

Jane Austen and Contemporary Romance Fiction: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Motifs

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá ztvárněním tří romantických motivů – od nepřátel k milencům (enemies to lovers), přátelství přerůstající v lásku (friends to lovers) a zakázaná láska (forbidden love) – v dílech od Jane Austenové a třech vybraných románech současné romantické literatury. První část práce obsahuje vliv Jane Austenové na žánr romantické literatury. Také vysvětluje literární termíny jako je romantický žánr, současný romantický podžánr a literární romantické motivy. Druhá část, komparativní analýza, ukazuje, jak jsou romantické motivy zastoupeny v těchto románech, *Pýcha a Předsudek* (1813) a *Láska po španělsku* (2021), *Emma* (1815) a *Láska a jiná slova* (2018), *Pýcha a přemlouvání* (1918) a *Risk* (2019). Také si klade za cíl porovnat jejich podobnosti a rozdíly. Navzdory změn v prostředí a kulturního kontextu, zůstává emocionální podstata těchto motivů nadčasová a fascinující.

Klíčová slova: Jane Austen, současná romance, od nepřátel k milencům, od přátel k milencům, zakázaná láska, populární motivy v romantické literatuře

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis explores three of the most popular tropes today – enemies to lovers, friends to lovers and forbidden love – in three of Jane Austen's works and three selected novels from contemporary romance fiction. The first part of the study contains Jane Austen's impact on the romance genre. It also introduces explanations of literary terms such the romance genre, the contemporary romance subgenre and the literary tropes. The second part is a comparative analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *The Spanish Love Deception* (2021), *Emma* (1815) and *Love and Other Words* (2018), *Persuasion* (1817) and *The Risk* (2019), the thesis aims to compare the similarities and differences in the tropes of these novels. Regardless of changes in settings, tone and social expectations, the emotional core of these tropes remains timeless and captivating.

Keywords: Jane Austen, contemporary romance, enemies to lovers, friends to lovers, forbidden love, popular romance tropes

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INTRODUCTION

The appeal of the romance genre is present across many generations. The genre offers not only emotional reassurance but also insight into the values and expectations of the time the central story is set in. Jane Austen is one of the most influential authors for romance genre, as her novels are the foundations for today's romance genre, as we know it. Over two centuries later, the romance genre is one of the most read and the most commercially successful literature genre of fiction. Recent statistics reveal that romance novels generate over \$1.44 billion annually, which makes romance the highest-earning genre of fiction. With the contemporary romance fiction subgenre reaching heights of popularity through digital platforms and book communities on social media.¹

This bachelor's thesis is going to focus on the most popular tropes in contemporary romance fiction and their representation in Jane Austen's novels. The first of them is enemies to lovers, where the protagonists start their journey as antagonists and end up as lovers. The second trope is friends to lovers, which depicts the gradual evolution of friendship into a romantic relationship. The final, forbidden love, depicting a romantic relationship that is obstructed by external or social constraints. While much has been written about Austen's contributions, there is a lack of focused comparative research examining how these specific tropes are used differently in her works compared to contemporary romance fiction. Understanding the differences and also the similarities provide insight into how romantic ideas have changed and to what extent they remained the same over time.

The thesis statement of this study is that the tropes of enemies to lovers, friends to lovers, and forbidden love are both portrayed in Jane Austen's novels and contemporary romance fiction show similarities and differences. This thesis aims to explore the portrayal and transformation of the mentioned tropes through a comparative analysis of Jane Austen's novels *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1815) and *Persuasion* (1817), and selected examples of contemporary romance fiction *The Spanish Love Deception* (2021), *Love and Other Words* (2018) and *The Risk* (2019). It will analyse the themes and character development that shape how romance is resolved in both the Regency era and today's world.

¹ Dimitrije Curcic, "Romance Novel Sales Statistics," *WordsRated*, October 9, 2022, <https://wordsrated.com/romance-novel-sales-statistics/>

1 JANE AUSTEN AND ROMANCE GENRE

Jane Austen was born on 16 December 1775 in Steventon, near Basingstoke, Hampshire as the seventh of eight children in an educated and lively family. She was the second daughter of the rector, George Austen, and his wife, Cassandra.

We know about her joyful upbringing from a first memoir [A Memoir of Jane Austen] that was written shortly after her death by her nephew Edward Austen-Leigh, niece Anna Austen and niece Caroline Austen. In the morning, the children played together. In the afternoon, their parents came to play with them. They did puzzles, danced and in the evening, they read together. Growing up, Jane was used to being always together with her sister, Cassandra. When Cassandra grew up and left the house, Jane became very shy because she suddenly felt helpless without having her around.²

According to Lucy Worsley, the basis for their strong relationship was how much time they spent together in their childhood. Later on, Jane became very productive and creative in letter writing. Worsley says that she wrote letters that were mainly addressed to Cassandra because other members of her family had strong reproaches, and as Worsley mentions, she was not as close with them as she was with Cassandra. We do not know the exact reason why the family was opposed to the letters. Worsley suggests that the reason for that might have been that she was writing about domestic duties women had to secure while being able to find time for her writing. Fortunately, that did not stop her. Thanks to those extensive letters, we now know her detailed lifestyle.³

Other than that, it seems that all the siblings have gotten along very well. When little Jane started taking lessons in reading and writing, it was just during the Age of Enlightenment in Europe. According to Phillips, the occurrence of the Enlightenment paved the way for the formation and succession of Austen's age.⁴

A young Jane, learning to read and write for the first time in the 1770s and 1780s, would have grown up amidst the smoking gun left in the wake of Enlightenment's shot through Europe. Ripping through the loose seam first torn by the Reformation, the thoughts – accepted for centuries – that

² Marilyn Butler, "Austen, Jane," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/904>.

³ Worsley, Lucy, *Jane Austen at Home*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017), 11.

⁴ Elisabeth Phillips, "Jane Austen: A Study on the Influences, World, and Character of an Eighteenth-Century Novelist," *Bound Away: The Liberty Journal of History* 5, no. 1 (2022): 4-5, 20-21, <https://doi.org/10.70623/YRIR8982>.

formed the basis for European society were mortally wounded, leaving behind doorways for new movements, writings, and characters.⁵

The changes that came with ending one era opened the door to incoming Enlightenment with the openness to create new scenarios, characters and relationships, this event holds such a big impact on Jane's writing.⁶ Her novels were used to educate women in political economy, Evangelicalism, and biological definitions of women, which aimed to position women within the household.⁷ Other than that, Deirdre Le Faye says that Austen got her education from her father, who was teaching her brothers. By virtue of her father's library, she got to read about Aristotle and many Enlightenment philosophers and writers.⁸

When somebody mentions the name, Jane Austen, one can imagine the word romance. Even though Jane had many suitors, even a proposal, she turned down every love interest. Therefore, she never married and chose to spend her life alongside her family in spinsterhood.⁹

Joan Perkin writes, that marriage partnerships during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when Jane lived and wrote, were primarily determined by wealth and social status rather than emotional connections or romantic love. As Perkin explains further, for women especially, marriage was one of the few socially acceptable ways to secure their future, as they had limited income opportunities.¹⁰ This deeply affected Austen's work, which critiques the social pressure that is placed on women to prioritize wealth and status over affection, just as one can see in *Persuasion* (1817). However, rather than focusing on politics, Sutherland writes, that Austen explores mainly the domestic life.¹¹ That is why Jane drew her storytelling predominantly from her friendships. Mostly women's friendships and the society life were her inspiration.¹²

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Betty A. Schellenberg, "Review: Enlightenment and the Writing Self in Eighteenth-Century Britain." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (2010): 290–291.

⁸ Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen's Country Life* (London: Francis Lincoln Limited, 2014), 46–47.

⁹ Phillips, "Jane Austen: A Study on the Influences, World, and Character of an Eighteenth-Century Novelist," 12.

¹⁰ Joan Perkin, *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (Chicago: Lyceum Books, 1989), 6–8.

¹¹ Kathryn Sutherland, "Jane Austen: social realism and the novel," *British Library*, March 27, 2025, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/jane-austens-social-realism>.

¹² Phillips, "Jane Austen: A Study on the Influences, World, and Character of an Eighteenth-Century Novelist," 13–14.

Worsley claims that in Austen's novels, readers can see the reappearing theme of longing for home, a space of emotional security.¹³ Phillips reacts to this theme with a reflection on the societal conditions of the era, where women's sense of identity and stability was closely bound to domestic duties.¹⁴ "Laws preventing women from holding jobs, retaining their own funds, and inheriting in the same manner as their brothers ensured that women would be enslaved to the whims of men for the foreseeable future."¹⁵ Therefore, one can see how single women from Austen's class were overlooked during her lifetime. That is why we repeatedly see women yearning for independence, freedom and a stable home in Austen's work.

