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Jane Austen`s novel as an example of a depiction of English society in the long nineteenth century

Żaneta Przybylska

Department of English Language, Poznan College of Modern Language,
59 Św. Marcin Street, 61-806 Poznan, Poland

E-mail address: zanetap4@op.pl

ABSTRACT

Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Classicism had come to an end and Romanticism had just started, Jane Austen wrote her famous, fabulous and funny novels. All of them are known as sentimental novels. On the other hand, they are not only romances, but also detailed description of English society in the nineteenth century. According to Burgess, influenced the Age of Reason (Burgess 2003: 173). What is more, it is said that the nineteenth century novels replaced romances easily because they still had the general structure of the romances. Like in a romance, Austen connected the main plot with love affairs. In accordance with the statement of Burgess, her books mixed romantic and classical features (Burgess 2003: 174). This style of writing gave her the popularity of a unique writer who tried to present some a part of the English society, especially the issues connected with women`s life. Mostly she skipped political and historical events and focused on people and their everyday life and love affairs. Human dilemmas were the priority for her. Another important issue was a depiction of the character`s lives in novels. Austen mostly used comical and funny dialogs, tricky plots, and happy endings.

Keywords: Classicism, Romanticism, eighteenth century, nineteenth century, Age of Reason, Jane Austen

INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be described by the numbers of rebellions which were caused by a social and political situation. These events started to determine people`s feelings, their needs and priorities. Writing style became more emotional and instinctive. It means that the nineteenth century writers restored the Elizabethan`s style in literature which was described by the moral dramas and love issues (Mroczkowski 1986: 340). Furthermore, their creativity focused on the writing cannons of medieval times.

On the other hand, the Romantics created the new style, rules and standards of writing. During that time one of the most famous writers, Jane Austen, wrote her novels. The main topics are connected with the upper-middle class girls who could change their boring or unhappy lives only by marriage. In *Pride and Prejudice* or in *Emma* Jane Austen presented the political and financial power of a man and a husband. What is more, in these novels the author reflected indisputable social superiority of a man. Because of these factors survival of a lady was strongly dependant on protection and approval that a man could give to her. That is why women had really serious problems with the finding of a proper man or a husband, and what is more, with finding real love. That kind of issues led Austen to introduce in a satirical way the classes of clergymen, aristocracy, peasants, or the poor. In Austen`s writing the readers can notice that she mixed romance, characteristic for the previous epoch, and realism which was newly born in the nineteenth century.

Austen did not publish any of her books before she turned thirty-six. Despite this, her literary creativity is divided into two periods. First period of her creativeness is connected with her father`s influence. As an educated man he tried to support Jane`s writing interests and skills. Jane`s father, George Austen, was a rector and school teacher. Second period is related with living in Chawton which is commonly known as a rebirth of Austen`s book publications.

The first chapter will be devoted to the discussion of Jane Austen`s life and the general division of the social classes in England in the nineteenth century. This will concern also the social situation in England during that time. Second chapter depicts the society presented in *Pride and Prejudice*. Moreover, the issues connected with woman`s social position, her education and the way of improving her life by finding a rich husband are also discussed in this chapter. Last, third chapter is about the way of presenting Highbury society and their connections with middle class in England in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL AND FAMILY BACKGROUND IN JANE AUSTEN`S NOVELS

1.1. Jane Austen`s writing style

Jane Austen was born in 1775 in Parsonage House of Steventon in Hampshire, which was the family residence for about thirty years. As the seventh child of George and Cassandra Austen, Jane became one of the most famous writers at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Austen bridged the gap between both of these centuries, but on the other hand, she could be assigned to no group because she was considered as a unique writer (Burgess 2003: 174). As Burgess said, Jane Austen`s novels were full of freshness and humor (Burgess 2003: 174). What is more, he described her as the first important woman novelist because, as a young writer, she wanted to present the readers a small and still mysterious part of English society (Burgess 2003: 175). Her main aim was to clarify the ordinary human life, especially these parts which were connected with the social mobility and social conventions.

Another characteristic feature of Austen`s writing was omission, or even disregard for the political events. The Napoleon`s history, or the wars led by England in the nineteenth century were not one of the main factors which determined Austen`s creativity¹. That is why, her plots were mostly straightforward, and did not outline more difficult issues than marriage,

¹ During the time when Jane Austen was writing her novels Napoleon was leading a numerous wars with his permanent enemies.

social life, and love affairs. Furthermore, by creation of the specific types of characters Austen acquaints the readers with the different social groups of England.

It is important to notice what kinds of dialogs were used by Jane Austen. Usually they were funny and tricky with a whit of moral issues, or advice. Mroczkowski said that Austen, as a modest and provincial writer, had uncommon abilities to use satirical and comic language in her novels (Mroczkowski 1986: 340). Her dialogs often included the moments of choice between that what people should do, and that what they really wanted do choose. According to Burgess, Jane Austen`s dialogs were admirably true to life (Burgess 2003: 175) .

In *the Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* the author noticed that Jane Austen began to define herself as a writer who criticized the overvaluation of love, the uneducated women, and so called marriage market (Gilbert, Gilberton 2007: 460). Austen also depicted rivalry among women for approval and social acceptance. That is how Austen presented women as a dependant only on men, their wishes and good will. (Gilbert, Gilberton 2007:460).

1.2. Influence of family on Jane Austen`s writing skills

The main characteristics of Austen`s writing have some common roots. Her life, and what is more, her family had a big influence on her creativity. Female faith, marriage market, social label, financial problems, and family connections became the most important issues in Austen`s novels.

As we know, Austen was very close with her family, especially with her elder sister, Cassandra, and with parents. Jane kept the most intimate contact and correspondence with Cassandra. What is more, Jane often corresponded also with her nephews and nieces. One of the best Austen` biographies was written by her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh.

Jane Austen was well-educated. She started her education when she was seven. She attended different schools, but she received her most important education from her father. The beginnings of Austen`s creativity can be traced to her childhood. Still her most famous novels were written quite late and published a few years after their completion. She published her first novel when she was in mid-twenties².

Austen`s first audience was her closest family. She was reading aloud the sketches of her works to them. According to all of the information from *Memoir of Jane Austen*, her family really appreciated.

