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BACHELOR THESIS

**Women, Family, Marriage and Social Life of the 19th
century middle-class society in Jane Austen's *Pride and
Prejudice* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and
*Good Wives***

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis, entitled “Women, Family, Marriage and Social Life of the 19th century middle-class society in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* and *Good Wives*”, is a result of my own work and that I used only the cited sources.

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ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis is focused on the matters of social status and prospects of middle-class women, family and family relations concerning not only immediate relatives, but also distant ones, social life and the meaning of marriage from the point of view of women in the 19th century England and America. These themes are primarily explored in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *Little Women* and *Good Wives* by Louisa May Alcott.

Keywords

Women, America, England, 19th century, Family, Marriage, Social Life

ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá společenským postavením a vyhlídkami žen střední třídy, rodinou a rodinnými vztahy mezi nejbližšími i vzdálenými příbuznými, společenským životem a významem manželství v devatenáctém století v Anglii a Americe. Primárními díly pro tuto práci jsou *Pýcha a Předsudek* od Jane Austenové a *Malé ženy*, první i druhý díl, od Louisy May Alcottové.

Klíčová slova

Ženy, Amerika, Anglie, 19. století, Rodina, Manželství, Společenský život

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INTRODUCTION

I have chosen this topic chiefly because reading of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *Little Women* and its sequel *Good Wives* by Louisa May Alcott provoked me to think of the unenviable situation of women in the 19th century and to get to know more about women in those days. I have chosen these particular novels because they all deal with sisterly love and family relations, and the meaning of marriage as the crucial means for women to be financially secured in the future life. The aim of the thesis is to analyse and compare and contrast lives of women, family life, marriage from the point of view of women and social life in these novels.

The theoretical part is focused on middle class women in the 19th century England and America, predominantly in relation to marriage, means of finding an ideal husband, views on unmarried women or so called “spinsters”, and also development of women rights in these two countries.

The practical part analyses the features that these novels have in common. Firstly, they deal with typical roles of married women which are namely being a wife, mother, and a housekeeper. Secondly, they describe family relations, especially bonds between siblings and parents, and other kinsmen like aunts, uncles, or, in Alcott, those who are blood-unrelated, but yet belong to the family. Further there appear also reasons for getting married and prospects from it, which are social status, being provided for the future, having children and hopefully with a beloved person. The next part is focused on working women. The mother and the two eldest sisters in *Little Women* have to work to provide for the family. There is no such duty in *Pride and Prejudice*, however the main protagonists might be forced by circumstances to work eventually if they do not manage to get married before their father dies. The last chapter deals with the social class of the main characters and how they individually experience the social life and potentially benefit from it.

1 THEORETICAL PART

1.1 Middle class women in 19th century England and America

Women in England

In the 19th century England, women were “isolated in the home” (Beauvoir 131). The public life was for men, women’s empire was the household and family (Maletzke 62). Marriage and motherhood were the highest and also the only achievements a virtuous middle-class woman could reach. Women were only “a subspecies destined only for reproduction” (Beauvoir 131), which was a technical definition for saying that the women’s purpose was to become mothers and raise children.

There was traditionally a patriarchal society (Teachman x) in England. The social status of an unmarried woman was determined by her father and by her husband (Teachman 3) after she got married. She had no status of her own. An unmarried woman was dependant on her father. When he died the responsibility for her passed over to her brothers or potentially uncles (Teachman 87) if she had some. Her further life depended on willingness and financial means of her male relatives to support her.

In fact, women could possess and inherit property, but only unmarried women or widows (Teachman 101). Unfortunately for them there were several factors which almost excluded these women from possession or inheritance. First was the “common law” (Teachman 28) which was the law of “primogeniture” (Teachman 28). Customarily, the family estate was entitled to the eldest son. In case there was no son the inheritance came to the eldest male collateral relative from the paternal side, his nephew or cousin (Teachman 28).

Nonetheless, daughters usually did not inherit anything, except for a little money, because everything they had became a possession of their husbands when that they got married. A married woman had a special status in front of the law. Not only all that she possessed including her money, jewellery or clothes, but also and her legal entity was absorbed by her husband. Someone’s wife had “no independent legal identity” (Teachman 38). A widow could inherit her husband’s property, if he had some. However, if she

remarried and her first husband's property would come to her new husband. Therefore, "few widows were left in complete control of estate" (Teachman 101).

Education of women in England

Whereas men from upper-middle and aristocratic circles were educated at private prestigious schools like Eton and then received academic education at universities, women hardly ever had such an opportunity because it was considered to be a waste of time and money. Moreover it was considered to be harmful for their health (Teachman 109-110). The doctors were afraid that "too much thinking and studying would overstrain their [women's] brains, and it would almost certainly render them infertile (Wojtczak 9)". A woman could not be a lawyer, a doctor or a clergywoman. Even though she would have the knowledge and degree, the men never allowed her perform such an occupation in the 19th century. A woman was not equal to a man. "Besides all this, an educated woman with opinions was a fearsome prospect for most men and her matrimonial prospects were negligible (Wojtczak 9)". In other words, men were afraid that a learned woman would not properly do her duties as wife, mother and housekeeper. As the education of women concerns, women from middle classes and aristocracy usually could "read and do basic sums" (Teachman 110). Elsemarie Maletzke says that 40 per cent of men and a half of women in that time England were illiterate.

Women were educated very differently from men with regard that they were supposed to get married one day. Because "their 'trade' was marriage" (Wojtczak 8). There were only two options, marriage and spinsterhood, and the second one was miserable. Hence, young ladies were taught "how to attract a marriage proposal from a man with a title, wealth or, at very least good prospects" (Wojtczak 9).

According to Debra Teachman, there were two possible ways of how to educate a girl for marriage. The first one was to teach her how to attract a man through various ornamental accomplishments, the second one how to be a good housekeeper (Teachman 110). The first one was reserved for daughters from wealthy upper-middle class and aristocracy, whereas the second one for those of lower gentry.

“The overt intention [was] that they would make pleasing and useful companions to men and graceful ornaments in society generally” (Wojtczak 8). A universally accomplished woman could play the piano, sing, dance, embroider, draw or paint (Teachman 110). Those skills could directly attract a suitor, or at least help her to socialize with others, and make friends among influential people who could introduce her to potential suitors and compliment her by them. This woman did not usually know anything about housekeeping or cooking. It was of no importance to burden her with such education because she was supposed to marry a man who would be wealthy enough to keep enough servants, so that she did not have to work.

On the other hand, daughters of lower gentry because had to allow the possibility of marrying not so well-off husbands and would have to supervise the servants once, or perform housekeeping activities, or even become servants if they did not get married. According to Debra Teachman they were educated in rudiments of housekeeping including sewing and cooking, cleaning, or purchasing food. They were prepared to perform the role of a housekeeper (Teachman 110).

Nevertheless, a woman might have sing as beautifully as she could, or be an exquisite cook, the decisive factor has always something to do with the amount of her dowry which was dependent on the financial means of her father. Since only a very rich man could afford to ignore how much money he would gain by getting married.

Women in America

American women were legally in the same situation as women in England in the 19th because “a married woman could not engage in or bring forth lawsuits; she could not enter into business contracts, nor could she buy or sell or otherwise have control over any property...Upon marriage, all property, land, even personal possessions and wages earned, became the property of her husband, as did her children” (Wayne 17). A married woman and her children were the property of her husband, similarly as his house, money or cattle.

“The traditional domestic ideal dictated that a woman's task after marriage was motherhood and devotion to the needs of her husband” (Eiselein and Phillips 197). It was the deep-rooted idea of the women’s predestination. The wife was considered to be “the

light of home” (Wayne 1). She was really important to create the homely atmosphere. Men usually could not take care of the household because they were never conducted for housekeeping.

Women in America were more emancipated than in Europe (Beauvoir 131). However, the most expected place for a woman was still at home with her husband and children. (Wayne 1). Therefore, they fought to have more options than being housewives and mothers they did not want to subordinate any more.

American women began the Women rights movement in the 1840s. At first it was for improving the conditions for women and their children. This movement went simultaneously with the movement for the rights of the African American inhabitants (Wayne 16). The aim of both these movements was to improve living conditions of the disadvantaged shifts of inhabitants.