The search for a home must have been constantly on Jane's mind, as she was not provided by a husband and only earned a bit from her writing. This sense of instability and emotional tension then reflects into the experiences of her protagonists. For example, at the end of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), the daughters Kitty and Mary will leave their home, and there is no say in whether they want to or not. When reading her novels at first readers see the theme of love, but the theme of finding a happy home is also as important in her stories. Worsley mentions how Austen writes about the difficulty of finding a home where one can feel safe and happy.¹⁶ It was not easy only for spinsters, Jane's sister-in-law Fanny confessed in her letters that even after marriage she did not feel "at home".¹⁷

During Austen's lifetime, her works have not been classified as a part of the romance genre as we now know it. Yes, they are about marriage and courtship, however, they are mainly focused on the satire of society at that time. The main reason why her books became popular was how realistically she portrayed domestic life. She paid most of her attention to observing early 19th-century English society and its class structures. This led critics to categorise her work as part of the *novel of manners*.¹⁸ The term *romance* during that period often referred to works involving adventure and the supernatural, which were influenced by Gothic and Romantic literary features.¹⁹ Modern romantic fiction, with emotional intimacy, character growth and focus on resolution, had not yet emerged as a formal genre. Austen's

¹³ Worsley, Lucy, *Jane Austen at Home*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017), 2.

¹⁴ Phillips, "Jane Austen: A Study on the Influences, World, and Character of an Eighteenth-Century Novelist," 11.

¹⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶ Worsley, Lucy, *Jane Austen at Home*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017), 10.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "novel of manners," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed December 21, 2024.
<https://www.britannica.com/art/novel-of-manners>.

¹⁹ "Gothic novel," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed March 20, 2025.
<https://www.britannica.com/art/Gothic-novel>

work stood apart, she was blending realism, irony and character-driven narratives, that reshaped literary expectations.²⁰ In *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction*, one can read that Austen's novels began to be recognized in the 19th century. Austen published her novel *Northanger Abbey* (1817) with its Gothic elements; however, she also included her main protagonists to undergo personal growth through their love relationship.²¹ Her emphasis on the emotional and moral development of her characters, particularly her heroines, laid the groundwork for the character-driven narratives that define the genre today.²²

Jane Austen was one of the first authors who introduced a new type of fiction. The story was centred around a female protagonist. While contemporary romance novels have now countless authors and protagonists of diverse genders, races, sexualities, and abilities, historically, the genre distinguished itself by being primarily written by women, for women, and focusing on women's experiences.²³ Putting the individual's emotional journey in the center no matter the restrictions from society has influenced countless authors and continues to resonate with readers today. Her writing also inspires numerous TV and film adaptations due to the appeal of her storytelling.²⁴

However, Austen was not always a famous author. Throughout her life, her work was published anonymously. She received good reviews and sales, for example, for *Pride and Prejudice*, but still, she was in no sense a famous writer. It changed after the publishing of her memoir, which was written by her nephew with the help of his half-sisters. Jane reached a broader audience and became a significant literary figure in today's world.²⁵

1.1 Romance and Contemporary Romance Fiction

According to Ramsdell and Tixier Herald, romance literature has its rules which must be followed. There are four of them. First, the storyline has to centre around the evolving

²⁰ Kathryn Sutherland, "Jane Austen: social realism and the novel," *British Library*, March 27, 2025, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/jane-austens-social-realism>.

²¹ Jayashree Kamblé, Eric Murphy Selinger and Hsu-Ming Teo, *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 32.

²² Rachel M. Brownstein, "The Enduring Legacy of Jane Austen," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed December 21, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/The-Enduring-Legacy-of-Jane-Austen-2213888>.

²³ Kristin Ramsdell and Diana Tixier Herald, *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre* (Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited, 2012), 4, 22-23.

²⁴ Katie Halsey. "Jane Austen's Global Influence." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* (2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.279>

²⁵ Rachel M. Brownstein, "The Enduring Legacy of Jane Austen," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed December 21, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/The-Enduring-Legacy-of-Jane-Austen-2213888>.

romantic relationship or courtship between the main characters. Second, there must appear “HAE – Happily Ever After” ending or some other pleasing type of ending. Then, the plot must be emotionally engaging for the reader. The final point says that if there are any other subplots, the romance plot must be settled as the last one.²⁶

The term romance in the 19th century referred broadly to Gothic novels that included emotional excess, moral instruction, or fantastic elements, which is quite different from the modern understanding of the genre.²⁷ Writers like Jane Austen began to shift this perception by romantic narratives in domestic settings and focusing on character development rather than on dramatic plots. In the 20th century, romance gradually evolved into a clear literary genre that follows Ramsdell and Tixier Herald rules. This transformation was because of cultural changes, the rise of mass-market publishing, and the shift in diversification of romantic protagonists and relationships.²⁸

The whole romance genre has evolved significantly, and nowadays, we can identify multiple subgenres. As Frantz and Murphy Selinger write, the journey of academic study that this field had to go through was not easy. As this genre is mainly written and consumed by women, the reason for the slow evolvement might have been because of the historical position that women have been in.²⁹ The majority of people consider the contemporary romance subgenre of romance fiction itself.³⁰ Nevertheless, there are many more romance subgenres, such as historical romance, young adult romance, paranormal romance, erotic romance, and many more that are included in *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction*.³¹ The contemporary romance subgenre, however, follows its own rules and definitions. For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to define these rules, as the focus will be on the comparison between Jane Austen’s books and contemporary romance books. The reason why the analysis will be comparing Jane Austen’s books with this subgenre is that, as Paluri Lavanya and Dr. Priya Raghav explain in their research article,

²⁶ Kristin Ramsdell and Diana Tixier Herald, *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre* (Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited, 2012), 4.

²⁷ “Gothic novel,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed March 20, 2025.

<https://www.britannica.com/art/Gothic-novel>

²⁸ Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), part 3, chap. 6, 59-61.

²⁹ Sarah S. G. Frantz and Eric Murphy Selinger, *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction: Critical Essays* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2012), 2-3.

³⁰ Ramsdell and Tixier Herald, *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*, 47.

³¹ Jayashree Kamblé, Eric Murphy Selinger and Hsu-Ming Teo, *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), v-vi.

Austen's novels explore themes of romantic relationships, love and marriage.³² Plus, all of them contain settings which take place during her lifetime. These themes and the current settings are represented in the traditional contemporary romance subgenre.³³

In contemporary romance, the romance is to be set in the contemporary world, which means any time after World War II. However, it is not so clear-cut as Ramsdell and Tixier Herald mention. For example, Cat Sebastian's *We Could Be So Good* (2023) is set in the 1960s and was marketed as a historical romance.³⁴ Along with that, the main characters try to find fulfilment not only in their love life, but they also focus on their professional and personal growth.³⁵

Ramsdell and Tixier Herald later write that this definition is not the only thing that differentiates the subgenre from the main one, where the plot is mainly focused on the development of a romantic relationship. In straight contemporary romance fiction, the heroine is also more focused on her own journey. She searches to find her happiness and potential through her romantic, personal and professional life.³⁶ Over the course of the plot, the heroine must overcome many obstacles and face many struggles. In the end, however, she gets to her happy ending, which is not only getting married or having a child, but she is also doing well at her job, usually gets promoted or in general is more appreciated and taken seriously.³⁷

In the 1970s, there was a new emergence in romance fiction, which put emphasis on taboo scenarios, such as teen pregnancy, abortion, suicide, drugs, abuse and sexual orientation. Out of this came nowadays so-called queer romance. Queer romance also known as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Romance is defined by its main characters and their queer sexual orientation.³⁸ It is also important to say that we distinguish straight contemporary romance and queer contemporary romance. Although queer counterparts exist, this thesis is only going to revolve around terms heroine and hero and will describe tropes which are typical for straight romance.

³² Dr. Priya Raghav et al., "Love and Marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*: A Comparative Study of Austen's Portrayal of Romantic Relationships," *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice* 29, no. 3 (2023): 1272, <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v29i3.8870>.

³³ Ramsdell and Tixier Herald, *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*, 51.

³⁴ Cat Sebastian, *We Could Be So Good* (Avon, 2023), accessed April 10, 2025, <https://www.amazon.com/We-Could-Be-So-Good/dp/0063272768>

³⁵ Ramsdell and Tixier Herald, *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*, 47.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 367-368.

The character of the main heroine may vary. She might be, for example, the stereotypical eldest daughter, who grew up into a very independent, strong and sarcastic woman. On the other hand, there might be a woman lead who is very bubbly, innocent, and sweet but not as confident. These two are just highly popular examples of endless combinations of the heroine's personalities. Countless combinations of these personalities exist in contemporary romance fiction.³⁹

As Ramsdell and Tixier Herald claim, male leading characters are also represented in various forms and have many faces, although they are mostly presented as strong, smart, dominant and wealthy men. They are typically reserved with their feelings and at first not emotionally available. This first type of male hero is called the alpha.⁴⁰ The opposite of that type is named by Ramsdell and Tixier Herald the beta hero, who is less popular in the contemporary romance genre. He is gentler and more sensitive and has a generally good personality, which appears very attractive in some scenarios.⁴¹ The authors agree that most of the heroes nowadays contain features of both of these stereotypes. They also write that another trend for male heroes is to appear very mysterious, thinking they do not deserve love. That is usually caused by their childhood trauma or troubled past with women. Nevertheless, they have a soft side in them that only the heroine can see. Later on, they accept their feelings and get together with their female protagonist.⁴²

Supporting characters frequently appear with less description of their character. Ramsdell and Tixier Herald write that they are represented in character stereotypes such as toxic ex, the best friend, the villain and others. Their main purpose is to provide more information and background for the main characters and their storyline. If the story is a part of a series, their plotline might be further developed.⁴³

Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre says that the general appeal and success of contemporary romance fiction has two reasons.⁴⁴ The first reason the authors list is how readers like the familiar setting. It is the same present we live in and we are used to it. The audience essentially knows from the very first opening of the book what they are getting.⁴⁵

³⁹ Kristin Ramsdell and Diana Tixier Herald, *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre* (Santa Barbara: Libraries), 49.