As James Edward Austen-Leigh said, the family, especially Cassandra, was very important for Jane (Austen-Leigh 1871: 7). When Cassandra was sent to Mrs. Latournelle`s school, Jane went with her though she was younger. She could not imagine being separated from her sister. They had been sharing the same house and even the same room until the moment of Austen`s death. The best description of the connection between Jane and Cassandra was given by their mother, "If Cassandra were going to have her head cut off, Jane would insist on sharing her fate"-, (Austen-Leigh 2006: 9).

The period that Jane spent in Steventon from 1775 to -1801 was a time of calmness and peace for her. During that time Jane and her sister learnt the most important duties for a woman like drawing, singing, and dancing. Moreover, girls were encouraged to read and write. During that time Jane wrote her the best novels and sketches which were not published until Jane moved to Chawton Cottage.

² Jane Austen`s novels publications: Sense and Sensibility 1811, Pride and Prejudice 1813, Mansfield park 1814, Emma 1815. Two of her novels were published after Jane Austen`s death Northanger Abbey 1818 and Persuasion 1818.

Jane and her sister spent a lot of time on balls which should give them the opportunity to find a husband. Marriage was considered as the best way of changing woman's fate and improving her social position. Women were strongly determined to find rich husband with good connections. Love was not important, it was replaced by the need of improving the own social position.

When Jane Austen was twenty years old she fell in love with an Irish man, Tom Leferoy. She expected to be engaged and marry, but unfortunately his family believed that marriage to a daughter of a poor clergyman could not be proper for a man who had a great future as a lawyer. That is how Jane suffered from the disappointment. That event had a great influence on her writing.

Despite the fact that Jane Austen died as an unmarried lady, *Memoir of Jane Austen* provides information that Jane had some opportunities to marry (Austen-Leigh 2006: 17). Soon she fell in love again. During one of her trips to the seaside Jane met a man who was ready to propose to her. In Cassandra's opinion, Jane was ready to accept it, but again she was disappointed because that man had to leave her in some unexplained circumstances. Another occasion to get married occurred when Jane was twenty-seven. She had already accepted an engagement. Mr. Harris Bigg-Wither was six years younger, but he had a quite good financial position. At the age of twenty-seven Jane was considered an old maid. It was even a shame that such a talented and pretty woman did not have husband. Harris Bigg-Wither was a great candidate for a husband for every lady, especially for "old" Jane. Unfortunately, Jane did not love him. He was not handsome, and what was more important for Jane, he was not so intelligent. That is why the next day Jane changed her mind and cancelled the engagement.

In 1801 Jane and her family moved to Bath. She loved the countryside which was depicted in detail in all of her books. None of her novels were written during her residence in Bath. This time is considered as a precipice in Jane Austen's creativity.

During the time Jane lived in Bath, a tragedy took place. In 1805 Jane's father died. He left his wife and daughters almost without money. For Jane it was a big shock, and since that time Jane associated Bath with the death of her father. On the other hand, according to Mroczkowski, Bath became a source of observations of human's behavior and conventions (Mroczkowski 1986: 340-341). It was a time of Romantic influence on Jane's life.

In 1809 Jane started a new period of life. She moved to Chawton where she again could admire the cottage landscapes, and feel comfortable. It is commonly known that nature was important in Austen's creativity. Far away from the city Jane started to write again. Full of memories and the new experiences, Jane could extend her creativity. During that time Jane finished some novels and started to write a new one. Unfortunately, she got sick and her disease did not let her publish the last books. Despite the doctor's and Cassandra's help, Jane felt worse every day. In July, 1817 Jane Austen died.

During her life, Austen wrote six novels. She decided to publish her first work when she was thirty-six years old. As a great writer she presented the life of English society between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in a funny, but realistic way. All of her experience that she had gained during her life became very clearly reflected in Austen's novels. According to James Edward Austen-Leigh, Jane Austen was successful in everything that she attempted with her fingers (Austen-Leigh: 187, 49).

1.3. Historical and social background in Jane Austen's novels

Jane Austen was not interested in historical events. Austen totally skipped the political issues of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, wars and political events did not impact the plots of her novels. She was focused only on the social issues, and on a female position in the

society. The author very clearly distinguishes the differences between male and female role in the society.

Eighteenth-century England was still a country divided into small villages. Before the industrial revolution country life was and the main source of writers' interests. According to Burgess, a new kind of literature should seem more natural (Burgess 2003: 166). Burgess also said that Romanticism in English literature started with the publication of *The Lyrical Ballads* written by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Burgess 2003: 166). These two poets are considered as founders of the Romantic Movement.

William Wordsworth laid down very important rules for Romantic writing, which should use common language. That kind of language was an ordinary language of people. Moreover, writers should pay more attention to rural characters. William Wordsworth was totally against the poetic diction. Austen followed these rules and rejected the ideas of Samuel Taylor Coleridge who returned in his poetry to the mysterious and magical elements.

Austen could identify with other Romantic writers like Byron, who was a scoffer of his country's conventions and laws. He used a lot of satire and social criticism in his poems. Another writer, Percy Bysshe Shelley, rebelled against existing laws, religion and common customs. What is more, he was an opponent of an existing marriage law and, as Burgess called him, the advocate of universal love (Burgess 2003: 170). That kind of writing had to influence Austen's writing style. She tried to adapt to the style of her epoch.

English urban society of that period was divided into four groups. The first group were the wealthy merchants, the second consisted of ordinary merchants and traders. The third class were skilled craftsmen. The last class, and the largest one, were workers without skills who could not be sure of their work and financial situation. The situation of the poorest class in England was better than in other countries because aristocrats had less power. David McDowall claims that for foreigners, the English law was an example of a perfect justice (McDowall 2002: 115). What is more, it was strange for foreigners how easy it was to move up or down the social ladder.

The most important duties for the rich men were hunting and improving their estates, while female lifestyle was more boring and depressing. The biggest and the most desirable entertainment was visiting London during winter. London was commonly known as the city of balls. In addition, London gave the best occasion to meet well-situated, rich, and lonely men. That is why many young girls dreamed about spending some time in London. On the other hand, London was also very important because of the possibility of making political connections which could raise one's social status.

