JIHOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V ČESKÝCH BUDĚJOVICÍCH

FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL CLASS ON MARRIAGE IN THE WORKS OF JANE AUSTEN

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Studijní obor: nAAL (maior) – nCNAS (minor)

Ročník: 3.

2023

I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

České Budějovice, 30. listopadu 2023

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Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor doc. PhDr. Ladislav Nagy, Ph.D. for his patience and the valuable advice that he provided during the guidance of my diploma thesis.

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na rozdíly mezi společenskými třídami v době regentské Anglie na přelomu osmnáctého a devatenáctého století a na to, do jaké míry tyto společenské nerovnosti ovlivňují utváření manželství v šesti dokončených románech spisovatelky Jane Austenové. Jelikož byla tato doba význačná také znevýhodněným postavením žen ve společnosti a v manželství, obsahuje práce také analýzu této problematiky a rozdílů práv a povinností mezi mužskými a ženskými postavami. Celkovým cílem práce je poukázat na to, za jakých podmínek se postavy v jednotlivých románech Jane Austenové rozhodují vstoupit do manželství, jakou roli pro ně při výběru partnera hrají rozdíly ve společenském postavení a zda při tom zohledňují své city či spíše ekonomické a společenské důvody.

Klíčová slova: regentská Anglie, dílo Jane Austenové, utváření manželství, dědictví, společenské třídy, pozemková šlechta, postavení žen

Abstract

This diploma thesis focuses on the differences between social classes in Regency England at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the extent to which these social inequalities affect the formation of marriage in the six completed novels of the author Jane Austen. As this period was also marked by the disadvantaged position of women in society and in marriage, the thesis also includes an analysis of these issues and the distinctions in rights and responsibilities between male and female characters. The overall aim of the thesis is to highlight the conditions under which the characters in Jane Austen's novels decide to enter into marriage, what role the differences in social status play for them when choosing a partner, and whether they take into account their feelings or rather economic and social reasons when doing so.

Key words: Regency England, the work of Jane Austen, the formation of marriage, inheritance, social classes, landed gentry, the role of women

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1 Introduction

The novels of Jane Austen have been loved by readers and celebrated for their social commentary and insightful exploration of the intricacies of human relationships for decades. While the author achieved some success during her lifetime, it was in the 20th century that her popularity grew significantly and her works gained widespread acclaim and became a significant part of literary culture. With a keen eye for the social dynamics of the Regency Era, Austen managed to craft narratives that not only entertain but also offer a critical examination of social norms and class distinctions of the time in which she lived and wrote her novels. One of the central themes that permeates her works is the role of social class in shaping the aspirations and eventual choices of individual characters in the context of marriage, which is the topic of my diploma thesis.

Jane Austen, one of the most recognized and appreciated authors of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, remains an enduring figure in the world of literature, on which it can be said that her works have left an indelible mark. Growing up, she was influenced by a wide range of authors, from the works of 18th century novelists like Samuel Richardson and Fanny Burney to the witty plays of William Shakespeare. These influences, coupled with her own observations of the society in which she lived, laid the foundation for Austen's unique storytelling style. Her novels were all published during the Regency Era in England which spanned from 1811 to 1820 and represents a period in British history when social dynamics were profoundly influenced by the intricacies of social class. The life situation of Jane Austen was ideal for observing the behaviour of people of various social standings and thus forming her own views on human nature and different types of human characters, which she used well in composing her novels. While her contemporaries often focused on themes like the Napoleonic Wars and other important historical events happening around them, Austen's novels are celebrated for their

exploration of the everyday lives of people from the middle and higher classes (most of her characters are part of the so-called ‘landed gentry’). She was able to create complex and vivid characters, whose stories are set in southern rural England in the early 19th century, which was the time and place in which she lived herself and of which she therefore had an intimate knowledge. Her novels are widely known to be about romance, which is undoubtedly true, however, perhaps the most intriguing part of her writings is the wit and sarcasm with which she is able to masterfully describe and make fun of the social expectations of her time. Jane Austen's novels are indeed mostly characterized by their social realism, biting irony, and keen social commentary. Her writing also delves into the intricacies of class, marriage, and morality, offering an authentic portrayal of the social norms and expectations of Regency England.

The lives of women who lived in the time of Jane Austen were not too comfortable if they did not manage to get married like the society generally expected of them. Unmarried women found themselves on the outskirts of society, they were financially dependent on their fathers or bothers and were not offered many options to support themselves, unlike men who either inherited the family estate and fortune or were allowed to choose a profession they preferred and start working. Austen does not directly criticize the social disadvantages that women of her time had to face, nevertheless, she demonstrates through her characters what the lives of men and women in the early 19th century looked like, how much money they made, what privileges or restrictions they dealt with and if they could hope to marry well based on the social classes, to which they belonged.

Since I am very much intrigued by the historical period of Regency England and Jane Austen is one of my favourite authors, I came to the decision to continue exploring what I had already started in my bachelor thesis, this time focusing not just on one but on all six of Austen’s completed novels. This diploma thesis therefore provides an analysis of the differences between

social classes in Regency England, focusing mainly on how woman were viewed by society as opposed to men and on what grounds people usually decided to get married to someone, which is very well reflected in the chosen literary works. This thesis will analyse how social class influenced not only the selection of marriage partners but also the legal and social implications of such unions. The economic aspects of marriage, including dowries, inheritances, and property rights, will be explored, as well as the societal pressures and expectations that individuals from different classes faced in their pursuit of marital happiness.

The reason why Jane Austen's novels are still gaining popularity among readers and getting new movie adaptations after two hundred years, apart from her masterful and witty writing style is that her characters feel like authentic people with their own flaws, insecurities and courage to defy the established social rules of the Regency period. Apart from looking for their suitable matches, they deal with everyday issues which speaks to people today as much as it did back then. Austen is known to be the first ever novelist who used free indirect discourse in her works, which is a narrative technique that blends the narrator's voice with a character's perspective and thus allows readers to personally relate to and feel an intimate connection with her characters. Moreover, her exploration of female characters, their struggles, and their agency in a patriarchal society can be considered quite groundbreaking, because although she did not directly criticize the rules of her society, she did express how difficult life was for many women in Gregorian England through her morally strong female characters who act on their feelings instead of the social expectations of their time. Her writing technique, coupled with her astute observations, continues to create a rich and immersive reading experience for people of all ages and times.

2 The Life and Work of Jane Austen

Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775, to George Austen and Cassandra Leigh Austen in Hampshire's small village called Steventon. She had six brothers and one sister named Cassandra, who she had grown extremely close to thanks to being her constant companion. Their parents made sure that both she and Cassandra received a proper education just like their brothers, however, the girls were first sent to a boarding school in Oxford when they were very young, Jane only seven years old. Tomalin points out that since Jane was a shy child (at least she described herself as being so), she was not happy about being away from home for such a long time. This was also when she possibly developed her love for reading as she turned to it in hopes of finding an escape from reality, which eventually made her dream about seeing her own novels on shop shelves one day.[1] Later, Jane and Cassandra attended the Abbey School in Reading owned by Mrs La Tournelle, which was a very well recognized institution at the time. In adulthood, Jane repeatedly expressed the distaste and pity that she felt for teachers, saying things like: "To be rational in anything is great praise, especially in the ignorant class of school mistresses."[2] or "I would rather do anything than be teacher at a school."[3] She includes some mentions of girls' boarding schools in her novels, the biggest example being *Emma*, where she, on the contrary, creates a picture of a safe and very agreeable place run by the amiable Mrs Goddard, whose school "was in high repute—and very deservedly…she had an ample house and garden, gave the children plenty of wholesome food, let them run about a great deal in summer, and in winter dressed their chilblains with her own hands"[4] Although one of the main themes Jane Austen writes about is finding love and forming marriages, she never actually married herself. She decided to refuse the only marriage proposal

[1] Tomalin, Claire. *Jane Austen: A Life.* Penguin Books, 1998, p. 38.
[2] Id., p. 38.
[3] Id., p. 38.
[4] Austen, Jane and Stephen M. Parrish. *Emma*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 12.

that was ever made to her (as far as known), nevertheless, despite the fact that she did not have a husband, she had the privilege of enjoying a rather peaceful, uncomplicated life. In his *Memoir*, Jane's nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh comes to the same conclusion as her older brother Henry Austen had before, namely that Jane's life was "not by any means a life of event"[5] and "few changes and no great crisis ever broke the smooth current of its course."[6] Eventually, Jane was able to fulfil her dream of becoming a published author and today she can without a doubt be considered one of the most beloved writers, whose works are among the most popular classics of all time.

The approach of female authors to writing had gradually changed and was becoming truly professional at the time when Jane Austen wrote and published her works. To a certain degree, the success of Austen's writing career was determined by her female contemporaries helping to establish a literary market for domestic fiction created by women.[7] According to a research carried out by Judith Phillips Stanton, "the number of women writers increased dramatically throughout the [eighteenth] century, but exploded at the end, rising by around 50 percent every decade starting in the 1760's."[8] We can therefore say that Jane Austen had the advantage of trying to make her break through as an author at a time when the opportunities for women to write and publish their works were essentially greater than ever. Like I have mentioned, Jane had dreamt about engaging in this profession ever since she was a child, and she managed to finish three novels before the age of twenty-five, although for quite a long time she struggled to find a publisher who would be willing to finally put her novels into public circulation.[9] She had previously tried to put both *First Impressions* (an earlier version of *Pride*

[5] Tomalin, Claire. *Jane Austen: A Life.* Penguin Books, 1998, p. 4.
[6] Id., p. 4.
[7] Copeland, Edward and Juliet McMaster, editors. *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 13.
[8] Id., p. 13.
[9] Id., p. 13.

and Prejudice) and *Susan* (whose title would, in the aftermath of Jane's death, be changed to *Northanger Abbey* by her brother Henry Austen) in print, however, neither of these two manuscripts were accepted by the publishing houses that she had decided to approach. Having completed *First Impressions* in 1797, Jane's father George Austen, who had always been very supportive of his daughter achieving her dreams, personally sent the manuscript of the novel to *Cadell and Davies* (a very respectable publishing company of the time), but the package was soon returned unopened. A similar thing occurred with the manuscript of *Susan*, which was withheld for a long time by the publishing house *Crosby* that Jane had sent it to, without them ever actually giving the novel a chance and printing it. Eventually, the first novel of hers which saw the light of day ended up being *Sense and Sensibility*, the revisited version of *Elinor and Marianne*, no sooner than in October 1811, when Jane was about to turn thirty-six years old. *First Impressions*, now remade to *Pride and Prejudice*, finally followed in 1813. *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* came out respectively in the next two years and the rest of her completed novels, namely *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, only ended up being published thanks to Jane's brother Henry, who had arranged their publication a few months after her death in 1817. There are two novels of Austen's, which she started to work on but did not manage to finish in her lifetime, *The Watsons* and *Sanditon*. Her only epistolary novel called *Lady Susan*, which is generally assumed to have been written in 1794, was not released until many years later, in 1871. In a *Memoir* about her life, Austen's nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh draws attention to a certain change in the author's style that can be found in *Mansfield Park, Emma* and *Persuasion*: "The long interval that elapsed between the completion of Northanger Abbey in 1798, and the commencement of Mansfield Park in 1811, may sufficiently account for any difference of style which may be perceived between her three earlier and her three later productions…marking the difference between the brilliant girl and the mature woman."[10]

[10] Deresiewicz, William. *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets*. Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 1.