⁴⁰ Ramsdell and Tixier Herald, *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*, 50.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ramsdell and Tixier Herald, *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*, 55.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Contrarivise, Kristin Ramsdell and Diana Tixier Herald claim that the plot resonates with our dream reality.⁴⁶ We might glamorize reality as something it could be, but necessarily, it is not. Some readers just want to experience everyday life that is about ordinary things, however evolves into hopeful result. The authors examine this on the game of “What if...” as it is also a big attraction.⁴⁷ “What if I moved across the world and lived in a beach town?” “What if I met a cute guy at a bus station?” “What if I inherited half a million?” Contemporary romance allows to experience the reader all of these questions. With its endless types of possible scenarios, the subgenre gives great diversity for anyone to find what they enjoy in a romance.⁴⁸

1.2 Selected Romance Tropes

In the romance genre, the central plot is called a trope. It is the central concept of the narrative, and it enables the author to give guidelines for the plot. For a reader, a trope provides a framework with excitement and lures them into what to expect. Besides that, the audience is also curious about the author’s creativity in the plot, knowing that the ending will be happy in order to be a romance. In *10 Common Romance Tropes...Plus, how to write them* by Kerrie Flanagan we get to understand why readers love romance tropes. She explains that the appeal comes from already knowing what one can expect but still being surprised by unique subplots.⁴⁹

The following tropes are some of the most used tropes of all. It is proven by their ever-increasing popularity in contemporary romance fiction. Today, with the start of BookTok - a community that talks all about books on the social media platform Tiktok,⁵⁰ these tropes are represented by tens of millions of videos with millions of views. This establishes today's relevance and general appeal of romance tropes today. Some of the most popular tropes listed in the top *21 Popular Romance Tropes for Writers* are enemies to lovers, friends to lovers and forbidden love.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ramsdell and Tixier Herald, *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*, 55-56.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁹ Flanagan, Kerrie. 2021. "10 COMMON romance TROPES ...Plus, how to write them." *The Writer*, 02, 19-20. <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/10-common-romance-tropes-plus-how-write-them/docview/2487475938/se-2>.

⁵⁰ “BookTok,” Urban Dictionary, March 25, 2021, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=booktok>

⁵¹ Robert Lee Brewer, "21 Popular Romance Tropes for Writers," *Writer's Digest*, February 9, 2024, <https://www.writersdigest.com/write-better-fiction/popular-romance-tropes-for-writers>.

In the Czech language, the word trope carries a different meaning. Motif is the closest name we can use when talking about contemporary romance tropes, but for the purposes of my thesis, as it is written in English and it centers on contemporary romance, in the context of which the term trope is used most often, I will be operating with the term trope rather than motif.

1.2.1 Enemies to Lovers

Enemies to lovers trope is one of the most used and popular trope in contemporary romance fiction. The course of the storyline defines this trope. At the beginning of the story, the two main characters feel negative emotions toward each other, however as the storyline progresses their resentful feelings and inner conflict change into a strong connection that develops into a love relationship.⁵²

In the beginning, the heroine with the hero hate each other. Naturally, hate may be for some scenarios too much of a strong word, however in most cases the main leads have experienced some miscommunications and that is why they despise, or even loathe each other. As mentioned, these feelings of hatred are usually caused by misunderstandings. For example, one of the main characters overheard the other one talking badly about them. Unfortunately, she or he heard just a part of the conversation and did not hear the rest which explains that they did not mean what they said harshly. Or the main character might be childhood enemies, hating each other because of some trivial thing that happened when they were 6 but still holding grudge for that. On a more serious note, other examples of their inner conflict may be class difference, animosity between their families, or the fact that one of them was physically or mentally abusive toward the other. This is depicted in many stories as one of them was bullying the other in their childhood or youth. No matter the reason for their bickering, they take it very seriously and would have never considered or admitted having romantic feelings for the other one.

Throughout the course of the story the heroes are usually subjected to another popular trope, which is forced proximity. Protagonists are put in the same setting and generally forced to work or live together. Somehow, they always appear in the same place at the same time. These coincidences without a doubt make them closer. They open up and share their thoughts and emotions to one another. After that they develop feelings for each other,

⁵² Jennifer Hilt, *The Trope Thesaurus: Romance: An Author Resource Guide* (Jempire Publishing, 2023), part 2, Kindle.

however they are not ready to admit or confess them. Later, they bump into obstacles and when they overcome them together, that is when they realize their romantic feelings. Additionally, during the narrative, the leading characters often have hilarious and cute banter among themselves. This includes making fun of each other and pulling pranks on one another, which then escalates into happy memories.

To summarize, the key elements of every enemies to lovers trope are initial conflict, banter, a transformation of the relationship, tension, and gradual emotional development.

The general appeal behind this trope seems to be simple. It appears that the more the couple hate each other at the beginning, the more they love, adore and are sweet at the end. Also, the idea of someone seeing your worst and still loving you is truly heartwarming. It is the biggest acceptance you can get from another human being, which is one of the basic desires of a human to have. This trope also raises great excitement in a reader because as rough as the start of the couple is, the characters have to mentally grow and evolve, which then leads to a happy and satisfying ending.⁵³

1.2.2 Friends to Lovers

Probably everyone has at least once heard that a woman and a man cannot be friends. This theory applies to friends to lovers trope. The trope is the opposite of enemies to lovers trope. Protagonists are from the beginning very close to each other. However, their feelings are only platonic. Throughout the storyline, their bond develops beyond platonic, and they fall in love with each other.

Another trope that often appears together with friends to love, however is not a necessity, is slow-burn. It is about the gradual and drawn-out process of the main characters falling in love, the opposite of instalove trope. Instalove trope is characterized by the feeling of falling in love at first sight.⁵⁴ This trope mostly relates to the main characters who are strangers. When protagonists are already friends, there is usually no sudden strike to wake up their feelings. Romantic feelings are developed gradually alongside familiarity and trust. Their relationship is not only established on fleeting lust, their connection is already built on much stronger principles.⁵⁵ This statement is supported by a study, *Friends to Lovers: It's*

⁵³ Flanagan. "10 COMMON romance TROPES ...Plus, how to write them," 21-22.

⁵⁴ Jennifer Hilt, *The Trope Thesaurus: Romance: An Author Resource Guide* (Jempire Publishing, 2023), part 2, Kindle.

⁵⁵ Smrami Patel, "Friends to Lovers: It's More Than My Favorite Book Trope," *Scientific Kenyon: The Neuroscience Edition* 8 (2024): 78–79, <https://digital.kenyon.edu/skneuro/vol8/iss1/10>.

More Than My Favorite Book Trope, where the author, Smrami Patel, dives deeper into the neuroscience behind this phenomenon and how our hormones affect it.⁵⁶

As stated by Hilt, this trope is about the shift in the main character's platonic relationship. One of them wants to move the relationship from platonic to romantic but is hesitant to do so because the other one wants to remain only as a friend. The core conflict lies in their different types of wishes.⁵⁷ The transition from friendship to romantic love is the key element in this type of love story. The characters mirror real-life relationships with strong and complex emotions. One of the protagonists is usually a so-called secret admirer and has their feelings hidden in front of the other one.

Familiarity is the main element that draws appeal to this trope. As mentioned above, the importance of shared history and emotional intimacy is crucial in modern romance. Romance readers will always appreciate seeing romance in familiar spaces, as that is how many relationships arise in real life – by beginning as close friends.

The obstacle and the actual plot come to the scene when the parties are willing to take up all their courage and reveal true emotions. Confessing real feelings is one of the scariest things, nevertheless wanting your friend to be happy, being jealous over their romantic partners, or just simply wanting to be physically closer to them can reveal that the friendship is moving from platonic into a romantic relationship. Which is a familiar and natural experience for most people. Friends to lovers trope also challenges the position of friendship in society. For society, romance is the ultimate form of emotional fulfilment put on a pedestal, while friendships are seen as less important. Research supports the preference for friendships evolving into romantic relationships. A study published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* found that two-thirds of participants reported their romantic relationship began as friendship. The study also highlights the importance of platonic relationship as foundations for romance.⁵⁸ When illustrating the strong friendship base and the struggles one has to overcome to get together with the other person, this trope shows that friendships are equally as capable of profound connection and long-term commitment as romantic relationships.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Hilt, *The Trope Thesaurus: Romance: An Author Resource Guide*, part 2.

⁵⁸ Danu Anthony Stinson, Jessica J. Cameron, and Lisa B. Hoplock, "The Friends-to-Lovers Pathway to Romance: Prevalent, Preferred, and Overlooked by Science," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 13, no. 4 (2022): 562-571, <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506211026992>.

⁵⁹ Flanagan. "10 COMMON romance TROPES ...Plus, how to write them," 25.

1.2.3 Forbidden Love

The last popular trope in the contemporary romance genre that my thesis is going to focus on is forbidden love. This trope can be traced back a very long time, to its probably most famous application in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The trope of forbidden love is about two individuals who must overcome usually a non-socially acceptable struggle together. So as one can see Romeo and Juliet are forbidden from being together and loving each other, due to being descended from enemy clans.⁶⁰

An additional reason for the unacceptable connection between the two protagonists may include cultural norms, class differences or moral prohibitions. Love is in this trope seen as the one thing one can not resist. It challenges personal and social boundaries. The lovers stay together in spite of external forces.