English countryside changed more than the cities in the eighteenth century. Farming became more efficient because of the improvements in the agriculture. Greater landlords wanted to invest their money in lands. Farmers started to use new machinery and more effective methods of farming. In the eighteenth century the process of enclosing the lands started³. It was beneficial for agriculture, but unfortunately not for the English society. Sometimes the villagers had no idea about the land enclosure (McDowall 2002: 116-117). In conclusion, the enclosure of the lands changed English countryside and contributed to the growth of landless class. Many people were forced to leave the countryside and to look for a job in the city.

As far as family life is considered, McDowall claims that people started to express their affections more openly. Furthermore, children were considered as a group with special needs, not as small adults like before. These of girls who led the lonely life were the worst.

³ Enclosure was used for mixing cereal and animal farms. People with money took under their control common lands and enclose them. And later they could invest large amount of money in farming.

Woman should be mentally and physically beautiful. Young girls should have undeniable and unique beauty. Of course girls' appearance improved their chances of finding a wealthy man. In the nineteenth century parents still decided about a suitable marriage. However, it also became common for children to get married against their family's wishes. It was not entirely strange for people to marry for love. Still, wives and husbands were not equal. A husband, as it was in the past, was considered a house master. Wives were still husband's properties (Chwalba 2007: 41).

In the nineteenth century it was still normal for an older man to take a younger woman for a wife. On the other hand, it was hard to imagine the wedding between an older woman and a younger man. As Chwalba noticed, such way of thinking was caused by the fact that the main function of a family was procreation (Chwalba 2007: 41). It was possible for an older man to have children with a young woman. In addition, in most of the European countries the Napoleon's Codex was widely accepted. It changed the way of thinking about human's rights, but unfortunately not about women. According to this Codex, men had the legal superiority over women. What it more, they decided about family's finances and signed transactions. Without the husband's permission a woman could not decide about issues connected with the law, except when she was her husband's representative. Furthermore, after divorce ladies did not have the rights to ask their ex-husbands for maintenance, or for some financial support. Moreover, it was very common that women could not write their last wills, and thus they could not appoint their children foster-father (Chwalba 2007: 41-42).

Because of the law and tradition, a man was usually respected. The position of women in family depended on him. Fathers were responsible for the future of their children. They also chose future husbands for their daughters.

The best type of wife was a humble and religious, lady: she also had to be obedient. Chwalba said that it was very important to notice the different roles of the women (Chwalba 2007: 41). Their duties were dependant on their social positions. In aristocratic families a woman had to be a lady. She always had to be present when her husband welcomed the guests, or when they had a meal. What is more, wives should be able to conduct nice and intelligent conversations.

Women from the townspeople state had more duties and were more important in the family life. That is why, they were more respected as well. Workers' families demanded from women to be more hard-working. In this class differences between men and women were the smallest. Women and men mostly had the same duties because it was common that they worked in the same place like a mine, or a factory. Moreover, in the workers families women and men were both responsible for earning the money (Chwalba 2007: 41). In the countryside the position of women was a little better that the position of the women in the city. They had to be hard-working as well, but they were more respected.

As Chwalba said, in the countryside, women did not have that kind of training and education as girls from the aristocratic families (Chwalba, 2007: 41). That is why, the relations between girls and boys were less strict than in the cities. What is more, the same author put an emphasis on marriage process (Chwalba 2007: 41). Marriage did not have a lot in common with love. It was more dependent on trade, or financial advantages. It was common that people from different classes should not mix with each other. If it happened, it was called "misalliance" and it was widely criticized (Chwalba 2007: 41). In the end of the nineteenth century this situation started to change.

The main destination for women was to get married, and the main duty for every family was to have a child. Therefore, women who did not have husbands were not respected in the English society. What is more, they seemed to live with sense of their vital vain.

Austen wrote her books in accordance with general and social rules that were practiced during her childhood and adulthood. She tried to reflect the social conventions. The author very clearly depicted the male and female roles in the society. Social issues in the nineteenth century became one of the most important plots in the Austen`s novels.

CHAPTER II

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOCIAL CLASSES IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

2.1. Flexibility in English classes between the eighteenth and nineteenth century

Jane Austen`s novels seem to be a book about love. However aside from the love affairs, Austen tried to picture something more. According to Burgess, the readers can agree that the writer wanted to follow the classic and the romantic movements. What is more, Austen wanted to create an accurate picture of the English society (Burgess 2003: 170). The author tried to express how people of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century perceived the social divisions and the possibility of mixing among the classes.

Austen tried to put an emphasis on the main issues which divided particular classes like money, political position, or parentage. Moreover, the author reflected how these social issues determined the fate of the main characters in her novels. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice* Austen tried to explain whole system of primogeniture which was one of the biggest problem of Bennet`s family. The most important problems were daughters` marriage issues.⁴

Another characteristic feature of Austen`s writing was showing the attempts to mix among the classes. Furthermore, the author was trying to explain what consequences it could bring. Austen presented people from the different classes, and with the different needs, or problems. These groups of people should reflect their social positions and their possibilities.

Austen tried to paint a picture of the English society which was well-known for her. It was a society where Austen grew up and which she was able to observe during all her life. What is more, Austen presented her own opinion about particular classes and about the general social divisions in England.

As it was said before, in *Pride and Prejudice*, or in *Emma* the author reflected her own life experience. Furthermore, she was mostly focused on the English middle class with whom she was connected. Austen wanted to explain how variable the position in the society was. It was hard to get promotion to the upper classes, but it was possible. Of course mostly it was connected with a beneficial marriage. On the other hand, in the end of the nineteenth century that kind of marriages attracted a lot of common criticism. Another way to be ennobled was to inherit the property on account of relatives` death, testament, or donation.

It is worth noticing that Austen proved not only the possibility of social promotion, but also the general curse of becoming degraded. This degradation to the lower class could happen after losing a property, exclusion from the family, or because of marriage with someone without proper asset, or without good family connections.

2.2. Gentry

To depict the classes of English society Austen created the memorable characters. She associated people with the English social classes. That is why, all social groups became clearly depicted and they could reflect the reality of everyday life.

⁴ Primogeniture was the law which gave the right to the firstborn to inherit the estate.

