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THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL CLASS ON MARRIAGE IN PRIDE AND
PREJUDICE

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Na tomto místě bych ráda poděkovala doc. PhDr. Ladislavu Nagyovi, Ph.D. za odborné vedení této práce, vstřícný přístup, dobré rady a trpělivost při konzultačních hodinách.

Abstrakt

Cílem bakalářské práce je zhodnotit důležitost sociálního postavení a určit do jaké míry má vliv na utváření manželství v jednom z nejznámějších klasických románů *Pýcha a předsudek* od významné anglické spisovatelky Jane Austenové. V teoretické části popíši historické a společenské pozadí přelomu 18. a 19. století, ve kterém autorka žila. V praktické části se poté zaměřím konkrétně na manželství, která byla v románu utvořena a pokusím se určit, zda se postavy při výběru partnera nechali ovlivnit třídními rozdíly. Dále charakterizuji důležitost společenské třídy obecně a závěrem zmíním, jak se role ženských postav lišila v porovnání s mužskými.

Klíčová slova: společenské postavení, třídní rozdíly, manželství, vztahy, láska, bohatství

Abstract

The aim of my bachelor thesis is to consider the importance of social class and determine to what extent it influences the formation of marriages in one of the most famous classic novels *Pride and Prejudice* by the significant English author Jane Austen. In the theoretical part, I will describe the historical and social background of the late 18th and early 19th century, which is the time the author lived in. In the practical part, I will specifically focus on the marriages that were formed in the novel and try to determine whether the characters were influenced by class differences when choosing their partner. I will also characterize the importance of social class in general and mention how the role of female characters differs from the male ones.

Keywords: social standing, class differences, marriage, relationships, love, wealth

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1. Introduction

In my introduction, I would like to explain the topic of my bachelor thesis, which is called: *The Effect of Social Class on Marriage in Pride and Prejudice*.

Jane Austen, one of the best-known authors of England's Regency Era, wrote several novels in which she captures the lives of ordinary people living in the English countryside at the beginning of the 19th century. She describes them with ease, wit, and an ironic undertone and gives her readers an insight into the women's world in this period. For her main characters, Austen chooses young girls from middle-class families who experience falling in love for the first time. Significant topics in her works also include courtships and arranging advantageous marriages, and her characters must generally overcome many obstacles to get what they long for at the end. She also focuses on presenting her characters in the most realistic way possible and describes the relationships of people who find themselves in different social positions while setting certain moral lessons both for her characters and her readers.

The novel *Pride and Prejudice* was first published on January 28, 1813, and same as Austen's other works, it has become a classic and remained an influential work for another two centuries after the author's death.

In the first part of my thesis, I am going to characterize the historical and social background of the novel. Namely, I will discuss how marriages were formed in the time of Jane Austen, what roles women had both in society and marriages and, what were the most common professions for men. I will also talk about the author, mention how she decided to start writing, and to what extent she was influenced by her surroundings and the time that she lived in while working on her novels.

In the second part, I will focus on *Pride and Prejudice* specifically. I will explain the role of the female characters in this novel and how their lives differ from the males. Further, I will compare the four relationships that are formed during the novel and try to describe how these couples ended up together and what were their motives for getting married. My thesis aims to analyze if the different social classes of the characters influenced their decisions to get married and what values were taken into consideration when choosing their future spouse.

2. The introduction of Jane Austen

2.1 Life and work

Jane Austen was a significant English novelist active in the years that we call the Romantic period, and she has eventually become one of the "most widely read and loved of all the classic novelists of English literature."¹ To this day, her novels have remained popular, and she keeps on gaining new readers even though it has been over two centuries since she wrote her works.

Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775, in Hampshire, England, in a village called Steventon. Her parents were Reverend George Austen and Cassandra Leigh Austen, and Jane was the seventh of their eight children.² When she was only seven years old, she was sent away from home. Along with her only sister Cassandra, she was brought to Oxford to get some education.³ The Austen girls were later taken back home where they spent another year before leaving again, this time for the Abbey School in Reading. Here they learnt how to dance and play the piano. They were also given French, grammar, and embroidery lessons. In 1786, they were brought back home, the reason most likely being Mr. Austen's feeling that his daughters were not getting enough education for the prize that it had cost him. Jane had not visited any other school after that.⁴

It is obvious that after entering society, she enjoyed dancing and visiting balls a lot. She included full descriptions of them in her letters to Cassandra.⁵ She only received one marriage proposal throughout her life, by a man called Harris Bigg-Wither. She accepted it at first but changed her mind later for some reason and decided to call the engagement off. No other proposals were made to her, as far as known, and Jane ended up staying unmarried for her whole life.

The Austen family was moving a lot. By the time Jane turned thirty-five, they had changed the place of living more than five times before finally settling down

¹ COONER LAMBDIN, Laura and Robert Thomas LAMBDIN: *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies: A Social History*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000. ISBN 0-313-30662-1, p. 44

² TOMALIN, Claire: *Jane Austen: A Life*. London: Penguin Books, 1998. ISBN 978-0-140-29690-7, p. 1

³ Id., p. 35.

⁴ Id., p. 44.

⁵ BAKER, William: *Critical Companion to Jane Austen: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. New York: Facts on File, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8160-6416-8, p. 522.

in the village of Chawton.⁶ Jane Austen died on the morning of July 18, 1817, in Winchester where she travelled with her sister Cassandra.

Tomalin points out the fact that the life story of Jane Austen is a bit difficult to explore since there was no autobiography written by her. It is also not certain if she owned any journals in which she would record the events of her life because none were preserved. Most of the letters she wrote were destroyed by her family members and only one hundred and sixty of them have been maintained, however, none of them goes further than to the time when she was twenty years old. It was not until after she died that one of her older brothers, Henry Thomas Austen, recorded several pages about her life and thus created the very first memoir about her. After the fifty following years, which did not bring anything new in terms of written records about Jane Austen, it turned out that her nephew James-Edward Austen-Leigh had written a biography about her. Both he and Henry agree on the fact that the course of her life was rather uneventful, without bigger problems or difficulties she would have to face.⁷

Ever since she was little, Jane Austen dreamt about writing books and getting them published. She soon started working on making her dream come true and before she turned twenty-five, she had managed to complete her first three novels. She indeed had to wait for a long time before she was able to see her works on the shelves of book shops. On the other hand, Austen was lucky enough to write at a time in which women were starting to break through as authors, and having their books printed was more possible than ever before. In the eighteenth century, the literary market was becoming more available for women and the number of female writers kept rising. There were a lot of female novelists, and they had all managed to establish a market for their domestic fiction. The number of women, who wanted to try their luck in the field of authorship at that time, was huge and some of them, for example, Maria Edgeworth, Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Smith, or Frances Burney were even more successful than Jane Austen. They were able to get more recognition for their works and make much more money.⁸

Having written a short epistolary novel called *Lady Susan* in 1794, Austen began working on *Elinor and Marianne*, a novel that she was likely able to start and

⁶ DERESIEWICZ, William: *Jane Austen and the romantic poets*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-231-13414-2, p. 2.

⁷ TOMALIN, Claire: *Jane Austen: A Life*. London: Penguin Books, 1998. ISBN 978--0-140-29690-7, p. 4

⁸ COPELAND, David and Juliet MCMASTER: *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. ISBN 9780-521-74650-2, p. 13

finish within the same year. In 1796, she started writing *First Impressions*. After completing it, her father George Austen tried to sell the manuscript to a publishing house called Cadell, where it got rejected without anyone even reading it. After this attempt failed, Austen did not give up and decided to revise *Elinor and Marianne*, eventually changing the novel's name to *Sense and Sensibility* in the process. The next novel she then proceeded to work on was *Susan*, later to be re-named *Northanger Abbey*, in 1798, which she finished a year later. Once again, she offered the manuscript to a publishing house, this time to Crosby located in London, and she managed to sell it to them, however, they held on to the manuscript for a long time without printing it. In 1804, she started writing *The Watsons*, a story that she had never finished. It was not until the autumn of 1811 that her first novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, was published. A year later, she sold the revised version of *First Impressions*, now called *Pride and Prejudice*, to Egerton, and it was released on January 28, 1813. The novels that followed next were *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*.⁹ Her last two completed novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, did not come out during her lifetime. Their publication was organized thanks to one of her brothers, Henry Austen, the very same year that she passed away.

Jane Austen wrote all her novels through the eyes of her female protagonists. Even though it is sometimes expressed what the male characters are feeling or thinking, we can notice that there is never a scene in any of the novels where two men speak privately without female characters listening to them or being directly engaged in the debate. Leithart addresses this, saying Austen did not feel confident enough to write about private conversations between males, so she thought it best not to include them in her novels at all.¹⁰

Deresiewicz argues that while the first three novels that she finished (*Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*) are still excellent, amazingly confident, and with just the right amount of sarcastic undertone, they are a little different from the later ones. *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* "represent manifestly greater artistic achievements than do the first" because they are better developed and Austen goes in-depth of exploring the hearts of her heroines, rather than

⁹COPELAND, David and Juliet MCMASTER: *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. ISBN 9780-521-74650-2, p. 10.

¹⁰ LEITHART, Peter J: *Jane Austen: Christian Encounters*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009. ISBN 0-231-13414-2, p. 19.

just following the courtship plot and being mainly a matchmaker for her characters. This was most likely caused by the fact that she was twenty-three by the time she wrote her first three novels and thirty-five when she started working on *Mansfield Park*.¹¹

2.2 Jane Austen and social class

In terms of society, the Austen family belonged to the middle class, and Jane had to face the difficult situation of not having a husband.¹² However, she chose this life-path herself when she decided to decline the proposal she received, and, unlike some other ladies, did not see her fate as a tragedy. Newton remarks that she was by no means wealthy, and it was almost impossible for her to earn more money than she had. By the time she released her novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane shared a home with her unmarried sister and their mother, and that all their financial means consisted of £250 a year, which was the amount that Jane's brothers contributed to them, some money that Cassandra inherited and also the supply of money that their mother had, which was considerably limited as well. Thanks to her work as an author, Jane Austen was able to make some extra money herself, even though those £250 that she earned after publishing her earliest novels, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Sense and Sensibility*, were not that much of a help from a long-term point of view. From the written correspondence that she left behind, it was obvious that Jane suffered from the restrictions on women personally. Every one of her brothers had the opportunity to engage in a rewarding profession. Because they were men, it was naturally possible for them to gain property as heritage, and they did not have to be dependent on anybody. The annual income of her oldest brother James, who worked as a clergyman, was £1100. Her other brothers, Charles and Frank, both sailed to the sea as ship commanders. Henry managed to become a co-owner of a financial institution that was very prosperous. Edward did not work, but instead, he could settle in a large residence in the countryside that was bequeathed to him. It is interesting that in her letters, Jane never complained very much about the advantages her brothers had over her and Cassandra, although the inequality between men and women was perfectly evident.¹³ She seemed to take the whole

¹¹ DERESIEWICZ, William: *Jane Austen and the romantic poets*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-231-13414-2, p. 1.