Deresiewicz reacts approvingly to this statement, arguing that although Austen's first three novels are considered to be great in terms of their artistic merits, at their core they are essentially stories about the female protagonists finding husbands and getting married. He still describes the earlier novels as excellent and witty with impressively confident ideas, but expresses his agreement with the other three being more mature, more complex and deeper. This can be largely attributed to the fact that there was a twelve year difference between Austen finishing the work on her first three novels and starting *Mansfield Park* and in the meantime, her life conditions and experiences had substantially changed.[11] He characterizes the transition as follows: "From a maker of marriages, she becomes an investigator into the delicate anatomy of the human heart."[12]

It is quite known that Jane Austen never pays too much attention to the Napoleonic wars or other political affairs taking place during her life in her works. However, Monaghan argues that in contrast to what is often generally assumed, Austen actually shows a deep understanding of the current issues taking place in her day. This becomes especially obvious when we take the situation in England in the eighteenth century into consideration and realize how much of an important role was played by the relationships between neighbours living in the same small community, the landed gentry and their large country residences, the general rules of conduct and the formal occasions where the whole community meets up, for example at balls or dinners. References to the major issues of Austen's time (like the slave trade, the Napoleonic wars or even the ongoing agricultural reform) thus do not need to be found in her novels in order for Jane Austen to be considered a social novelist. She keeps her focus on the way that people of the landed classes interacted with each other in the context of the big house and the village.[13] When her niece Anna wished for her aunt to give her advice regarding novel writing, Jane

[11] Deresiewicz, William. *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets*. Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 1-2.
[12] Id., p. 1.
[13] Monaghan, David. *Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision*. The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980, p. 5.

responded directly in a letter addressed to Anna that "3 or 4 families in a country village is the very thing to work on."[14]

Austen's novels could by no means be considered the most successful of her time, in fact, she got neither big money, nor much recognition for them. Many female contemporaries of hers were, at their time, more acclaimed as novelists than she was and managed to earn a lot more than her, some examples being Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, Maria Edgeworth, or Amelia Opie. Like Copeland and McMaster state, "if we depart from Austen's practice, however, and calculate her earnings of just over £630 between 1811 and 1817 as a yearly income of £90 , we cannot conclude that she wrote herself into even temporary wealth."[15]

When the near contemporaries of Jane Austen express their opinion about her novels, they frequently describe them to be in contrast to other author's works, or even in contrast to their own.[16] Having read *Pride and Prejudice* in 1827, Sir Walter Scott formed his appreciation of Austen's writing abilities as follows: "That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements, and feelings, and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonder I ever met with. The Big Bow-wow strain I can do like any now going; but the exquisite touch, which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me."[17] G. H. Lewes, a well-known literature critic, recommended *Pride and Prejudice* to Charlotte Brontë in the year of 1848, but her response to the work was not nearly as positive as his. In a letter written to him, she wonders why he "likes Miss Austen so very much"[18] and argues that the novel portrays "an accurate, daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face! a carefully-fenced, highly-cultivated garden, with neat borders

[14] Monaghan, David. *Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision*. The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980, p. 5.
[15] Id., p. 13.
[16] Cooner Lambdin, Laura, and Robert Thomas Lambdin. *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*. Greenwood Press, 2000, p. 42.
[17] Id., p. 42.
[18] Id., p. 43.

and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck."[19] Lambdin states that Lewes acknowledged Brontë's question in his essay called *The Novels of Jane Austen* which was published in 1859 in *Blackwood's Magazine*, where he defends his praise for the novel and for Austen's works in general. He explains: "It is easy for the artist to choose a subject from every-day life, but it is not easy for him to so represent the characters and their actions that they shall be at once lifelike and interesting. . . . But Miss Austen is like Shakespeare; she makes her very noodles inexhaustibly amusing, yet accurately real. We never tire of her characters."[20] In 1870, Jane Austen's nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh published *A Memoir of Jane Austen* describing the life of his deceased aunt. Until that point, Jane had had her circle of faithful readers that was slowly but surely expanding, however, the *Memoir* had changed everything as it ended up being remarkably successful. Suddenly there was a wave of new enthusiasm for Jane Austen's novels, which were being massively re-released in new (often even illustrated) editions and also became subjects to many critical studies.[21] It was a second ever memoir written about Austen, the first being by one of her elder brothers Henry, who released it under the name *Biographical Notice of the Author* about fifty years prior to James Edward, nonetheless the writing was published rather quickly after his sister's death and it only consisted of a few pages.

3 Historical Background of Austen's Novels

The novels of Jane Austen were all published during the Regency Era, a historical period in England between the years 1811 and 1820, which referred to the accession of the Prince

[19] Cooner Lambdin, Laura, and Robert Thomas Lambdin. *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*. Greenwood Press, 2000, p. 43.
[20] Id., p. 43.
[21] Copeland, Edward and Juliet McMaster, editors. *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 232.

Regent to the English throne after his father, king George III, was found to be temporarily indisposed because of his illness. In reality, the first preparations regarding the question of Regency already began forming in 1788 because of the king's fluctuating health condition and eventually in 1789, a legislation was drafted that was supposed to allow the Prince of Wales to take over some of his father's responsibilities and privileges. However, since the King's health eventually improved, this legislation turned out to be unnecessary. Because of the Prince's outspoken rebellious friendships with prominent Whig leaders like Richard Brinsley Sharidan and Charles James Fox, the Tories, who were members of the opposing political party, felt especially alarmed by the idea of a Regency, which appeared destined to deprive them of their status and influence. The Whigs were understandably of a different opinion and when the King's health seemed to be deteriorating once more in both 1801 and 1804 respectively, Sidney Smith, a member of the Whig party, made a sarcastic comment about the King's 'deplorable knack of recovering'. Nevertheless, in October 1810, following the festivities marking the fiftieth anniversary of his reign, the health condition of George III ended up worsening so badly that he was no longer able to maintain his position as the head of state and his son officially took the oath of office a few months later on February 6, 1811.[22] Sales brings attention to Jane Austen taking interest in the important events of her time by quoting a letter that she had written to her sister Cassandra in 1809: "The "Regency" seems to have been heard of only here; my most political correspondents make no mention of it. Unlucky that I should have wasted so much reflection on the subject", indicating that she had spent a large amount of time thinking about the possibility of the Prince temporarily replacing his father on the throne and on this particular occasion being well ahead of the general opinion.[23]

[22] Sales, Roger. *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*. Routledge, 1996, pp. 56-57.
[23] Id., pp. 56-57.

Austen's life was also significantly marked by the French Revolution which started in in the year of 1789, making Jane thirteen years old at the time, and the following Napoleonic wars, which lasted up until 1815. As it progressed, the Revolution had made all countries in Europe feel uneasy, Mcdowall points out that "the British government was so afraid that revolution would spread to Britain that it imprisoned radical leaders. It was particularly frightened that the army would be influenced by these dangerous ideas…the government built army camps, where soldiers could live separated from the ordinary people."[24] Nevertheless, thanks to being positioned on an island and thus having the advantage of a much less accessible location for the French army than other European nations, The Great Britain did not find itself under immediate thread. In fact, they did not join the war until four years after it broke out, in 1793, after France had attacked the Low Countries (Holland and Belgium). Because of its conviction that it had the superior naval power and equally because of the need to maintain control over its trade routes to ensure its own survival, when Britain eventually joined the war, it chose to battle France at sea. The main strategy of the British was causing serious harm to the French trade by not granting the French a free passage of their ships (their navy fleet included) and hindering them from entering and leaving French ports. The British navy was first commanded by Admiral Horatio Nelson, who was killed at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, and ended up being succeeded by Wellington, who celebrated several victories over France. He finally managed to defeat Napoleon for good at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, with the help of the Prussian army.[25]

Jane Austen, like I have already mentioned, did not let her writings be too influenced by the political affairs that were happening around her, and although both of these significant events spanned over the majority of her life, she rarely ever makes any mention of them in her

[24] Mcdowall, David. *An Illustrated History of Britain.* Longmann, 1989, p. 128.
[25] Id., pp. 128-129.

works. Upon reading *Pride and Prejudice*, Winston Churchill, a prime minister of the United Kingdom, took notice of this as well and he made the following remark about the novel: "What calm lives they had…No worries about the French Revolution, or the crushing struggles of the Napoleonic wars."[26] In fact, many critics used to hold this against Austen and because she did not write about Napoleon, the French Revolution or other important events that took place during her lifetime, they decided to dismiss her as a not serious enough author. In reality, Jane Austen probably had a closer connection to the Napoleonic Wars than many other people because of her two brothers who served in the navy.[27] Austen herself made a sarcastic comment about *Pride and Prejudice* in one of the letters that she had addressed to her sister Cassandra, saying the novel is "rather too light, and bright, and sparkling; it wants shade; it wants to be stretched out here and there with a long chapter of sense, if it could be had; if not, of solemn specious nonsense, about something unconnected with the story; an essay on writing, a critique on Walter Scott or the history of Buonaparte…"[28] Roberts refers to this quote of Austen's, saying that it clearly shows the fact that she deliberately made the decision not to preoccupy herself with these issues like other authors in her situation might have done and to keep her focus and the setting of her novels limited to the country village life in England. He describes it as Austen's 'artistic decision', however he also admits that it could very well just be caused either by her being isolated enough from the war to never really feel directly influenced by it (she lived her life in the calm atmosphere of the rural south England) or by her simply not caring about it, since, given her social standing and her gender, she kept herself busy attending to other matters on a daily basis.[29]

[26] Worsley, Lucy. *Jane Austen at Home*. Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 2017, ch. 7.
[27] Id., ch. 7.
[28] Schorer, Mark. "Pride Unprejudiced." *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1956, pp. 72–91. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4333636, p. 74. Accessed 21 May 2023.
[29] Roberts, Warren. *Jane Austen and the French Revolution.* The Athlone Press, 1995, p. 68.