Primary features are as mentioned before societal or personal obstacles, which are overcome with strong emotional intensity. Often other themes involved are for example secrecy, passion and conflict between desire and duty. This creates increased tension between the leads, leaving the reader not knowing whether the characters will find their happy ending.⁶¹ When the ending occurs, readers is then satisfied to see that the couple in fact did find their happy ending.

According to Avci, this trope explores societal expectations versus the freedom of an individual. That is why this trope is very attractive and appeals to many readers. It brings empathy to the audience, as most people have to overcome hardships and difficult experiences.⁶² The general feeling of relatability and familiarity is very appealing to people.

Therefore, when an author grabs the reader's attention with this feeling and also includes characters who have a deeply passionate love story, there is no barrier for the story to become popular.

⁶⁰ Nilay Avci, "Forbidden Love of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and Fuzûlî's Layla and Majnun," *International Journal of Literature and Arts*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2016): 1, doi:10.11648/j.ijla.s.2016040101.11

⁶¹ "Trope Talk: Forbidden Love," Medium, accessed December 31, 2024, <https://medium.com/@frost5ive/trope-talk-forbidden-love-ae12db13a933>

⁶² Avci, "Forbidden Love of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and Fuzûlî's Layla and Majnun," 1.

2 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

2.1 Enemies to Lovers in *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Spanish Love Deception*

The novel *The Spanish Love Deception* (2021) was chosen as a counterpart to *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) because of its similarities in plot structure and underlying themes, particularly in its use of the enemies to lovers trope. In each novel, the romantic development is challenged by pride, miscommunication, and flawed first impressions, yet both couples undergo emotional growth leading to mutual understanding.

Along with the parallel trope, the character of Aaron Blackford in *The Spanish Love Deception* reflects many of the defining traits of Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. Both men are emotionally reserved, socially awkward, which leads to perceiving them as arrogant. However, as the story progresses, they are revealed to be loyal and deeply caring. For that reason, Aaron is the contemporary embodiment of the romantic hero prototype established by Austen. Janet Todd describes Mr. Darcy as a prototype of a main character hero who is wealthy but lacks good manners in the eyes of others. Despite that, he is capable of great personal growth through love.⁶³

This resembles the relevance of a comparative analysis, showing how the foundational elements of classic fiction continue to influence and shape contemporary romance fiction.

2.1.1 Overview

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* follows a family of six, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet with their five daughters, Jane, Elizabeth ("Lizzy"), Mary, Catherine ("Kitty"), and Lydia. The story is set during the Regency period in England. The main heroine is Elizabeth, who is an intelligent and determined young woman. In the story, she deals with love, family expectations, and social class constraints. The novel's central romance revolves around Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, a wealthy but seemingly indifferent aristocrat. Their relationship is considered the original embodiment of the enemies to lovers trope, marked by initial misunderstandings, clashing personalities, and gradual character development.

⁶³ Janet Todd, "The Romantic Hero," in *The Cambridge Companion to "Pride and Prejudice"*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 150.

The book's title comes from Darcy's initial pride and Elizabeth's prejudice. Darcy thinks less about Elizabeth due to her lower social status and Elizabeth forms an opinion about him only on his reserved nature and misleading judgements from others. These are the first impressions they form of each other; however, as the novel progresses, their initial opinions of each other change as they get to know each other better and both undergo personal growth. Darcy learns humility and demonstrates his love through selfless action, as he helps Elizabeth's family prevent a big scandal. Elizabeth's younger sister Lydia gets seduced by Wickham, a charming but insincere officer who then does not want to marry Lydia. Darcy then secretly pays off Wickham's debts and provides financial support to ensure he marries Lydia. Elizabeth then acknowledges her misjudgements and recognizes Darcy's true character.

Jane Austen focuses on themes of social class, reputation, and the transformative power of love. The love story is an addition to the character development of both the main characters. It relies on subtle tension and, as mentioned, character development to build emotional depth.

Elena Arma's *The Spanish Love Deception* is a contemporary romance novel where the enemies to lovers trope also appears. The story is about Catalina Martín, a Spanish woman working in New York, and her colleague, Aaron Blackford. Catalina is in search of a fake boyfriend because she needs an accompaniment to her sister's wedding in Spain. Aaron, despite being Catalina's workplace rival, unexpectedly offers to fill the role.

Their antagonistic relationship arises from past misunderstandings and Catalina's prejudices about Aaron's personality. Throughout the story, Catalina gets to know Aaron more thanks to spending a lot of time with him. Gradually, their aversion shifts into romantic tension, and Catalina begins to see Aaron in a different light. This book contains personal insecurities, cultural identity, explicit romantic scenes, witty banter filled with humour and modern workplace dynamics.

The enemies to lovers trope is one of the most beloved elements in romance fiction. It thrives on tension and character development, which makes the eventual romantic resolution more satisfying.⁶⁴ Both of these works mentioned before, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Elena Amras' *The Spanish Love Deception*, embody this trope, and yet they are adapted

⁶⁴ Nisha J. Tuli, "Romance Tropes: The Heartbeat of a Genre," Dabble, April 22, 2022, <https://www.dabblewriter.com/articles/romance-tropes-the-heartbeat-of-a-genre>.

in different ways due to the historical and cultural contexts in which they were written. This analysis focuses on three aspects: the initial antagonism between the main characters, the role of class and reputation in *Pride and Prejudice* versus workplace dynamics and personal insecurities in *The Spanish Love Deception*, and how misunderstanding plays a big role in preventing the persuasion of a romantic relationship.

2.1.2 Initial Antagonism: Pride and Social Class in *Pride and Prejudice* and Professional and Personal Dislike in *The Spanish Love Deception*

The origin of Elizabeth and Darcy's antagonism is in their strong clashing personalities, misunderstandings and stoic social class structures of the Regency Era in England. When they first meet at the Meryton Ball, Darcy's detached attitude and his remark about Elizabeth's attractiveness immediately set an offensive and negative tone: "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me."⁶⁵ Elizabeth, who is known for her sharp wit and independent spirit, is offended by his arrogance and forms a strong prejudice against him. This initial friction between the protagonists escalates when Darcy interferes in Elizabeth's sister's romantic prospects and later proposes to Lizzy in a manner that by mistake emphasizes her lower status, which further enlarges her resentment towards him.

Unlike the rigid class system in *Pride and Prejudice*, the dislike between Catalina and Aaron in *The Spanish Love Deception* grows from workplace dynamics and personal insecurities. Catalina perceives Aaron as distant, overly serious, and judgmental. She is convinced that he has disliked her from the moment they started working together. Aaron's nature is to be reserved and formal, which Catalina misinterprets as standoffish, and his remarks are seen as arrogant. Her and Elizabeth's points of view of their counterparts are very similar, as these traits are precisely how Elizabeth sees Darcy.

Different from *Pride and Prejudice*, where social class is a significant barrier, Catalina and Aaron's conflict is rooted in personal doubts, past relationships and professional competition, which reflects today's anxieties about self-worth and career growth. Catalina's initial resistance to Aaron's presence mirrors Elizabeth's wariness of Darcy, both heroines struggle with having misleading assumptions that make them resist seeing the true colour of their male counterparts.

⁶⁵ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Wisconsin: Global Publishers, 2024). Chap. 3, Kindle.

2.1.3 Class Reputation vs. Workplace Dynamics and Personal Insecurities

One of the most significant differences between the two novels is the source of conflict beyond the personal misunderstandings between the main characters. In *Pride and Prejudice*, class and reputation dictate social order and influence every aspect of life, including marriage. Darcy's initial hesitation to pursue Elizabeth is largely due to her lower social position. He comes from a family of wealth, which comes with choosing a bride of equal or higher status, and Elizabeth, as the daughter of a gentleman with small estate and rent, does not fit those standards and expectations. His first marriage proposal reflects these concerns.

He spoke well; but there were feelings besides those of heart to be detailed; and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority-of its being a degradation-of the family obstacles which had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit.⁶⁶

He confesses his love but is also focused on other feelings like pride and hesitation. He speaks about how difficult it is to love her, due to the subordination of her family, more than he expresses his actual feelings. He openly admits that a relationship with her would make him a "degradation"; it would be something beneath him and his social status. He expresses himself passionately as he is acknowledging his social sacrifice; ironically, at the same time, this does not help him with his proposal. In fact, Elizabeth is offended by his proposal because, in a moment that should be tender, he is insulting her and her family.

Elizabeth is just as aware of her reputation. She knows how her family is perceived by others because of their behaviour. Her younger sister is not proprietary and lacks decency, her mother is an obvious social climber, and her father is indifferent toward society. All these elements affect how others perceive her. Therefore, when Darcy highlights her and her family's social status, it aggravates and reassures her that he sees her as inferior. Elizabeth's famous rejection proves her strong sense of self-worth.

"From the very beginning-from the first moment, I may almost say-of acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form the groundwork of disapprobation on which

⁶⁶ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Wisconsin: Global Publishers, 2024). chap. 34, Kindle.

succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry”⁶⁷

The resolution of their conflict, leading to romance, depends on personal growth, Darcy humbles himself and proves himself through actions rather than words, while Elizabeth learns to set aside her judgements and see more than first impressions.