¹² NEWTON, Judith Lowder: "'Pride and Prejudice': Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen." [online]. *Feminist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1978, pp. 27–42. [cit. 2020-03-07]. DOI 10.2307/3177624. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3177624>, p. 27.

¹³ Id., p. 27.

situation with ease, although she often wrote about how her brothers were gaining access to money or how they did not have to worry about finding a partner and getting married. While there are a few hints about the differences between men and women, most of the time Austen's "attitude toward the economic restriction of being a woman.... is, in the letters, amused, uncomplaining, without emphasis."¹⁴

Social classes and the distinctions between them were, naturally, not seen as anything unusual by the people of that time, Jane Austen included. To portray the characters and the relationships between them in the most realistic way possible, she knew she had to pay attention to people in real life and examine the slight differences between the classes carefully. Like McMaster mentions, the feeling of being oppressed by the social system was very much known to her, but on the other hand, because she did not have a husband and practically stood aside, she could not have had a more suitable position for studying the people around her. After her father's death, she could live in Chawton with her mother and sister Cassandra, who did not have a husband either, all thanks to the kindness of her brother, who was the owner of the house. She was also offered to spend time at said brother's residence in Godmersham whenever she wanted to.¹⁵

3. Historical background of *Pride and Prejudice*

3.1 Historical context

The life and work of Jane Austen belong to the turn of the 19th century in England. The period between the years 1811 and 1820 is called the Regency Era. England's ruler had been king George III. until then, however, his worsening health condition eventually made it impossible for him to remain on the throne. Sales says that he was generally believed to most likely suffer from melancholia or madness, even though, according to Sales, today's studies have mostly refuted this theory. The king had had health difficulties for a long time before his son ended up replacing him as Prince Regent. In 1788, a doctor was called to come to Windsor and try to cure him. The

¹⁴ NEWTON, Judith Lowder: "'*Pride and Prejudice*': Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen." [online]. *Feminist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1978, pp. 27–42. [cit. 2020-03-07]. DOI 10.2307/3177624. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3177624>, p. 28.

¹⁵ COPELAND, David and Juliet MCMASTER: *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. ISBN 9780-521-74650-2, p. 115.

king's condition had indeed improved, only to eventually relapse in 1810. The Prince of Wales was declared his father's Regent a year later.¹⁶ Jane Austen dedicated her novel *Emma* to him.

The naval and armed forces of England were getting significantly bigger throughout the whole century, and Great Britain was able to solidify its powerful position in the world. New organization plans for the British military were established, and a lot of them contributed to the fact that for the majority of the 19th century, no country could compete with England in terms of its strength in battles.¹⁷ This time was also heavily influenced by the French revolution and the Napoleonic wars that it preceded. Europe was being invaded by the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, who managed to dominate a large portion of all European states, forcefully making them join his side. Unlike the rest of the countries, there was no immediate danger for Great Britain because being an island, it had a more convenient position and English people were able to avoid the wars up until 1793, at which point the French army had attacked Holland and Belgium. The famous Battle of Trafalgar took place in the year of 1805, the British fleet led by Admiral Horatio Nelson. He died in the battle, but still managed to secure a victory for his country and had become one of the most significant figures of England's history. The battle was fought at sea because England knew their naval forces had a better chance of winning that way and took advantage of it. At the same time, they knew they needed to be in full control of the sea lane for their trade ships.¹⁸ After Nelson died, Wellington became the new general of the British army. There were not many commanders at that time who did not think that the French had the strongest army of all and that nobody could compete with its generals, however, Wellington was one of them. He was not scared of fighting Napoleon and he won against him many times. The final battle of the Napoleonic Wars was fought at Waterloo in 1815, where Bonaparte lost for the last time.¹⁹ Despite living through all of this and her brothers serving in the navy, there are not many mentions of the Napoleonic Wars in Jane Austen's novels. The most significant ones are probably in *Persuasion*, where Captain Wentworth gains a lot of wealth working for the British navy and also in *Mansfield Park*, where Fanny Price's

¹⁶ SALES, Roger: *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*. London: Routledge, 1996. ISBN 0-415-10921-3, p. 57.

¹⁷ HUGHES, Kristine. *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in Regency and Victorian England: From 1811-1901*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 1998. ISBN 0-89879-812-4, p. 88.

¹⁸ MCDOWALL, David: *An Illustrated History of Britain*. Harlow: Longmann, 1989. ISBN 978-0-582-74914-6, p. 128.

¹⁹ Id., p. 129.

brother William goes to the navy with the help of their uncle and keeps visiting his sister when he has the chance to. This might have been written because Jane, much like her heroine, was missing her naval brothers.

3.2 Social context

3.2.1 Marriages

Even though we are told that "it is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife"²⁰ at the very beginning of *Pride and Prejudice*, this statement is not quite true. Men of the upper class did not have to be searching for wives unless they decided they wanted to be. While a man was fully entitled to make a dance or matrimony proposal to a woman, he had to be very considerate when it came to choosing his future bride. He could not let himself get too misguided by affection since there were many aspects to take into consideration. Not many men were able to do what they wanted in this case unless they were lucky enough to be unusually wealthy or did not have any family to take into account. Jane Austen, as well as other authors of the same period, made it very clear in her works and letters that social connections and money played a fundamental role for both sides when deciding to form a marriage. It can be said that love, even without the consent of the family, was very romanticized in popular novels of that time, but for people in real life, it was usually not possible to completely ignore the fact that they were going to need a steady and sufficient income after they marry. In the eyes of society, it was condemnable to only enter matrimony because of money and wealth, however, on the other hand, it was very unreasonable to get married without any financial security whatsoever. Jones puts an end to this argument by saying that marital unions were most often concluded for monetary profit, as well as happiness and contentment of the two people included.²¹

After a man formally asked for a woman's hand and his proposal was accepted, both by herself and her parents and nothing was standing in the way of their engagement, the man was automatically welcomed into his future wife's family and his

²⁰ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 3.

²¹ JONES, Hazel: *Jane Austen and Marriage*. London: MPG Books, 2009. ISBN 978 1 84725 218 0, p. 7.

fiancee was, of course, introduced to his in return. Before the wedding ceremony took place, the couple were allowed to start spending time together privately without other people constantly being present. It was also expected that the man, regardless of what social class the woman's relatives and loved ones belonged to, would treat them all with the utmost respect.²²

Because women greatly depended on men in terms of money and social status, the wealthy bachelors could afford to be quite selective. As an example, let us consider the situation that Fitzwilliam Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* found himself in; he was an unmarried and extremely rich young gentleman with an estate and a high income. It is obvious why he was so desirable. There is no question that his reserved behaviour at social events and his unwillingness to ask any of the young ladies present at the balls to dance with him made everyone angry because by standing aside and refusing to play the expected role of a man searching for a wife, he foiled the plans of the single ladies and their mothers.²³

Clergymen, who were able to provide their wives with a relatively comfortable lifestyle, captains who came back home with fortunes in their hands or gentleman, whose incomes were secured and steady, were all generally considered very suitable husband candidates and owned the power to either fulfill or shatter the expectations of women. Their younger brothers, whose possessions were not as large and who usually engaged in costly habits, might have had the feeling that they were not as free while choosing wives as their brothers were. It was very common for this time that at least one of the younger sons did not end up marrying anybody in his whole life. If any of them decided to get married, it was usually only after they had managed to gain a good professional position for themselves and earned enough money to appear attractive and desirable to women, which was usually in their mid-thirties. This was something the oldest sons did not have to deal with as they already had their property guaranteed and thus used to get married in their late twenties, usually when they were about twenty-seven years old. Men engaged in professions, like doctors and lawyers, generally married at twenty-eight. For clergymen, it could get a bit difficult since they sometimes had to wait several years for a suitable house to become available so they could provide

²² HUGHES, Kristine. *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in Regency and Victorian England: From 1811-1901*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 1998. ISBN 0-89879-812-4, p. 184.

²³ JONES, Hazel: *Jane Austen and Marriage*. London: MPG Books, 2009. ISBN 978 1 84725 218 0, p. 7.

their future wives with a comfortable living. Therefore, they did not use to rush into marriage and usually married in their forties or late-thirties.²⁴

Men, who did not possess enough wealth to maintain the lifestyle they aimed for, commonly tried to pursue women who were richer than them. Here they could put their advantage - the privilege to play selective - to use and not settle for anyone unless they met their expectations. This is a topic that Elizabeth Bennet and Mrs. Gardiner, her aunt, discuss in *Pride and Prejudice* upon finding out that Mr. Wickham has stopped courting Elizabeth and turned his attention to Miss Mary King, who has just recently inherited £10,000. Elizabeth tries to excuse his actions by claiming it is perfectly reasonable and acceptable for him to try and find a wife who owns a bigger fortune than him because he wants to become independent and does not happen to have enough wherewithal himself to achieve his goal. However, it is quite obvious that Elizabeth is a little biased when it comes to Mr. Wickham and her sympathy towards him might have clouded her judgement here. Mrs. Gardiner, on the other hand, has no reason not to express her dislike over his behaviour. Miss Georgiana Darcy and Miss Mary King were both lucky enough to have their family step in before they let themselves be fooled by Wickham and fall into his trap. However, as Jones suggests, not every woman in real life could be saved like this before it was too late. There was, for example, a woman named Mary Russell who lived in the Austens' neighbourhood. She might not have been too pleasant to look at but she did have a lot of money, which is what attracted George Mitford, a man chasing after wealth, to her. He decided he wanted to marry her only to have all her capital used for his purposes after he became her husband. Some rich heiresses of this time might have taken the advice from a *Popular lovers' handbook for both sexes*, which came out in 1809, to heart. Publications of this type tended to warn vulnerable women from falling into a trap of someone like that.²⁵

When two people decided to become husband and wife, the ownership of the woman's possessions automatically passed to the man. For this very reason, there were so-called "marriage settlements"; documents created before the wedding, where it was determined that the wife was going to have access to a certain amount of money during the whole course of her life and that it could later be inherited by her children. How much money it was, depended largely on the amount of her dowry. The settlement

²⁴ Id., p. 8.