Simone de Beauvoir says that after the Civil War, the African American men were given the right to vote and white women wanted the same. In 1869, the National Association for Suffrage was founded, and in the same year Wyoming gave women the vote. In 1893 Colorado followed, then in 1896 Idaho and Utah (Beauvoir 132). Women saw this as an opportunity because once the African American succeeded they could reach their goals as well.

According to Wayne, the Southern was society was more traditional. Southern planter families followed stricter codes of feminine “honor” and purity. The courtship in the South was going on similarly as in England and the young couple was under constant supervision by the woman’s family, usually her mother, another member of her family, or at least a black slave. Until the Civil War, the wealth in the South was measured in land and slaves (Wayne 4). The southern culture reminded of England at the beginning of the nineteenth century except for the slaves. However, it was completely ruined after the slavery was abolished because planters were dependant on their slaves.

According to *Dějiny angloamerického práva* by Jan Kuklík and Radim Seltenreich the first Married Women’s Property Act was published in 1870. This act guaranteed them that anything they earned by law would be considered as their own and not be passed on their husbands. However, married women still could not possess a property. It was not until 1882 (Kuklík and Seltenrein 163). Despite these little victories, women were far from

being legally equal to men. In contrast to the USA, “feminism was very timid until about 1903” (Beauvoir 131) in England.

1.2 Marriage

Marriage in England

The traditional opinion was that marriage is “a business venture between families” (Teachman 53). Anthony Giddens in Sociology says that until the end of the 18th century romantic feelings and attraction were not important for marriage (Giddens 330). However, “the idea of marrying for love appeared in many societies” (Teachman 54) on the turn of the 18th and 19th century.

“As a general rule, women expected to be married by the age of twenty-six, although there were a number who became wives beyond this age” (Hazel 173). The sooner a woman got married the better because her chances decreased with her age. Marriage meant for a woman almost certainly that she will be either continually pregnant or breastfeeding until the end of her fertile age. Frequent pregnancies were very destructive for the vital power and health of women in general. Moreover, women often died because of complications connected with childbearing.

Marriage in America

Also in America the traditional model of marriage for convenience changed. “In the nineteenth century, the ideal of companionate marriage, or a partnership based on love and mutual respect, replaced the earlier economic model of marriage” (Wayne 1). Marriage no more served only for multiplying the property and lineage, but also as a relationship between people who were fond of each other and provided mutual support to each other.

Married women were too much occupied with looking after their housework and children, so that they could not fully concentrate on their work. Moreover, their husbands would not be pleased if their wives were negligent of their housekeeping duties.

Furthermore, the fact that a married woman had to work implied that the husband is not capable to provide for the family.

According to Tiffany Wayne, women in America were allowed to pursue their careers, however, it was usually necessary to choose between “either marriage, or career” (Wayne 9) and the major roles in the household for a wife were housekeeping and childbearing (Wayne 3). A married woman usually did not have to work because her husband was supposed “to provide for her financially” (Wayne 2). In theory she did not have to worry about money and her only concern was the home and children.

1.3 Unmarried Women

Unmarried women in England

An unmarried woman had a very few prospects for having a satisfying life. It has been already said she had a minimal chance to inherit money and thus she had to depend on mercy of other people, ideally her male relatives, but also her friends, or complete strangers. An unmarried woman could perform very limited kinds of low-paid work, namely “a governess, a teacher in a school for children, a companion to aged and ill” (Teachman 87), to provide for herself and these occupations lowered her social status and made almost impossible for her to find a husband. Thus, for a woman the best option was to get married. It was her assumed social role after all.

An unmarried woman in England was expected to live in permanent celibate and serve the others (Teachman 87). They were expected to remain virgins forever and be inferior to the society.

If a single woman of gentry was left without family and income she usually had to rely on mercy of others. A family could take her to live with them. Her position was above average servants, however lower than her employers (Teachman 94). Therefore, she lived with the family, but did not belong to them and was inferior.

Spinsterhood was considered unnatural and to be of less fulfilling and less satisfactory kind of life by many people (Teachman 89) because unmarried woman were usually poor without any possibility to considerably improve their lives.

Unmarried women in America

According to Tiffany Wayne, the social status as well as the position and prospects of unmarried women in America were completely different from those in England. Many women deliberately decided not to get married in order to either pursue their own careers or care for their parents (Wayne 1-21). Marriage was no more the best option for women to be provided.

“The nineteenth-century single women by choice were most likely to be of the middle or upper class, white, native-born, with some formal education” (Wayne 6). Education increased a woman’s chance to find a qualified work and her possible independence on men. Louisa May Alcott belonged to this generation and claimed that “the new single woman need not to no pitied” (Wayne 6). The new single woman was able to provide for herself and could live as she thought fit. They could focus on their own careers. They also did not have to care for their husband and undergo constant pregnancies that exhausted them and endangered their live.

The number of spinsters increased and they constituted 11 per cent of American population during the Revolution and the Civil War. This was also influenced by the lack of men after the war because more than 600,000 of them were killed in the Civil War (Wayne 11). The whole generation of women were left with a very limited possibility to get married. Especially in the South there was a complete lack of men (Wayne 11). Women had to cope with absence of men already during the war when they were fighting. She had to create a society which functioned without men and this situation continued after the war. This, however, also contributed to their emancipation.

2 PRACTICAL PART

2.1 *Pride and Prejudice* and *Little Women* and *Good Wives*

The unquestionable resemblance of these novels lies in the fact that they depict stories about young sisters who support each other in everyday joys and worries. These girls grow up in middle class families who struggle with insufficient financial means, which puts them in social disadvantages. Besides that they have no brothers. Whereas in *Little Women* and *Good Wives* it has no fatal consequences, in *Pride and Prejudice* the fact that there is no son in the Bennet family is essential because in this case is “the Longbourn estate is entailed to a distant relative” (Adams, Gesch and Buchanan 3).

Finding a husband, getting married and matrimony are features which connect both novels. It is obvious that *Pride and Prejudice* is primarily focused on these issues. Nevertheless, categorizing *Little Women* and *Good Wives* purely as pursue-the-ideal-husband novels would be rather misleading because these works are also extensively focused on developing family relations and friendships, self-education and self-development in both married and personal life. However, marriage still remains one of the central motifs in *Little Woman* and *Good Wives* because it is a very appealing theme for the target group of readers, teenage girls.

Louisa May Alcott wanted to gain “independence and solvency for her family” (Mathesson 329) through her writing. Jane Austen, who wrote only six novels in total, eventually succeeded in publishing of four novels, the other two were published after her death (Sage 27), and “received no special recognition in her lifetime” (Sage 27).

Both stories deal not only with the bright but also with the shadowy sides of matrimony, such as the “unsuitable marriage” (Austen 183) of the Bennets or the case of Charlotte Lucas who married the impossible Mr. Collins purely for convenience in *Pride and Prejudice*, and the matrimonial crisis after birth of children in *Good Wives*.

Whereas *Pride and Prejudice* describes and satirizes the English society, *Little Women* and *Good Wives* are predominantly focused on self-developing and self-improvement. Virginia Woolf summarizes Austen’s works as follows: “She wishes neither to reform nor to annihilate; she is silent; and that is terrific indeed” (Woolf), and Alcott, according to a movie *The Women behind ‘The Little Women’*, “believed that every human being should be useful, and should be able to develop their talents in the way that was best

for them. The thought that was best for society. We can see this, once again, in almost all her writings for children” (Porter).

Elsemarie Maletzke remarks that according to Walter Scott, *Pride and Prejudice* and other Jane Austen’s novels create a portrait of English gentry, which is considered to be upper-middle class (Maletzke 23), on the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. However, they describe only a little segment of the society (Maletzke 233). Alcott, on the other hand, describes living of several social classes in one place. She wants to stress that all people should be considered equal regardless their property and that people should help each other. Austen depicts the main problem of society, which is that it is divided into two separate worlds, the feminine and masculine. Women are absolutely dependant on men and subordinate to them. They have to surrender and get married, or remain old maids in case no man wants to marry them.

Both Jane Austen and Louisa May Alcott deal with serious issues of life. In *Pride and Prejudice* it is the importance of finding a husband or living in destitute, unfair social stratification of women and people of “low origin”, and Lydia’s elopement and possible consequences for her and her family. In *Little Women*, the main characters struggle with poverty, war, separation from their father and serious illness of a member of the family and in *Good Wives* death of a relative who is too young to die.

These two Alcott’s novels “are in some autobiographical refractions” (Sage 8). Jane Austen based her characters in *Pride and Prejudice* and her other works on real people but definitely primarily not on her family history.