For the average English person living in this period, anything connected with France had negative connotations. Although Austen is too careful and discrete to openly express her dislike towards the French, Hellstrom mentions that some kind of francophobic allusions can be discovered in her novel *Emma* that may not be too obvious at first glance, but are worth pondering. Austen obviously puts the two main male characters, George Knightley and Frank Churchill, in contrast, nevertheless it can be argued that they essentially symbolize England and France. For while Knightley's name is a clear reference to the character's praiseworthy qualities that suggest he is the epitome of a good English knight, Frank's name and mainly his flaws seem to paint him as a reflection of the traditional French character as attributed to them by the English.[30] Churchill is condemned by Knightley right at the beginning of the novel, before the two even have the chance to meet: "if he turn out anything like it, he will be the most insufferable fellow breathing!...to be the practiced politician, who is to read everybody's talents conduce to the display of his own superiority; to be dispensing his flatteries around and that he may make all appear like fools compared with himself!"[31] and during the story, Knightley's opinion of him only continues to get worse. Once he even directly compares him to the French: "No, Emma, your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very 'aimable', have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him."[32] Mr. Knightley judges Frank Churchill very harshly, we can tell it is partly because at that point Emma's unconcealed attraction to Frank sparks feelings of jealousy in him that he is unable to control very well, on the other hand, Mr. Knightley is written in such a way that the readers realize that he is a man of good moral convictions and his judgement is sound and can be safely

[30] Hellstrom, Ward. "Francophobia in Emma." *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900, vol. 5, no. 4, 1965, pp. 607–17. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/449430, p. 611. Accessed 19 May 2023.
[31] Austen, Jane and Stephen M. Parrish. *Emma*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 98.
[32] Id., p. 97.

depended on, as his critiques of Emma are always fair and grounded in reality.[33] Frank can be very charming and definitely has a way with words, nonetheless, at the end of the novel, he is revealed to have been secretive and deceitful towards everybody the whole time. Worsley agrees with Hellstrom's view and apart from Frank Churchill, who, as she points out, likes enriching his speech with occasional French words and whose behaviour Mr. Knightley unwaveringly condemns, mentions another instance where Austen appears to be making a similar unfavourable allusion, namely the very disagreeable Mr. Hurst in *Pride and Prejudice*, who just happens to be a lover of the French cuisine.[34]

4 Social Background of Austen's Novels

4.1 Jane Austen and Social Class

The Austen family belonged to the upper-middle-class. Jane's father George Austen worked as a vicar at the local parish and had enough financial means to raise all his children in comfort and to even maintain a carriage with two horses. Thanks to him, the whole family also enjoyed amicable relations with wealthier neighbours. George Austen was a refined man who supported both his daughters' and sons' educations equally, without favouring his sons' education above that of his two girls. He was also not surprised when Jane told him about her writings, instead he encouraged her, unlike, for example, the father of Frances Burney, who did not learn about his daughter's authorship of the novel *Evelina* for a long time because she was determined to keep it from him. Jane's mother was, just like her daughter, a woman full of humour and boldness. In fact, all members of the Austen family shared the same perspective

[33] Hellstrom, Ward. "Francophobia in Emma." *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900, vol. 5, no. 4, 1965, pp. 607–17. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/449430, p. 610. Accessed 19 May 2023.
[34] Worsley, Lucy. *Jane Austen at Home*. Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 2017, ch. 7.

on society, which was very ironic and they obviously took great delight in all the ridiculous aspects. It is beyond doubt that Jane got the inspiration for her novels from her own surroundings and from all the people she encountered.[35] Because of her family's status and her position as an unmarried woman, Jane had access to meet many people who were members of various social classes and thus had the chance to observe and study their daily behaviour. Like Nicolson mentions, she was "humble enough to meet the villagers on terms not intimidating to them, refined and bright enough to associate with the minor aristocracy without awe or awkwardness."[36] This was easy to deduce from the letters that she wrote to her sister Cassandra, where she usually used 'cynically tolerant' but 'fun-loving' language. In one of the letters she wrote of her visit to a certain Lance family: "Mr. and Mrs. Lance live in a handsome style and are rich, and she seemed to like to be rich, and we gave her to understand that we were far from being so. She will soon feel therefore that we are not worth her acquaintance."[37]

Austen naturally had to deal with the difficulties that came with being a middle-class unmarried woman throughout her life. On one hand, it cannot be inferred from her correspondence that she felt in any way bitter about her life situation, on the contrary, she does not emphasize or complain about the restrictions imposed on her because of her gender and her attitude towards the way that the social system works seems to be more amused than anything. On the other hand, it is certain that she personally experienced said restrictions, such as being confined to her home, feeling the intense pressure of being obliged to find a husband and most of all, being economically dependent on her father and later her brothers. Since it was impossible for her to engage in a profession according to her preference, she had to get by with basically no access to money. At the time when her novels were finally starting to get published,

[35] Nicolson, Nigel. "Jane Austen and the English Class System." *Southwest Review*, vol. 70, no. 2, 1985, pp. 173–86. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43469736, p. 175. Accessed 24 Apr. 2023.
[36] Id., p. 176.
[37] Id., p. 175.

Jane's father had died and she was living together with her mother and her older (also unmarried) sister Cassandra in the Chawton Cottage. The financial resources of all three ladies were composed of the annual amount of £250, provided to them by the Austen brothers, Mrs Austen's income, which could by no means be considered large, and a small inheritance that had been bequeathed to Cassandra. Jane eventually helped expand the sum with the money that she earned for both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* combined. However, this amount was undoubtedly far from sufficient in the long term.[38] In a letter written in July 1813, Jane reports to her brother Frank that "I have now written myself into £250 – which only makes me long for more."[39] She often mentions her brothers in her written correspondence so we know that she witnessed four of them prosper in their careers (one of them worked as a curate, one in a prosperous banking firm, two became ship captains) and the only brother who had no employment happened to be an owner of two country estates. Jane and Cassandra lacked everything their brothers were free to enjoy; independence, the possibility of obtaining an inheritance and most importantly the privilege of choosing an occupation which would then become a stable and reliable source of income for them, but like I have already mentioned, there is almost no indication to be found in Jane's letters that would point to her taking the inequality between her brothers and herself too much to heart or feeling oppressed by society in general.[40]

4.2 The Importance of Social Status

The differences between social classes are important to many of the characters in Jane Austen's novels, just as they were important to people in real life at the time. These distinctions affected everything from the choice of suitable life partners to the way people perceived and

[38] Newton, Judith Lowder. "'Pride and Prejudice': Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1978, pp. 27–42. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/3177624, pp. 27-28. Accessed 29 May 2023.
[39] Id., p. 27
[40] Id., p. 27.

treated one another. This is true for Austen's characters as well. We can say some of them behave snobbishly and take great pride in their family status and wealth, while others, although they are still very much aware of the social differences, do not perceive them as too much of an obstacle and treat everyone with kindness and respect regardless of which class they happen to come from.

It is a very good point that a title "is sometimes almost a guarantee of fatuousness in Austen's fiction."[41] Her titled characters almost always serve as a comedic relief because they either act pompously in the sense that they feel very strongly about their own significance or just ridiculously. Good examples of that would be Sir John Middleton and his wife Lady Middleton in *Sense and Sensibility*, who "strongly resembled each other in that total want of talent and taste which confined their employments…within a very narrow compass"[42], Sir William Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice* who cannot seem to stop talking about 'St. James's' (the royal palace where he received his knighthood) or *Persuasion*'s Sir Walter Elliot, who is a ridiculous character obsessed not only with his baronetcy, but also his, and other people's, appearance.

Except for Lord Osbourne, a character from Austen's unfinished novel *The Watsons*, and Lord Fitzwilliam, the father of Colonel Fitzwilliam, who is only briefly mentioned in *Pride and Prejudice*, the highest male titles in her works are baronet and knight. Le Faye takes notice of this, saying Austen "never attempted to portray any landowner of higher rank than Mr. Darcy, the grandson of an earl, nor anyone richer than the foolish Mr. Rushworth, with his £12,000 a year…She herself was of the middle rank... and drew pen-pictures of that same middle-rank society which she saw around her - the country baronets, squires and parsons."[43] Copeland and

[41] Copeland, Edward and Juliet McMaster. *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 116.
[42] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Sense and Sensibility*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 26.
[43] Le Faye, Deirdre. *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002, p. 73.

McMaster compare baronetcy and knighthood, which are both expressed by the usage of 'Sir' in front of a man's name. They conclude that the title of a baronet holds way more significance, for it always passes from father to son. Knighthood, on the other hand, is not inherited but awarded.[44] A woman has the right to attach the title of a 'Lady' to her first name if her father is an earl, in which case the title is hers for life and she does not have to worry about losing it, even if she happens to marry an untitled man. This was the case with Mr. Darcy's mother, who could still be called Lady Anne, after she married Darcy's father, who came from a very honourable and respectable family, which was, however, untitled. When, on the other hand, a woman's title belonged to her last name instead, like that of Lady Russell in *Persuasion*, Lady Bertram in *Mansfield Park* or Lady Middleton in *Sense and Sensibility*, it meant that she only acquired it after getting married to a knight or a baronet. If such a lady were to re-marry and her new husband would be a plain 'Mr.', she would not be able to keep her title.[45]

For some characters in Jane Austen's novels, it is an absolute necessity to marry somebody who is going to bring them money and social significance and for some of them it is love that is essential in a marriage. However, they all know that if they plan on getting married, a decent and steady income is undoubtedly required. This is a topic that is discussed between the two Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, after Elinor points out that money is one of the guarantees of happiness for married couples:

> "Elinor, for shame!" said Marianne, "money can only give happiness where there is nothing else to give it...." "Perhaps," said Elinor... "we may come to the same point...Come, what is your competence?" "About eighteen hundred or two thousand a year; not more than THAT." Elinor laughed. "TWO thousand a year! ONE is my wealth!