²⁵ JONES, Hazel: *Jane Austen and Marriage*. London: MPG Books, 2009. ISBN 978 1 84725 218 0, p. 9.

also established what financial rights she would have if she ended up living longer than her husband and where the money she got as dowry would go in such a case. The husband could increase this amount if he could afford it. Marriage settlements were incredibly important for women because if an unmarried girl decided to run away with somebody and get married in secret in the process, not having made any such agreement beforehand, the girl immediately became financially dependent on her new husband. Everything that was hers before the wedding now belonged to him according to the law. Nobody had the right to tell him what he can or cannot do with the money he acquired from his wife, so he could very well abandon her, take all the money with him, and there was nothing she could do about it. This can help us understand just how bad it would be if George Wickham managed to run away with Mr. Darcy's sister. Or how careless and foolish it was of Lydia Bennet to elope with him without having any marriage settlement whatsoever. Elopements were generally socially unacceptable and any men who intentionally convinced an inexperienced girl to leave with him so he could financially benefit from her gullibility, could not be considered a gentleman. If a wife left her husband to run away with somebody else, the man going with her would not have an easy time gaining access to her wealth and, on top of that, the husband had the right to press charges against him in this case. Things like social status, money, a potential friendship between the husband and the lover, and how long the marriage had lasted until then were all taken into consideration when determining how much money the husband was entitled to get for being offended in such manner. Sometimes the amount climbed up to 10,000 pounds. Only men could afford to do something like that. If the situation was reversed, the wives were not given such a privilege.²⁶

According to some people, money, and fortune themselves should not play that big of a role in a marriage. When one of the betrothed was rich, and the other was not, yet they loved each other genuinely and sincerely, they were very likely to be happy together, despite the differences in their property. However, for the most part, "such alliances were rarely greeted with unalloyed pleasure by families with money". Even if they acted like they did not mind, their joy was rarely genuine and there were always concerns about the honourable intentions of the less wealthy partner.²⁷

²⁶ WHALAN, Pamela: *The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice. Excellence in Literature* [online]. February 4, 2015 [cit. 2020-07-13]. Available at: <https://excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/>.

²⁷ JONES, Hazel: *Jane Austen and Marriage*. London: MPG Books, 2009. ISBN 978 1 84725 218 0, p. 9.

3.2.2 Landed gentry

Landed gentry was a name established for the group of people who owned certain pieces of land, rented the houses located on their estates, and earned money that way. They belonged to the upper class and did not have to work. Some gentlemen were lucky enough to have inherited such huge estates they even might have consisted of big towns or villages. When somebody rented a house or a farm on such land, they put their reserve money in so-called funds. That is precisely what women, should they find themselves in such a situation, would do with the money they had as marriage settlements. If the sum was about £5,000 for example, like that of Mrs. Bennet's in *Pride and Prejudice*, then, in this case, her annual income would consist of £250. Firstborn sons were always the ones who inherited the ownership of the lands. Although it was not out of the question that their younger brothers could get a certain piece of property from their families as well, whether they inherited it or it was bought for them, the younger brothers were generally supposed to find a profession and start working. There were a few that they usually turned to.²⁸

3.2.3 Common professions

3.2.3.1 The army

Many of them found themselves engaging in the army as it was a very popular profession to take up. It was not exactly cheap since it was necessary to pay a certain amount to get commissioned at all, and it was usually the influence of the rich families that led to promotions, not the actual skills of the officers.²⁹ Hughes points out that it was not the state who received the money for this, instead, it was paid directly to the men who had decided to give their military position up and pass it onto somebody interested in buying it. This way, "a wealthy officer could advance quickly through the ranks, buying vacancies in either his own or another regiment, as long as he was willing to pay top dollar."³⁰

²⁸ WHALAN, Pamela: *The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice. Excellence in Literature* [online]. February 4, 2015 [cit. 2020-07-13]. Available at: <https://excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/>.

²⁹ Id.

³⁰ HUGHES, Kristine. *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in Regency and Victorian England: From 1811-1901*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 1998. ISBN 0-89879-812-4, p. 88.

There were also so-called "militias", which were groups of men who chose, on their own volition, to offer their service to their country when it was at war and in need of more defense forces. The officers in *Pride and Prejudice* are an example of what such a militia looked like. In contrast with becoming an officer in the army, for entering the militia, no wealth or good statuses were required. George Wickham only became a part of the real army after Darcy paid enough money for him to get commissioned. By working for the army, he was going to gain a better social position for himself and also, of course, a full-time profession. If a younger son came from a rich background, he would need some extra payment as help from this family if he desired to maintain the lifestyle he had been used to until he joined the army because his salary would not be sufficient for that. If he, on top of that, happened to choose a wife with no fortune attached to her, it would be very difficult for him to take care of the household and their children. His family would likely continue to support him financially, but it is also imaginable that they could decide to stop if they were against the woman he married.³¹

3.2.3.2 The navy and law

Working for the navy was not as popular as working in the army. The men had to be clever and capable of doing their work the right way because if some issues occurred, it could have had catastrophic consequences for everybody. Those who served at the navy also had to give up the number of social activities they might have been used to. Lawyers were not all regarded the same way. There were so-called "country lawyers", in *Pride and Prejudice* it was for example Mr. Gardiner, the father of Mrs. Bennet, whose social position was good enough for him to provide appropriate schooling to his only son, introduce him to trade, and also to arrange for his two daughters to get married to a landowner and a fellow attorney. Of course, country lawyers were not able to reach the prestige of those working in large cities, London being an example, where there were more possibilities for them to make a good name for themselves and even to get a higher working position that they would have in the

³¹ WHALAN, Pamela: *The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice. Excellence in Literature* [online]. February 4, 2015 [cit. 2020-07-13]. Available at: <https://excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/>.

country. That required favourable acquaintances and contacts, some wealth, and naturally also some intelligence.³²

3.2.3.3 The church

Another possibility in terms of profession was joining the church. In England, the so-called Church of England has been acknowledged as the traditional religious belief of the English folk. Back then, landowners were given the privilege to assign the position of a clergyman in the area where they lived to somebody they chose themselves, or the position could also be bought. If someone became a parson this way, they received a house, a piece of land that was fully at their disposal, and they had the advantage of not having to pay any rent. After their death, their potential family would have to move out of the house immediately because the ownership of everything would go back to the landowner who provided it to them in the first place and it would be up to him to choose the next person as a replacement. Therefore, it was important for the clergyman's family to be provided for before he died. It was not too difficult becoming a clergyman. When someone wanted to engage in such a profession, they had to study at a highly regarded university. After graduating, the last step before being ordained was setting up a meeting with a bishop and leading a conversation with him where they were asked a few questions regarding the principles and convictions of the Church of England. The clerics were generally kind people with honourable intentions, who treated their believers in a very considerate way. Where it was necessary to help them overcome various difficulties they had to face, many of them did not hesitate to donate a certain amount of money from the "parish funds" to lessen their misfortunes. Of course, that was not always the case and not all clergymen were good. For example, sometimes, when a landowner had sons, he was determined to dedicate the personages on his estate to them and did not particularly care if they were even appropriate for the position. All of this was way more difficult without a patron. If somebody lacked one, but they wished to perform the cleric profession regardless, they could move into a parsonage where they would live for a certain amount of time, taking over all the responsibilities that came with it and living off the income they would get from the tithes as long as the man, who was originally meant to live there, has not been ordained. There was one more option, to work as a curate, which was not an easy job

³² Id.

and it also did not make a lot of money and have faith that eventually you will get a patron, if you are efficient in what you do and if somebody notices you for that.³³

3.2.4 The role of women

At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century, women were regarded as the weaker and less important sex. According to the law, they were dependent on men, whether it was their father or their husband when they got married later, who were considered their guardians. Since they were not as physically strong nor as financially powerful as men, this social arrangement was considered to be good for them.³⁴ In *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, which were highly influential documents written between the years of 1765 and 1769, the author, Sir William Blackstone, mentions that "by marriage, the husband and wife and one person in law; that is, the very being, or legal existence of a woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything."³⁵

The most important thing for the majority of women who belonged to the middle-class was taking care of their families, especially children. By the end of the eighteenth century, married couples in England had started having larger families and because fewer children were dying than formerly and a lot of them lived long enough to become adults, childcare was relatively demanding, and the mothers were kept quite busy. This was also something that undoubtedly contributed to the social tradition, which said that the world of a woman revolves solely around her household.³⁶ It was not unusual for people of the middle class to have a lot of children, sometimes even more than seven, which naturally caused the women to be extremely tired. Steinbach goes on to point out that roughly after 1850, the situation got better for them because couples started to behave more carefully in their sexual lives, and thus did not have as many children anymore. Logically, the belief had expanded that if people only have a few children, they will be able to take care of them better and also pay more

³³ WHALAN, Pamela: *The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice. Excellence in Literature* [online]. February 4, 2015 [cit. 2020-07-13]. Available at: <https://excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/>.

³⁴ PERKIN, Joan: *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England*. London: Routledge, 1989. ISBN 0 415 00771 2, p. 3.

³⁵ Id., p. 4.

³⁶ STEINBACH, Susie: *Women in England 1760-1914: A Social History*. London: Phoenix, 2005. ISBN 0 75381 989 9, p. 48.

attention to each of them. Women were considered to have the love for children in their blood and all of them were supposed to be enjoying their motherhoods. They faced the duty of providing education for the children when they were small, and they had to make sure they were getting some knowledge in terms of religion as well.³⁷

Steinbach goes on to point out that not every single one of the women that were a part of the middle-class was able to find a husband. Sometimes they were just not lucky enough, sometimes they decided that for some reason they did not want to get married at all. If a woman remained unmarried, she had no choice but to live on her own, at her friends' house, or for example with a man belonging to her family, whose home she would probably take care of in exchange. Some of them also decided to turn to the church and "became Catholic or Anglican sisters."³⁸

Perkin names a few benefits that women had in their situation despite the male dominance in society. For example, when a woman happened to do something illegal, nothing as serious as treason or homicide though, and her husband was with her, then according to the law, she acted under his pressure and thus could not be blamed for anything that happened. The men also had to pay any potential debts that their wives might have made. It did not matter if the two of them had already shared home by the time that she borrowed the money. However, if that was not the case, the husband had the right to take any measurements necessary to free himself from this obligation. It was a rule that a man had to take care of his wife and provide for her if she lived under the same roof as him, which was her duty anyway.³⁹

Apart from that, women were not allowed to initiate things, no matter their social status or how wealthy they were. They could not ask men to dance and they also had no choice in the matter of marriage but to wait for somebody to ask for their hand. They could of course try and make things go the way they wanted to, especially if the man they set eyes on happened to only have little experience with women or was too hesitant and cautious, but that was all they could do.⁴⁰

³⁷ STEINBACH, Susie: *Women in England 1760-1914: A Social History*. London: Phoenix, 2005. ISBN 0 75381 989 9, p. 49.

³⁸ Id., p. 50.

³⁹ PERKIN, Joan: *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England*. London: Routledge, 1989. ISBN 0 415 00771 2, p. 4.

⁴⁰ JONES, Hazel: *Jane Austen and Marriage*. London: MPG Books, 2009. ISBN 978 1 84725 218 0, p. 17.

4. Introduction to Pride and Prejudice

Pride and Prejudice has been considered a literary masterpiece, one of the most beloved novels of the classic literature and also the most famous work by Jane Austen for almost two hundred years. The first version that Austen had finished working on was called *First Impressions*, but later she was compelled to change the title and it was under the name *Pride and Prejudice* that the novel was published for the first time in 1813. Paris describes it as "the most complex of Jane Austen's novels and one which is very much in accord with the spirit of comedy."⁴¹ In the story, we follow the protagonist, a young woman called Elizabeth Bennet, whose father is a part of the landed gentry, and her mother comes from the middle class. Despite her mother's never-ending demands, Elizabeth is fully determined to marry for love. In her, Jane Austen had created a heroine who is not afraid to go against the norms and subvert the expectations of society. Even though most of the girls are looking for husbands, Elizabeth turns down two marriage proposals because of her principles. She does not feel inferior to people of higher social classes and is not afraid to always speak her mind.