Austen described gentry class in England by creation two different worlds. One of them presented the upper class of the gentry, and other the lower group of this class. According to McDowall, gentry were the class which was divided into gentlemen farmers, or landed gentry who possessed huge estates and improved farming methods (McDowall 2002: 57). The number of gentry increased during the Middle Ages after the Hundred Years War, or after the War of the Roses.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, gentry were divided into upper and lower-middle classes. That division was dependent on the assets. Upper-middle class was represented by Lady Catherine de Bourgh, her daughter Miss de Bourgh, Fitzwilliam Darcy, his cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam, and Darcy's sister Georgiana, It was hard to classify Charles Bingley and his family, sister Caroline and Mr. and Mrs. Hurst. According to the general rule, they should have land in order to be members of the upper-middle class. On the other hand, they possessed a huge asset, but they still were without their own land.

Lower-middle class was represented by the Bennet and Lucas families. Austen smartly mixed these two groups of middle classes by the love affairs to show the manners, behaviors, traditions, and characteristic way of thinking of the particular groups.

Each of these groups had their characteristic features and usually impassible barriers. Lower and upper-middle classes were very clearly divided. To put more emphasis on these differences, the characters in Austen's novels were very attached to their class, or group. What is more, people who belonged to one of these groups presented their parentage with its importance and advantages. Above that, Austen tried to create characters that depicted also the defects of belonging to particular classes. For example Mrs. Bennet was always complaining about her poor social position, and the future prospects of primogeniture in her family. Moreover, she was afraid that her daughters would be deprived of a family asset.

In the nineteenth century an unmarried woman could be a governess, what was considered as a social degradation. Marriage was the only chance to change their fate. Moreover, a single life did not give the occasions to lead an interesting social life.

In the fourth chapter the author very accurately described the upper-middle class. Austen presented all the main features of the people who were associated with this group. Ladies were refined with a smart sense of humor. Moreover, they were pretty, but haughty, and conceited, "They were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in a good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of being agreeable where they chose it: but proud and conceited. They were rather handsome (...)" (Austen 2010: 13).

What is more, the author wanted also to notice how important the education in this upper-middle class was. "They were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in town" (Austen 2010: 13). Girls should read a lot, moreover, they should use their knowledge during an intelligent conversation with a man. Upper-middle class girls' education had to include reading, singing and playing. Furthermore, it was unacceptable to not hire a governess who would be responsible for teaching girls and preparing them for the role of a wife. During the conversation between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine de Bourgh Elizabeth admitted that she and her sisters ever had a governess, and that was why, they were not as good at playing the piano, or singing as girls from the upper class. What is more, Elizabeth added that these of the Bennet's daughter who wanted to learn could find time for it, these who wanted to do more interesting things and spent their time on laziness also had the occasion to do it. These views and methods of breeding young girls shocked Lady Catherine de Bourgh. She could not believe that parents could be so irresponsible, and did not see what negative causes for these young girls it could have in the future (Austen 2010: 159). For Lady Catherine it was obvious that learning was the biggest and the most important duty for the young girls.

Not only lady Catherine de Bourgh noticed the importance of education. Also Mr. Darcy and Bingley's sister had their own opinion about that topic, "A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing and the modern languages (...) and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions" (Austen 2010: 36). Of course, they were mostly speaking about their own abilities and skills. They considered themselves as the most intelligent and educated.

The Bennet family presented the social and the financial situation of the lower-middle class. The value of the asset of Mr. Bennet was just two thousand pounds per year. Unfortunately, because of the primogeniture, all of his property should be taken in the future by Mr. Collins⁵. Their financial position overshadowed the possibilities of Elizabeth and Jane. Despite that fact, they were beautiful and quite intelligent, for sure more bright than their sisters, their financial position limited the possibility of good marriage. Elizabeth and Jane exactly knew about it "We are not rich enough and grand enough" (Austen 2010: 153). The social background, and family connections determined the position of young women in the society in those times.

Charlotte, the best friend of Elizabeth, got married to Mr. Collins who firstly had proposed to Elizabeth. Elizabeth rejected the proposal because she did not love him, and what is more, she even did not like him. Elizabeth was depicted as an independent-minded woman who preferred to live in solitude than to marry a man who could never reciprocate her affection. Inside her heart she knew that her most secret wish was connected just with Mr. Darcy. Of course Elizabeth saw the differences between Mr. Darcy's and Bennet's backgrounds.

In the contrary to Elizabeth, Charlotte decided to accept Mr. Collins's proposal. Her parents, Sir William Lucas and Lady Lucas, were the neighbors of Bennet. In the past Sir William Lucas earned his fortune at the trade. His asset, the function of mayor, and what is more, his speech delivered in honor of King made him a member of the knighthood. That social promotion changed his attitude to himself and to his profession. That was why, he decided to change his lifestyle and moved out of Meryton with his family. They started a new life in a house called the Residence of Lucas.

Austen did not devote so much of her attention to Lady Lucas. Mostly she was described as a woman who, as much as Mrs. Bennet, wanted to find wealthy men as husbands for her daughters. Both ladies, Mrs. Bennet and Lady Lucas, competed with each other. Both women had daughters who, as quickly as it was possible, should find husbands. What is more, ladies wanted to announce their new friendship, or the life possibilities that occurred, for example when Jane met Bingley, or when Charlotte accepted the proposal of Mr. Collins. According to Austen's depiction of Mrs. Lucas, "Lady Lucas was a very kind of woman, not too clever to be a valuable neighbor to Mrs. Bennet", we got a perfect picture of lady Lucas (Austen 2010: 16).

For Mrs. Bennet the proudest moment of her life was when Lydia announced her marriage to Wickham. The circumstances of the wedding were completely unimportant for Mrs. Bennet. She did not care that Lydia had dishonored her family when she escaped with Wickham "My dear, dear Lydia! This is delightful indeed! - She will be married!" (Austen 2010: 294).

One of the best examples of Mrs. Bennet's success was when she learned that during a few months three of her daughters found husbands, "Nor was it under many, many minutes that she could comprehend what she heard; thought not in general backward to credit what was for the advantage of her family" (Austen 2010: 363). That time Elizabeth's family was considered as the most blessing family during last time.

⁵ Mr. Bennet did not have a son who could be Mr. Bennet's heir. His daughters could not inherit their father's property.