[44] Copeland, Edward and Juliet McMaster. *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 116.
[45] Id., p. 117.

> I guessed how it would end." "And yet two thousand a-year is a very moderate income," said Marianne. "A family cannot well be maintained on a smaller…" (67)

It thus "immediately transpires that Elinor's idea of wealth amounts to considerably less than Marianne's notion of competence"[46], even though Marianne likes to think that passionate love is the only thing that could ever persuade her into matrimony and that she has no regard for anything else.

An example of a very ambitious female character who is attracted to wealth and intends to marry advantageously would be Mary Crawford from *Mansfield Park*. Initially, she is ready to capture the attention of Tom Bertram because he is the eldest son of a baronet and thus the heir to Mansfield Park. After spending some time in his company, she comes to the conclusion that he has "easy manners, excellent spirits, a large acquaintance, and a great deal to say; and the reversion of Mansfield Park, and a baronetcy, did no harm to all this"[47] and she "soon [feels], that he and his situation might do. She [looks] about her with due consideration and [finds] almost every thing in his favour…"[48] We see that as long as there is a chance for her to charm the eldest Bertram son, she does not consider his younger brother Edmund a potential husband at all. Despite Mary eventually falling in love with Edmund, it is obvious that love is not enough for her to be content in life, which becomes apparent from her unpleasantly surprised reaction after being informed about Edmund's plan to be ordained a clergyman as soon as possible. Because a good social standing is the most important thing to her, she essentially goes against her own convictions in liking Edmund. Mary's lack of respect for the profession that he deems his true calling, makes Edmund disappointed and he is shocked by the way she expresses her

[46] Downie, J. A. "Who Says She's A Bourgeois Writer? Reconsidering the Social and Political Contexts of Jane Austen's Novels." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2006, pp. 69–84. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30053492, p. 69. Accessed 6 June 2023.
[47] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Mansfield Park*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 35.
[48] Id., p. 35.

opinions about it. He wishes that the woman he would like to marry was willing to adapt to his life-style and tried to understand why it is so important to him to take up this occupation. However, Mary does not regard Edmund's future prospects as favourable and cannot imagine herself as a clergyman's wife. She makes a lot of remarks to provoke Edmund and let him know how much she disagrees with his choice. For example, when a ball is taking place in Mansfield Park, she refuses to dance with him, because "she never has danced with a clergyman she says, and she never will."[49] The relationship between them is not going anywhere and "remains in a precarious balance between Mary's unwillingness to lower herself socially and submit to a country life, and Edmund's equal reluctance to shirk his duties and spend half the year in town."[50] Lauber highlights Mary Crawford's conviction that it is a duty of every woman to look after herself as well as she can, regarding, of course, social status and money. Mary says that Maria Bertram agreeing to marry Mr. Rushworth is essentially a sacrifice on her part[51], however she deems it completely natural and approves of her decision: "[Maria] has done no more than what every young woman would do; and I have no doubt of her being extremely happy."[52]

Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* is similar to Mary Crawford in the sense that she too is a cunning female character and a fortune chaser. We learn that her mother Mrs. Thorpe is "a widow, and not a very rich one"[53] and therefore Isabella does not have any fortune to her name which would guarantee that she will be able to find a husband. To carry out her plan to marry into wealth, she knows that she must use the only weapon that she possesses; her beauty. Before the beginning of the novel, she manages to win the affections of James Morland, the best friend of her brother John, while the Thorpe family hosts him for Christmas. For some

[49] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Mansfield Park*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 184.
[50] Lauber, John. "Minds Bewildered and Astray: The Crawfords in Mansfield Park." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1970, pp. 194–210. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29531389, p. 205. Accessed 6 June 2023.
[51] Id., p. 207.
[52] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Mansfield Park*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 77.
[53] Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey (Webster's Thesaurus Edition).* ICON Classics, 2005, p. 28.

reason however, she succumbs to the false impression that James's family, the Morlands, are much richer than they are in reality and continues to act upon this conviction. While the characters are located in Bath in the first half of the story, Isabella spends as much time with James as possible and subtly tries to bring Catherine Morland and her own brother closer together. She is revealed to be a hypocrite to the readers through her endless insisting on her own humbleness and selflessness to her friend Catherine: "My wishes are so moderate that the smallest income in nature would be enough for me. Where people are really attached, poverty itself is wealth; grandeur I detest: I would not settle in London for the universe. A cottage in some retired village would be ecstasy."[54] When she and James become officially engaged, she is absolutely thrilled about the idea of being a rich man's secured wife. Austen describes her enthusiasm in a similar way to Lydia Bennet's in *Pride and Prejudice*: "She saw herself at the end of a few weeks, the…admiration of every new acquaintance at Fullerton, the envy of every valued old friend in Putney, with a carriage at her command, a new name on her tickets, and a brilliant exhibition of hoop rings on her finger."[55] After Isabella finally learns about the actual financial situation of the Morland family, as Mr. Morland promises James and his bride-to-be a "living, of which [he] was himself patron…of about four hundred pounds yearly value… an estate of at least equal value, moreover, as [his son's] future inheritance"[56], she is taken aback and very disappointed. She pretends to be a faithful fiancée to James in front of Catherine but in reality she immediately lets go of her betrothed and is ready to choose her next target, someone, whose financial circumstances would better suit her intentions, eventually setting her eyes on Captain Frederick Tilney, the heir to Northanger Abbey, who seems to be paying attention to her.

[54] Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey (Webster's Thesaurus Edition).* ICON Classics, 2005, pp. 118-119.
[55] Id., p. 121.
[56] Id., p. 131.

The same pattern of behaviour can be found in *Sense and Sensibility*'s Lucy Steele, who shamelessly exchanges one brother for another in a blink of an eye once their mother decides to re-write her will. Lucy is initially engaged to Edward, the eldest son of the Ferrars family, however when the novel takes place, the two have been forced to keep their engagement a secret for four years, since Lucy would never be accepted by Edward's relatives, especially his proud and snobbish mother, if they found out about it. Like Lucy herself admits: "…she would never approve of it, I dare say. I shall have no fortune, and I fancy she is an exceeding proud woman."[57] Edward and Lucy fancied each other when they were younger but since they got engaged, they have barely spent any time together and it is apparent that Edward has lost all his interest for his fiancée a long time ago. Despite that (and his recently born love for Elinor Dashwood), their engagement continues, because, like Baker mentions, Lucy would never pass up the opportunity for such a wealthy match and Edward's character is so honourable that his conscience would not allow him to leave her, after once promising to marry her.[58] Eventually, Lucy resolves the situation for both of them by secretly marrying Edward's younger brother Robert instead, after Mrs. Ferrars finds out about the engagement and responds by disinheriting Edward. Like Easton says, Lucy ends up deceiving everyone by instantly adjusting her affections according to who the current heir is, which is very much in character for her and "how Lucy could so easily accept one Ferrars for another puzzles Elinor, but certainly not Austen's readers."[59] Perhaps the greatest irony is that despite behaving very much like Isabella in *Northanger Abbey*, everything works out for Lucy at the end and by her constant flattering, she even manages to win the favour of Mrs. Ferrars and ends up becoming her favourite daughter-in-law.

[57] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Sense and Sensibility*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 96.
[58] Baker, William. *Critical Companion to Jane Austen: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. Facts on File, 2008, p. 431.
[59] Easton, Celia A. "'Sense and Sensibility' and the Joke of Substitution." *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1993, pp. 114–26. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225383, p. 120. Accessed 8 June 2023.

Aside from characters wishing to find advantageous partners for themselves, there are also snobbish characters in Austen's novels, usually older and somehow related to the protagonists, who feel entitled to intervene in their love life and control who they decide to marry so that it does not go against their own wishes.

In *Pride and Prejudice* it's Catherine de Bourgh, a lady of a high social rank, who is, because of her wealth, of the opinion that other people are obligated to obey whatever she says. Like Mr. Collins reminds his cousin Elizabeth while they are visiting Rosings, Lady Catherine "likes to have the distinction of rank preserved."[60] She believes that people should choose their partners based on wealth and social background and she voices her opinion more than clearly to Elizabeth after she hears the rumours of her nephew Darcy's intentions to marry her. She comes to Longbourn personally to scold Elizabeth for her plan to capture Mr. Darcy to climb the social ladder. She talks about her conviction that Darcy should marry her own daughter, Anne de Bourgh, since they are of the same social rank and directly calls Elizabeth a "young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world."[61] Lady Catherine tries to humiliate Elizabeth and make her call the supposed engagement off, the young lady, however, is not intimidated and argues back, which is something Lady Catherine is not used to experiencing at all. Elizabeth reminds her that while Mr. Darcy is a gentleman, "I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal."[62] Giles notes that in her works Jane Austen goes against the courtship plot typical for many other courtship novels that were written in the eighteenth century, for example in Elizabeth Bennet she created a heroine who declares to be in charge of her destiny and refuses to submit to convention and the authority of Lady Catherine.[63] There is an obvious parallel

[60] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 182.
[61] Id., p. 393.
[62] Id., p. 395.
[63] Giles, Heidi. "Resolving the Institution of Marriage in Eighteenth-Century Courtship Novels." *Rocky Mountain Review*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2012, pp. 76–82. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23120602, p. 76. Accessed 4 June 2023.

between Lady Catherine and Mrs. Bennet. The behaviour of both ladies in public is shown to be ridiculous. Elizabeth feels embarrassed whenever her mother starts boasting about Bingley liking Jane or whenever she makes rude remarks about Mr. Darcy knowing that he is listening. When they are at Rosings, Darcy experiences something similar because of the way that his aunt treats Elizabeth and Charlotte Collins. At one point, he looks "ashamed of his aunt's ill breeding, and [makes] no answer."[64] It is worth noting that while Mrs. Bennet's inappropriate behaviour is often the topic of discussion, no character dares to make similar remarks about Lady Catherine since she is wealthy and socially significant.