2.2 Women and their usual marital roles

Mrs Bennet: mother, wife, housekeeper

Mrs. Bennet is a mother of five daughters, a wife and a housekeeper, although she is not exactly thrifty. She represents a comical element and is being ridiculed in the novel. However, her intentions are the best. Her flaws are being silly, unintelligent and that she usually embarrasses herself in public by gossiping and her constant evident efforts to hunt for husbands for her daughters. On the other hand, she is absolutely right that without getting married the future of her daughters might be very miserable because Mr. Bennet

has not enough money to secure them after he dies, and their house is entitled to Mr. Collins who will very probably evict them (Austen 50).

She absolutely lacks any are matchmaking skills, however, she has a talent to recognize a potential suitor. She also notices the most important information, the amount of his income per year. Therefore, she pushes her husband to go to officially introduce himself to Mr. Bingley when he settles in Netherfield, or completely changes her opinion on Mr. Collins when he comes up with a wish to marry one of her daughters, and about Mr. Darcy after Elizabeth gets engaged to him because Mr. Darcy is immensely wealthy.

Her husband constantly mocks her even in front of her own children for her silly behaviour. Nevertheless, she makes efforts to secure the future of their daughters, whereas he passively waits in his study for potential suitors to come to ask him for his daughters. With no sign of understanding from her husband and five daughters with a low dowry she is living in constant fear of insecure future of her children. No wonder that she is often nervous and hysterical.

Mr. Bennet is certainly not happy in his marriage with Mrs. Bennet and seeks solace in his country life and books. He married the-once-miss-Gardiner because he was “captivated by her youth and beauty” (Austen 183). Unfortunately, she turned to be a woman of “weak understanding and illiberal mind. (Austen 183). However, it gives him no right to torture her by statements like: “Let us hope for better things. Let us flatter ourselves that I may be the survivor” (Austen 105). This is very inconsiderate because although it looks like a joke he might as well be hinting that he would be happier without her. In any case it is one of many examples indicating that the marriage is not a good one.

After Lydia elopes with Mr. Wickham, Mrs. Bennet declares a statement, “and as for wedding clothes, do not let them wait for that, but tell Lydia she shall have as much money as she chooses to buy them, after they are married” (Austen 220). It sounds completely out of sense at first. Nonetheless, she is well aware of the shame for her daughter living with a man without being married. In this case, the wedding dress is really the last thing which her daughter Lydia needs.

When Lydia finally becomes Mrs. Wickham, Mrs. Bennet behaves seemingly as though she would not mind at all her daughter living unmarried for a fortnight (Austen 238). She buys her new clothes and boasts about her daughter on visits in the

neighbourhood. In reality, this is for the first time in many years that this poor silly frightened woman can sigh with relieve that she reached her first victory and that it is possible that the other daughters will find husbands eventually.

Charlotte Lucas: wife, housekeeper

Charlotte is “a sensible, intelligent young woman” (Austen 63). Unfortunately she is already twenty-seven years old and not exactly pretty and she also does not have a staggering dowry. Under such circumstances she is more or less destined to remain an old maid because there are more suitable brides in the neighbourhood who are younger, more beautiful and with a potentially have a higher dowry. She has brothers to take care of her after her father dies, but she would like to get married because she does not want to be a spinster. For her “marriage had [has] always been her object; it was the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune” (Austen 98).

Charlotte feels that she is a burden for her family. Her parents cannot give her much money because she has several siblings, her brothers worry that they will have to provide for her after their father dies and her sisters cannot come out into the society and try to find husbands for themselves until she gets married, or is at least acknowledged as a spinster which is said to take at least another year (Austen 97-98).

The fact that Mr. Collins appears is a real and unexpected “stroke of luck”. Charlotte sees her only chance to get married, despite the fact that she finds him “neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome” (Austen 98). Charlotte hopes that material benefits from this marriage would exceed all his flaws.

Immediately after Mr. Collins is declined by Elizabeth Bennet, Charlotte takes an opportunity and employs all her efforts to attract Mr. Collins. Luckily for her, Mr. Collins proposes her barely two days later. Whereas Mr. Collins “name[s] the day that was to make him the happiest of men” (Austen 103), Charlotte “accepts him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment” (Austen 98), Anyhow, “everything was settled between them to the satisfaction of both” (Austen 98) and Charlotte’s family.

There is no first hand evidence how she endures living with Mr. Collins. Everything is seen through Elizabeth Bennet when she comes to visit her best friend to Hunsford.

Elizabeth finds out that Charlotte seems not to suffer in her marriage and is clever enough to employ Mr. Collins somehow in order to avoid him. She for example encourages her husband to tend the garden and praises the advantages of being outside (Austen 123). Twice a week Mr. and Mrs. Collins are invited to Rosings to have dinner with Lady Catherine de Bourgh. She is very bossy and has an inclination to lecture about different subjects because she is convinced that she understands things better than anyone else. Lady de Bourgh and her daughter along with their visitors to Rosings are the only people who the Collinses meet socially because “the style of living in the neighbourhood in general was beyond Mr. Collins’s reach” (Austen 132-133).

When she leaves, Elizabeth regrets abandoning Charlotte in the company of Mr. Collins and lady de Bourgh. Nevertheless, she admits that it was her choice and she seems to be quite satisfied because “her home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns, had not yet lost their charms” (Austen 168).

It is hardly probable that Mr. Collins would make her happy. Although he describes their marriage as follows: “My dear Charlotte and I have but one mind and one way of thinking. There is in everything a most remarkable resemblance of character and ideas between us. We seem to have been designed for each other” (Austen 168). However, it is rather improbable that Charlotte would feel the same way concerning his personality.

Mrs March: mother, wife, housekeeper

The model figure for Mrs. March was LMA’s mother Abigail Alcott (Eselein and Phyllips 86). From the first time she appears in the story she is described as the most amazing woman in the world for her daughters Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy. She is strong-minded, moral and encouraging. They tenderly call her “Marmee”. All of them would like to be like her when they grow up. She admits that she is not perfect and struggles especially with her temper every day of her life. However, even being her age around forty years old she is always trying to learn from her own mistakes in order to be a good example for her children (Alcott *Women* 78) who mean everything in the world for her. She is apparently interested in different things than gossiping and getting her daughters married for money. For her, the greatest rewards are her daughters’ “love, respect and

confidence“ (Alcott *Women* 78), and she loves and cherishes them in return. Mrs. March encourages her four daughters to be above all good people and she “would rather see you [her daughters] poor men’s wives, if you [they] were happy, beloved, contented, than queens on thrones, without self-respect and peace” (Alcott *Women* 93). She is also very frugal and teaches her daughters to be moderate.

Her aim is to raise decent people who are able to cope with their lives. She helps Jo to moderate her wildness and cheekiness, Amy to fight with her selfishness, and Meg to prepare for her role of the wife, mother, housewife, and later keeps on helping her after she gets married. However, she does not seem to correct Beth’s shyness. Beth is in all other respects a well-behaved obedient and selfless child so there is no need to force her to socialize with people when she does not want.

In the fourth chapter, Marmee narrates to her daughters an allegoric story about four girls who had actually everything in the world. They had loving parents, where to sleep, something to eat and, above all, they had each other (Alcott *Women* 49). That is the basic moral lesson which their mother wants to instil in them so that to they realize that poverty is not the worst thing in the world.

Mrs. March is obliged to provide for her family and struggles with the life of a single mother during the Civil War because he husband serves as a chaplain in the Union Army. She is very generous and charitable despite the fact she is poor and she donates clothes and food to anyone in destitute. She helps people who were afflicted by the war, immigrants, beggars and people in need in general. A special attention gives she to a very miserable German family with six children whose mother is ill, and encourages her daughters to give them their special Christmas breakfast (Alcott *Women* 24).

As for the keeping the house in order, there is a servant Hannah in the March family who does the house chores and supervises the children. The girls also have their duties concerning the housework. However, Beth does the most part of it because the older ones, Meg and Jo, work, and Amy often passes her duties on Beth. Mrs. March’s occupation is really too tiring to do the housework as well.