When Charlotte decided to accept Mr. Collins's proposal she was sure that it could hurt Elizabeth. On the other hand, she knew that it was the only occasion for her to change her life. Charlotte wanted to explain her decision to Elizabeth. She tried to tell her that it was a great opportunity to have such a comfortable house, and better social position. Moreover, Sir Lucas and Lady Lucas could not provide their daughter with the same lifestyle as Mr. Collins proposed "Mr. Collins's present circumstances made it a most eligible match for their daughter, to whom they could give a little fortune, and his prospects of future wealth were exceedingly fair" (Austen 2010: 118). Charlotte always wanted to choose wealthy husband for herself, an educated girl without valuable asset.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century people considered as a disgraceful if a wealthy man wanted to marry a woman from the lower-middle class. Social criticism was so strong that most couples did not decide to stay together. Austen perfectly pictured that situation by creating the plots between Jane and Bingley, or Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy.

Mr. Darcy, rich, proud, mostly arrogant, and disrespectful for people who were in a poorer financial situation, fell in love with a beautiful and intelligent girl. Probably it would not cause so huge confusion if Miss Bennet had the same social position as Mr. Darcy. In the beginning it was hard for him to admit to himself that he lost his mind for Elizabeth. For Mr. Darcy it was hard to confess that he loved a girl who was not so wealthy and did not lead as refined social life. Mr. Darcy tried to fight that feeling, but he could not "His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequences he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit" (Austen 2010: 183). For Mr. Darcy it was a shame to love a woman of a lower social position. What is more, he did everything what he could do to separate his best friend Bingley and Elizabeth's sister, Jane. According to his opinion, Jane's low social position, the parentage of her mother, and moreover, behavior of a family were totally not accepted and insulted the nearest relatives (Austen 2010: 192-193). In Darcy's opinion they could not behave properly, always talked about themselves, and about the possibilities of good marriage. They planned, especially Jane's mother, a wedding between Jane and Bingley before these two decided to be together. By the example of Jane and Bingley Austen presented lower-middle class mentality.

The best description of the lower and the upper-middle classes was shown during the quarrel between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth. Lady Catherine could not believe that her nephew Mr. Darcy proposed to Elizabeth. In her opinion, it must have been an awful slander for Mr. Darcy. What is more, later Lady Catherine explained that because of honor, customs, and prudence Elizabeth should not accept that proposal. Elizabeth should know that after marriage to Mr. Darcy she could be humiliated and criticized. For Lady Catherine it was obvious that Mr. Darcy had to marry someone from his class, like for example her daughter. The main reason for it was that they both were from the noble lineage, families; moreover they both possessed the large estates. Mr. Darcy's fortune was collected by several generations of inheritance. Estate in Derbyshire, called the Pemberly, earned 10,000 pounds per year. Mr. Bennet's income was worth around 2,000 pounds per year, and could not be compared with Mr. Darcy's asset.

For Lady Catherine Mr. Darcy whose mother, Lady Anne Darcy, came from an aristocratic family, and his maternal grandfather was a peer, could not marry woman with so paltry family connections. On the other hand, only Elizabeth's mother came from a family with lower social status. Mr. Bennet's was an English gentleman who was not a simple yeoman

farmer, or a tenant farmer⁶. He married a daughter of an attorney in Meryton without any more important social connections. Mr. Bennet did it because he admired her appearance, unfortunately later he discovered his wife's awful character and inability of behaving properly in the company "Her father, captivated by youth and beauty, and the appearance of good humour which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind had, very early in their marriage, put an end to all real affection for her" (Austen 2010: 229).

Mr. Darcy, Bingley's sisters and later Lady Catherine expressed their contempt's at Mrs. Bennet's social origins. Luckily daughters of Mrs. Bennet did not inherit their mother's social status, but were the heiresses of Mr. Bennet landowning position. That was why, all of the Bennet's daughters became the members of the landed gentry, what meant that they belonged to the upper-middle class.

Lady Catherine compared her daughter with Elizabeth who was a simple girl without a social position and suitable asset, whose family did not have a proper parentage (Austen 2010: 343). Elizabeth replied that she was a daughter of a gentleman, but Lady Catherine immediately draw attention to the background of Elizabeth's mother and rest of the family. Brother of Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Gardiner, was a businessman, while her sister Mr. Philips was a wife of attorney. These connections could not be perceived as a good enough for Lady Catherine.

Both Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth belonged to the landed gentry which were divided into more groups. Because Mr. Bennet was a landowner of Longburn he and his family belong to the upper-middle class. On the other hand, between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century the social connections decided about belonging to the group. Because Mr. Bennet did not have any better connections, or the wealthy relatives, he and his family did not have such a high social status, for sure lover than Mr. Darcy or Lady Catherine.

Comparing with Bennet's family it is worth noticing how Mr. Bingley got his asset. His family enriched in the trade, that is why Bingley was not a landowner and could not be considered as a member of the upper-middle class. Despite that fact, Bingley collected a big asset, around 4,000 pounds per year. As long as Bingley did not have his own estate and his asset came just from trade, he was not able to be promoted to the higher group. That is why, Bingley had the same social position as Mrs. Bennet and her siblings. On the other hand, Bingley's father wanted to buy some estate for his family, but unfortunately he died, "Mr. Bingley inherited property to the amount of nearly an hundred thousand pounds from his father, who had intended to purchase an estate, but did not live to do it. Mr. Bingley intended it likewise (...)" (Austen 2010: 13). Just the social contacts and the proper relatives made Bingley more impressive and interesting.

2.3. The classes of clergymen and officers

One of the ways to make a career when a person comes from the middle class was to get a position of a clergyman pos. Austen was mostly focused on the English class of gentry. Moreover, the author depicted other social classes in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Clergyman class was represented by Mr. Collins who was the cousin of Mr. Bennet, and because of primogeniture he was a heir of Bennet's asset. That is why, in the beginning of the novel he was not considered as a welcomed and pleasant man. Mrs. Bennet dislike him because she perceived her husband's cousin as a thief of a family asset, "Pray to not talk of that odious

⁶ Yeoman farmers own the land and have to work on their fields while tenant farmers rent the land from landowners.

man. I do think it is the hardest thing in the world that your estate should be entailed away from your own children”(Austen 2010: 59).