5. Marriage and social class in Pride and Prejudice

The marriages in the story are concluded for different reasons but the awareness of social differences and inequality influences all of them. They must be taken into consideration when courting somebody because if they happen to come from a family of a lower rank, it is considered an inconvenient match for the other partner. In fact, not only romantic relationships are influenced by social classes, but the relationships between people in general. While some of the characters, like Charles Bingley, do not let the distinctions affect them too much and are polite towards everybody, there are also characters, like Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who, thanks to their social standing, feel that they are superior to other people and act accordingly to it.

⁴¹ PARIS, Bernard, J. *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978. ISBN 978-1-4128-4986-9, p. 96.

5.1 Repressed desire

Austen's critics often agree on the same thing; it is quite typical for all her works that her characters are held back from openly expressing their romantic feelings, emotions, and desires. It was Charlotte Brontë, who suggested that Jane Austen tends to restrain these aspects in her books for the very first time, and, going onward, she was not the only one who thought so. It feels like Austen holds her characters back a little as they only ever discuss their feelings in a way that is acceptable by society, nothing beyond that.⁴² Hinnant holds the same view and points out that "no one writes more subtly about courtship than Jane Austen."⁴³

Pride and Prejudice could be taken as an example of this reasoning. The expression of desire is so strictly minimized in this novel that it eventually goes way beyond the limits and orders of social norms. When it comes to Elizabeth, the protagonist of the novel, she is unable to decide what precisely she feels for Mr. Darcy, it almost feels as if she cannot read her own emotions, and we do not hear her confess she has fallen in love until the end of the story. She is probably the character who suppresses her feelings the most, but there are more examples to be found. Darcy, Bingley, and even Jane are all very cautious to openly admit their feelings. Darcy only ends up proposing to Elizabeth after he tries to ignore what his heart wants and convince himself that a woman of her social rank would not be suitable for him, and it does not seem to work. It does not matter if the novel is examined from the author's or the characters' point of view, there is a lot of oppressed desire in *Pride and Prejudice* and that is a fact.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it might not be that simple. Only because the characters are not publicly talking about it, does not mean they do not feel any desire whatsoever. It still exists, but in a different form than we are used to. Since the characters hesitate to define what exactly they feel towards other characters and their passions thus remain hidden from the readers for most parts of the novel, we must

⁴² ALLEN, Dennis W: "No Love for Lydia: The Fate of Desire in *Pride and Prejudice*." University of Texas Press, vol. 27, no. 4, 1985, pp. 425–443. [cit. 2020-05-11]. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* [online]. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/40754783, p. 425.

⁴³ HINNANT, Charles H: "*Jane Austen's 'Wild Imagination': Romance and the Courtship Plot in the Six Canonical Novels.*" Ohio State University Press, vol. 14, no. 3, 2006, pp. 294–310. [cit. 2020-05-11] *Narrative* [online]. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/20107392, p. 304.

⁴⁴ ALLEN, Dennis W: "No Love for Lydia: The Fate of Desire in *Pride and Prejudice*." University of Texas Press, vol. 27, no. 4, 1985, pp. 425–443. [cit. 2020-05-11]. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* [online]. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/40754783, p. 425.

always read between the lines in their direct speeches and dialogues to find them ourselves.⁴⁵

5.2 Formed marriages

5.2.1 Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins

In this novel, Charlotte and Collins represent those couples who only got married because it was socially advantageous for them. Weinsheimer states that when we take all the marriages that are formed in the course of the novel into consideration and compare them, the marriage of Charlotte Lucas might seem rather pitiful.⁴⁶ However, as Kica says, the relationship between her and Mr. Collins is probably the most realistic one in the story and truly represents what marriages at that time most commonly looked like. It was not about love but simply about finding someone to share life with.⁴⁷

Charlotte meets Mr. Collins for the first time when he decides to pay a visit to the Bennet family. His motives are not entirely selfless as he plans on getting married soon and came to Longbourn to choose one of his cousins for a bride. The first one to catch his eye happens to be Jane, who is generally said to be the prettiest of the sisters, but Mrs. Bennet quickly turns his attention to Elizabeth since she believes that her oldest daughter is soon going to receive a marriage proposal from Bingley. Jones refers to the fact that Mr. Collins is free to use his privilege to be selective because one day he is going to inherit Longbourn. Apart from that, he already owns a house, and being a clergyman, his income is steady and adequate. He decides to stay for some time to pursue Elizabeth, but because he deems himself a desirable husband, he believes it will not be necessary to work too hard to get what he wants.⁴⁸

Charlotte Lucas has the disadvantage of not being considered a beauty like some other girls, who attend social events and balls to get noticed for their good looks and lure potential husbands that way. She is also aware that her being intelligent is

⁴⁵ Id., p. 426.

⁴⁶ WEINSHEIMER, Joel: “*Chance and the Hierarchy of Marriages in Pride and Prejudice.*” The Johns Hopkins University Press, vol. 39, no. 3, 1972, pp. 404–419. [cit. 2020-02-12] *ELH* [online]. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/2872192, p. 408.

⁴⁷ KICA, Eljvira: *Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice.* International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), vol 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13. DOI 10.20431/2347-3134.0511002. Available at: <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v5-i11/2.pdf>, p. 4.

⁴⁸ JONES, Hazel: *Jane Austen and Marriage.* London: MPG Books, 2009. ISBN 978 1 84725 218 0, p. 16.

never going to have any influence in this matter because that is simply not what women are evaluated by in society.⁴⁹ Charlotte knows that if she wants to gain independency on her family, she needs to find herself a husband. Here Jane Austen emphasizes what difficult position young women without a fortune were put in. Charlotte is also aware that being twenty-seven, she is slowly becoming "an old maid" in the eyes of society. "She does not expect to have much choice in the selection of a mate, she is determined to accept the first socially eligible offer."⁵⁰

Charlotte firmly believes that nobody is guaranteed to be happy or unhappy with their spouse in advance. In her opinion, "happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance...and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life."⁵¹ According to Weinsheimer, Charlotte is somewhat similar to Lydia Bennet in the way that they both are determined to find themselves a husband and do not particularly care who it is going to be. However, unlike Lydia, Charlotte knows she will have to pretend to be oblivious to many things to achieve her goal.⁵² Mr. Collins eventually asks for Elizabeth's hand and after she refuses him, Charlotte begins to feel she might have a chance after all. She purposefully starts spending more time with him, and she makes sure to always be kind and attentive towards him. This is her way of inconspicuously manipulating him to get exactly what she wants. She eventually succeeds and Collins proposes to her. Charlotte gladly accepts, knowing she does not have any other choice as she needs somebody who is going to provide her with a comfortable life and thanks to whom she will not have to deal with the question of money anymore. Elizabeth is not too keen on the idea of her best friend agreeing to marry her cousin. In her perspective, "Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man;... the woman who marries him cannot have a proper way of thinking."⁵³

Kica states that Charlotte's character is the representation of the typical mindset that women of that time used to have. They had to find a husband if they

⁴⁹ KICA, Eljvira: *Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*. International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), vol 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13. DOI 10.20431/2347-3134.0511002. Available at: <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v5-i11/2.pdf>, p. 5.

⁵⁰ PARIS, Bernard, J: *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978. ISBN 978-1-4128-4986-9, p. 113.

⁵¹ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 21.

⁵² WEINSHEIMER, Joel: "Chance and the Hierarchy of Marriages in *Pride and Prejudice*." The Johns Hopkins University Press, vol. 39, no. 3, 1972, pp. 404-419. [cit. 2020-02-12] *ELH* [online]. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/2872192, p. 408

⁵³ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 116.

wanted to become secured and lead a good life. Charlotte is glad that she has managed this, even if the relationship she shares with her husband is far from perfect.⁵⁴ Weinsheimer addresses this too, by describing how Charlotte keeps pretending her obliviousness even after she and Mr. Collins have gotten married. Since she believes, as we already know, that her husband's flaws should not affect the chance of their future happiness, she tries to ignore all his inappropriate remarks even though he makes her feel embarrassed sometimes.⁵⁵ We learn about this through the eyes of Elizabeth, who remarks that whenever "Mr. Collins said anything of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed...Charlotte wisely did not hear."⁵⁶

Much like Charlotte, Mr. Collins does not care very much about love being present in a marriage. The reason why he decides to find himself a wife is that Lady Catherine de Bourgh, whom he enormously admires, advised him that he should because he feels like marriage will make a positive contribution to his life and because he thinks it his duty "to set the example of matrimony in his parish."⁵⁷ Charlotte Lucas was not his first choice. After being told about Jane's upcoming engagement, he tries to court Elizabeth and he is utterly certain that she will accept his proposal because he has a house, a steady income, good connections, and "it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made"⁵⁸ to her. While making his proposal, Mr. Collins is very arrogant. He keeps explaining his reasons to Elizabeth without as much as asking for her consent, he fully expects her to be thankful for what he is offering, and he fails to take her refusal seriously even though she rejects him five times during the conversation. While Collins idealizes people of high society, does everything Lady Catherine tells him to do, and clearly could not be prouder of being acquainted with her, he does not care about his future wife being rich. His plan is simply to marry someone available as soon as possible.

Jane Austen uses the relationship between Charlotte and Collins to represent marriages with economic motives, which were very usual in her time. Although there is no love or passion between these two characters, in the end, their union proved to be

⁵⁴ KICA, Eljvira: *Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*. International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), vol 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13. DOI 10.20431/2347-3134.0511002. Available at: <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v5-i11/2.pdf>, p. 5.

⁵⁵ WEINSHEIMER, Joel: "Chance and the Hierarchy of Marriages in *Pride and Prejudice*." The Johns Hopkins University Press, vol. 39, no. 3, 1972, pp. 404-419. [cit. 2020-02-12] *ELH* [online]. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/2872192, p. 409.

⁵⁶ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 134.

⁵⁷ Id., p. 90.

⁵⁸ Id., p. 94.

quite favourable for them both. Charlotte can now move out of her family's house and become independent, which is something she wanted all along. In addition to that, she does not need to fear being excluded from society or being looked down upon for not having a husband. Mr. Collins managed to get exactly what he longed for as well.

5.2.2 Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley

Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley make acquaintance at the first social event of the novel, the Netherfield Ball. They immediately take a liking to each other and they dance together several times. Bingley's enchanting, outspoken character along with, of course, the amount of his annual income, make him reasonably desirable in the eyes of the Longbourn society, and most of all Mrs. Bennet, who, after learning he has rented Netherfield Hall, immediately starts thinking about him getting married to one of her five daughters.