Compared to *The Spanish Love Deception* is set in a contemporary world where a traditional class structure is not the primary source of conflict. Instead, workplace dynamics and personal insecurities play a crucial role in shaping the romantic tension between Catalina and Aaron. The part of the source of Catalina’s insecurities is her immigrant status. She is not a native speaker therefore she feels like an outsider because she is from a different culture and has an accent. This is similar to Elizabeth, who feels out of place among the high aristocracy. She does not have the most top-notch manners, she cannot play the piano well, she likes to run outside in the mud and her family is somewhat vulgar, which Bingley’s sister or even Lady Catherine perceive as if Elizabeth is beneath them.

Catalina and Aaron are colleagues, their relationship is influenced by Catalina’s perception that Aaron is overly critical of her work. However, much of her dislike comes from her own insecurities, she assumes that Aaron’s criticism comes from a personal view rather than a professional one. They work in an engineering firm, so Catalina’s need to prove herself in a male-dominated field also contributes to her resistance toward Aaron.

There it was. The truth. The real reason why I, among the four other people sitting in this room, had been handpicked to do this damn thing. I was a woman – the only woman in the division leading a team – and I had the goods, no matter how generous my curves were or not. Perky, cute, female. I was the attractive option, apparently. I was being showcased to our clients as the golden token that prove that InTech was not stuck in the past.⁶⁸

She fears that she was hired just for her appearance and the fact that she is a woman. Catalina feels like she was picked as a “Diversity Hire”⁶⁹, where a firm recruits someone who is from marginalised groups just to show this person to their clients and partners as a proof of their company’s progressiveness. She wants to prove to herself that this was not why she was

⁶⁷ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Wisconsin: Global Publishers, 2024). chap. 34, Kindle.

⁶⁸ Elena Armas, *The Spanish Love Deception* (Simon & Simon UK Ltd, 2021), 25.

⁶⁹ "Diversity Hire – Definition and Explanation," *The Oxford Review*, accessed April 9, 2025, <https://oxford-review.com/the-oxford-review-dei-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dictionary/diversity-hire-definition-and-explanation/>.

hired and that she is capable of doing her job. This reflects her inability to accept any help or kindness from Aaron.

Meanwhile, Aaron's initial coldness is later revealed to be shyness and a desire to maintain a professional position, not a dislike toward Catalina. Their "simmering tension"⁷⁰, as Catalina's friend calls it, escalates between them when Catalina needs a date for her sister's wedding to avoid being pitied by her family. Aaron unexpectedly offers to play the role, which challenges Catalina's perception of him.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the protagonists are exposed to external pressure from society that dictates romantic possibilities, however, it also expresses how personal characteristics, such as Elizabeth's judgement about Darcy's distant and stoic nature and Darcy's pride about social status and class, stand in the way of pursuing a romantic relationship. Similarly, *The Spanish Love Deception* focuses on the characters' personalities being the main obstacle to their romantic encounter. Both Darcy and Aaron have emotionally reserved and socially awkward personalities, and both Elizabeth and Catalina form prejudices on these traits from the initial encounters with the male protagonist. Therefore, both of these books' main romantic tension arises not only from external expectations but also from the characters' feelings and faulty perceptions. Here we can see how relevant Austen's influence is to contemporary romance.

2.1.4 The Role of Misunderstandings in Romantic Development

For the enemies to lovers trope, a key feature is the role of misunderstandings that delay the romantic relationship, which then makes the resolution all the more satisfying. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the misunderstanding is presented in Elizabeth's initial belief that Darcy is cruel because she is tricked by Wickham's words. They support her first impression, as she interprets Darcy's reserve as arrogance and fails to recognise his social awkwardness as genuine kindness. In return, Darcy fails to recognize Elizabeth's self-awareness and makes assumptions about her based on the class she comes from, not on her character. When they both confront their faulty perceptions of one another, they open to heartfelt romance, enabled by their personal growth.

Similarly, in *The Spanish Love Deception*, Catalina assumes that Aaron's reserved nature and formal attitude mean that he despises her, when in reality, he has strong feelings

⁷⁰ Elena Armas, *The Spanish Love Deception* (Simon & Simon UK Ltd, 2021), 34.

for her all along. Therefore, her conviction is rooted in misinterpretation, not in reality. The unravelling of these misconceptions is gradual, thus, it adds depth to their romance, and Catalina starts to see Aaron as somebody who values her. In the epilogue, she admits to herself how miscommunication complicated their relationship: “Aaron was fully aware of the power he held over me, and I wanted it that way. Neither of us wanted a single unsaid thing between us. There had been plenty of those in the past.”⁷¹

2.1.5 Differences in Tone, Sexual Description, and Resolution

Despite their thematic similarities, these two novels differ in tone, narrative style, and the portrayal of romance. Austen’s novel is coherent with the decency of the early 19th century, which restricted emotional or sexual expression and emphasised propriety. The romance of Elizabeth and Darcy is built on dialogue, wit and the gradual realization of their deep romantic feelings, not at all on physical intimacy. Their resolution leads to marriage, which upholds social norms and celebrates emotional growth.

On the other hand, *The Spanish Love Deception* embraces the emotional and physical intensity typical for contemporary romance fiction. The novel contains explicit content with detailed descriptions of physical attraction and connection, which reflects today's readers' interest in intimacy in storytelling and the existence of erotic romance. Just like their whole relationship, the resolution of their initial animosity is much more openly affectionate, ending with heartfelt confessions and a more direct and emotionally expressive conclusion.

2.1.6 The Core of the Trope – The Power of Transformation in Romance

Despite the works having a difference in their setting, tone, and narrative, both *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Spanish Love Deception* represent the essential core of the enemies to lovers trope. From their initial dislike, they reach devoted love. Elizabeth and Catalina are the same in making a strong assumption and personal biases of their male counterparts from their first impression, which leads to misunderstandings. Likewise, Darcy and Aaron go through personal growth and character transformation that makes them more open and emotionally vulnerable. Making them the perfect partners for their heroines.

This trope shows and reflects the complexities of human relationships, which makes it resonate with readers and its ultimate popularity. It describes how pride, assumptions and social constraints can hinder connection, and how growth, understanding, and mutual respect

⁷¹ Elena Armas, *The Spanish Love Deception* (Simon & Simon UK Ltd, 2021), 446.

can overcome those barriers. Whether set in Regency England or a modern workplace, the enemies to lovers dynamic remains emotionally satisfying, which proves the timeless appeal of romance literature.

2.2 Friends to Lovers in *Emma* and *Love and Other Words*

The choice of *Love and Other Words* (2018) as a contemporary parallel to *Emma* (1815) is rooted in the shared use of the friends to lovers trope, a structure that emphasizes emotional intimacy developed over time. While many modern romances feature this trope, *Love and Other Words* has gained recent popularity, spending most of 2022 on the USA Today bestseller list, as Christina Lauren posted on Instagram, making this the authors' one of the bestselling titles after its release.⁷²

What makes this comparison especially meaningful is how both Emma and Macy gradually come to understand their own emotional vulnerabilities through reflection and the slow evolution of love, even though their personalities differ. Furthermore, Elliot in *Love and Other Words*, like Mr. Knightley in *Emma*, is portrayed as a steady and morally grounded figure who is there for the heroine not only as her romantic counterpart but also serves as a guide in her personal growth. This mirroring of characters and the emphasis on characters' development, which both of the novels have in common, is why *Love and Other Words* is a fitting subject for the comparative analysis with Austen's *Emma*.

2.2.1 Overview

Jane Austen's *Emma* follows the life of Emma Woodhouse, a wealthy and intelligent young woman whose greatest joy is matchmaking. The novel is set in England in the early 19th century. There are themes of love, self-discovery, and societal expectations, just like in *Pride and Prejudice*. Unlike Elizabeth and Austen's other heroines, Emma is not in search of a husband, she much rather prefers to meddle in the romantic lives of people around her because she believes and is convinced that she knows what is best for them.

Emma Woodhouse does not rush into marriage because she enjoys financial independence and social status, which gives her the rare freedom to stay single without risking her safety or reputation. Unlike Elizabeth Bennet, whose future is uncertain due to

⁷² Christina Lauren (@christinalauren), "Love and Other Words spent most of 2022 on the USA Today bestseller list and is one of our bestselling books five years after its release," Instagram, April 6, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cq261lrZkK>.

her family's lack of fortune, Emma has the privilege of choosing to marry completely on her own terms.

The novel contains several relationships, the central one being between Emma and Mr. Knightley. Mr. George Knightley is a close family friend who is sixteen years older than Emma. Different from other novels at that time, their relationship is built on mutual respect and understanding. Emma is confident about herself, she is convinced that she is wise and knows everything the best, Knightley is one of the few people who challenges her assumptions and offers honest criticism. Over the course of the novel, Emma undergoes significant personal growth, realizing her own imperfections, weaknesses and feelings for Knightley.

Austen is describing the insight into character development, as the reader follows Emma's journey from self-assured arrogance to genuine self-awareness. The friends to lovers trope is evident in her relationship with Knightley, as their long-established friendship turns into love. *Emma* is not a passionate or dramatic love story, it focuses on intellectual and emotional compatibility and emphasizes the idea that the best romances often grow out of deep friendships.