One time Mr. Collins visited his cousin because he was looking for a good wife, and in his opinion the best candidate could be one of the Bennet daughters. Firstly he chose Jane, but luckily for her in her mother`s opinion she should get married to Bingley. Later Mr. Collins tried to ask, even forced, Elizabeth to say “yes”, but as it was written before, Elizabeth felt that she could not fall in love in that kind of a man, and what is more, it was even hard to stand his company and a boring character. Finally Mr. Collins found a proper wife for himself.

By the character of Mr. Collins Austen tried to show a part of a life of churchmen, their duties and social position. It seemed that no one treated Mr. Collins seriously and in most of the situations people could not stay with him more than a few minutes.

Mr. Collins was totally under Lady Catherine`s control. She was the one who advised him a fast marriage with a smart and a prudent girl. Despite the fact that Mr. Collins was educated, his character and a lifestyle did not make him an interesting man. His lucky days began with a day when he had accepted the position of a clergyman in Hunsford. Soon he got also a nice house and a good income. For Mr. Collins clergymen`s salary was sufficient. On the other hand, Lady Catherine said that the asset that Mr. Collins could collect would not be so high. All what Mr. Collins needed in that time was a wife. During one of his conversations with Elizabeth Mr. Collins presented the advantages of a clergyman`s life. One of his pleasures was a happy and almost idyllic life with a lovely wife and with the children. According to Mr. Collins views, churchman`s behavior should be an example of a good manners and lifestyle.

Indeed Mr. Collins was a good candidate for husband because in the future he could gather a proper asset. Moreover, his position and social connection, especially with Lady Catherine, were his biggest advantages. Unfortunately Mr. Collins dared to remind Elizabeth her poor social connection (Austen 2010: 105). In his opinion, he was the perfect and the only candidate for Elizabeth`s husband.

Mr. Collins was grateful that Lady Catherine appointed him for a parson in one of her parishes. Lady Catherine, as a local landowner, had the power to appoint the local churchmen. Because of Mr. Collins`s patronage, it was possible to buy the church office for himself. With that profession a churchman mostly received a house, rent-free, and farmland. Mr. Collins very accurately described his properties especially when Elizabeth visited him and his wife.

Mr. Collins had to solicit the favor of his employer. During every possible occasion Mr. Collins told flattering stories about Lady Catherine, her kindness, asset and family. For him she was like ideal woman.

Austen created second, a mysterious story about a man who should become a clergyman too. Wickham should get the parish from Mr. Darcy`s father. Old Mr. Darcy very appreciated Wickham and his father, who was a servant. As a price and a little of inheritance Wickham got one parish, but he changed his destination and demanded the money despite the parish. Mr. Darcy accepted his request. Unfortunately Wickham led a wasteful life and lost all of his money. That situation caused big reluctance between both of the men.

The example of Mr. Collins should show an idyllic, calm, and peaceful life of clergy between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century which was compared with the full of concerns and worries life of the other classes in England.

Becoming a clergyman was an alternative for a younger son⁷. For example younger sons, whose parents were not so wealthy, could try to find a job in a counting house which was called the bank. The most favored occupation for a younger son was a soldier profession.

⁷ Older son mostly get the land and stayed there.

Unfortunately men need money to buy an officer position as they need money to buy the profession in the parish. The most famous officer in Austen's novel was Wickham who got this position thanks to Mr. Darcy. After affair with Lydia Mr. Darcy wanted to help the Bennet's family and paid for some position in the army for Wickham, "His debts are to be paid, amounting. I believed to considerably more than a thousand pounds, another thousand in addition to her own settled upon her, and his commission purchased"(Austen 2010: 313). That was how Mr. Darcy wanted to pay for all of his mistakes and showed Elizabeth that he was not so mean and haughty.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL CLASSES DEPICTED IN *EMMA*

3.1. Description of Emma's background

Not only *Pride and Prejudice* is considered as a perfect picture of the English society in the nineteenth century. Once again Austen depicted her own society and the divisions of the middle class. According to her style, *Emma* could be considered as a classic romantic comedy with tricky, funny and humorous plots. On the other hand, the author created a satirical, but realistic picture of the social divisions in the nineteenth century. To present detailed and accurate description, and to facilitate the understanding of the social situation in England, Austen decided to create in *Emma* a lot of love and marriage affairs. Selection of the future spouse should reflect the biggest concern about getting appropriate social position in that time.

Inside of Highbury community Austen presented that not only money, but also the family connections were important. Moreover, these prominent connections were even the main and determining factor of a social status. People could be rich, have huge asset, but without good origins and contact they could mean nothing. Parents, sibling or cousins should not insult the rest of the family.

Emma was published in 1815 when Austen, with her mother and sister, lived in Chawton Cottage. In that place Jane could start to write again. As a mature and experienced woman Austen better understood and reflected the social conventions. In *Emma* the author focused mostly on the upper class of the English society. That class was described the most extensively. Above this, Austen devotes her attention to people from other social groups like clergy, merchants, soldiers, and peasants. In this novel the author created the numbers of characters whose main role was to outline the anomalies in the English societies. What is more, Austen created also characters whose fate was luckily changed from worst into better. That ennoblement pictured so rare possibility of changing the social position.

Most of the Emma's actions took place in the countryside, but it does not mean that Austen joined her plots only with peasants, or farm workers. She tried to reflect their influence on the higher classes. Moreover, the author tried to describe the attitude of the higher class to the people with a lower asset, and the poorer social and family connections.

By writing *Emma* Austen wanted to present her feelings for the upper class. She tried to criticize their way of thinking, behaviors, and perceiving of the human life. The author was against higher class's snobbery, and she wanted to explain the readers that everyone should be respected. No matter if the people had good background, or worst parentage, everyone had the right to be esteemed.

What is more, the author, by creation of the particular characters, explained that the wealthy, good manners, importance of the extended and good family connections were not the

main factors which decided about human`s dignity. These social factors did not reflect good soul and human character. Moreover, the boundaries among particular classes can be named as an artificial line between people who should have the same rights in the society.