Mrs. Norris in *Mansfield Park* is another example of such a character, but unlike Lady Catherine de Bourgh, she takes her snobbish tendencies out on a little girl who is, on top of that, a part of her own family. Fanny is already a very shy child and the way that her aunt treats her only continues to make it worse. It is a combination of many factors that has shaped Fanny's character to be anxious and insecure, the most important being that she has been neglected her whole life. Firstly by her mother, who (like we witness later in the novel) has to take care of way too many children at once to be able to give proper attention and love to either of them, and by a father who has been an alcoholic and always made her intimidated more than anything else. Fanny never feels like an important part of her family and this does not change when she is brought to Mansfield Park to live with her relatives. On the contrary, her aunt Mrs. Norris, does everything in her power to make Fanny believe that she does not matter and cannot compete with her cousins in anything since she comes from a poor family. Aunt Norris emphasizes at every opportunity that Fanny should be grateful to the Bertrams for letting her stay with them in the first place and that she should always stay humble and not think too much of herself. This attitude successfully makes however little confidence Fanny had to begin with

[64] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 195.

disappear and she constantly feels insecure. Nevertheless, Fanny undergoes a significant change during the course of the novel, not so much a change in her character but in the way other people perceive her. At first, she is looked down upon by almost everybody, but at the end "all this is reversed. Fanny becomes the favorite of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, she gains the love of desirable men, and she comes to be admired as the most consistently virtuous and perceptive person around."[65]

Mrs. Ferrars and her daughter Fanny Dashwood are two really snobbish characters in *Sense and Sensibility*. John and Fanny Dashwood move to Norland as soon as John's father dies, despite knowing that his step-mother and three sisters have nowhere to go. After some time of sharing the estate with its new owners, Mrs. Dashwood is unable to tolerate Fanny's insults anymore and considers it a necessity to find a new home as soon as possible. The main reason for Fanny's bitter remarks is the flourishing relationship between her brother Edward Ferrars, who is a visitor at Norland, and Elinor. Now that the Dashwood ladies have lost their wealth and social standing, Fanny does not want her brother to be involved with Elinor in any way, because she does not consider her an appropriate match for somebody who comes from her high-status family. At the earliest opportunity she makes sure to talk to Mrs. Dashwood about Edward's "great expectations, of Mrs. Ferrars' resolution that both her sons should marry well, and of the danger attending any young woman who attempted to draw him in"[66], obviously referring to Elinor. Her mother Mrs. Ferrars is a very proud woman who has always been "disappointed by [Edward's] lack of ambition."[67] At first she is angry with him because he clearly has feelings for Elinor and later, when it is revealed that he has been secretly engaged

[65] Paris, Bernard, J. *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach.* Wayne State University Press, 1978, p. 24.
[66] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Sense and Sensibility*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 19.
[67] Morgan, Susan. "Polite Lies: The Veiled Heroine of Sense and Sensibility." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1976, pp. 188–205. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2933501, p. 190. Accessed 20 May 2023.

to Lucy Steele, she decides to reject him as her son and sign over everything that should have been his to her younger son Robert.

Paris describes *Persuasion's* Sir Walter Elliot and two of his daughters, Elizabeth and Mary, as "vain, self-indulgent, superficial people who are devoid of inner resources and who do not deserve the privileged position which they enjoy."[68] Sir Walter and his eldest daughter are responsible for spending far beyond their financial means, which is why they are forced to consider renting Kellynch at the beginning of the story. Sir Walter also disapproved of Anne agreeing to become Wentworth's wife eight years ago. He believes that should one of his daughters marry a navy man, it would be a most undignified union and therefore he gave Wentworth's proposal "all the negative of great astonishment, great coldness, great silence, and a professed resolution of doing nothing for his daughter."[69] Also worth mentioning is General Tilney from *Northanger Abbey*, who wants his son Henry to marry Catherine Morland, for he is falsely convinced of her being a future heiress of the wealthy and childless Allens, "hence his embarrassingly flattering attentions to her, in effect courting her on Henry's behalf."[70] It is only after the vindictive John Thorpe spreads the word of Catherine not being actually rich that General Tilney "instantly dismisses Catherine from his home"[71], unaccompanied and in the middle of the night.

There are two main characters in Austen's novels who start their respective stories being very proud of their social standing and acting quite snobbish towards other people, namely Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Darcy. It should be noted that both of these characters go through a major character development and in the end are able to realise and learn from their mistakes.

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[68] Paris, Bernard, J. *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach.* Wayne State University Press, 1978, p. 148.
[69] Austen, Jane and Patricia Meyer Spacks. *Persuasion*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1995, p. 18.
[70] Le Faye, Deirdre. *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002, p. 212.
[71] Baker, William. *Critical Companion to Jane Austen: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. Facts on File, 2008, p. 291.

However, at the beginning they believe to be superior to people from lower social classes and act accordingly. They both make the same mistake of separating a couple in love because they do not deem one of them good enough for the other. Goodheart describes the character of Emma as "wilful, manipulative, an arranger or rather a misarranger of other people's lives…much of the time she fails to see things clearly and truly, and her self-knowledge is uncertain"[72], which is true for most of the story. Emma immediately opposes the idea of her friend Harriet Smith agreeing to marry the young farmer Robert Martin. She speaks ill of his looks and his manners even though she has never even properly spoken to him and warns Harriet that they could no longer continue with their friendship if she were to marry somebody like Mr. Martin. She says that regarding social class, he is "the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity. The yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower… might interest me; I might hope to be useful to their families... But a farmer can need none of my help, and is, therefore, in one sense, as much above my notice as in every other he is below it."[73] At the beginning of the story, Emma fancies Mr. Elton in love with Harriet, because she is of the opinion that since Harriet is now her friend and companion, she has every right to have ambitions, hope to marry advantageously and that she can certainly do better than Robert Martin. When Mr. Elton proposes to her instead of Harriet, Emma is in shock and tries to explain to him that she was merely being nice to him because she thought of him as her friend's suitor. It is quite ironic that Emma is surprised by Mr. Elton feeling offended that she should think him interested in somebody as insignificant and poor as Harriet, but she is very insulted herself that Elton ever believed her to be enamoured with him, when she is so far above him. She thinks about it in the following way:

[72] Goodheart, Eugene. "Emma: Jane Austen's Errant Heroine." *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 116, no. 4, 2008, pp. 589–604. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27550012, p. 589. Accessed 21 May 2023.
[73] Austen, Jane and Stephen M. Parrish. *Emma*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 17.

> He must know that in fortune and consequence she was greatly his superior. He must know that the Woodhouses had been settled for several generations at Hartfield, the younger branch of a very ancient family -- and that the Eltons were nobody…and the Woodhouses had long held a high place in the consideration of the neighbourhood which Mr. Elton had first entered not two years ago, to make his way as he could, without any alliances but in trade, or anything to recommend him to notice but his situation and his civility. (89)

At the beginning of *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy attends the Netherfield ball but as Ewin points out, he is "cut off from the new people he meets, or at least from those he regards as being his social inferiors,… because of…something within his control; he does not speak freely to them and will not dance."[74] He is therefore declared to be terribly proud by the whole local community. Darcy too is against his best friend Charles Bingley courting Jane Bennet, because he believes her to be indifferent towards his friend but especially because of her not too flattering family connections from her mother's side and because of the total lack of good manners frequently practiced by the whole Bennet family in public. He explains his reasoning for playing a role in separating Jane and Bingley to Elizabeth in the following way: "The situation of your mother's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison of that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father."[75] The most significant turning point for Darcy is when Elizabeth resolutely rejects his marriage proposal and lets him know how inappropriate it is for him to speak about her family in such an insulting way in front of her when trying to propose marriage to her. She humbles him when she calls out his rude behaviour by saying "[the

[74] Ewin, R. E. "Pride, Prejudice and Shyness." *Philosophy*, vol. 65, no. 252, 1990, pp. 137–54. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3751384, p. 138. Accessed 21 May 2023.
[75] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 220.

mode of your declaration] spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner."[76] For Emma it is the trip to Boxhill, where she carelessly offends the poor and socially insignificant Miss Bates in front of all their mutual friends and acquaintances. Just like in *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth helps Darcy realise that he should try and fix his manners, in *Emma* it is Mr. Knightley who always expresses his true and honest opinions about Emma's behaviour and who gives her a scolding for what she did to Miss Bates. Emma, who values Mr. Knightley's good opinion more than she even realises, feels very humbled, embarrassed and is full of remorse. She takes Knightley's reproaches to heart and pays a visit to Miss Bates the next day to apologise.

We also have characters who tend to idealise people that are socially above them, the best example being Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*. We witness him acting overly confident and self-absorbed because of his acquaintance with Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who sometimes invites him to dine at Rosings. She mostly pays attention to him because she likes to order people around and knows that Mr. Collins admires her and does everything she tells him to. Mr. Collins, however, believes that the attention of somebody so rich and socially significant, is the greatest honour one can possibly receive and he boats about their relations at every opportunity. He only decides to look for a wife after Lady Catherine advices him that he should. Kica highlights the acquired arrogance of Mr. Collins, saying that "taking from what Lady Catherine had taught Mr. Collins, Collins considered himself superior to other people, especially the Bennets' sisters."[77] This becomes obvious when he pays a visit to the Bennet family. He intends to choose himself a bride among his cousins because being the closest male relative of Mr. Bennet, he has the certainty of inheriting Longbourn one day and thus believes

[76] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 215.
[77] Kica, Eljvira. "Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice." *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, vol. 5, no. 11, 2017, p. 4-13, *IJSELL*, www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijsell/v5-i11/2.pdf, p. 5. Accessed 30 Apr. 2023.

that any of the girls would be most grateful for his proposal. Mr. Collins is proud of having a steady income, a prospect of a future inheritance and good social connections and believes himself to be the best possible husband candidate that his cousins could ask for. He does not require his wife to be rich, he simply wants to quickly marry somebody to set "the example of matrimony in his parish"[78] and to please Lady Catherine.