As Kica points out, Jane Bennet is, in her nature, not very different from Mr. Bingley and neither of them changes during the whole course of the novel.⁵⁹ Both these characters display similar traits, they are very kind-hearted, considerate, friendly, and well-mannered. However, they both naturally have some bad traits as well. Jane is very shy and does not express herself very strongly. Whereas other women would have surely taken advantage of the opportunity and tried to make Bingley propose to them, Jane holds herself back so much that even though they have already spent some time together, Mr. Bingley is not certain if she likes him or if she is only being polite. Having noticed as well, Charlotte Lucas addresses this situation, telling Elizabeth that her sister ought to show a little more affection because this way she could "lose the opportunity of fixing him."⁶⁰ Jane is always ready to assume the best about everyone, sometimes to the point of being rather naive than kind. This is also noted by her sister Elizabeth who says to her: "You never see a fault in anybody. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I have never heard you speak ill of a human being in your life."⁶¹ Paris suggests that Jane's unwillingness to see and admit other people's bad intentions, as well as her tendency not to express her feelings too obviously have to do

⁵⁹ KICA, Eljvira: *Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*. International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), vol 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13. DOI 10.20431/2347-3134.0511002. Available at: <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v5-i11/2.pdf>, p. 6.

⁶⁰ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 20.

⁶¹ Id., p. 15.

with her being "insecure about her own worth and trying to defend herself against fears of rejection."⁶²

Jane, as well as Elizabeth, would like to marry for love one day. She falls in love with Mr. Bingley at the beginning of the novel and he returns her feelings, but their love must overcome a lot of obstacles before they can get together. Without suspecting anything, Jane gets a letter from Caroline Bingley and learns that she and her brother have left Netherfield, which leaves her heartbroken. Caroline makes it clear that she has a great interest in Charles getting engaged to Georgiana Darcy, who is, obviously, much richer than Jane. Bingley lets himself be persuaded quite easily, so when his two sisters and Darcy put pressure on him, they manage to convince him without difficulties that he should distance himself from Jane. Darcy later admits to Elizabeth that he did it because he did not believe her sister felt too strongly about his friend and because he did not think it appropriate for Bingley to associate with the Bennet family due to their social standing and behaviour in public. Jane talks about this with her sister and expresses her uncertainty about whether she could reach happiness with "a man whose sisters and friends are all wishing him to marry elsewhere."⁶³ It is Mr. Darcy who ends up clarifying the whole misunderstanding and in the end, he "leads him back to Jane as easily as he had steered him away."⁶⁴

Jane's perception of marriage is romantic. She even advises her sister Elizabeth to "do anything rather than marry without affection."⁶⁵ On the other hand, Jones discusses in her book *Jane Austen and Marriage* that given Jane's obedient nature and her tendency to satisfy everybody, she probably would have given in to the wishes of her mother and married Mr. Collins anyway, had she been in Elizabeth's place. She was simply lucky that Mr. Bingley was around at that moment and that his income made him a more suitable candidate in the eyes of Mrs. Bennet.⁶⁶ We do not know very much about Mr. Bingley's attitude towards marriage, however, based on his actions it can be deduced that it is very important to him that his future wife does not only marry him for economic reasons. He decides to leave Netherfield and not propose to Jane after Darcy

⁶² PARIS, Bernard, J: *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978. ISBN 978-1-4128-4986-9, p. 111.

⁶³ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 103.

⁶⁴ PARIS, Bernard, J: *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978. ISBN 978-1-4128-4986-9, p. 112.

⁶⁵ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 312.

⁶⁶ JONES, Hazel: *Jane Austen and Marriage*. London: MPG Books, 2009. ISBN 978 1 84725 218 0, p. 10.

convinces him that she does not truly care for him. He also does not care about the fact that Jane comes from a lower class or the way that her family behaves, which Darcy initially condemns. He is very cheerful and friendly, and it seems like he treats everyone with respect, regardless of their social standing. It can also be deduced that love in marriage is very important to him because he has the chance to get married to Georgiana Darcy and he does not, despite her being wealthy, from a good family and the sister of his best friend.

Jane Austen presents the more hopeful, happier aspect of getting married to someone on Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley. Their characters fit perfectly together, and most importantly they both truly love each other when they marry. Mr. Bennet expresses his opinion of their relationship saying: "I have not a doubt of your doing very well together. Your tempers are by no means unlike. You are each so complying that nothing will ever be resolved on; so easy, that every servant will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always exceed your income."⁶⁷

5.2.3 Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy

The relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy is the central relationship of *Pride and Prejudice*. They are two characters who have their differences and their opinion and view of each other are clouded by prejudice right from the first time they meet. Their marriage is concluded out of love at the end of the novel, however, before they get together, they must face many obstacles and overcome their disagreements. Their love develops gradually throughout the whole story.

Elizabeth is the second oldest of the Bennet sisters, she is intelligent, quick-witted, and always follows her principles. Her views on marriage are very romantic. She wants to marry for love and as the story evolves, we can see that she is not going to change her opinion, even when she has the chance to. She turns down both Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy who offer her a comfortable home and independence of her family. She knows there is no guarantee of her receiving other marriage proposals in the future, and still, she rejects them both because she does not love the men who asked for her hand. Elizabeth would rather spend her whole life unwed than only marry somebody for their wealth. She also cannot believe that Charlotte would want to marry Mr. Collins. Her

⁶⁷ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 291.

first reaction when she finds out is: "Engaged to Mr. Collins! My dear Charlotte--impossible!"⁶⁸

Fitzwilliam Darcy is a man of the upper class who lives at the Pemberley estate in Derbyshire and is the nephew of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. He is proud of his social standing and does not expect to marry below his class. According to Jones, the story of these two characters demonstrates that it is not always good to judge somebody based on the first impression they make on us. In the beginning, the whole Maryton is excited to meet Mr. Darcy at the ball because he is a single man of pleasant appearance with an income of £10,000 a year. However, when it becomes clear that he has no intention of dancing with the ladies, he is immediately proclaimed arrogant and proud by most of the people.⁶⁹

Upon accidentally hearing Darcy say: "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men."⁷⁰, Elizabeth hardens her heart against him, and from that moment on, she stubbornly defends her prejudiced opinion of him. Paris states that "the thematic pattern of *Pride and Prejudice* is one in which the protagonists are both flawed by pride and are prejudiced as a result- Elizabeth toward Darcy and Darcy toward people of lower status who are outside of his immediate circle."⁷¹ Had Elizabeth been more unbiased, she could have discovered his qualities way sooner than she did. When she, for example, goes to Netherfield to visit her sick sister and decides to stay for some time, she has several occasions to observe Mr. Darcy and appreciate the good sides of his character – he is an intelligent, well-spoken man who cares about his younger sister a lot and never even mentions his wealth, although he could very well boast about it if he wanted to.⁷²

Mr. Darcy is the first of the two who undergoes a significant change in his feelings. Against his will, he falls in love with Elizabeth and because she is a woman of a lower social class and given her family's situation, he suffers from his feelings and tries to ignore them. Nonetheless, he ends up asking for her hand and from the fact that his proposal starts with the words: "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My

⁶⁸ Id., p. 108.

⁶⁹ JONES, Hazel: *Jane Austen and Marriage*. London: MPG Books, 2009. ISBN 978 1 84725 218 0, p. 15.

⁷⁰ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 13.

⁷¹ PARIS, Bernard, J: *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978. ISBN 978-1-4128-4986-9, p. 136.

⁷² JONES, Hazel: *Jane Austen and Marriage*. London: MPG Books, 2009. ISBN 978 1 84725 218 0, p. 15.

feelings will not be repressed."⁷³, it is easy to tell that it bothered him to fall in love with her and that he did try to fight his feelings. Just like Collins, the thought of being rejected never even crosses his mind. Allen points out that from the fact alone that Darcy proposes to Elizabeth twice during the novel, it can be deduced that the structure of their courtship is constructed from actions that keep repeating themselves in the course of the story. These two characters do not act on the mutual attraction they have both come to feel for each other and therefore the shaping of their relationship consists mostly of simple actions like taking walks, stealing glimpses, and Darcy asking Elizabeth to dance with him.⁷⁴

Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy changes dramatically after reading his letter and visiting Pemberley. She is now ashamed of speaking so harshly to him and accusing him of mistreating Mr. Wickham. By being proven as wrong as she was, Elizabeth feels "she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd."⁷⁵ At first, Darcy hesitates to accept his growing affection for Elizabeth because he believes she would not be suitable for a man of his income and social position, later because he does not dare to hope her feelings for him could change after everything she said to him when he proposed for the first time. For this reason, he does not express his love verbally but rather symbolically through actions. Elizabeth successfully ignores and conceals her attraction to Darcy through the antipathy he provokes in her and then by refusing to directly acknowledge that her feelings for him have changed. That is why she keeps rejecting his proposals until finally, she ends up accepting him - in a moment, where she forgets to control herself. We witness this at the balls that take place throughout the novel, Darcy refuses to dance with her at the first one, then proceeds to ask her to dance with him at three following occasions. Elizabeth, hurt by Darcy's initial arrogance, does not hear him out until they are at the Netherfield ball, where she unexpectedly accepts his dance proposal. This could be an indicator of her subconsciously being attracted to Darcy without even realizing it.⁷⁶

⁷³ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 161.

⁷⁴ ALLEN, Dennis W: "No Love for Lydia: The Fate of Desire in *Pride and Prejudice*." University of Texas Press, vol. 27, no. 4, 1985, pp. 425-443. [cit. 2020-05-11]. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* [online]. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/40754783, p. 426.

⁷⁵ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 177.

⁷⁶ ALLEN, Dennis W: "No Love for Lydia: The Fate of Desire in *Pride and Prejudice*." University of Texas Press, vol. 27, no. 4, 1985, pp. 425-443. [cit. 2020-05-11]. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* [online]. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/40754783, p. 426.

Darcy has come to admire the beauty of Elizabeth's eyes, which results in him constantly searching for her with his eyes, watching her stand on the other side of the room, or play the pianoforte. Completely unaware of having aroused interest in Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth finds his glances rather uncomfortable because she believes he is trying to find mistakes in everything she does. However, this is eventually accepted by her as well. When she visits Pemberley and walks around the house, she happens to come across a portrait of Darcy and stops to examine it. Thinking about it, she no longer perceives his attention as unwelcome, on the contrary, she thinks about it with gratitude. Thanks to this transformation of thoughts, we can tell she is slowly beginning to open her heart to Darcy's affections and understand her own.⁷⁷

Later when they are engaged, and Jane asks her how long she has been in love with Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth responds:

"It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley."⁷⁸

Jones argues that Elizabeth is indeed not joking when she says that, however, that does not necessarily mean she fell in love with his property. There is certainly some truth to her claim because, by the time she visits Pemberley, she truly begins to discover the good personality traits of Darcy and fully understand and appreciate his character. Austen gives Elizabeth enough time to learn everything about Darcy and fall deeply in love with him.⁷⁹ It can be argued that while Elizabeth appreciates Darcy's social position, if she only wanted to marry him for economic reasons, then she would have surely accepted his first proposal.

"It was a union that must have been to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manner improved, and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance."⁸⁰ From this quote, it becomes clear that Elizabeth eventually realizes that she and Mr. Darcy complete and balance each other out perfectly.

