcottové jsou zachyceny v jakémsi vývoji, kdy se z dětských představ stává realita jako v případě Meg. Ta sní o bohatém muži, ale z lásky se vdá za chudého učitele a musí si projít kolotočem radostí i strastí manželského života, aby nakonec zjistila, že i zde je pod tlakem společenských požadavků a pro manželovu spokojenost v rodinném životě je zásadní její naprosté podřízení a podvolení se manželovým názorům a přáním.

Posledním tématem, kterým se tato práce zabývala bylo mateřství. Zde se projevuje opět zásadní rozdíl. Zatímco Alcottová ve své *Marmee* představuje ideál mateřství té doby, ženu, která je ctnostná, zbožná, obětavá, jinými slovy je příkladem „pravého ženství“, matky vyskytující se v knihách Austenové buď chybí nebo naprosto postrádají kvality, které by z nich dělaly dobré matky. Například Lady Middletonová z knihy *Rozum a cit* celou svou existenci podmiňuje tím, že je matkou a také stále usiluje o to se mateřsky projevovat. Přesto jako matka selhává, neboť své děti nekriticky zbožňuje a nic jim nedokáže upřít.

Závěrem lze říci, že obě spisovatelky přispěly ke zpodobnění žen žijících v 19. století a jejich odrazem v očích společnosti. V dílech vybraných pro tuto práci popisovaly především ženské hrdinky, z čehož vyplývá, vzhledem k době ve které žily, že se do značné míry shodly v tématech, jimiž se jejich hrdinky zabývají, ale každá tato témata jinak pojala a zpracovala. Jejich ženské protagonistky jsou originální a nezaměnitelné, přestože se mohou sobě podobat v určitých aspektech charakteru či jednání.



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