Similarly to Mr. Collins, in *Emma* we find a comical character called Augusta Hawkins, who gets married to Mr. Elton soon after she meets him in Bath. She is a social climber whose overwhelming desire is to be admired and accepted by the high society. Even though Mrs. Elton believes herself to be of a great social significance, her artificial manners give away that she is merely trying hard to fit in and has no real perception of what is and what is not socially tolerable and therefore she comes across quite ridiculous. Knowing that her rich brother-in-law is the only reason she can be associated with high society, she feels the need to frequently mention his wealth. Nicolson calls out her very out of line behaviour during the whole course of the novel, like calling Mr. Knightley, a man who belongs to a superior social class and whom she has only met once before, "Knightley" as if she knows him intimately, which leaves Emma really annoyed because she would never think about doing that herself (and she and Knightley have been closely befriended for Emma's whole life). This is one of the indications of how impertinent Mrs. Elton can be.[79] Le Faye points out that "in the 1790s it was permissible to call or refer to a man by his surname alone, as 'Willoughby' or 'Bingley', but twenty years later Mrs Elton's use of 'Knightley' is considered a vulgarity."[80] Mrs. Elton loves attributing more importance to herself than she really has. She theatrically refers to her husband as 'caro sposo' and makes sure to emphasize to Emma how much of a favour she has done Mr. Elton by

[78] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 118.
[79] Nicolson, Nigel. "Jane Austen and the English Class System." *Southwest Review*, vol. 70, no. 2, 1985, pp. 173–86. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43469736, p. 180. Accessed 30 Apr. 2023.
[80] Le Faye, Deirdre. *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002, p. 212.

marrying him since she is in possession of greater wealth than him. She shows off at every opportunity, talks constantly about Maple Grove, the estate where her married sister now lives, compares it to Hartfield and even mentions that having a lot of friends in Bath, she could introduce Emma to the best local society if she ever decided to visit the place.[81] Whalan points out that Mrs. Elton's vulgarity also comes through when she admits to not remembering her servants by name and thus makes it clear that she does not pay them any respect. However that does not stop her from boasting about having more than one servant at her disposal [82],: "The man who fetches our letters every morning (one of our men, I forget his name) shall enquire for yours too and bring them to you."[83]

On the other hand, there are also characters who do not form their opinion on other people based on their social standing, who do not feel superior because of their wealth, but on the contrary, act very friendly towards everyone. Such characters include Charles Bingley or Edward Ferrars, who are, at the beginning of their respective stories, painted as obvious contrasts to Mr. Darcy and Fanny Dashwood.

When a man has money at his disposal and a good social standing on top of that, he is inevitably going to be perceived as attractive to women, although nothing is yet known about his character or appearance. This is the case with Mr. Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*, who is considered an impeccable husband candidate, especially by Mrs. Bennet, who sees herself as his mother-in-law from the moment she finds out about his arriving to the countryside, despite not knowing anything about what he is actually like. Another good example would be *Persuasion*'s Captain Wentworth who was once considered a not good enough match for Anne

[81] Nicolson, Nigel. "Jane Austen and the English Class System." *Southwest Review*, vol. 70, no. 2, 1985, pp. 173–86. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43469736, p. 180. Accessed 30 Apr. 2023.
[82] Whalan, Pamela. "Understanding Emma's World." *Excellence in Literature*, 5 October 2015, www.excellence-in-literature.com/understanding-emmas-world-by-pamela-whalan/#work. Accessed 30 Apr. 2023.
[83] Austen, Jane and Stephen M. Parrish. *Emma*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 192.

Elliot, a baronet's daughter, and now that he has made a lot of money and established a good name for himself, he suddenly becomes a very desirable man worth of respect. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Colonel Brandon must tolerate constant teasing by Mrs. Jennings who takes pleasure in matchmaking, because he is a wealthy bachelor. When she first meets the Dashwood daughters after the family has moved to the neighbourhood, she promises the young ladies that she will find husbands for them as soon as possible. Le Faye describes how Mrs. Jennings soon brings Colonel Brandon to Elinor's attention, on behalf of her sister Marianne, with whom she believes that Brandon has fallen in love. She makes sure to emphasise that his estate Delaford is worth two thousand pounds a year and praise how beautiful and conveniently situated it is.[84] Mr. Rushworth in *Mansfield Park* lacks both intelligence and good looks, however when he takes a liking in Maria Bertram, his proposal is immediately accepted, because he is rich and thus desirable. After they have been formally engaged, Rushworth becomes a frequent guest at Mansfield and everybody blatantly ignores the fact that Maria is not affectionate towards him in any way. The only one who does not think them to be a suitable match is Maria's older brother Edmund:

> Edmund was the only one of the family who could see a fault in the business; but no representation of his aunt's could induce him to find Mr. Rushworth a desirable companion. He could allow his sister to be the best judge of her own happiness, but he was not pleased that her happiness should centre in a large income; nor could he refrain from often saying to himself, in Mr. Rushworth's company—"If this man had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very stupid fellow." (30)

[84] Le Faye, Deirdre. *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002, p. 164.

4.3 Eldest Sons and Inheritance

In Regency England, the eldest sons were usually the ones who inherited everything from their families, whilst their younger brothers and sisters were left to make their own way in the world. The sisters were commonly expected to achieve this by getting married and having their husband take care of them financially while the younger brothers had to decide what profession to take up in order to make money and start living independently.

Sometimes it was possible for a man to become an heir to a family, to which he was only distantly related. We see an example of that in *Pride and Prejudice,* where we learn that "Mr. Bennet's property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year, which, unfortunately for his daughters, was entailed in default of heirs male, on a distant relation…"[85] This means that Mr. Bennet did not choose to bequeath his property to Mr. Collins of his own free will, but that the hereditary line of succession was determined by a previous owner. When a land or an estate was 'entailed', it basically meant that after the father's death, it would automatically go to the first-born son and in case the family only had daughters, then the closest male relative would become entitled to it instead. This is the case not only in *Pride and Prejudice,* but also in *Persuasion,* where Sir Walter Elliot does not have a son and therefore the whole family property is going to go to a close male relative, Mr. William Elliot. Sir Walter calls him his "heir presumptive"[86] since there is always a chance for him to re-marry and have a son before he dies, in which case Mr. Elliot would lose his right to inherit. The fear of losing what he already considers his makes Mr. Elliot come to Bath later in the novel to keep an eye on Mrs. Clay, a close family friend, who is secretly believed to be trying to get Sir Walter to marry her.

[85] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 31.
[86] Austen, Jane and Patricia Meyer Spacks. *Persuasion*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1995, p. 4.

Sometimes the estates did not have entitlements on them, so the presumed future heirs had to behave in a certain way that the people who decided to gift them their money considered unproblematic. There is a certain similarity between *Emma*'s Frank Churchill and *Sense and Sensibility*'s John Willoughby's life conditions. Both men are depended on their aunts to bequeath their estates and wealth to them after they die. Once Willoughby's aunt finds out about him seducing a young girl called Eliza Williams and leaving her uncared for with his child, she threatens him with disinheritance unless he fulfils his moral duties and marries her. Willoughby is frightened about losing the social standing and life-style that he has always been used to and decides to sacrifice his relationship with Marianne Dashwood in the name of wealth. He quickly leaves Devonshire without a proper explanation, but instead of accepting his responsibility for Eliza, he comes to London, where he immediately starts courting a rich heiress, miss Sophia Grey, who he knows is going to get a dowry of 50,000 pounds. Neill says that Willoughby, at first, "looks decided and open…but proves decidedly devious and unreliable."[87] Similarly, the whole subplot centring around Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax in *Emma* is a direct consequence of Frank being financially reliant on his aunt. Unlike Willoughby, he is not willing to give up his fiancée Jane and is determined to make their relationship work somehow, even if it means being secretive in front of everyone. He knows that his despotic aunt would never agree with such a union since Jane has nothing to her credit but education and good manners that she has acquired in Ireland thanks to her guardians, Mr. and Mrs. Campbell. In order for there ever being a chance of them getting married, they decide to keep their relationship a secret from everybody so that Frank's aunt does not have a chance to find out about it and disinherit

[87] Neill, Edward. *The Politics of Jane Austen*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 47.

him. As Monk suggests, they essentially have no choice but to "[hold] out until her death, at which time they could appeal to her more tractable husband."[88]

There were naturally cases when the eldest son and heir was in favour of choosing a profession even though there was no need for it, simply to keep himself occupied. *Northanger Abbey*'s General Tilney approves of this, which we find out when he tells Catherine that he deems it "expedient to give every young man some employment…even Frederick, my eldest son, you see, who will perhaps inherit as considerable a landed property as any private man in the county, has his profession."[89] We have *Sense and Sensibility*'s Edward Ferrars complaining about being bored and idle since no profession is required of him, saying it "will always be a heavy misfortune to me, that I have had no necessary business to engage me, no profession to give me employment, or afford me any thing like independence… I am, an idle, helpless being"[90] and Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, who, in the presence of Fanny's sailor brother William Price, suddenly realizes how useless he feels: "The glory of heroism, of usefulness, of exertion, of endurance, made [Henry's] own habits of selfish indulgence appear in shameful contrast; and he wished he had been a William Price, distinguishing himself and working his way to fortune and consequence with so much self-respect and happy ardour, instead of what he was!"[91] It is also shown how the idleness so often practiced by the eldest sons could lead to an irresponsible life-style. We have the example of Tom Bertram, the heir to Mansfield Park, who has gambled away so much money that his younger brother Edmund, who aims to become a clergyman, cannot afford to keep the Mansfield parsonage in his possession.

[88] Monk, Leland. "Murder She Wrote: The Mystery of Jane Austen's 'Emma.'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1990, pp. 342–53. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225305, p. 343. Accessed 21 May 2023.
[89] Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey (Webster's Thesaurus Edition).* ICON Classics, 2005, p. 171.
[90] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Sense and Sensibility*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 75.
[91] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Mansfield Park*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 162.