Elizabeth and Darcy represent marriages concluded out of true love and based on mutual respect and understanding. It is by no means love at first sight, they both

⁷⁷ ALLEN, Dennis W: "*No Love for Lydia: The Fate of Desire in Pride and Prejudice.*" University of Texas Press, vol. 27, no. 4, 1985, pp. 425–443. [cit. 2020-05-11]. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* [online]. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/40754783, p. 427.

⁷⁸ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 313.

⁷⁹ JONES, Hazel: *Jane Austen and Marriage*. London: MPG Books, 2009. ISBN 978 1 84725 218 0, p. 15.

⁸⁰ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 259.

must realize their own mistakes and overcome their pride first, but in the end, they are very happy together, and their marriage proves to be successful.

5.2.4 Lydia Bennet and Mr. Wickham

Lydia Bennet and Mr. Wickham represent couples who get together for shallow reasons. Since they carelessly decide to elope, they are compelled to marry at the end of the novel.

George Wickham is a young officer who comes to Maryton with his regiment, and this is where he meets the Bennet sisters for the first time. He is an irresponsible and selfish man who likes using his good looks and enchanting behaviour to seduce young women. He was supposed to become a clergyman and inherit a parsonage from Mr. Darcy's father, however, he voluntarily gave it up and accepted 3,000 pounds from Darcy instead. "Being now free from all restraint, his life was a life of idleness and dissipation."⁸¹ As this quote suggests, Wickham has made a lot of debts over the years and is now looking for an easy way to solve his situation. At first, he expresses interest in Elizabeth, but it fades away as soon as he learns that there is a Miss King who has recently inherited 10,000 pounds. As Elizabeth learns from Darcy's letter, in the past he also tried to elope with Georgiana Darcy, who was very young back then and who he deliberately made think that they were in love and should get married.

Lydia is a young naive girl who is under the strong influence of her mother. She grows up thinking that the biggest success a woman can reach is to find a husband and secure a profitable marriage for herself. Kica supports this claim, saying that for Lydia as well as for some other girls, it is unthinkable that she should stay without a husband and it is obvious how big of an impact it had on her listening to people discuss the topic of marriage all the time.⁸² Lydia is very cheerful and likes having fun at social events, as well as flirting with men, especially those wearing uniforms. Her parents do not discipline her. When she is invited to Brighton, her mother is just as happy as she is, and her father, upon Elizabeth expressing her dislike, only says: "We

⁸¹ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 171.

⁸² KICA, Eljvira: *Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*. International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), vol 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13. DOI 10.20431/2347-3134.0511002. Available at: <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v5-i11/2.pdf>, p. 6.

shall have no peace at Longbourn if Lydia does not go to Brighton. Let her go, then... At any rate, she cannot grow many degrees worse."⁸³

Lydia fails to act rationally and makes hasty decisions that could end quite badly for her, which is clear to see when she escapes with Wickham without properly considering what might happen to her and her whole family's reputation first. Like Kica states, she never once stops to reflect on the question if Wickham plans on proposing and getting married to her. All that is takes to make her blissfully happy is the fact that she has managed to find a good-looking man who shows interest in her even though the thing Wickham is really after is not a commitment but a short-term romance and having some fun. Proposing to Lydia is the last thing he would think about, as he owes money to a lot of people and everyone in his surroundings is aware of it.⁸⁴ Morgan remarks that Mr. Wickham is "socially unacceptable, but for moral reasons rather than economic ones, not because he has no possessions but because he has no principles."⁸⁵

Kica argues that what Jane Austen presents here is that in the 18th century in England, women were not equal to men, because unlike men and their ability to deal with certain things their way, they could not afford to do the same without being judged for it. When Lydia and Wickham run away together, it happens because Lydia is too inexperienced. It is supposed to show just how influenced the immature girls at an early age were by the lack of education back then. Wickham is forced to unite his life with Lydia's because that is what Darcy requires of him in return for giving him enough money to pay back what he owes. Wickham was certainly not planning on marrying her, but he knows very well that he cannot afford to turn Darcy down. His intentions of winning the hand of a random rich lady to gain some wealth must be put aside because that is what the situation now demands.⁸⁶

Lydia and Wickham are a great example of a couple where one partner's intentions are motivated by money and the other is too young and naive to pay attention to that. Given their characters, the improbability of their future happiness is not easy to overlook. Wickham would never have agreed to take Lydia for a wife if it was not

⁸³ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 196.

⁸⁴ KICA, Eljvira: *Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*. International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), vol 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13. DOI 10.20431/2347-3134.0511002. Available at: <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v5-i11/2.pdf>, p. 6.

⁸⁵ MORGAN, Susan. "Intelligence in 'Pride and Prejudice.'" The University of Chicago Press vol. 73, no. 1, 1975, pp. 54-68. [cit. 2020-02-21] *Modern Philology* [online]. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/436104, p. 56.

⁸⁶ KICA, Eljvira: *Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*. International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), vol 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13. DOI 10.20431/2347-3134.0511002. Available at: <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v5-i11/2.pdf>, p. 6.

for Darcy and his offering to pay for his debts, and Lydia is so in love with the idea of being married that she does not care about her husband's financial situation or his character very much. She seems to be beside herself with excitement when they visit the Bennet family after the wedding, but it is obvious she still acts very naive and more than anything wants to boast about her new situation: "She longed to see...all their other neighbours, and to hear herself called "Mrs. Wickham" by each of them."⁸⁷

5.2.5 Mr. and Mrs. Bennet

Through the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Jane Austen sets an example of a relationship that did not turn out right, because based on their character and education, the two partners are not too compatible with each other.

It is easy to see that Mr. Bennet is not satisfied with his choice of wife. She cannot compete with him intellectually and she acts silly most of the time. She brought 4,000 pounds into the marriage, which, although being "ample for her situation in life, could but ill supply the deficiency"⁸⁸ of her husband. Mrs. Bennet was very beautiful when she was young. She also seemed to be cheerful and of good nature. Mr. Bennet let himself get carried away by all of this and it was only later, after their marriage, that he came to know the true character of his wife and gradually lost all his respect for her. The displeasure he feels regarding Mrs. Bennet's behaviour causes him to distance himself from the rest of the family. Paris believes that he is the kind of person who, after realizing that he cannot live happily with his wife, instead of getting a mistress, finds pleasure in isolating himself and educating his mind by reading. It feels like he has given up on the domestic situation and just watches everything from afar like he is not a part of anything that happens and allows himself to be amused by it.⁸⁹ He does not pressure his daughters to find rich husbands, nor to accept the first proposal they are made. Unlike his wife, he is against the idea of Elizabeth marrying Collins only to be secured, on the contrary, he stands up for her, which makes Mrs. Bennet mad. After being told about her engagement to Darcy, he immediately expresses worry that she is only marrying him for money. He says to her "My child, let me not have the grief of

⁸⁷ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 263.

⁸⁸ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 25.

⁸⁹ PARIS, Bernard, J: *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978. ISBN 978-1-4128-4986-9, p. 116.

seeing you unable to respect your partner in life."⁹⁰ It is safe to assume that because he made this mistake himself, he hopes his daughters will choose better than he did and reach happiness.

Mrs. Bennet is presented as a foolish woman with a lack of education, who passionately expresses her feelings and does not act very reasonably. It seems as if she only has one goal in her life; to marry all her five daughters off as quickly as possible. But the way she goes about it and the way she acts results in the exact opposite of what she wants, and she is essentially more likely to scare off potential husbands than to help her daughters lure them. Austen makes it clear that Mrs. Bennet is willing to go far just to get her way, for example when she lets her oldest daughter Jane get sick just so she can spend more time with Mr. Bingley. When Elizabeth and Jane arrive home after dwelling at Netherfield Hall, their mother is not happy to see them because, in her opinion, they are back too soon.⁹¹

Mrs. Bennet pays a lot of attention to young single men suitable to become potential husbands. Austen introduces her character in a way that makes it very clear. She is telling her husband about Mr. Bingley renting Netherfield and immediately starts dreaming about him marrying one of her daughters:

"Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!"⁹²

Every girl who was able to find a husband sooner than her daughters evoked the feelings of jealousy and resentment in Mrs. Bennet. This statement is backed up by Mrs. Bennet's behaviour after she finds out about Mr. Collins' engagement with Charlotte Lucas. She gets hysterical, whenever somebody as much as mentions their upcoming marriage, and her opinion of Charlotte changes completely. Whenever she visits the Bennet family from that moment on, Mrs. Bennet cannot bear to even look at her and behind every visit, she only sees Charlotte coming to observe everything that is going to be hers one day.

One the other hand, her reactions to the news of her daughters getting married are just as emotional. When she finds out about the fact that her youngest daughter

⁹⁰ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 315.

⁹¹ KICA, Eljvira: *Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*. International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), vol 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13. DOI 10.20431/2347-3134.0511002. Available at: <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v5-i11/2.pdf>, p. 10.

⁹² AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 3.

Lydia might be married soon, she feels such great happiness that she is barely able to control the outbursts of pure joy that the news has given her. Not to mention how enthusiastic her reaction is upon learning about Elizabeth's engagement to Mr. Darcy. Jane's accomplishment immediately fades in comparison to Elizabeth's, and Mr. Darcy suddenly becomes "such a charming man! – so handsome! So tall!"⁹³

It can be assumed that the inequality and unhappiness in Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's relationship did not set the best example for their five young daughters. Austen says: "Had Elizabeth's opinion been all drawn from her own family, she could not have formed a very pleasing opinion of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort."⁹⁴, which shows how much effect unfunctional marriages can have on children, and that marrying for such shallow reasons as initial attraction and enchantment can later have a negative impact of the whole family.

We can tell that the marriage of the Bennets is not very good for either of them. They were probably not staying together because of their affection for each other, but because it was not exactly easy to bring up the subject of divorce at that time and they were simply following the tradition. Mr. Bennet never helped his wife to learn anything new. He did not make her aware of her mistakes and what she should change about her behaviour, he never tried to educate or encourage her to evolve into a more accomplished woman than she was. Instead, he let her behave ridiculously in public and never made any comments about it. Austen uses Mr. and Mrs. Bennet to present an unequal relationship where the two partners do not long for each other's presence, nor do they seek it out and where one of them is not capable of respecting the other. All of this shows that they cannot be truly happy together and that such marriages are very likely to bring unhappiness to the whole family.⁹⁵

5.3 The importance of class and its effect on marriage

The theme of social class is one of the fundamental elements of *Pride and Prejudice*. The social standing of characters influences how they are seen by

⁹³ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 316.

⁹⁴ Id., p. 201.

⁹⁵ KICA, Eljvira: *Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*. International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), vol 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13. DOI 10.20431/2347-3134.0511002. Available at: <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v5-i11/2.pdf>, p. 11.

society and radically shapes other people's opinion of them. Naturally, it also plays a huge role when it comes to courtship and marriage.