Margaret March: bride, mother, wife, housekeeper

"For some readers, Meg represents the status quo for young girls in the nineteenth century. She is a typical young woman who deals with the conflict of being kind and humble while wishing for wealth and admiration. Meg is the only March daughter to choose the normal route a long and closely watched engagement, marriage, housewifery, and motherhood" (Eselein and Phyllips 203). She has no artistic ambitions like Jo and Amy. She dreams about a comfortable life with a husband and children. Her maternal instincts are very well developed (Alcott *Wives* 338) and her major desire is to have a satisfied family.

Meg always wanted "a lovely house, full of all sorts of luxurious things—nice food, pretty clothes, handsome furniture, pleasant people, and heaps of money" (Alcott *Women* 57). She deals with the family poverty worse than her sisters because she remembers the times when they were rich (Alcott *Women* 43) and she admits that she is vain. When her sister Beth lies down with scarlet fever and almost dies Meg finally realizes how important are "love, protection, peace, and health" (Alcott *Women* 164). She only wishes Beth to recover. All her desires for luxurious things are insignificant for her.

Meg falls in love with John Brooke, a home tutor of their neighbour and best friend Laurie. She is very shy when he starts courting her. However, she defends her love fiercely when Aunt March comes to her to thwart her possible wedding plans. She could not bear that her niece might marry a poor man without money, rich relatives, proper job and the social status (Alcott *Women* 203). It is understandable because she is afraid that he will not be able to provide for Meg. Nevertheless, John has prospects to do well in his life because his friends, especially the wealthy and influential Mr. Lawrence can help him to find a good job.

It takes three years until Meg and John get married because her parents decide that she cannot get married before she is twenty years old. They have plenty of time to get to know each other, and to plan their future life together, or to buy and equip a house. There is a contrast to *Pride and Prejudice* where all the women get married immediately after they are proposed. On the other hand, it was unthinkable that their suitor would not have a house and stable income among gentry. John is a very poor man, and he and Meg begin completely from scratch, with the support of Meg's family and Mr. Lawrence, of course.

Meg compares her marriage with her friend Sally Moffat who is a newlywed as well. Sally comes from a wealthy family and marries a man of fortune and could buy fancy things that Meg would like to possess as well. Sally also has four servants, whereas Meg has none in order not to get bored of doing nothing because their house is rather small, and besides, her husband cannot really afford to pay a servant at the start. Mrs. March thinks that Sally's occupation is to "dress, give orders, and gossip" (Alcott *Wives* 219) because she does not have to do any house chores. On the other hand, Sally seems out to be a kind-hearted, trustworthy friend to Meg.

"Meg began [begins] her married life with the determination to be a model housekeeper" (Alcott *Wives* 244) She is a good cook and copes with all her housework. The marriage is happy except for one thing – money. John does not earn much and they must be very considerate about things they buy. However, John trusts Meg and allows her a free approach to family savings but she is obliged to take notes about everything that she buys.

The husband of Meg's friend Sally is rich enough and his wife has absolute freedom in shopping. When Sally takes Meg with her, Meg often buys something nice what she actually does not need in order to show Sally that she can afford it. In other words, Meg wants to catch up with Sally. One day Sally buys fine expensive silk for a dress and so does Meg after quite a long consideration. Meg takes 50 dollars from the family savings, even though Sally offers to lend some money to buy the dress which Meg refuses. However, when she brings home the fabric she finds out she does not like it anymore and feels ashamed of herself. She confesses everything to John in an apologetic tone, adding that she is fed up with poverty. She practically blames him for being poor. However, what she did was that she spent money that he earned and entrusted to her. He is very upset because he does his best. Nevertheless, he puts up with it and cancels his order for a new winter coat because now he cannot afford it. When Meg finds out she goes to Sally and tells her everything. Her friend has understanding and is so kind that she buys the silk and has enough tact not to give it to Meg as a present right away.

When Meg and John have children she becomes somewhat negligent to her husband and pays her whole attention to the twins. Her mother claims that this is a problem of many young parents after the children are born. John would like to participate in raising them and spend some time with his wife alone, but Meg will not let him. When she realizes that

there is something wrong, she does not know what do to and asks her mother for help. With Marmee's guidance they reach understanding after all and divide the care for children between each other. This passage in the novel *Good Wives* is very didactic and applicable even nowadays.

Amy March: bride, wife

Amy always behaves like a “young lady” (Alcott *Women* 16). When she is around fifteen to eighteen, she has a lot of acquaintances among young schoolmates of her friend's Laurie and she is a platonic love for many of them. Amy is an ambitious and talented painter and she would like to go to Rome to see the paintings of old classical masters. When she is preparing for her European journey she confides to her sister Jo that she might become an art teacher when she comes back if she does not find a husband. Jo assures her that she will marry a wealthy man and will “sit in the lap of luxury” (Alcott *Wives* 273).

In Europe Amy meets an old friend, Fred Vaughn from London. At first she sees him as nothing more than “a travelling friendship” (Alcott *Wives* 280). However, she changes her opinion after he begins courting her. He perfectly summarizes her vision of an ideal husband except for one little detail: she does not love him. In spite of that the sensible Amy makes a decision that she will accept him if he proposes to her. Her reasons are as follows: “Fred is very entertaining, and is altogether the most agreeable young man I[*she*] ever knew— except Laurie, whose manners are more charming” (Alcott *Wives* 279). What is more, “he is handsome, young, clever enough, and very rich” (Alcott *Wives* 280). She even admits that she likes him and is convinced that she “in time I [*she*] should get fond enough of him if he was very fond of me [*her*]” (Alcott *Wives* 281). The Vaughn family is very rich and “Fred, as the eldest twin, will have the estate” (Alcott *Wives* 281), and they also have “country place, with its park, great house, lovely grounds, and fine horses“ (Alcott *Wives* 281).

Despite the fact that Amy is aware that she is still young and beautiful (Alcott *Wives* 83), and thus she could possibly find someone she would really love, she does not want to risk missing her chance. One never knows if it is not the last opportunity and Fred is at least a decent handsome man who would respect her and treat her well. Having been

brought up in a poverty-stricken household she would not like to stand such conditions in her marriage. She also does not want her future children to undergo sorrows that are connected with poverty ranging from wearing second-hand clothes to more serious issues like being pitied in the society and be dependent on someone else's mercy. The fact she might not love her husband is not so bad for her because getting married to Fred Vaughn would mean for her to have the open door to high society, all possible cultural venues, or travelling. In this sense Amy seeks in marriage material and social advantages rather than love and with Fred she would gain them.

In the end Amy gets married and gains everything that she wanted including love. The happy husband is Laurie, one of her best friends from childhood who comes from a wealthy family. They have always had a very close relationship, although he was for her like a brother and he used to be in love with her sister Josephine. Nevertheless, Jo declined him and he was heart-broken for long months. In the end he has to get over it and falls in love again; this time to someone who reciprocates his feelings. They are very happy in their marriage and after they return to America they decide to help together the poor.

2.3 Family relations

Siblings in *Pride and Prejudice*

Jane Austen had a very close relationship with her sister Cassandra, and a special strong bond between two sisters, Elizabeth and Jane Bennet and possibly Lydia and Kitty Bennet is a theme *Pride and Prejudice*. They all have agreement in opinions and hobbies and they exchange long letters when they are away from home. Elizabeth and Jane, however, really care for each other's feelings, and whenever anyone is of them unhappy the other one feels the same way. When Jane falls ill at the Netherfield Park, Elizabeth immediately sets off and walks over three miles and is not ashamed, even though it is not a proper behaviour for a woman. Elizabeth is also the only person to whom Jane is able to confide her innermost feelings because she is very shy. For Elizabeth it is self-evident that Jane is fond of Mr. Bingley but her friend Charlotte Collins thinks that Jane should be more open him and thinks that "in nine cases out of ten a women had better show more

affection than she feels.” (Austen 19). Otherwise he might not notice the same as Charlotte did not with Jane.

Lydia is “self-willed and careless” (Austen 166), whereas Kitty is “weak-spirited, irritable, and completely under Lydia’s guidance” (Austen 166). She is a submissive person and Lydia gives her a really bad example. They are vain and lazy and spend all their time flirting with officers in Meryton and gossiping with each other, their mother or aunt Phyllips. The two eldest Bennet sisters are the only people who attempt to correct Lydia’s and Kitty’s obvious flaws like the lack of tact and ill manners. Nevertheless, the two of them are “supported by their mother’s indulgence” (Austen 166) and their father reveals no effort to raise them, and only often mocks their silliness which is a sign that he tolerates such behaviour.