As Katherine Rundell writes for The Guardian, the story is rich in humour and offers a satirical look at the stiff class structures and gender expectations of the Regency Era.⁷³ Rundell says that Austen does not judge Emma's character based on her wealth or social status; she gives Emma and the reader lessons with each new character that arrives in Highbury.⁷⁴

Christina Lauren's *Love and Other Words* is a contemporary romance novel that explores themes of love, friendship, and second chances. The story is told through a dual timeline, alternating between the past and present, as the protagonist Macy Sorensen works through the difficulties of love and loss.

In the past, Macy met Elliot Petropoulos as a teenager, and the two of them develop a bond over their shared love for books and words and their friendship gradually blossoms into romance. Elliot is Macy's first love and their relationship is built on trust, understanding

⁷³ Katherine Rundell, "Much Darker Than Pride and Prejudice!," *The Guardian*, March 15, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/mar/15/much-darker-than-pride-and-prejudice-authors-pick-their-favourite-jane-austen-novel>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

of one another and emotional intimacy. However, a mysterious event causes a painful split between them, leading Macy to cut off contact.

In the present timeline, Macy is engaged to another man. She lives a traditionally structured life in a reserved emotional state until she unexpectedly comes across Elliot again. Their reunion forces her to confront the unresolved pain of their past and question whether their love ever truly faded. As they reconnect, Macy must decide whether she is willing to open herself up to love again or continue living an emotionally safe life.

The story deals with more intense emotions and personal trauma. It explores themes of grief, healing and the power of first love. The trope of friends to lovers is captured through Macy and Elliot's gradual transition from childhood companions to romantic partners, emphasizing the emotional foundation that makes their love so devoted. *Love and Other Words* takes the idea that true love never really disappears, even after years apart.

The friends to lovers trope at its heart explores how emotional intimacy, shared history, and gradual emotional shifts can create a compelling and realistic path to love. Its narrative can be inserted in both classic and contemporary literature.⁷⁵ Jane Austen's *Emma* and Christina Lauren's *Love and Other Words* are two novels that fit this trope, albeit in different eras and cultural contexts. *Emma* illustrates a story of romantic realisation rooted in social class and emotional self-awareness. Macy's and Elliot's bond in *Love and Other Words* is based on childhood trauma and healing through reconnection. This comparative analysis will explore how the trope is constructed and developed in both novels, focusing on character development, contrasts between the novels, and the storyline that results in the ending, where the protagonists get together.

2.2.2 The Foundation of Friendship

The foundation of friendship in *Emma* is established between the titular character and Mr. George Knightley through familiar and social proximity. Knightley is Emma's brother-in-law's brother and a frequent visitor at Hartfield, where Emma lives. Their connection is built on a shared social environment, familiarity and mutual respect. From the very beginning, Knightley is portrayed not only as a friend but also as somebody who sets moral beliefs and guides Emma through her actions, often challenging her opinions and questioning her

⁷⁵ Nisha J. Tuli, "Romance Tropes: The Heartbeat of a Genre," Dabble, April 22, 2022, <https://www.dabblewriter.com/articles/romance-tropes-the-heartbeat-of-a-genre>.

behaviour. As Knightley says, “Emma, you have been no friend to Harriet Smith.”⁷⁶ His words indicate that Emma’s desire to find a husband for Harriet is not a real friendship that is built on honesty and concern. She does not consider the fact that Harriet is not in her social class and almost deprives her of her only chance to get married.

In contrast, the protagonists of *Love and Other Words*, Macy Sorensen and Elliot Petropoulos, meet as teenagers when Macy and her father move into a weekend house after her mother dies. They find their shared fondness for books that evolves in the quiet intimacy of shared teenage experiences. One key moment that defines their friendship occurs when Elliot tells Macy, “I just want you to know you can talk to me.”⁷⁷ This simple yet powerful line illustrates the emotional safety and openness that define their friendship from the start.

The main difference in these initial bonds lies in the life stages of the characters. Emma and Knightley’s friendship blooms into a romantic relationship through intellectual equality and the time they spend together, while Macy and Elliot’s connection is emotionally intense from the start but is disrupted by trauma and time.

2.2.3 Slow-Burn Romance – The Path to Realization

Characteristic of the friends to lovers trope is the slow recognition of romantic feelings. Emma is at the beginning of the story determined to never marry and spends much of the novel playing matchmaker for others while remaining oblivious to her own feelings. Knightley, who is more self-aware, plays the role of a rational and supportive friend. Their dynamic is intellectually driven, much of their emotional development happens through conversation, observation, and internal monologue.

The turning point is when Emma realizes that she is jealous of Knightley’s potential affection for another woman, Harriet Smith. This moment of introspection forces Emma to confront her emotions. “It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!”⁷⁸ This sudden realization transforms the whole dynamic between the heroine and the hero and reflects on the interactions that led to it.

In *Love and Other Words* Macy’s and Elliot’s journey is similarly a slow burn, but with much more emotional outbursts. Their teenage friendship ends due to a misunderstanding that happens when Macy walks in on Elliot in an intimate moment with

⁷⁶ Jane Austen, *Emma* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2022), vol. 3, chap. 11, Kindle.

⁷⁷ Christina Lauren, *Love and Other Words* (New York: Gallery Books, 2018), chap. 6, Kindle.

⁷⁸ Jane Austen, *Emma* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2022), vol. 3, chap. 11, Kindle.

another girl. This is for Macy's invincible wound that she has carried for over a decade. When the two of them reconnect years later, and Macy learns that the whole incident was a misunderstanding, the romantic tension awakes quickly again however the healing process is gradual. Elliot expresses his unwavering feelings: "You are the love of my life. I assumed I would get over you eventually, but seeing you yesterday? I couldn't go home to someone else and pretend to love her with everything I have."⁷⁹ This heartfelt confession captures the opening for the resolution of the misunderstanding in their relationship.

Emma deals with the gradual awakening of romantic attraction, *Love and Other Words* dives into the slow process of finding trust and emotional intimacy again. Both of these novels illustrate how shared history intensifies emotional bonds, which then makes the eventual union more satisfying.

2.2.4 Social Class and Emotional Self-Awareness in *Emma*

Due to the time, when *Emma* was written, the novel is deeply interested in the societal hierarchies of Regency England, which significantly shapes the friends to lovers dynamic by class consciousness and the expectations placed on women. As the opening line of the novel tells the reader: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and a happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her."⁸⁰ our main heroine Emma is a wealthy, beautiful and independent woman, who has the luxury of rejecting suitors without consequences. Her social privilege leads her to arrogance and clouds her judgment, especially when it comes to matters of the heart. Knightley is in the same social position as her, and yet he is more grounded and honourable.

Their eventual partnership is less about overcoming external obstacles and more about Emma's journey toward her inner self. She must confront herself, her lack of empathy, and her egocentrism. It is only after she matures and recognizes Knightley's virtues and her own flaws that she can see him as a romantic partner. After that, Knightley finally confesses, "If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more".⁸¹ This iconic declaration shows the depth and restraints of his long-standing feelings that connect them and unite them as a couple.

⁷⁹ Christina Lauren, *Love and Other Words* (New York: Gallery Books, 2018), chap. 7, Kindle.

⁸⁰ Jane Austen, *Emma* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2022), vol. 1, chap. 1, Kindle.

⁸¹ Ibid., vol. 3, chap. 13, Kindle.

The social class dynamics also play a subtle role in Knightley's hesitance. He observes Emma's arrogant behaviour which concerns him, which suggests that their romantic compatibility depends not only on affection but also on mutual emotional maturity. Their story, therefore, is as much about self-awareness and personal growth as it is about love.

2.2.5 Trauma, Emotional Healing, and Personal Growth in *Love and Other Words*

In *Love and Other Words*, the barriers between the protagonists are not societal anymore, they are rather psychological. After Macy's mother's death and the emotional abandonment, she feels after her breakup with Elliot, she has a deep trauma that follows her in her adult relationships. She becomes emotionally closed off and chooses to get engaged with a man she doesn't truly love, rather than risking a loss if she would pursue a passionate and deeply emotional love.

On the other hand, Elliot has remained emotionally open, holding onto his love for Macy and hoping for a second chance. Their reunion is marked by steps toward trust, complicated by Macy's lingering fear of heartbreak. "Why can't everyone be like you?"⁸² Macy confesses. "I can be enough of your world that it feels like everyone is."⁸³ This line captures the unique emotional understanding between the two characters, even after years of silence.

A crucial emotional turning point in the novel is the traumatic misunderstanding from their teenage years. When Macy is ready to confess her romantic feelings to Elliot and become intimate with him, she finds him with another girl in bed. He actually did not engage in any romantic involvement with this other girl. Elliot was heartbroken and misinterpreted her absence as a rejection, not realizing her overwhelming feelings of grief and fear. That night, while emotionally devastated, he attended a party, drank too much and in a moment of vulnerability, ended up in another girl's bed. Nothing sexual happened, but Macy, after witnessing this scene, thought that Elliot had moved on. This painful moment shaped both of their lives. She felt devastated, so she cut off all contact, which resolved into a decade of pain. After eleven years, Macy finally gets to know what happened as Elliot finally gets to explain to her that he was drunk and thought that the girl who he had been with was Macy.⁸⁴

⁸² Christina Lauren, *Love and Other Words* (New York: Gallery Books, 2018), chap. 26, Kindle.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, chap 26. Kindle.

⁸⁴ Christina Lauren, *Love and Other Words* (New York: Gallery Books, 2018), chap. 43. Kindle.