4.3.1 Landed Gentry

Spring states that the landed society of eighteenth and nineteenth century England could essentially be divided into two main groups; "the aristocracy (roughly owners of estates of 10,000 acres and more) and the gentry (owners of estates of less than 10,000 acres)"[92], who were socially right below them. Todd estimates that the number of aristocratic families in England in 1803 was around three hundred and goes on to calculate how far the different ranks of the landed gentry were represented in the same year: "a gentry society comprising the families of approximately 540 baronets, 350 knights, 6,000 landed squires and 20,000 gentlemen, amounting in total to about 1.4 per cent of the national population and enjoying 15.7 per cent of the national income…"[93] The eldest sons who were born into the landed gentry were one day automatically going to inherit the family estates and fortunes. Whalan remarks that sometimes their inheritance consisted of such huge sections of land that they included entire towns or villages.[94] They did not have to engage in any occupations like their younger brothers for they earned money by renting houses or farms which were located on said lands and could thus very well live off their rental incomes. As Whalan further points out, being a landowner also came with some civic responsibilities, like settling minor disputes in the neighbourhood, which is best seen in *Emma*, where Mr. Knightley is the appropriate person to be notified of there being a group of gypsies who attacked Harriet Smith.[95] We also know that Robert Martin, one of his tenants, wishes to get his approval to marry Harriet and that it is also required of him to attend Highbury's regular parish meetings along with Mr. Elton and a few other local men.[96]

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[92] Spring, David. "English Landed Society in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." *The Economic History Review*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1964, pp. 146–53. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2592696, p. 150. Accessed 12 June 2023.
[93] Todd, Janet. *Jane Austen in Context.* Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 390.
[94] Whalan, Pamela. "The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice." *Excellence in Literature*, 4 February 2015, https://www.excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/#earning. Accessed 12 June 2023.
[95] Whalan, Pamela. "Understanding Emma's World." *Excellence in Literature*, 5 October 2015, www.excellence-in-literature.com/understanding-emmas-world-by-pamela-whalan/#work. Accessed 12 June 2023.
[96] Le Faye, Deirdre. *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002, p. 74.

It is interesting that Jane Austen does not concern herself much with the lives of aristocrats, but that "the largest incomes in [her] novels are most frequently reserved for the landed gentry."[97]

4.4 Younger Sons and Professions

Sometimes the younger sons were lucky enough to get some financial help as well. Like Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park* points out: "There is generally an uncle or a grandfather to leave a fortune to the second son"[98] and sometimes they could hope to inherit some land or money from the relatives on their mother's side.[99] In special cases, they may have acquired the family fortune in other ways. *Sense and Sensibility*'s Colonel Brandon is sent into the army after his first love is forced to marry his elder brother instead of him. Brandon then spends many years serving in east India and he only comes back home five years before the events of the novel take place, because of his brother's death. This way, he ends up inheriting the family estate called Delaford with the income of two thousand pounds a year and consequently becomes a very eligible husband candidate for the ladies. This is also exactly why Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park* wishes for Tom Bertram to die when he is seriously ill. She hopes that Edmund, as the younger brother, will suddenly inherit everything, give up on his dream of becoming a clergyman and marry her. Another case in point would be Robert Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*, who, as well as Colonel Brandon, suddenly inherits the entire fortune of his family. However, in his case it is not because of his older brother's passing but because his mother, the arrogant Mrs. Ferrars, decides to punish Edward for getting engaged to the poor Lucy Steele and disinherit him. The really ironic part about this is that Robert, after getting all

[97] Todd, Janet. *Jane Austen in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 324.
[98] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Mansfield Park*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 65.
[99] Todd, Janet. *Jane Austen in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 366.

the money, proposes to and marries the very same woman that his brother had previously been engaged to.

Other younger sons who could not count on having their wealth bequeathed to them or getting it another way, would commonly choose a profession and start working to earn their own money. Todd observes that Austen drew her knowledge regarding various occupations from her own relatives or from people in whose company she frequently spent her time. She was especially familiar with the clergy profession, since her own father and other relatives were engaged in it. From her brothers, Charles and Francis, who became sailors, she learned a lot about the Navy, which she touched upon in both *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park*. Henry told her about his life in the militia, which she included in *Pride and Prejudice* when working on the first draft in 1796-97 while her brother was serving.[100]

4.4.1 The Army

Joining the Army was "the favoured choice of aristocratic families."[101] The officers could either volunteer to be a part of the so-called militia, which consisted of groups that always formed in the times of war to defend their country, or become members of the regular army. In *Emma*, both Mr. Weston, who is Frank Churchill's father, and the father of Jane Fairfax had been in the army, however while Mr. Weston was in the militia for some time and started working in trade after his departure, Mr. Fairfax served in the regular army as an lieutenant. This ironically means that Jane's family was in fact more respectable than Frank's. Becoming a militia officer was actually not as difficult, because one was not in need of the wealth or social connections that were necessary to possess when joining the regular army. Of course, to some

[100] Todd, Janet. *Jane Austen in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 367-368.
[101] Id., p. 366.

extent it was important that the men in militia had a respectable background and were well educated but it was not like in the army, where they, for one, needed money to buy a commission for themselves and then also powerful connections since it rather depended on them than on their own ability if they were somehow going to be able to move up the ranks.[102] A good example of a militia would be the officers residing in Meryton in *Pride and Prejudice*. We learn that George Wickham decided to enlist in the militia after a chance encounter with a friend and he only becomes a regular army officer at the end of the story, thanks to Darcy buying a commission for him because of Lydia, providing him a stable employment and more of a social importance.[103]

Soldiers earned enough money to lead relatively comfortable lives, however, it was not enough to maintain the same lifestyle as the wealthy families that they came from. Since they were accustomed to a different standard of living, many of the young men were supported by their parents who would give them some amount of pocket money to help them out. A good example is Colonel Fitzwilliam in *Pride and Prejudice*, who, as an Earl's younger son, has had sufficient help to get his promotions in the army and to enjoy a carefree life. Had he, however, married a woman with no fortune attached to her, he would most likely have run into financial difficulties.[104] He does mention this to Elizabeth at one point: "Our habits of expence make us too dependant, and there are not many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention to money."[105]

[102] Whalan, Pamela. "Understanding Emma's World." *Excellence in Literature*, 5 October 2015, www.excellence-in-literature.com/understanding-emmas-world-by-pamela-whalan/#work. Accessed 10 June 2023.
[103] Whalan, Pamela. "The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice." *Excellence in Literature*, 4 February 2015, https://www.excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/#earning. Accessed 10 June 2023.
[104] Id.
[105] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 206.

4.4.2 The Navy and Law

Apart from the Army, there was also the possibility for the younger sons to become naval officers. According to Paris "the naval people generally are characterized by informal, spontaneous manners which proceed from a genuine feeling for others. They have earned their place in the world through meritorious service; and they lead adventurous lives, the discomforts and dangers of which are compensated for by the variety and intensity of their experience."[106] It was possible to make a fortune in the Royal Navy as the serving men were financially awarded for capturing enemy ships and besides that, they could also earn some additional money from a share of the spoils.[107] Captain Frederick Wentworth in *Persuasion* was "made commander in consequence of the action off St. Domingo"[108] in 1806, eight years before the beginning of the novel and because he was not currently needed by the royal navy, he stayed with his older brother in Somersetshire for six months, where he made the acquaintance of Anne Elliot. He did not possess any significant amount of financial resources when he started courting her, because he was "lucky in profession, but spending freely."[109] He had however managed to make a lot of money while serving in the navy after Anne turned him down and when the story begins, he is already a well-established captain. Aside from Wentworth, the naval profession is also represented by Captains Hardville and Benwick, two of Wentworth's friends who were however not nearly as lucky as him. According to Monaghan, "for every Captain Wentworth…there are many others like the disabled Harville [or] Benwick[110], who was "a year or two waiting for fortune and promotion."[111] In fact, many young men had to face the difficulty

[106] Paris, Bernard, J. *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach*. Wayne State University Press, 1978, p. 142.
[107] Hughes, Kristine. *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in Regency and Victorian England: From 1811-1901*. Writer's Digest Books, 1998, p. 99.
[108] Austen, Jane and Patricia Meyer Spacks. *Persuasion*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1995, p. 18.
[109] Id., p. 19.
[110] Monaghan, David. *Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision*. The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980, p. 145.
[111] Austen, Jane and Patricia Meyer Spacks. *Persuasion*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1995, p. 65.

of not being commissioned for a long time, like Hughes notes, it was fairly easy to attain a captain's rank if one had the certainty of an influential patronage, nevertheless continuously advancing in his career was a much more complicated task.[112] A good example of that would be another male character of Austen's who is engaged in the navy; William Price in *Mansfield Park.* By the time he decides to pay a visit to his sister Fanny and other relatives at Mansfield, he is "still only a midshipman"[113], although his uncle Sir Bertram has been supporting him throughout the years. He complains about his current situation because he wishes to advance in his career: "One might as well be nothing as a midshipman. One *is* nothing indeed."[114] and we can tell that he is becoming rather desperate: "I begin to think I shall never be a lieutenant, Fanny. Every body gets made but me."[115] He is, of course, talking about promotion. It is only through the intercession of Henry Crawford with his uncle Admiral Crawford, who obliges and puts in a good word for William that his long awaited promotion is finally confirmed:

> The first [letter] was from the Admiral to inform his nephew, in a few words, of his having succeeded in the object he had undertaken, the promotion of young Price, and inclosing two more, one from the Secretary of the First Lord to a friend, whom the Admiral had set to work in the business, the other from that friend to himself, by which it appeared that his Lordship had the very great happiness of attending to the recommendation of Sir Charles, that Sir Charles was much delighted in having such an opportunity of proving his regard for Admiral Crawford and that the circumstance of Mr. William Price's commission as second Lieutenant of H. M. sloop Thrush, being made out, was spreading general joy through a wide circle of great people. (204)

[112] Hughes, Kristine. *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in Regency and Victorian England: From 1811-1901*. Writer's Digest Books, 1998, p. 99.
[113] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Mansfield Park*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 160.
[114] Id., p. 171.
[115] Id., p. 171.

Neill remarks how interesting it is that "Fanny's own brother William is (corruptly) 'made' as an officer through his Mansfield connection"[116] This illustrates the unpleasant reality that men in the Navy had really slim chances of gaining rank without some kind of patronage from their acquaintances.