Mary, their middle sister, is not interested in gossiping, and assiduously concentrates on reading books and self-education. Despite that she hardly ever says something witty because she lacks common sense. She is a little bit of a recluse and stays away from her sisters, although at the Netherfield Park ball she proves that she is a true Bennet at last when she contributes to public embarrassment of the whole family by singing at the Netherfield Park ball whereas her mother is tattling about Jane’s possible engagement.

Mr. Charles Bingley moves into the Netherfield Park estate near the Bennets along with his two sisters. The first one is Mrs. Hurst who “married a man of more fashion than fortune” (Austen 15) and together with her husband often idles visiting her brother. It is rather a parasitic behaviour. The second one is Miss Caroline Bingley who is still unmarried and lives with her brother enjoying all benefits of his wealth and social status. Her father died, but she does not have to worry about her livelihood because she has a brother who has a sufficient income, so that she is not only provided for but also lives in luxury.

Georgiana Darcy is in the same material situation like Miss Bingley. Her father died and her brother, Mr. Darcy, who is ten years older than her takes full responsibility for his sister’s well-being and education. She has a very large dowry, 30 000 pounds, which is approximately thirty times more than each of the Bennet daughters has. Mr. Wickham wanted to make use of this situation and crept in Georgiana’s graces and persuaded her to elope with him. She would have to marry him then, otherwise her reputation along with a

good name of the whole Darcy family would be completely ruined. Luckily, Georgiana revealed these plans to her brother who averted the disaster.

Mrs. Bennet has a sister, Mrs. Phyllips, in Meryton whose husband took over their father's law office. These ladies are similarly simple-minded and Mrs. Phyllips has also a good relationship with her nieces Lydia and Kitty. All of them love gossiping and handsome officers in red regimentals. Mrs. Bennet also has a brother, Mr. Gardiner, who lives with her family in Cheapside, London.

The Gardiners

Mr. Gardiner is described as "a sensible, gentlemanlike man, greatly superior to his sister, as well by nature as education" (Austen 110). However, being a tradesman he cannot be considered to be a real gentleman like Mr. Bennet. What is more, his honest occupation, in which he earns a sufficient amount of money to secure his family, lowers his social status, and even damages the reputation of the Bennet family. It also diminishes prospects of their girls to find a suitable husband as Mr. Darcy says to Mr. Bingley (Austen 30). All of this Lady de Bourgh reminds to Elizabeth in order to discourage her from marrying Mr. Darcy (Austen 274).

The Gardiners are on good terms with the Bennets. Together with their children they traditionally come to the Longbourn house for Christmas, and the two eldest Bennet sisters come often to visit the Gardiners in London. Jane and Elizabeth Bennet have a very close, friendly relationship with Mrs. Gardiner, who is said to be much younger than Mrs. Bennet. The two of them actually seem to have more in common with their aunt than with their own mother, and, in fact, match the Gardiner family better than their own. Not surprisingly the Gardiners dislike Lydia Bennet who is silly and spoilt. However, Mr. Gardiner is willing to do as much as possible to help the Bennet family after Lydia's elopement with Mr. Wickham because she is a member of their family after all. Not surprisingly, in return Lydia behaves impudently to her uncle and aunt when she stays at their place in London before her wedding.

Mr. Darcy has prejudicial objections to Mr. Gardiner because of him being a tradesman, and labels him and his family to be "low connections" (Austen 30) of the

Bennets without even meeting them before. However, when the Gardiners and Elizabeth appear at his Pemberley estate he is impressed with their decent behaviour and changes his first opinion completely.

Mr. William Collins

Mr. Collins, on the other hand, is a clergyman, and therefore is a member of gentry. Nevertheless, he is apparently incapable of behaving himself in front of people. He is very odd in every respect one can imagine and is “sycophant and hypocrite” (Adams 7). He is the one who is to inherit the Bennet’s family estate. It is said that his late father was not on good terms with Mr. Bennet (Austen 51), and therefore he comes to the Longbourn house with pretence to reconcile with Mr. Bennet and, of course, see the place he is about to inherit. Mr. Collins intends to propose one of the Bennet daughters to be his wife. Or, better, Lady Catherine de Bourgh gave him “particular advice and recommendation” (Austen 85) to get married to one of his cousins of the Longbourn house.

Since Mr. Bennet has no son his estate is supposed to be left to Mr. Collins, “a distant relation” (Austen 24) after Mr. Bennet dies. Seemingly luckily, Mr. Collins’ intents to get engaged to one of the Bennet daughters. In theory, this would be a fairly good deal for both sides. Firstly, he is the heir of the Longbourn property, so that the property would remain in the Bennet family. Moreover he could eventually provide for Mrs. Bennet and his future wife’s unmarried sisters. Thus a declination of his proposal is the last thing that he would expect. Nevertheless, Elizabeth Bennet declines him in spite of all the possible prospects for her family and herself because his company is for her simply intolerable and being his wife absolutely unimaginable.

As a matter of fact, for Mr. Collins might be a cousin with no inheritance whose father-house is entitled to him one of very few possibilities to find a bride. According to Elizabeth he is “a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man” (Austen 107). Moreover, he “is not sensible” (Austen 57) in spite of being educated at a university. In short, he is not really a good match for any girl who is not in a desperate situation. Elizabeth is therefore lucky enough that her father also finds Mr. Collins absolutely unthinkable as her potential husband and gives her the option of free choice.

Mr. Darcy the family de Bourgh

Lady de Bourgh was Mr. Darcy's late mother's sister and she intends to marry her daughter to her cousin to "unite the two estates" (Austen 68). However, they do not seem to have any romantic interest in each other. It is Elizabeth Bennet who Mr. Darcy yearns for instead, and Lady de Bourgh is very furious when there emerge rumours about their engagement. Firstly, she wants him to marry her daughter, and, secondly, she does not approve of Elizabeth's family and relatives. She comes to the Longbourn house to forbid Elizabeth to marry him and saying, besides other things, that Elizabeth might be a gentleman's daughter but her mother's origin as well as their aunts' and uncles decrease her social status (Austen 274). However, Elizabeth refuses to obey her commands, which Lady de Bourgh cannot accept because she is not accustomed that someone would ever disobey her.

The March family in *Little Women* and *Good Wives*

"*Little Women* conforms with the family story convention of the father-dominated family in which the father's authority seems godlike" (Eiselein and Phillips 104). The father is at war until the last chapter *Little Women* and he has no significant part in *Good Wives* either he is adored and respected. His absence is perceived painfully, just like his return brings back stability to the household. The March family is based on Louisa May Alcott's family and the novels have semi-autobiographic features. The Alcotts are said to be "a family of remarkably close relationships" Mathesson (192) and so are the Marches because they are all very close to each other. The family struggles with poverty because "Mr. March lost his property in trying to help an unfortunate friend" (Alcott *Women* 43). The girls from time to time complain about poverty and having to work, and dream about the past. On the other hand, they are no unhappy because they have each other. In fact the Alcott family lived under far worse conditions as George Matesson describes in *Eden's Outcasts*.

The novels belong to "didactic domestic fiction" (Eiselein and Phyllips 78). The parents represent exemplary characters for their daughters. All of the girls and later young women are given moral lessons from their parents, especially their mother, who encourages them to improve themselves.

The March sisters

The main character is Josephine March who prefers to be called Jo because it sounds more like a name for boy. She does not particularly enjoy being a girl. She is LMA's alter ego and shares with her a passion for books, literary talent and ambitions, and a fear of marriage (Eselein and Phyllips 160-161).

Contrastingly to the Bennet sisters, all the March girls have very strong affectionate bonds with one another, although the main attention is focused on Jo's relationships to her sisters. "The March sisters form the Pickwick Club and dramatize scenes from Dicken's novels" (Eselein and Phyllips 80). They also dramatize Shakespeare's plays and even Jo's first own works.

The eldest sister Meg who is sixteen is based on LMA'S oldest sister Anna Alcott Pratt (Eselein and Phyllips, 203). She plays the role of "big sister" for the three younger ones. She gets on particularly well with her youngest sister Amy. In *Little Women*, Meg attempts to raise and moralize all her younger sisters, especially the boyish Jo, and Amy who is "particular and prim" (Alcott *Women* 15). On the other hand, Beth is "a dear and nothing else" (Alcott *Women* 15) for everyone. Jo looks up to Meg, although she simultaneously gives her really hard times because she is very wild and lively. The tomboyish girl hardly ever pours coffee without spilling it or approaches a fireplace without burning her dress. Meg is worried that her sister will have a tough life if she does not start behave appropriately. Jo is petrified when John Brooke reveals his romantic interest in Meg because she fears that Meg will leave the family house for good and wishes to be able to marry her sister herself (Alcott *Women* 181).