As it was said in the previous chapter marriages took very important place in the women`s life; ladies were dependant on money, family connections, and family background. That is why Austen presented the differences between classes by creation of a lot of plots connected with searching for a wealthy husband, or wife. Because of this process the author showed that finding a proper spouse could be fast process, but for sure not so easy. Love were not the main factor which connected two people during the nineteenth century.

3.2. The roles and position of the middle class in Emma

Social class such as the landed gentry was the most powerful class in the countryside in the nineteenth century in England. This superiority of landowners became reflected by the society of Highbury. Highbury presented the social divisions among classes. People with a different social status lived close to each others. These groups of people participate in the common events as balls, dinners, and share their time, but still keep the boundaries confirmed by long-lasting tradition. Depicted countryside contains of highly hierarchical families which were characterized by different manners, style of living, behaviors, and ways of thinking.

In Austen`s novel the Churchills were depicted as the most prominent landed gentry. On the other hand, they seemed to be imperious, haughty, and mannered. What is more, they have a strong sense of their superiority.

Captain Weston was a general favourite; and when the chances of his military life had introduced him to Miss Churchill of a great Yorkshire family, and Miss Churchill fell in love with him, nobody was surprised, except her brother and his wife, who had never seen him, and who were full of pride and importance, which the connexions would offend. Miss Churchill, however, being of age, and with her full command of her fortune – thought her fortune bore no proportion to the family-estate – was not to be dissuaded from the marriage, and it took place, to the infinite mortification of Mr and Mrs Churchill who threw her off with due decorum. It was unsuitable connexion (...)" (Austen 2010:12).

In Churchill`s opinion, Miss Churchill committed misalliance and tarnished her family reputation by marriage to Mr. Weston, who did not deserve to be connected in any way with the Churchills. For Churchill`s family it was not important that Mr. Watson had a very good reputation. Even his ancestry, which shows general respect for Watson`s family, was not enough for Churchills.

Mr Watson was a native of Highbury, and born of a respectable family, which for the last two or three generations had been rising into gentility and property. H had received a good education, but, on succeeding early in life to a small independence, had become indisposed for any of the more homely pursuits in which his brothers were engaged, and had satisfied an active, cheerful mind and social temper by entering into the militia of his country, then embodied." (Austen 2010: 12).

After Mrs. Weston death Mr. Weston`s financial situation was worst than before the marriage. Mrs. Weston spent more money than she could. Moreover, Mrs. And Mr. Weston had a son who`s living cost a lot too. That is why, after Mrs. Weston`s death Mr. Weston at the

request of Mr. and Mrs. Churchill, who did not have any child, let them to take care of his son Frank. Unfortunately, Mrs. Churchill make Frank and his father`s contact almost impossible. Everything depends on her good mood. What is more, she was depicted as a neurotic woman who could change her mind in every moment. That is why she forced Frank to delay almost every meeting with his father.

Lifestyle and high social position that the Churchills gave to Frank, forced him to be grateful. That is why, he felt so dependent on them, and it forced him to be obedient in every situation. Because of this Frank could not visit his father for a long time. This topic aroused huge discussion. Frank`s father and Emma tried to protect Frank saying that he delayed his meeting with Mr. Watson just because of Mrs. Churchill`s humors. She was the one who stopped Frank`s wish to visit his father. Moreover, she has that power because she knew that Frank felt a need to requite for what he got from Mrs. And Mr. Churchill.

On the other hand, Mr. Knightley expressed a different opinion about Frank`s behavior. According to his view, Frank was accustomed to the high life and he loved to feel that he was better than the others. That is why he did not want to be disobedient because he was sure that he could lose his actual social position. What is more, for Mr. Knightley it was obvious that Frank Churchill as an adult man should express his opinion, and no matter what kind of difficulties could appear, he should visit his father. Moreover, Mr. Knightley could not believe that a man in his age cannot think and act for himself. (Austen 2010: 141-142).

Also the Woodhouses, the Knightleys, and the Westons were very important members of Highbury society, but not as prominent and mysterious as Churchills. The Coles represented lower class and they tried to rise in their prominence. Coles were just simple merchant, not big landowners.

In Austen`s novels the main characters, or even whole families showed how to get, or lose the social position. It is important to realize that in the nineteenth century wealth and family connections decided about one`s social status. Because of these factors the author had an opportunity to show rivalry between the social classes. It was depicted in *Emma* where the society of Highbury was so differently connected with each other. These connections were mostly based on family ties, or rivalry. What is more, it was not so hard to start to compete in such small village group.

Austen in a very interesting way depicted the social position of Mr. and Mrs. Bates who were introduced rather as a poor people “Mrs. Bates, the widow of a former vicar of Highbury, was a very old lady, almost past everything but tea and quadrille. She lived with her single daughter in a very small way (...)” (Austen 2010: 18). On the other hand, their respectable parentage allowed them to mix with the higher social classes and still be present among more prominent family groups like Woodhouses.

As always Mr. Knightley has his own opinion, this time about Bates. For him Bates was a tertiary company in Highbury, and it was no pleasure to spent time with so boring Bates ladies. (Austen 2010: 149). Austen presented Mrs. Bates as a second group of Mr. Woodhouse`s quests. She was a frequent guest in Hartfield, property of Mr. Woodhouse, but not the most important one. Generally Mrs. Bates and her family were respected in the Highbury. In a contrast to Bates Austen created the Coles family which has much better financial position, but worst social status as a result of an insignificant origin.

This was the occurrence: - The Coles had been settled some years in Highbury, and were very good short of people – friendly, liberal, and unpretending: but, on the other hand, they were of law origin, in trade, and only moderately genteel. On their first coming into the country, they lived in proportion to their income, quietly, keeping little company, and that little unexpensively; but the

last year or two had brought them a considerable increase of means – the house in towns had yielded greater profits and fortune in general had smiled to them” (Austen, 2010, 201).