The emotional healing in *Love and Other Words* is facilitated through shared memories, conversations, and the safe space of their earlier bond. This focus on inner connections and then reconciliation gives the narrative a raw emotionality that contrasts with the polite restraint of Austen's world.

2.2.6 Narrative Techniques and Structure

Austen uses a linear narrative in *Emma*, which allows readers to observe Emma's evolving consciousness in real time. To ensure that her realizations about love and friendship feel authentic, Dry says that she uses an omniscient and reliable narrator.⁸⁵ As a reader, one doesn't know much about Knightley's feelings as they are mainly revealed through dialogue. This structure supports the trope by keeping the romantic shift silent and deeply tied to character development.

Love and Other Words, on the other hand, uses a dual timeline that alternates between Macy and Elliot's teenage years and their later adult reconnection. This structure emphasizes the nature of their early developed bond that was so strongly developed that it still remained a key indicator for their adult relationship, while not forgetting the emotional gap between past and present. The narrative creates a contrast between youthful innocence and adult pain, enhancing the slow-burn effect and making the resolution deeply cathartic.

The use of first-person narration here allows a more intimate exploration of Macy's personality. Her internal monologue is filled with vulnerability, regret, and longing. The reader is drawn by this into her healing process. This contrasts with Austen's more detached style, due to the era she lived in and the social decorum that offered less emotional openness.

2.2.7 Resolution and Emotional Payoff

Both novels show a satisfying romantic resolution because it reflects the characters' emotional journeys. Emma and Knightley's engagement is a celebration of mutual respect, growth and compatibility. Their love, which is built over years of generosity, feels stable. As Emma reflects, "What did she say? Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does. She said enough to show there need not be despair and to invite him to say more himself."⁸⁶ Austen's subtle irony here highlights Emma's shift from the beginning of the novel, where Emma's character is depicted as a playful schemer, to the end, when she is a woman who is

⁸⁵ Helen Dry, "Syntax and Point of View in Jane Austen's 'Emma'," *Studies in Romanticism* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1977): 88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25600065>.

⁸⁶ Jane Austen, *Emma* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2022), vol. 3, chap. 13, Kindle.

deeply in love and ready for commitment. She gave Knightley just enough encouragement to let him know she felt the same, and she opened the door for him to continue. With that, she offered him emotional reassurance while still giving him space to fully express.

Macy and Elliot's reunion is more emotionally charged, fuelled by a decade of separation and unresolved longing. Their final coming together is not just a romantic victory but a testament to the healing power of love and the importance of emotional authenticity. "He winces, shifting his glasses up his nose, and studies me the way he always did, as if he could read my mind one blink at a time. Maybe he could." "Favorite word?" he whispers. I don't even hesitate: "You."⁸⁷ Macy says at the end, capturing the book's central message about the strength of the journey to rediscover their love.

While in *Emma* reader gets a subtle and graceful resolution, which highlights the historical context, *Love and Other Words* delivers a more emotionally explicit payoff, which highlights the contemporary tendencies. However, both endings are very gratifying as they are both rooted in the slow and important evolution from friendship to love, that Austen planted the seed for.

2.2.8 Similarities and Timeless Appeal of the Trope

Despite all the cultural and temporal differences, *Emma* and *Love and Other Words* are both novels that express the appeal of the friends to lovers trope. The emotional investment that comes from shared history, the gradual shift from platonic affection to romantic love, and the emphasis on mutual growth and understanding are crucial to both stories.

Both novels also highlight the importance of emotional compatibility over superficial attraction. Emma and Macy must undergo personal development before they can fully embrace love. The stories suggest that true love is not only about instant chemistry but also deep emotional connection, trust and patience.

In the end, this trope remains powerful because it mirrors real-life relationships, those that evolve through time and obstacles. Whether through historical ballrooms or modern bookstores, the journey from friends to lovers continues to captivate readers, offering great hope that love can grow from friendship rather than sudden passion.

⁸⁷ Christina Lauren, *Love and Other Words* (New York: Gallery Books, 2018), chap. 46, Kindle.

2.3 Forbidden Love in *Persuasion* and *The Risk*

The Risk (2019) serves as a contemporary counterpart to *Persuasion* (1817) for its use of the forbidden love trope complicated by family expectations and pressures. Brenna's conflict over pursuing Jake, due to his connection to her father, mirrors Anne Elliot's hesitation because of her family influence and lost opportunity. Both novels explore emotional maturity, which makes them compelling for a comparison.

2.3.1 Overview

Jane Austen's final completed novel, which was published after her death tells the story of Anne Elliot, a 27-year-old woman, who was eight years earlier persuaded to break off her engagement to Captain Frederick Wentworth due to his lack of wealth and status. Now Wentworth has returned to society as a successful and wealthy naval officer, while Anne remains unmarried, living with the consequences of her past decision.

This novel deals with themes of regret, second chances and the everlasting power of love. It presents a more mature take on romance, contrasting youthful passion with the wisdom that comes from experience. Anne is an older heroine, shaped by years of quiet suffering and societal expectations. When Wentworth re-enters her life, she has to handle her still occurring feelings for him while witnessing the apparent indifference he shows toward her. Austen builds tension between the former lover through subtle interactions and unspoken emotions, leading to one of the greatest love letters in which Wentworth confesses his unwavering devotion to Anne.

Like other Austen's novels, this one also critiques the rigid class structures of Regency England, mainly through Wentworth's rise in social standing.

A contemporary romance novel by Elle Kennedy *The Risk* is part of the Briar U series. It follows Brenna Jensen, a confident and ambitious college student, and Jake Connely, the star hockey player of her school's rival team. Brenna's father coaches hockey at Briar University's hockey team, while Jake is the captain of Harvard's team. Despite their evident attraction and chemistry from the beginning, dating each other would be a betrayal in the eyes of their schools and her father. This plot like this is the core foundation for the forbidden love trope.

Brenna is very independent and determined to make a name for herself in the male-dominated sports journalism industry. Jake, at first, cocky, competitive and only caring about

himself, gradually proves to be more than just an arrogant athlete. Despite their initial clashes, Jake supports Brenna's career goals and as their chemistry is undeniable, they take the risk of being together and their relationship develops into much more than just a physical attraction.

This book is filled with funny banter, steamy scenes and strong female energy. It reflects on contemporary relationship dynamics emphasizing career aspirations, gender dynamics and personal independence alongside romance. The "forbidden" aspect comes from external pressures rather than societal class barriers, which makes it more light-hearted and relatable for today's readers.

In romance literature, the trope of forbidden love is one of the most resonant themes, passing over historical periods and societal structures. This trope captivates readers by intensifying the tension between desire and restriction. The reasons for why the protagonists should not be together may differ, for example they can be restrained by external circumstances like social class and family expectations or by modern professional boundaries and reputational risk.⁸⁸ This analysis will examine how the trope of forbidden love is developed in the previously mentioned novels, Jane Austen's *Persuasion* and Elle Kennedy's *The Risk*. The focus will be on the romantic arcs of Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth, and Brenna Jensen and Jake Connelly that is shaped by societal pressures, personal consequences and the promise of second chances.

2.3.2 The Core of Forbidden Love – Societal Pressures vs. Professional Barriers

Persuasion depicts the love between Anne Elliot and Captain Frederick Wentworth that is not broken by their lack of affection, it is due to the heavy weight of societal prejudice which spreads into family pressure. Anne was just nineteen years old when she got persuaded into breaking off her engagement with Wentworth. It was because of his lower class standing, he was considered unsuitable for Anne's family, and because she, at that time, took the advice and opinions of her family seriously and trusted Lady Russell, she broke off the engagement. Austen writes, "She was persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing-indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it."⁸⁹ This proves her family's

⁸⁸ Elayne Law, "Trope Talk: Forbidden Love," *Medium*, July 26, 2022, <https://medium.com/@frost5ive/trope-talk-forbidden-love-ae12db13a933>.

⁸⁹ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, (India: Grapevine India, 2018), chap. 4, Kindle.

influence on her decisions, which sets the tone for a love story that is about the weight of expectations and missed opportunities.

The Risk by Elle Kennedy does not tell a forbidden love story that is rooted in aristocratic expectations; the novel is set in a contemporary context. Brenna is the daughter of a hockey coach, and she tries to become a sports journalist. She finds herself attracted to Jake, the captain of a rival university team. In their case, there are no societal class restrictions that would discourage them of pursuing a romantic relationship between the two of them; professional ethics and personal loyalties make their romance complicated. At the beginning of the book, Brenna describes their relationship in these words: “Connelly is the captain of the Harvard hockey team, AKA, THE ENEMY. Harvard and Briar are rivals, and my father happens to be the head coach of the latter.”⁹⁰ Because her father’s career is so important to him and Brenna already has a complicated relationship with him, she would not want to add another disagreement between them and risk his acceptance. She is also trying to get into her dream career of becoming a sports journalist which is a male-dominated industry. Her first interview for an internship shows how hard is to get into the industry. “This isn’t a paid internship. You are aware of that?” “Good. I find that while male applicants come in knowing the details, the female ones often expect to get paid.”⁹¹ This sexist remark isn’t the only one in the interview, despite the fact that Brenna does not back down and shows her confident self again and again.

Both of the novels demonstrate how love can be constrained by forces outside their control, even though the nature of these two books is depicted differently. Austen’s work critiques the rigid social structure of her time, while Kennedy illustrates how today’s women handle ambition and emotional vulnerability in professional areas.