Men could automatically get a barony title as a heritage from their fathers. As a reward for doing something beneficial, they could also be granted the title of a knight, which was presented by the man using 'Sir' in front of his name, however, this title was not as significant as baronetcy. Mr. Lucas had too gained knighthood, making him 'Sir William Lucas', although he only used to be a tradesman beforehand. After that, he makes sure to mention the name of the place where he was knighted very often whenever he speaks. Whenever somebody has a title in Austen's novels, it looks as if the character is automatically destined to be a little silly or ignorant.⁹⁶

For women, it was impossible to acquire nobility titles from their families, but even they could have some titles in front of their names. When the title was connected to the forename of the woman, like in the case of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, it indicated that she had every right to use it since her father was an earl, and she would not lose it regardless of the social position of her potential husband. Lady Catherine's sister Lady Anne married Mr. Darcy, who did not have any title, and Lady Catherine even mentions that in front of Elizabeth. When Elizabeth, along with the Collins family, gets invited to Rosings for lunch, her cousin is quick to remind her that she should not put on something too elegant because the class difference between her and Lady Catherine and her daughter must be apparent just by looking at them.⁹⁷

Austen says that Lady Catherine "likes to have the distinction of rank preserved."⁹⁸ The conversation between her and Elizabeth can be used as an example of how important these social differences are to some of the characters in the novel. Lady Catherine personally comes to Bennet's house to ask Elizabeth if she is engaged to her nephew Mr. Darcy, having heard some rumours about it. The thought of Darcy marrying someone like Elizabeth makes her furious and it becomes apparent how much she looks down on her. She describes her as a "young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world"⁹⁹ to her face and accuses her of having unhonourable intentions and only wanting to marry Darcy for money. She also brings up the intended

⁹⁶COPELAND, David and Juliet MCMASTER: *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. ISBN 9780-521-74650-2, p. 112.

⁹⁷COPELAND, David and Juliet MCMASTER: *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. ISBN 9780-521-74650-2, p. 111.

⁹⁸ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 137.

⁹⁹ Id., p. 296.

engagement of Darcy and her daughter Anne de Bourgh and says that she wishes them to get married because their social background and wealth make them perfectly suitable for each other. Since she is socially superior to Elizabeth, Lady Catherine automatically supposes she can humiliate her and will meet with no opposition. Elizabeth, however, does not seem to let the distinction between them affect her very much, and she immediately stands up to her saying that Mr. Darcy "is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal."¹⁰⁰

It is not Lady Catherine solely who feels entitled to people of lower social rank. The same can be said about Mr. Darcy, who tries to fight his feelings for Elizabeth because of the family she comes from. He feels that he is socially superior to her and even says it to her face while proposing to her without thinking he might offend her. He also talks Bingley out of the intention to ask for Jane Bennet's hand, one of the reasons being her social background. Ewin comments on this by saying that while Mr. Darcy is self-centered, the character traits that he displays are optimal for a man of his social class. He might be proud and quite snobby. On the other hand, he does not lack confidence and always says just what he thinks. At the very first ball, Darcy does not consider the majority of the people there equal to himself in the social sense and therefore feels disconnected from them. However, we can argue that is something he could change if he tried. He makes no effort to talk to anybody or ask any of the girls to dance with him. We see that he is very much self-assured, and it looks like he is behaving that way on purpose, despite being aware that it is going to insult people. Nevertheless, the fact that Darcy does not easily communicate with those people is very intensified by their response. They are so focused on this one bad trait of his, they do not even bother to try to find any redeeming qualities he could have.¹⁰¹ It needs to be noted that in the second half of the novel, Darcy realizes he had been acting too proudly and becomes more open and friendly towards Elizabeth's family. He especially likes the Gardiners, who help him and Elizabeth get together and ends up having a good relationship with Mr. Bennet, who enjoys visiting Pemberley after they marry.

Bingley's sister Caroline is against her brother courting Jane as well because she would like to see him married to the wealthy Georgiana Darcy. Caroline Bingley, as a representative of a higher social status, feels superior to Elizabeth and other women

¹⁰⁰ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 298.

¹⁰¹ EWIN, R. E.: "*Pride, Prejudice and Shyness*." Cambridge University Press, vol. 65, no. 252, 1990, pp. 137–154. [cit. 2020-04-02]. *Philosophy* [online]. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/3751384, p. 138.

who are socially below her. She would like to marry Mr. Darcy herself, which is the reason that she always tries to get his attention and why she constantly compliments him, even for something as ordinary as writing letters. When she notices that Darcy might like Elizabeth, she tries to make her look bad in his eyes by making ironic remarks about her family: "You will have a charming mother-in-law, and of course she will always be at Pemberley with you."¹⁰² She does not cease to tease him about it and indirectly insult Elizabeth's family by insinuating how unfortunate it would be for him to associate with them. She also makes rude comments about Elizabeth's looks, suggesting she is not good enough for Darcy.

Mr. Collins believes that men and women of the high society are automatically the best people and they are worthy of any praise and respect. The adoration that Mr. Collins feels for Lady Catherine de Bourgh rises from the fact that she is a lady of high social status, with a lot of money, and is thus naturally respected by all people around her. He automatically assumes that what she says and does must be right, and he does not hesitate to agree with her on everything. In his eyes, she does not have any flaws, although Austen makes it clear that she does not always treat people well and can get very snobbish. Because of his acquaintance with the said lady, Mr. Collins starts to think of himself very highly and when he pays a visit to the Bennet family, it becomes obvious that he feels like he is something more than they are.¹⁰³ One of the reasons he comes to Longbourn is that Lady Catherine tells him he should get a wife. He listens to her and does whatever she asks him to do. It is apparent how much the social standing and wealth of Lady Catherine influences Collins' perception and opinion of her.

When a man comes from a higher social class and possesses enough wealth to be desirable for single women, most of the women will likely not care about his looks and character too much. The main reason everyone is so interested in Bingley arriving at Netherfield is that he is young, rich, and unmarried. His "four or five thousand a year"¹⁰⁴ make him a perfect candidate for marriage in the eyes of Mrs. Bennet. At the beginning of the novel, she immediately dreams about him marrying one of her daughters even though she knows nothing of his character or life yet.

¹⁰² AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 25.

¹⁰³ KICA, Eljvira: *Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*. International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), vol 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13. DOI 10.20431/2347-3134.0511002. Available at: <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v5-i11/2.pdf>, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 3.

Given the social classes they belong to, the Bennet sisters practically have no other choice but to get married if they want to have some financial security in their lives. They could start working as governesses or become lady companions, but those were the only honourable job opportunities that women of their position had access to. The profession of a governess might not seem so bad when we imagine working for kind friendly families like the Gardiners or even Jane and Bingley, but the reality was a bit different. Those who worked as governesses did not have easy lives. They had to be available all day every day, their time off work only consisted of approximately one week a year, and on top of that, the amount of money they earned annually did not exceed twenty pounds and sometimes not even ten. Not to mention the fact that the employers did not always have to be very respectful or likable, and that could certainly make one's life even more unhappy. Then there was the possibility to get married, and for girls like the Bennet sisters, this was the best and most respectable way of becoming financially independent of their families.¹⁰⁵

Jane Austen makes it very clear in her novels that since women are dependent on men in terms of money, they should aspire to aim high and look for husbands with enough wealth to secure them, especially if they did not possess enough of it themselves and no male relatives were around for them to turn to if needed. From this point of view, Mrs. Bennet's obsession with the courtships of her daughters seems rather understandable. Since her five daughters would altogether have to live off 5,000 pounds after the death of Mr. Bennet, she just wants them to find some financial security and have good lives. It is no wonder she gets so enthusiastic when Mr. Bingley comes to live in the neighbourhood. She immediately feels the chance to ensure a good future for one of her daughters. Whoever read *Pride and Prejudice* at the time it came out, would have felt at least a bit of sympathy for Mrs. Bennet and comprehended what the motives for her behaviour were. On the other hand, the fact that she is willing to promise her daughters' hands to anyone who is within reach and has a tolerable income without paying attention to what the girls are feeling, would surely be condemned even back then.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ WHALAN, Pamela: *The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice. Excellence in Literature* [online]. February 4, 2015 [cit. 2020-07-13]. Available at: <https://excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/>.

¹⁰⁶ JONES, Hazel: *Jane Austen and Marriage*. London: MPG Books, 2009. ISBN 978 1 84725 218 0, p. 10

6. The social position of men in contrast to women

Like I have already mentioned, women in England did not find themselves in an easy situation at the beginning of the 19th century, and the same conditions naturally applied for the female characters of *Pride and Prejudice*.

As Newton states, Jane Austen did not complain very much about the differences between men and women in her letters, however, when reading her novels, it becomes more apparent how much aware of them she was. She concentrates on the fact that the financial situation of men was better than the one of women more in her stories, where she puts "a certain critical emphasis" on it.¹⁰⁷

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters."¹⁰⁸

When *Pride and Prejudice* begins, Austen makes an ironic remark about the advantages that men have right in the two opening sentences. From this quote, it could be deduced that those men who did not marry yet are guaranteed to have money at their free disposal while women do not and the only way for them to reach that is to get married. That is exactly the reason why unwed women and their families usually attach great importance to finding a partner and getting married and the rich gentlemen not so much. It might seem like men are the ones under control in this scenario, since the women are after them and want to claim them in a sense, but it is the single women who are being pressured and controlled by the position they are in.¹⁰⁹

As an example, we can look at the characters of Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins. Even though he was not endowed with too much handsomeness or intelligence, Mr. Collins has the advantage of being a man. He has a profession, a steady income, and after Mr. Bennet's death, he is going to inherit Longbourn. He does not have to worry about getting married in general and not being able to find a wife if he decides he

¹⁰⁷ NEWTON, Judith Lowder: "'Pride and Prejudice': Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen." [online]. *Feminist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1978, pp. 27–42. [cit. 2020-03-07]. DOI 10.2307/3177624. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3177624>, p. 28.

¹⁰⁸ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ NEWTON, Judith Lowder: "'Pride and Prejudice': Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen." [online]. *Feminist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1978, pp. 27–42. [cit. 2020-03-07]. DOI 10.2307/3177624. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3177624>, p. 28.

wants one. Charlotte is not considered pretty either, but unlike Collins, she knows she might stay single her whole life because of it. She is intelligent, but in her situation, it does not matter very much. She simply needs to marry someone to be secured and does not care who, because she is a woman and does not have a choice. This is well described in the novel when Charlotte thinks about her engagement: "Mr. Collins, to be sure, was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only provision for well- educated young women of a small fortune."¹¹⁰

Throughout the whole story, there is no real recognition of the relationship between power and wealth. Although it is insinuated at the beginning of the novel that for men who abound in money there are certain advantages connected to power, in the course of the story, the distinctions of women and men are not by any means acknowledged as something that makes the female characters less powerful than the male ones. The women in *Pride and Prejudice* are not supposed to be perceived as characters that should be pitied for the social limitations they are dealing with. And the men might be rich and have all the advantages that come with it, but the author will not allow them to feel more powerful than women because of that. Ultimately the one character who is seen as the most powerful in *Pride and Prejudice* is the protagonist Elizabeth Bennet, who is a young girl without a husband and access to money.¹¹¹ Elizabeth's power is mostly demonstrated by her having strong principles and being determined to follow them no matter what. She is not afraid to turn down two men who offer her home, financial stability, and, in Darcy's case, also a very high social status, which could help her whole family. Elizabeth's rejection takes them both by surprise as none of them expect it. She also tells Darcy exactly what she thinks about him, which ends up humbling him in the end. She is not going to surrender to the wishes of her mother and marry for money alone because she believes it wrong and longs for a husband whom she can love and respect.