Jo March is especially emotionally attached to her thirteen-year old sister Beth and she behaves very protectively towards her. Beth is described to be a shy, fragile creature living in her own happy imaginary realm which she leaves only for people she likes (Alcott *Women* 16). Beth is an idealised portrait of LMA's favourite sister Elizabeth Sewall Alcott who died at the age of 23, ten years before *Little Women* was published (Eselein and Phillips 15-16). It is remarkable that the author did not even change her name in this case. Jo's fierce temper and an open, courageous, adventurous and ambitious spirit sharply contrast with Beth's placid introvert temperament and shyness. They get on well because they seek in each other those qualities which the other one lacks. Jo is Beth's confidant,

and Beth tames her sister's wild nature. LMA tenderly describes Beth surrounding herself with imaginary friends, old torn dolls and kittens and music; she plays the piano beautifully. Beth has no ambitions but only a wish to stay with her parents and to be a housekeeper (Alcott *Women* 131). Apart from Jo Beth gets on very well with their father.

Towards the end of *Little Women*, Beth is infected with scarlet fever when nursing the poor family of Hummels and the disease develops very seriously. Although she survives, the recovery is not complete and she will never gain back her former vitality. She eventually dies ten years later surrounded by her family.

The youngest sister Amy is based on LMA's sister Abby May Alcott (Eselein and Phyllips 20). Jo and Amy are both very ambitious and share a desire to conquer the world; Jo as a writer and Amy in fine arts. They compete with each other because they having dominant but completely different natures. Their relationship is turbulent especially in *Little Women*. One quarrel results in Amy burning Jo's manuscript because Jo refused to take Amy to the theatre with her. Jo is devastated and furious and swears she would never forgive her. However, the next day Amy nearly drowns in the river and Jo forgets all about her anger. In *Good Wives* Amy attempts to teach Jo essential social skills by taking her to visit their friends – in vain. Jo is decided not to surrender to etiquette, whereas Amy is determined to be a lady and climb the social ladder. Consequently, Amy is taken to Europe with Aunt Carrol to be a companion for her daughter Florence. Aunt Carrol together with Aunt March cannot decide which of the two girls to choose because they like them both, but Jo makes it easier for them because she behaves impudently at the most important moment, and even though her aunts might be accustomed to her moods they choose Amy because she can always control herself. In spite of that the sisters stay very close and keep in touch through letters when Amy is in Europe. In the end Amy marries Laurie, Jo's best friend, who used to be in love with Jo and even proposed her - and was declined.

Aunt March

Aunt March is an elderly widowed lady who is wealthy unlike the family of her nephew. She is rather bitter because of her widowhood and is very strict with her great-nieces, although she has a soft spot (Alcott *Women* 171). She has no children of her own

and in some way considers the March girls to be a substitution for them. When the Marches became poverty-stricken Aunt offered them to adopt one of their girls but the parents refused which made Aunt annoyed and disappointed.

Jo works as her companion in *Little Women* because Aunt is lame and needs someone to help her. They get on surprisingly well together and like each other, although sometimes they have a fierce quarrel and Jo is determined not to go back any more. However, her Aunt always persuades return. Besides money Jo's is greatest reward for this job Aunt's immense library which attracts Jo very much. Whenever the old Aunt dozes off or has quests Jo creeps herself into there to read any book that she wants (Alcott *Women* 44).

After Beth falls sick with scarlet fever and the illness has a hard development, Aunt March remarks "no more than I expected, if you are allowed to go poking about among poor folks" (Alcott *Women* 161-162). She does not despise the Marches for being charitable but she is very angry and mortified that the children get in contact with poor people which can result in consequences like that.

When Beth struggles with scarlet fever Amy is sent to Aunt Marche's in order not to get infected. Amy has hard times there because she is accustomed to be pampered at home. However, her Aunt disapproves of such treatment and is very strict with her and makes her help with the housekeeping. She raises Amy the same way that they raised her when she was a child sixty years before. On the other hand, the Aunt begins to like Amy very much and recognizes that she is not as stubborn as Jo. Amy eventually replaces Jo in the job as a companion for the Aunt because the Aunt pays her painting lessons.

Aunt March intends Meg to marry well and is horrified when she finds out that Meg could marry a poor man John Brooke. Besides that she is afraid that John does not love Meg and only wants to use her to gain her Aunt's money (Alcott *Women* 204). She thinks that Meg's duty "to make a rich match" (Alcott *Women* 203) in order to help her family from poverty. She threatens her niece that she will disinherit her in an attempt to persuade her not to marry him (Alcott *Women* 204). However, the aunt regrets this promise later but she is too proud to take it back. She is really fond of Meg and wants to support her in spite of her decision and did not really intend to disinherit Meg and equips her the with house and table linen by through the agency of Aunt Carrol. However, the secret is revealed and

laughs at Aunt but Meg is actually grateful as it only proves how much the aunt likes her (Alcott *Wives* 220).

At the end of *Good Wives* Aunt March dies and bequeaths her jewellery to the three surviving March girls, and leaves her manor Plumfield to Josephine.

The fifth "sister"

This "sister" is actually a boy, Theodore Lawrence, who lives next door with his wealthy grandfather Mr. Lawrence because his parents died. Everybody nicknames him "Laurie" and Jo calls him "Teddy". He is Jo's best friend and soul mate in *Little Women* and becomes her declined suitor in *Good Wives*. He is based on two male friends of LMA's, Ladislav Wisniewski and Alfred Whitman (Eselein and Phyllips 170)

He is fifteen when the novel *Little Women* starts and was born in Italy and used to be educated in schools in Switzerland and travelled round Europe. His father was Mr. Lawrence's son who escaped to Europe against his father's will to marry Laurie's mother, an Italian pianist. Laurie himself plays the piano well and also composes music.

In *Little Women*, he does not have many friends because he does not like the manners of American boys and stays away from them. After their first encounter at a Christmas party, Jo invites herself to the Lawrence house in order to get to know her new friend better. She is surrounded only by women, her sisters, mother, their servant Hannah and Aunt March, and would like to have a male friend. Contrastingly, Laurie has no one to talk to apart from his Grandfather and tutor. Jo's boldness and spontaneity impresses even Laurie's grandfather with whom Laurie has a rather strained relationship because his grandfather expects him to go to college and overtake the family business, whereas Laurie would rather go to Italy and enjoy himself (Alcott *Women* 37). Even the old Mr. Lawrence becomes a friend with the March family, especially with the timid Beth who reminds him of his late daughter.

Laurie builds a strong brotherly relationship with all of the Marches sisters and being an orphan, Mrs. March represents a motherly figure for him, calling her "Madam Mother". He is rather delicate for a boy and the girls confide him secrets that they usually share only with their female friends. That is why he might be perceived as the fifth "sister". Not that

he would be effeminate, he only has some girlish sides untypical for a man just like Jo has her tomboyish sides unusual for a girl. Also in this way the two of them complement each other.

In *Good Wives* Laurie develops romantic feelings for Jo. However, she declines his proposal and breaks his heart. After many months of pain, he falls in love with Amy who loves him back and marries him.

2.4 Marriage

Pride and Prejudice

Marriage is the main theme of *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen marks out marriage as the necessity for a woman. It is the only possible means for women of lower gentry how to be provided for the future, get a social status after their father dies, and have prospects of having children.

From the social point of view, Charlotte Lucas, Lydia Bennet, Jane Bennet and Elizabeth Bennet get married predominately to gain the social status of wife and material security. Their husbands belong to gentry. Their importance, however, depends on their income and reputation. The clergyman Mr. Collins is much less important than Mr. Bingley with his 4 000 pounds a year, or Mr. Darcy who has 10 000 a year. As for Mr. Wickham, his late father used to be a housekeeper at Pemberley. Therefore, he comes from a lower class. Caroline Bingley emphasizes this fact to Elizabeth at the end of the ball at Netherfield. However, he received education of a gentleman thanks to the generosity of Mr. Darcy's father. Moreover, he is an officer now, so that he belongs to gentry (Maletzke 28). He used to be much favoured with the regiment and his commander in chief Colonel Forster. Nevertheless, he loses his popularity because of his impudent behaviour and chiefly the elopement with Lydia. However, he is given another chance with the regular army in the North.