That is how Coles were perceived in Highbury. Because they did not have any connections with the gentle bred families they were still socially isolated from higher groups of Highbury. One time Coles organized a dinner. They invited a lot of guests. For Emma it was obvious that they could not invite her and her family. Emma considered that idea as a something unexpected. In her opinion, with so poor social connections Coles should know that they cannot be the one with who more prominent families would like to keep closer contact (Austen 2010:176). Emma thought that they should know their place in the society. She perceived any of their attempts to get higher social status as a lack of good manners. Despite Emma’s feelings, Coles sent an invitation to the Woodhouses who unexpectedly had accepted it. Emma was surprised that Coles provided her so nice evening. On the other hand, with an innate superiority Emma still treated Coles as a lower-middle class. Austen commented the opinion about Coles in the following chapter saying “Emma did not repent her condescension in going to the Coles” (Austen 2010: 224). It showed that Coles could organize a nice party, be polite and intelligent, or be respected by everyone, but they would never be able to change their origin. That provenience determined their social position for the rest of their life.

In *Emma* another social classes like soldiers, attorneys, or churchmen were respected by more prominent groups. They did not have to feel that they were moved away from the social life. Despite all these divisions people from other social groups seemed to respect the boundaries between them. On the other hand, Austen proved that in the nineteenth century it was possible to be promoted and gained higher social status. The best example of this were the Coles who despite their trade background could aspire to a better position in Highbury. In time Coles collected a big asset which let them to change their lifestyle and try to link with higher classes by employing more servants, or organizing dinner parties. Dinner parties were perfect occasion to gain, or to improve the social contacts and present oneself.

The group of yeoman farmers were mostly represented by Mr. Robert Martin who was working on Mr. Knightley’s estate. His origin did not arouse Emma’s interest. Miss Woodhouse explained that people like farmer did not attract her attention. In her opinion, they did not have anything in common. For Emma it was not important if Mr. Martin looked nice or not, she preferred to not waste her time with people whose origin was so low (Austen 2010: 26). What is more, by deciding to keep contact with Mr. Martin it was obvious that his sister could be considered girls with whom Emma should associate. On the other hand, Emma respected Mr. Martin’s family. She admitted that his sisters were probably as well-educated as Emma. Despite that, Emma for sure did not want to contact with Mr. Martin’s future wife who was expected to be uneducated woman. Keeping too close contact with people with their position was not considered as a proper behavior. For Emma people from the lower-middle class were not interesting at all.

Despite all respect for Martins family Emma tried to dissuade Harriet from falling in love with Mr. Robert Martin. She introduced Harriet to more prominent gentlemen who had also better social connections. It should help Harriet to notice huge distance between Mr. Martin and man from higher classes.

Mr. Knightley tried to protect Mr. Martin. In accordance with his view, his friend was the one who deserved to find better wife than Miss Smith because Harriet with her character, low education, and what is more important, un-known parentage could not find better candidate for husband than Mr. Martin (Austen 2010: 58). On the other hand, Emma knew that Harriet, as an illegitimate daughter, could not be proud of her origins. What is more, this girl was not

presented as the most intelligent lady in Highbury. She was very pretty and funny, but Emma treated her more like subordinate friend who should listen to Emma like her master. Emma knew that Harriet considered her as a guide and a patron. Because Emma and Harriet spent a lot of time together, Miss Woodhouse did not want to share that time with so boring Robert Martin's family.

In Emma's opinion the best candidate for Harriet's husband was Mr. Elton who represented the clergy. In the beginning Miss Woodhouse tried to introduce Mr. Elton as a very intelligent gentleman with good manners. His family connection was not as bad as for churchman. Moreover, Mr. Elton's family could not reject Harriet because of her origins; Elton's connections were not so prominent as well. Despite that Mr. Elton could offer to Harriet a very comfortable life.

Mr.'s Elton situation was most suitable, quite the gentleman himself, and without low connections; at the same time, not of any family that could fairly object to the doubtful birth of Harriet. He had a comfortable home for her, and Emma imagined a very sufficient income; for though the vicarage of Highbury was not large, he was known to have some independent property; and she thought very highly of him as a good-humored, well-meaning, respectable young man, without any deficiency of useful understanding or knowledge of the world (Austen 2010: 31).

Miss Woodhouse totally changed her opinion about Mr. Elton when he had proposed her, and when after refusing of his proposal in one month he got married with other girl. All of the love affairs in *Emma* had the different endings than Miss Woodhouse had planned. Mr. Martin again proposed to Harriet and this time he was accepted. Frank who was seen as a perfect candidate for Emma's husband married with Jane Fairfax. Emma happily found a proper man for herself, Mr. Knightley. These marriages presented the social conventions which were perfectly kept.

The society of Highbury could be perceived as a claustrophobic. People knew everything about each other, and they were waiting for some news which could give the occasion to talk and to gossip. The fate of Frank and Jane quite quickly mix with the rest of Highbury society.

As the end of *Emma's* novel presented, all of the love affairs finished with expected in the nineteenth century solution. Apart from Frank, every one of Highbury citizens found love in their social groups. Thanks to this they did not commit a misalliance and could rescue their reputation. In the contrary to *Pride and Prejudice*, the society of Highbury was more haughty and intolerant. Social barriers were something very important to them and they did not see the need to abandon them. People had high opinion about themselves. The upper-middle class without any inhibitions criticized the people's parentage and did not give them any chance for the social ennoblement.

CONCLUSIONS

Jane Austen is worth her fame. She created not only the romantic and tricky novels, but also a perfect social depiction of the English classes in the nineteenth century. The author tried to present in an easy and funny way the most important rules which decided about the social status. What is more, Jane Austen commented on the social situation, especially manners, origins, marriage market, behavior, and attitude of other people. In *Pride and Prejudice* and

Emma Austen very clearly depicted the lower and the upper-middle classes. The author tried to present every details of a village life. The nineteenth century countryside was the best example of a place where different social classes had to life together, but also compete with each other. Furthermore, Austen focused on artificial barriers which divided people. On the one hand, people believed in the necessity of social divisions, but on the other hand, sometimes money and good connections could not ensure people`s happiness. Moreover, Austen explained the social position of women, and their way of perceiving marriage. The author tried to explain how important the role of education was. She also passed a lot of information about woman`s life, her duties and possibilities, but on the other hand, she created a picture of a lonely and unhappy lady. Austen tried to present a huge distance between people from different classes, however, she explained that these boundaries cannot describe the real characters. As one of the best narrators and a critic of the social divisions as well, Jane Austen gave short, but clear picture of the social history of England. The best example of how Jane Austen`s novels were popular is the number of films and books about Austen`s biography or creativity.

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