The most important distinction between men and women that Austen focuses on in the novel is the fact that women do not have money freely available for them like

¹¹⁰ AUSTEN, Jane, Keith CARABINE, Ian LITTLEWOOD: *Pride and Prejudice*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993. ISBN 978 1 85326 000 1, p. 105.

¹¹¹ NEWTON, Judith Lowder: "'Pride and Prejudice': Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen." [online]. *Feminist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1978, pp. 27–42. [cit. 2020-03-07]. DOI 10.2307/3177624. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3177624>, p. 29.

the men of the middle and naturally of the upper-class do. While not directly addressed, the male characters are entitled to have professions and thus make money, they have the right to become heirs and they can afford to study and gain a good education. On the other hand, women cannot engage in lucrative professions and their main task is public presentation. When it comes to heritage, women can only be gifted a certain amount of money, while men can have whole estates passed on to them.¹¹² We see an example of this privilege in the novel when it is discussed that after Mr. Bennet dies, all his property will automatically pass on to Mr. Collins, only because he is the closest male relative that Mr. Bennet has. If they do not get married or until they do, his daughters are going to stay without financial means after his death, and their further stay in the house is suddenly going to depend entirely on the goodwill of Mr. Collins.

Like Newton remarks, Jane Austen, once again, does not express any kind of outrage over the situation that women found themselves in. In the story, she even tries to avert the critique expressed. Two characters openly address the situation, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and Mrs. Bennet, but they both are written in such a way that the readers most likely will not take what they say very seriously.¹¹³ Morrison points out the fact that this approach of hers has been criticized by a huge number of feminists, who have analyzed Austen's work. Although they generally tend to see Austen as a "conscious or unconscious subversive voicing a woman's frustration at the rigid and sexist social order", some of them cannot help but feel betrayed by her attitude, saying she has "cowardly accommodations with the patriarchal order."¹¹⁴

Like already mentioned, men do not necessarily need wives. Some of them naturally want to get married but they do not have to feel the same pressure as women do. The male characters in the novel are aware of their ability to be selective and they like to follow this rule. When Mr. Collins makes his proposal to Elizabeth, he deems it very important to mention that she was not his only option and that he could have chosen differently if he wanted to. He also feels the need to justify to her why he chose her out of everybody else. Mr. Darcy, when we meet him at the Netherfield Ball for the first time, uses his advantage to be selective as well, refusing to dance with Elizabeth,

¹¹² NEWTON, Judith Lowder: "*Pride and Prejudice*: Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen." [online]. *Feminist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1978, pp. 27–42. [cit. 2020-03-07]. DOI 10.2307/3177624. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3177624>, p. 29.

¹¹³ Id., p. 30.

¹¹⁴ MORRISON, Sarah R. "*Of woman borne: male experience and feminine truth in Jane Austen's novels*" The Johns Hopkins University Press, vol. 26, no. 4, 1994, pp. 337–349. [cit. 2020-03-24] *Studies in the Novel*: [online]. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/29533008, p. 337.

because, at first glance, she is not very appealing to him. When asking Elizabeth for her hand, he is so deeply engrossed in his advantage, he does not even start his proposal off by speaking about love, on the contrary, he talks about his suffering and it may look like he is only proposing to her because he could not fight what he feels for her anymore. Mr. Bingley applies his privilege as well when he falls in love with Jane Bennet at the beginning of the novel. Even though he is later influenced by other people and it seems like he is not going marry her after all, he is initially prepared to defend his choice to his family. Mr. Wickham acts like an active chooser throughout the whole story, at first attempting to run off with Georgiana Darcy, after that turning his attention to Elizabeth, then to Miss Mary King, and finally to Lydia Bennet, his future wife.¹¹⁵

It is apparent that male characters in *Pride and Prejudice* are aware of their social advantages and they do not hesitate to put them to use. Because they know that women are dependent on somebody asking for their hand, they usually do not expect to be turned down when they decide to propose. This becomes evident when Mr. Collins automatically supposes Elizabeth is playing hard-to-get after she has refused him five times. Mr. Darcy is so certain of Elizabeth accepting his proposal that he ends up bluntly insulting her family without thinking about the consequences of his words. Men have the power to choose to court any woman that they like and propose to anyone they want while women have no choice but to wait for somebody to express interest in them and are usually expected to be honoured and accept the first proposal they receive. Women of this time suffered from social prejudices and it influenced *Pride and Prejudice* as well, even though Jane Austen does not complain about it in the novel itself.

¹¹⁵ NEWTON, Judith Lowder: “‘*Pride and Prejudice*’: Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen.” [online]. *Feminist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1978, pp. 27–42. [cit. 2020-03-07]. DOI 10.2307/3177624. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3177624>, p. 31.

7. Conclusion

The aim of my thesis was to analyze the significance of social class and the effect that it had on forming romantic relationships in the novel *Pride and Prejudice* by the English author Jane Austen. In conclusion, I would like to summarize my findings and talk about what I have learnt about this topic.

Jane Austen wrote about the lives of the gentry in the English countryside at the beginning of the 19th century. Because this was the time she lived in, we can argue that her works are very authentic. In all her novels, she deals with the question of interpersonal relationships, the differences between the social positions of her characters, and primarily with the theme of courtship and marriage. Austen also concentrates on the role of women at her time. She describes the uneasy situation of young women who were pressured by the society of this time to find a husband, which would give them the advantage of losing financial dependence on their families and getting their own home while possibly bringing a more desirable social status to their parents and siblings. This becomes very apparent in *Pride and Prejudice*, where Mrs. Bennet's only goal seems to be marrying off all her daughters while trying to make sure their marriages will be advantageous for the family. Because women were disadvantaged when it came to heritage, they often had no other choice than to get married, even without love. That is for example the case of Charlotte Lucas, who feels that she needs to get married in order not to become a burden for her family. The situation of men was much less complicated, they could get proper education, choose a profession they would like to engage in, and they did not need to get a wife to be financially independent, so they did not have to worry about these things.

In my thesis I tried to describe all the relationships that were formed in the novel, taking into consideration how the characters became couples and to what extent social class and money influenced their decisions. Taking a look at the marriage between Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley, we can conclude that the social status and annual income of Mr. Bingley were the main reason why Mrs. Bennet wanted Jane to marry him all along, however, his warm and kind personality was an important factor as well. For Jane, Bingley's wealth did not play too big of a role and she married him out of love. Bingley did not mind what family Jane came from and while it is true that he let himself be talked out of his intention to ask for Jane's hand at first, in the end, he realized he made a mistake. Austen lets her readers know that Jane and Bingley's

marriage is a happy one, which was to be expected since they are very close in mind and character. Charlotte Lucas, on the other hand, was not as lucky, she knew she had to get married to someone to move out of Lucas's house, become independent and start her own family. In Charlotte, it's very clear to see how difficult the situation was for women. Like many real girls of this time, the character of Charlotte ends up marrying a man she does not love only to essentially fulfil her social duty. Even though she is intellectually superior to her husband and they do not seem like a great match, she is quite content with her decision because Mr. Collins has a house and a steady income, everything she needs to lead a comfortable life. Mr. Collins married Charlotte neither for love, nor for social status, but simply because he believed that he should set an example for his parish and him being unmarried would be improper. And also because lady Catherine, a person of a high social class, told him to. Mr. Wickham and Lydia Bennet are an example of a marriage that has only little chance to be happy in the future. Wickham has a lot of debts so he seeks a way to gain some money throughout the novel, which is why he courts the wealthy Miss King and essentially why he marries Lydia. He takes advantage of a young naive girl who is too excited about finally being in a relationship with a man that she does not question his motivations and who cares very little about his social standing. Looking at the main couple of the novel, Elizabeth has always had the intention to marry for love. Despite constantly being under her mother's pressure to marry well to bring some financial contribution into the family, her mind never changes, and she is determined to stay without a husband rather than get married for economic reasons only. As proof, we see her getting upset over her friend Charlotte marrying Mr. Collins and also her refusing two marriage proposals in a row, that of Mr. Collins but also that of Mr. Darcy who is offering her a high social position and a lot of money. Elizabeth chooses herself and her happiness over her family's needs and rejects him simply because she does not love him. Mr. Collins is very confident when proposing to Elizabeth because he believes that given his social advantages, she is practically bound to accept him. The same can be said about Mr. Darcy who is so self-assured that he ends up insulting Elizabeth and her family. This shows just how aware men were of the fact that they had the power to be selective and women, being dependent on someone asking for their hand in marriage, not so much. It also shows that women were often expected to automatically accept marriage proposals only because the man asking happened to have a lot of money. Mr. Darcy is quite aware of where he stands in society and until he meets and falls in love with Elizabeth, he does not intend

to marry below his class. He tries to fight the growing affection but is eventually overwhelmed by his feelings. Elizabeth starts falling in love with him gradually after seeing Darcy's estate and lands in Pemberley for the first time. While she marries him out of love at the end of the novel and is happy she has found someone who is intellectually equal to her and whom she can respect, it can be argued that his economic situation was taken into consideration too, however, it was not the main reason that she eventually agreed to become his wife.

To conclude all my findings, in *Pride and Prejudice* the theme of class and social rank is one of the most significant ones. When somebody is poor or simply comes from a lower class than somebody else, they might be looked down upon. On the other hand, if a man comes from a good social background and is known to be rich, he can be sure it is going to make him very desirable in the eyes of unmarried women and he will be able to play selective, often regardless of his looks and character. High social rank and money help women as well. It makes them desirable in the eyes of rich bachelors who do not wish to marry below their class, but it is also sure to attract a lot of men like Mr. Wickham, who will try to seduce and get married to them only to profit from their wealth and possessions. The theme of the social class goes hand in hand with the topic of courtship. In this period, it is almost impossible to completely separate them. The females are generally interested in making the most favourable acquaintances because they need it to gain some social security in life. Of course, not all people married solely for money, there was love involved in most of the cases, however, the aspect of social standing was undoubtedly taken into consideration. Jane Austen describes different types of marriages in *Pride and Prejudice*, those based on love, those motivated by economic reasons, and those caused by naivety and formed because of an initial enchantment that will vanish after the wife and husband have spent some more time together, like in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet or Lydia and Wickham. Overall, she also gives hope to young girls of her time by having her main character, who is a middle-class girl of no fortune, refuse two marriage proposals in a row, showing them they do not need to settle for the first man who expresses interest in them just because he happens to be rich and that waiting for someone they can love and feel respect for is important to have a successful and happy marriage.

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