The Bennets, the Gardiners and the Lucases represent in married couples who raise children *Pride and Prejudice*. This is another basic function of marriage. In this novel it is not given much attention to little children and their education. The main focus is put on young adults who are expected to get married very soon. Mr. and Mrs. Bennets do not give

them a very good example (Austen 183). However, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiners seem to be quite a harmonious couple, so they might present a good example to their children.

Elizabeth and Jane Bennet are those who are lucky enough to marry from reciprocated love. Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley simply adore their wives. According to Elizabeth, their sister Lydia Bennet is more in love with Mr. Wickham than he with her. For Mr. Wickham it was probably a marriage from convenience because he is given a great deal of money by Mr. Darcy. It is hard to say how much or if he likes Lydia. He behaves very casually and charmingly when they come to visit Longbourn. However, he is likely to pretend all of it to impress his in-laws. He is a phony who can feign anything to reach his ends.

Mr. Collins convinces himself that he has passionate feelings for Charlotte and is very happy with her. Charlotte never tells to anybody how she really feels in life with her husband. Nevertheless she does not seek for love in her marriage as she confesses to Elizabeth before her wedding (Austen 100-101). When Elizabeth comes to visit her, she suspects that Charlotte tries to avoid Mr. Collins inconspicuously as much as she can. However, she is more satisfied with prospects of being his wife than a spinster.

As concerning the men, the only or the eldest sons can choose any woman they want if they have enough money. On the contrary, for Colonel Fitzwilliam, Mr. Darcy's cousin, it is important to get married to a wealthy girl because "younger sons cannot marry where they like" (Austen 143).

Little Women and Little women and Good Wives

In the first place, Alcott considers marriage and spinsterhood to be equal options. A woman should have the right of free choice whether to get married or pursue other plans. For Meg marriage is the only choice, Amy admits the possibility she would not get married, Jo and Beth are decided not to get married.

In America women are "discouraged from seeking marriage for purely economical and status reasons" (Wayne 1) and this is the message of these novels. In these novels marriage is first of all a connection of two people who are in love, regardless their financial situation, social status, or age. Meg, Amy and Jo March girls get married to men who they

love, just like they have been always encouraged by their parents. Mr. and Mrs. March are a good example for them because they have spent with each other already twenty years and still love and respect each other.

However, all of them originally have different views on marriage. Meg hopes that she will marry someone wealthy and she will live in luxury. Meg complains that “men have to work and women marry for money” (Alcott *Women* 143), which implies that she would like to find a rich husband. Amy makes a decision to marry a well-off man for convenience, and Jo is determined not to get married at all and become a writer. She declines her first marriage proposal from her best friend Laurie. This decision breaks not only his heart but also hearts of many of her readers who were looking forward for Jo and Laurie getting married since the two of them met for the first time (Eiselein and Phillips 170).

Their Aunt and the society expect that the March girls will make a good match and will marry wealthy men. When Meg is visiting her wealthy friend Annie Moffat she overhears a conversation about her and Laurie “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 *Women* 84) Laurie is really a good match – he is handsome, educated, well-mannered and he will inherit a fortune.

“Although LMA did not consider marriage and motherhood as the only possibilities in a woman's life, she reluctantly granted her young readers' clamorous requests to see the little women paired off” (Eiselein and Phillips 197). Jo falls in love with Professor Friedrich Bhaer and completely changes her attitude to marriage. They get married and she becomes a housekeeper and is much happier than she has ever been in unmarried life. This corresponds with the “happy ending“ which was ordered to Louisa May Alcott by her publishers. The readers would rather see the handsome Laurie next to her, but an old German Professor is better than no husband. American readers were not prepared for a spinsterish main heroine yet. However, this new Jo is not the ambitious, free spirited woman who she used to be. Not that such changes would be impossible in life. Jo’s transformation, however, does not look plausible regarding her personality and past ambitions.

In *Little Women* are Beth and Amy still children and Meg a Jo are on the boundary between childhood and adulthood. Their mother treats the two eldest as though they were

adults to express her trust to them. *Good Wives* directly deals with rising of little children. Meg and her husband John raise their twins who bring about a marital crisis between their parents. The three surviving sisters have offspring of their own in the last chapter, and Jo and her husband Friedrich even raise several adopted orphaned boys.

2.5 Working women

In *Little Women* the mother works for Soldier's Aid Societies and the two eldest daughters, Meg and Jo, deliberately choose to work to support themselves to make it easier for their parents because the family is poverty-stricken. This is a very striking difference between the approaches of the society to work of middle-class women in JA and LMA. Whereas the women of the March family, Marmee, Jo and Meg, work for their living, women in *Pride and Prejudice* they simply cannot because they would devalue their social status and their chances to find a wealthy husband would be very probably thwarted forever (Teachman 4). Besides, Mr. Bennet's income of 2000 pounds a year can financially secure the whole family, so the daughters do not have to consider working for living until he dies and they are still unmarried. Then they could find jobs as governesses (Teachman 4). However, Jane Austen does not deal with any possibility of the Bennet sisters considering these issues. There are two reasons why not: Firstly, this idea is so uttermost that they will never consider it until they have some other possibility. Secondly, because to the readers of the beginning the 19th it was quite obvious what options would the Bennet girls have after their father dies. Such things were part of common knowledge in the times of Jane Austen (Maletzke 183).

During the Civil War, in *Little Women* Marmee sews uniforms for soldiers of the Union Army, her eldest daughter, Meg, works as a governess in a rich family, and her the second eldest one, Jo, as a companion for their wealthy Aunt March. They know that they will not make a fortune. Nevertheless, the girls earn at least some money of their own so that they do not have to depend on their parents in everything and improve their family's budget, and their parents are proud of them that they "cultivate energy, industry, and independence" (Alcott *Women* 43). Thanks to their jobs they earn some money of their own and are not dependant on their parents in everything. Luckily, they still can live with their family because their jobs are quite near their home.

Jo's job for her Aunt concerns for example of yarning wind, washing her Aunt's poodle, or reading (Alcott *Women* 44). Apart from this job she writes short stories and plays and even gets published a story in the newspaper but does not get paid because the newspaper "didn't [don't] pay beginners, only let them print in his paper, and noticed the stories" (Alcott *Women* 142). In *Good Wives* Jo also works six months as a governess in New York.

Jo and Meg still have the status of middle-class women because their neighbours know the circumstances under which the family lost their money. They used to belong to the rich social circles. Now, they still have the family good name and rich acquaintances and their Aunts, March and Carrol, are wealthy. Besides, Jo works for their Aunt. If Meg a Jo were girls without family environment doing the same jobs somewhere where people do not know them, their social status would be different.

Good Wives begins three years after *Little Women* ends. Meg gets married and becomes a full-time housewife and later a mother. Amy works for Aunt March instead of Jo and Aunt pays her art classes. Later she attends an academy of arts, and she considers a career of an art teacher if she does not get married.

In *Good Wives* Jo develops little by little her writing talent and decides to pursue a literary career because she believes that through writing she could earn enough money to provide for her family, and lead them out of poverty. She earns quite a lot of money through writing sensational pulp short stories. She dislikes this work, but that is what the readers want, and feels compensated with the financial reward.

As for the servants, they come from lower classes, working classes (Streich). In the March family, their servant Hannah is regarded to be a family friend. In *Pride and Prejudice* the Bennets have two housemaids, housekeeper, Mrs. Hill (Austen 243), and a cook (Austen 53-54), but the girls never had a governess which Lady Catherine de Bourgh considers to be absolutely unprecedented and outrageous (Austen 129). These servants are not important for the story although the number of servants says a lot about the financial situation of the family. Only Mr. Darcy's housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds, has a significant role when she guides the Gardiners and Elizabeth around Pemberley and talks about Mr. Darcy's kindness and philanthropy.

2.6 Social life

Pride and Prejudice

The female members of the Bennet family apart from Mary are very sociable. Their mother is so benevolent that she allows the younger sisters to go to society in spite of the fact that the eldest sister is not married yet. They attend various luncheons and balls in order to entertain themselves, but also hope that they might be introduced to potential suitors.