2.3.3 Romantic and Emotional Tension

Both Anne and Brenna battle how to respond to the barriers that are placed on their romantic relationship. They wrestle with the consequences of loving someone they are “not supposed to”. This is the defining feature of their romantic journeys.

The main difference between the heroines is that Anne suffers silently. After being persuaded to end her engagement, she lives with years of unspoken longing and regret. Her heartbreak is also socially invisible and reflects that time’s expectations of femininity and

⁹⁰ Elle Kennedy, *The Risk*, (Elle Kennedy Inc, 2019), chap. 1, Kindle.

⁹¹ Elle Kennedy, *The Risk*, (Elle Kennedy Inc, 2019), chap. 4, Kindle.

propriety. Austen describes Anne as emotionally mature; however, her silence is due to duty and social style. “She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older: the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning.”⁹² In this bittersweet line, Austen captures the irony of Anne’s emotional journey, she comes to a realization only after she loses the chance to decide as her feelings tell her.

In contrast, Brenna is outspoken and unapologetically confident. She is shaped by the modern world, which allows her more autonomy but not necessarily more freedom from judgment. She doesn’t have the best relationship with her father. When she was a teenager, she got into a lot of trouble, and now her father is overprotective and judgmental about her decisions. After he finds out that Brenna is dating Jake, he assumes the worst, which leads to another conflict between them, which is Jenna’s initial reason for not being with Jake. “I want to go home and talk to him about everything, but I’m worried because I have such bad luck initiating heart-to-hearts with him. He’s so hard to talk to.”⁹³ This moment captures the gap between a parent and daughter that occurs in today’s world. Brenna wants her father to see her as a responsible adult and be proud of her. However, her father’s worries and assumptions stand in the way of their reconnection. These worries and assumptions are the initiative for Brenna to not be truthful towards her father at the beginning of the book and make her and Jake’s love “forbidden”.

2.3.4 What is “Forbidden”? Evolving Obstacles Across Centuries

The essence of what is forbidden in *Persuasion* and *The Risk* differs a lot. It reveals much about the historical and cultural background of each narrative.

Anne’s values in the Regency era are tied to marriage prospects. Captain Wentworth’s lack of status is, despite his respectable character, an unsuitable match for Anne. The “forbidden” aspect is deeply captured in class hierarchy. Anne sees Wentworth as: “Such confidence, powerful in its own warmth, and bewitching in the wit which often expressed it.”⁹⁴ However, Lady Russel opposes to her feelings: “She saw in it but an aggravation of the evil.”⁹⁵ She is genuinely convinced that Wentworth is not good enough for Anne by the standards of Regency society that dictated who women could and should marry.

⁹² Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, (India: Grapevine India, 2018), chap. 4, Kindle.

⁹³ Elle Kennedy, *The Risk*, (Elle Kennedy Inc, 2019), chap. 34, Kindle.

⁹⁴ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, (India: Grapevine India, 2018), chap. 4, Kindle.

⁹⁵ Ibid., chap 4. Kindle.

Brenna and Jake's forbidden love does not come from society structure but from the sense of betrayal. While there are professional concerns tied to her future career in sports journalism, the deeper tension stems from her relationship with her father, Coach Jensen. Brenna has always taken her father as somebody who she respects and knows how seriously he takes his team and the rivalry between his and Jake's team. In the beginning, Brenna does not know the exact reason why her dad hates Jake's coach much more than any other coach. However, she knows that she should not cross the line by dating somebody who is associated with her father's enemy.

Where Anne is torn between external class expectations, Brenna fears disappointing her father by emotional loyalty. Nevertheless, in both cases, the forbidden nature is linked to the heroine's relationship with a parental figure whose approval deeply matters. The disapproval is not because of the love interest character but because of how others see him and what he represents. Wentworth represents financial uncertainty and societal unacceptance. Jake represents Brenna's father's despise through his sports career. This creates a powerful inner conflict for Anne and Brenna.

2.3.5 The Role of Timing and the Power of Second Chances

In both novels, timing plays a big role in shaping the outcome of the romance. The couples are forced to undergo personal growth in order to get together as romantic partners.

In *Persuasion*, Anne and Wentworth are separated for eight years. During those years, Wentworth gains a fortune, which makes him a more suitable match for Anne. But despite that, it is not the reason why Anne desires to be with him. She is no longer easily swayed by society's expectations. She leans into trusting and acting on her desires now. The pair doesn't end up together because of a changing circumstance but as a result of Anne's assurance and Wentworth's long-lasting feelings. "You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope."⁹⁶ His declaration is not only a romantic turning point but a proof of true love that lasts despite societal interference.

For *The Risk*, the drawback is not in time itself, but the mature realization when Brenna understands that she needs to prioritize her happiness over her father's potential disapproval. Unlike Anne, Brenna is confident from the start, but her relationship with her father complicates her willingness to commit to Jake. "Thank you for being there for me."⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, (India: Grapevine India, 2018), chap. 23, Kindle.

⁹⁷ Elle Kennedy, *The Risk*, (Elle Kennedy Inc, 2019), chap. 33, Kindle.

This is her confession that follows after she opens up about her traumatic past to Jake; after that, she is sure about her strong feelings toward Jake, is ready to embrace them and accept Jake fully.

Just like Anne, Brenna is full of fear, Anne's fear of disappointing her social circle, and Brenna's fear of disappointing a beloved father. Both must overcome those fears, and after that, they are capable of entering those relationships.

2.3.6 The End – Love in the Face of Family

The final words of Austen suggest that Anne's happiness does not depend on social acceptance, but on her own. "She gloried in being a sailor's wife,"⁹⁸ this statement reflects Anne's character development from the woman who let's decide others about her life to one who makes decisions about herself. This goes hand in hand with today's expectations that are placed on young women and shows Austen's relevance on current audience.

For Brenna, the turning point that leads her toward her happy ending with Jake is when she opens herself to her father and honestly communicates with him. "I know you're ashamed of me. Trust me, I'm ashamed of myself for the way I behaved."⁹⁹ She lets herself be vulnerable and is, for the first time, honest about her feelings with her dad. By shedding her false façade, she opens the door to the reconnection with her father, which has been such a huge burden on her.

The freedom that both of the women earn after their reconciliation is what makes the trope so appealing to the reader. The source of the couple's forbidden love, whether aristocratic disapproval or parental concern, is still present, but it no longer holds power over the characters.

2.3.7 Love Beyond Approval – A Trope That Transcends Time

Regardless of the differences in time, setting and style, *Persuasion* and *The Risk* deal with similar emotional dispositions. The forbidden love trope focuses on something universal: the tension between what is expected from us and what we want.

By comparing these two novels with one another, one can see how the fundamental elements of the trope remain powerful across centuries. These elements consist of judgement by others, conflict within oneself and emotional resolution. We can see that the thing that

⁹⁸ Austen, *Persuasion*, chap. 24.

⁹⁹ Elle Kennedy, *The Risk*, (Elle Kennedy Inc, 2019), chap. 36, Kindle.

differs is the framework in each novel. On one hand, we have Austen's world of aristocratic judgements. On the other hand is the world of Elle Kennedy, which revolves around competitive college sports. Nonetheless, both of them remain deeply human with real-life emotions. It is stories like these that remind us that love often asks us to choose between expectations and truthfulness.

CONCLUSION

Through the comparative analysis of Jane Austen's novels and selected novels of contemporary romance fiction, this bachelor's thesis has analysed the following three romance tropes: enemies to lovers, friends to lovers and forbidden love. The aim was to explore the similarities and differences between the selected novels, demonstrate how these tropes reflect the cultural discourse, what do they tell us about society believes, values and character dynamics across time. This study shows that romantic fiction not only entertains but also serves as an insider of cultural values, it shows how society constructs ideas of love and partnership, which makes this research of romantic tropes literarily and socially relevant.

The thesis was divided into two main parts. The first part introduced Jane Austen and her impact on romance genre. The chapter also introduced contemporary romance subgenre and the usage of three popular tropes I specified above. The second part offered comparative analysis of enemies to lovers trope between the novels *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *The Spanish Love Deception* (2021), friends to lovers trope between *Emma* (1815) and *Love and Other Words* (2018) and the forbidden love trope between *Persuasion* (1817) and *The Risk* (2019). The analysis proved that in each case, the emotional core of these tropes remains the same, as all of the compared novels have a lot in common. Enemies to lovers depicts how misunderstandings can be solved and lead to love, friends to lovers recognises trust and emotional intimacy between friends, and forbidden love shows its power through confronting difficult obstacles. The main differences were observed in different settings and social expectations. Modern narratives tend to explore love through trauma and personal growth, while Austen's works are mainly focused on social classes and their pressures. Regardless of these differences, the tropes show their relevance in their timeless appeal.

Finally, this bachelor's thesis comes to a conclusion that Jane Austen's work remains highly relevant as a foundation for contemporary romance fiction. Her novels continue to influence today's authors and their work. The thesis examined that the tropes of enemies to lovers, friends to lovers, and forbidden love are both portrayed in Jane Austen's novels and contemporary romance fiction. This thesis also analysed the portrayal and transformation of the mentioned tropes through a comparative analysis of the six mentioned novels. The persistent usage and commercial success of the mentioned motifs, that are in current discussions about the romance genre called tropes, reveal their flexibility to adapt to numerous contexts across centuries, which confirms the impact of the romance genre.

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