The English “society was highly stratified: aristocrats tended to socialize with other aristocrats, the gentry (generally considered to be upper middle class by today's standards) socialized with other gentry, tradespeople socialized [socialize] with other trades people, the working poor with the working poor” (Teachman 3). The Bennets is a country gentry family and meet socially at least twenty four similar families of what Mrs. Bennet is very proud. Social connections, as well as the reputation, are of crucial importance. They also meet people from upper gentry who live at Netherfield, Mr. Bingley, his sisters and Mr. Darcy.

“The social stratification was not absolute” (Teachman 4). The father of Mrs. Bennet was a country lawyer in Meryton and she became a member of gentry through her marriage with Mr. Bennet, who is a gentleman “a man who has sufficient income from property he owns not to have to work in a profession or trade to support his family” (Teachman 1). Mr. Phillips, the husband of Mrs. Bennet’s sister is a lawyer and her brother, Mr. Gardiner, is a tradesman. They do not belong to gentry and therefore among “good connections”, however they belong to the family and the Bennets are on good terms with them.

During her visit at her friend Charlotte’s, Elizabeth is often invited to the manor house Rosings. Its owner, Lady Catherine de Bourgh is an aristocrat and manifests her superiority to her visitors of lower rank. People like Mr. Collins and Mary Lucas are amazed by her title and fortune and assume that such a person is always right and blindly fulfil her orders and repeat her opinions. For Elizabeth, she is a haughty lady and she does not feel inferior to her.

Little Women and Good Wives

The Marches lost their property, not their social status. They still belong to the middle class and have connections with high society. However, the girls are afraid to be pitied for their poverty.

Jo and Meg are invited to a Christmas party and Meg who is very sociable makes friends and is invited to spend two weeks with the Moffats, a local wealthy family in the spring. In the beginning, Meg is very impressed by the life of high society and soon begins “to imitate their manners and conversation” (Alcott 83) and enjoys going to theatre, and opera, and dancing at balls. However, at the end of her stay, she is disappointed by her hosts who are rather shallow and “not particularly cultivated or intelligent people” (Alcott 83).

Jo does not have ambitions to fit in high society because she does not like to dissimulate, and social conventions are binding for her. She prefers the company of several people she particularly likes because she can be natural with them and, family, or herself. Beth is very timid and taciturn and does not aspire to meet socially anyone but her family, Laurie and his grandfather. She was even too shy to go to school and she was educated at home.

Amy, on the contrary, was very popular at school and when she grows older she is very sociable. She keeps in touch with local wealthy families and often goes to courtesy calls. Maintaining such relations is very important for someone who aspires to rise on the social ladder. She would like to involve Jo as well, but she is uninterested and behaves inappropriately in public. However, Amy’s efforts are rewarded, and she is offered a table at a local fair which is “very elegant and select that it was considered a great honour by young ladies of the neighbourhood to take a table” (Alcott Wives 265). This event is a very prestigious event and Amy’s hand-painted goods is a great success, even though the daughter of the organizer envies her a good location of her table and convinces her mother to give Amy a worse selling place.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical part shows that the society in both countries considered marriage to be the best possible path for women. In the 19th century, the former concept of getting married for money was began to be replaced for the idea of marrying for love. In both countries married women were not allowed to possess property, whereas unmarried women or widows could come into it by purchase, sale or inheritance. The main difference was the approach to women's work and spinsterhood. Married women were supposed to be taken care of by their husbands. That is one of the main reasons of getting married. However, unmarried women without male relatives who would provide for them were left to rely on themselves if they. Unmarried women in England might have forced to work by circumstances. However, it lowered their social status. Husbandless women in America had a bit more opportunities. They were allowed to work and have their own careers. Nevertheless for a married woman it was not very common to work because these women were busy with attending to their families. Daughters were often supposed to work to help their parents and it was quite usual that women did not get married at all and stayed with them and took care of them.

The practical part focuses on similarities between *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *Little Women* and its sequel *Good Wives* by Louisa May Alcott. The marital roles are the same in both novels – being a wife and care for the husband, a mother who raises children and a housekeeper who tends the household or supervises on the servants. Nevertheless, each woman takes her duties differently. Mrs. Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice* is fully occupied with looking for ideal husbands for her five daughters and it is the only matter she is really interested in and is not a good example for her daughters. Her husband does not like her anymore and treats her with disrespect. As the housekeeper she is not exactly economical. On the contrary, Mrs. March from *Little Women* and *Good Wives* could win the prize for the best mother in the world, in the first part she must replace both parents to her children because her husband is at war. Their marriage is harmonious even after twenty years. Their daughter Meg would like to be a good housekeeper, however she often buys unnecessary things which she cannot afford which she regrets after that. Her weakness for fancy things burdens the family budget when she is married. She is a woman who tends to dedicates herself more to her children than to her husband which brings about a marital crisis. Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice* and Amy March in

Good Wives both decide to marry for convenience. They both state reasons for better marrying someone who they do not love than to remain unmarried. Both these women seek chiefly for material support. Nevertheless, Amy March is younger, prettier, and lucky, and she eventually marries someone who she loves. Charlotte must settle for life with the odd and horrible Mr. Collins, but it is still a better option than leave her family in charge of providing for her.

Family relations, mainly relations among siblings are of great importance in both stories. In *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth and Jane find in each other sisterly love, support and understanding that they never find by someone else. Lydia and Kitty are also very close. Lydia, however, loves herself more than anyone else. All the Bennet sisters suffer under bad guidance of their parents because they are allowed to do what they want and are not punished for inappropriate behaviour. Jane and Elizabeth's efforts to reprimand their younger sisters are of no effect because they could not remedy years of negligent upbringing. Caroline Bingley and Georgiana Darcy are lucky enough to have wealthy brothers who provide them after their father died and they remained unmarried. In *Pride and Prejudice* is very important the social class. Mrs. Gardiner, a tradeswoman in a gentleman's family lowers their status according to upper social circles. However, the Bennets are not that much class-conscious and are with the Gardiners on friendly terms. Elizabeth and Jane are even closer to Mrs. Gardiner than to their mother.

The immediate family plays a special part in *Little Women* and *Good Wives* because the novels are based on the family and childhood of the author. The characters of the novel are idealized portraits of her mother, father and sisters. Especially Beth, whose name and destiny are identical in the book and in reality. Jo and Beth's closeness is analogically symbiotic as Jane and Elizabeth's relationship in *Pride and Prejudice*. Alcott further demonstrates her rivalry with her sister May on competition between Jo and Amy. In both stories there are aunts who want their relatives avoid marrying under their social class. Whereas Lady Catherine de Bourgh in Austen hates the idea of having in her family Elizabeth Bennet who is related to the Gardiners, Aunt March in *Little Women* simply likes her niece Meg and does not want her to live a miserable existence with a poor man. In Louisa May Alcott's novels there are also the Lawrences, Laurie and his grandfather, in Alcott's novels belong to the March family, even though they are unrelated.

As for marriage in these novels, all women who get married in *Pride and Prejudice* gain the social status of married women and will be secured by their husbands for the future. Elizabeth and Jane marry for love because they are virtuous. On the other hand, Lydia Bennet is a morally rotten person and her punishment is to spend her life with the corrupted Mr. Wickham. The marriage of Charlotte Lucas shows the sad reality of those who got married to an unloved man purely for convenience. Three March sisters in *Little Women* and *Good Wives* get married for love, including Jo who was decided to remain an old maid. The publishers rejected the idea of a main female heroine who deliberately chooses to be a spinsterish writer. Marriage and they lived happily ever after was considered to be the best possible ending. Another aspect of marriage is raising children, *Little Women* and *Good Wives* are focused on this matter quite a lot, whereas in *Pride and Prejudice* it is only mentioned that the Gardiners have little children and it is not shown how they raise them.

In *Pride and Prejudice* middle class women do not work. The Bennet sisters are secured during their father's life, however they might end up earning their living as governesses or teachers for girls because it went like this in the 19th century England. Mr. March in *Little Women* is still alive, however the family is very poor and he is at war, so the girls have to work and help the family survive. Jo in *Good Wives* earns money through writing short stories of arguable quality. Her aim is to gain money and secure her whole family.

The social class determines the position in the society. The fact that Mr. Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice* is a son of a wealthy tradesman gained for his descendants a place among gentry. The impoverished Marches in *Little Women* and *Good Wives* are still members of the middle class, even though they lost their property. The heroines of all three novels struggle with the social conventions and their own anticipations, and an attempt to fit in the society.

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