The law was considered a respectable profession in various degrees. On one hand, there were country attorneys, such as the father of Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, whose social standing was sufficient to marry off his two daughters quite advantageously (one to his assistant and one to a local landowner's son), and giving his son a good enough education to establish his own business. On the other hand, when somebody aimed to become a lawyer in a big city like London, which was of course more respectable, they needed much more than just intelligence to succeed; mainly money to be able to support themselves and also strong social connections.[117] For example John Knightley, the younger brother of Mr. Knightley in *Emma*, is a London-based attorney and since he happens to possess wealth, an honourable family background and also good ability, he could easily rise to the top of his profession thanks to his advantage.[118]

4.4.3 The Church

There was also the possibility to take up a church profession. The fact that clergymen so often appear in Jane Austen's works reflects just how much of a prominent role they played in the rural society of her day. In the country parishes where they lived, they were considered

[116] Neill, Edward. *The Politics of Jane Austen*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 90.
[117] Whalan, Pamela. "The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice." *Excellence in Literature*, 4 February 2015, https://www.excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/#earning. Accessed 11 June 2023.
[118] Whalan, Pamela. "Understanding Emma's World." *Excellence in Literature*, 5 October 2015, www.excellence-in-literature.com/understanding-emmas-world-by-pamela-whalan/#work. Accessed 11 June 2023.

the head of their communities along with the local landowners. Apart from their duties at the church, they were also involved in the local community's social life and were obliged to perform their civil responsibilities. A clergyman was, among other things, accountable for registering when babies were born, when people died or when couples got married. He helped take care of poor people in the neighbourhood, reported on how many volunteering men were available for service in times of war and even had the permission to act as a magistrate. The church livings in about half of all the parishes in the country belonged to the local landowners, which meant that they naturally had the right to appoint clergymen in their areas according to their liking. This was indeed a great opportunity for the younger sons of the landed gentry.[119] When a landed gentleman happened to own a parish and he had a younger son, he commonly saved it for him, regardless of whether the son was actually suitable for the work. Since the landowners decided who would take charge of the rectory, it was, needless to say, possible to buy the position or have it bought by somebody else. It could also be given as a favour[120], just like we see in *Sense and Sensibility*, when Colonel Brandon generously offers Edward Ferrars the position of a clergyman in Delaford where he resides, to help him out.

After the clergyman was appointed by the landowner, the position could no longer be taken from him by anybody for the whole duration of his life. He also could not move away from his parish, so if for example Mr. Elton wanted to apply for a transfer from Highbury after Emma refused his marriage proposal, it would not even be a possibility.[121] Along with the parsonage building, where he was able to live rent-free, the clergyman came to own some farmland, which was fully at his disposal; he could either rent it or take care of it himself, and

[119] Todd, Janet. *Jane Austen in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 368.
[120] Whalan, Pamela. "The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice." *Excellence in Literature*, 4 February 2015, https://www.excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/#earning. Accessed 14 June 2023.
[121] Whalan, Pamela. "Understanding Emma's World." *Excellence in Literature*, 5 October 2015, www.excellence-in-literature.com/understanding-emmas-world-by-pamela-whalan/#work. Accessed 14 June 2023.

additionally, the parishioners were obliged to pay tithes to him. It was also within his power to hire a so-called curate, something like an assistant who, for a salary, did most of the work for him.[122] This profession was very respectable and became even more inviting at the end of the 1700s, due to the value of the livings continuously rising.[123]

The clergyman profession is probably the most represented one in Austen's novels. It is even the occupation of some of the male protagonists like Henry Tilney and Edmund Bertram, who are the younger sons in their families, or Edward Ferrars, who may be an older son, but gets disinherited by his mother and is forced to take up a profession and start working. The clergymen were able to enjoy a reasonably comfortable life. Mr. Collins "probably had to purchase the living, but it was 'a valuable rectory,' and his income was sufficient for him to live in some degree of comfort."[124] Mr. Elton's life situation, as evaluated by Emma, "was most suitable, quite the gentleman himself, and without low connections; at the same time not of any family that could fairly object to the doubtful birth of Harriet. He had a comfortable home for her, and Emma imagined a very sufficient income…"[125]

4.5 Courting and Marriage in Regency England and in Austen's Novels

When a girl in Regency England reached the age of seventeen, it was usually time for her to 'come out', in other words, to be officially introduced to society. This was generally done at a ball that her parents threw specifically for this occasion (like Sir Thomas does for Fanny in

[122] Whalan, Pamela. "The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice." *Excellence in Literature*, 4 February 2015, https://www.excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/#earning. Accessed 14 June 2023.
[123] Todd, Janet. *Jane Austen in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 368.
[124] Whalan, Pamela. "The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice." *Excellence in Literature*, 4 February 2015, https://www.excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/#earning. Accessed 14 June 2023.
[125] Austen, Jane and Stephen M. Parrish. *Emma*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 21.

Mansfield Park). The ball was then followed by her accompanying her mother when paying visits to their neighbours, especially in the morning hours, and being included in invitations to common social events like balls or dinners hosted by her family's acquaintances. Of course, once a girl was 'out', it most importantly meant that she had now entered the marriage market and was expected to attend said events with the motivation of finding a husband. It was common for younger sisters to wait until their older sister either got engaged or until she had been unsuccessfully out for so many years that she started to be considered an 'old maid', to enter the society themselves. In *Pride and Prejudice,* Mrs. Bennet clearly does not care about honouring this tradition and lets all her daughters attend the local balls since she is anxious to marry them all off as quickly as possible.[126] Later in the novel, we witness the astonishment of Lady Catherine de Bourgh at the fact that all younger sisters of Elizabeth are out before she and Jane managed to get married. In reply, Elizabeth expresses her opinion that "it would be very hard upon younger sisters, that they should not have their share of society and amusement because the elder may not have the means or inclination to marry early.—The last born has as good a right to the pleasures of youth, as the first…I think it would not be very likely to promote sisterly affection..."[127] If a young woman had a sufficiently high social status (if she was for example a member of the nobility), she was presented at the royal court on the occasion of her introduction to society and would then start attending parties and balls to find a suitable husband from the own class.[128]

In the year of 1753, "Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act…made null and void any marriage not preceded by either the posting of banns or the securement of an official license, and that

[126] Whalan, Pamela. "The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice." *Excellence in Literature,* 4 February 2015, https://www.excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/#earning. Accessed 17 June 2023.
[127] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 187.
[128] Hughes, Kristine. *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in Regency and Victorian England: From 1811-1901*. Writer's Digest Books, 1998, p. 179.

had not been carried out publicly in a church or chapel by a regular clergymen during the prescribed daylight hours."[129] This law also introduced the obligation to make a record of all marriages in the parish registers and prohibited people, who were not yet twenty one years old, from getting married without their parents' clear consent. At times it therefore happened that a young couple without a blessing from their parents decided to elope, live together in a large city and after a while try to find a local clergyman who had no way of knowing who they were and what families they came from and ask him to perform the ceremony for them. Since the parishes they managed were not exactly small and the clergymen were quite busy, they would usually not bother looking into the family backgrounds of the fiancés and checking all the details regarding their age or place of residence.[130] Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* probably has no idea how much of a trouble she is causing her family by running away with Mr. Wickham. She does most likely believe that Wickham intends to marry her, nevertheless, she fails to realize that being underaged, she is not legally allowed to get married without the consent of her parents.

If everything was done right and according to conventions, a couple became formally engaged as soon as the gentleman's marriage proposal was accepted by the lady and her parents. Henceforth, he and his wife-to-be were allowed to take walks alone together and even spend time in each other's company at home without other people being present. They were both also immediately introduced to each other's relatives and automatically welcomed into their respective families. It was expected of the man to treat his new relatives with utmost respect, regardless of their social standing and especially if they belonged to a class that was beneath his own. The bride commonly received the first present by her betrothed shortly after she

[129] Hughes, Kristine. *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in Regency and Victorian England: From 1811-1901*. Writer's Digest Books, 1998, p. 180.
[130] Id., p. 180.

accepted his offer, it was usually a ring that was supposed to seal and symbolize their union.[131] It was highly desired that a woman had a so-called marriage settlement created before she got married, which basically meant that a document was crafted that established the appropriate amount of money (determined by the size of her dowry) that would be to her private disposal and the husband would have no right to touch it. The wife could do whatever she wanted with this money during her lifetime and then later will it to her children. Since a woman's property legally became her husband's after they got married, these marriage settlements were really important so that the wife could own a certain sum of money that she could freely use. When the husband was rich, it was possible for him to increase this amount according to his wishes.[132]

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, people had an entirely different perspective on getting married to somebody who came from the same family as them. People from elite and middle classes would probably have preferred if marriages were concluded between two members of the same family because it was viewed as deepening and expanding the already existing family ties. Such unions were usually perceived more advantageous than those between two people who were strangers before they met. However, opinions regarding the degree of the familial closeness that these bonds should have, differed widely between the middle class and the aristocracy. For while the people from middle classes were striving to enact a law allowing a widower to get married to the sister of his deceased wife as late as the beginning of the twentieth century, the aristocracy had already legalised marital attachments between cousins three centuries prior to that. A marriage between Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park* would thus not be considered incestuous from an aristocratic point of view.[133]

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[131] Id., p. 184.
[132] Whalan, Pamela. "The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice." *Excellence in Literature*, 4 February 2015, https://www.excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/#earning. Accessed 17 June 2023.
[133] Corbett, Mary Jean. "Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf." 1st ed., *Cornell University Press*, 2008. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt7v9fc, p. 40. Accessed 31 Apr. 2023.

It was commonly expected by the society that rich men and women would look for partners who belonged to the same social class as them and for that reason money was often prioritized over love. Even though according to moral advisors of the time, "if one of the parties has an independence and loves a person who is not in affluence, there can be no reasonable objection to the alliance, provided the affection be mutual and the *character* of the less wealthy party be unblemished"[134], Jones comments that in reality the family of the more wealthy partner would rarely rejoice over such an alliance and the character of the less rich party would inevitably be questioned.[135] Even in Austen's novels, there are usually the rich snobbish parents or other relatives of either the male or female protagonist, who are vehemently opposed their children marrying below their station. Even in the case of the kind parents of James Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, who support his decision to marry Isabella Thorpe because he loves her cannot help but rejoice when their engagement is called off: "We are sorry for him,…but otherwise there is no harm done in the match going off; for it could not be a desirable thing to have him engaged to a girl whom we had not the smallest acquaintance with, and who was so entirely without fortune…"[136] While the protagonists of the respective novels always consider love to be the single most important thing in a marriage and end up getting married for love at the end of their stories, there are quite a few characters who think very differently. Either they are rather cunning and chase after wealth because they cannot imagine having to get by without a certain standard of living or they simply do not hold love in such a high regard and take other things, that seem more significant to them, into consideration when choosing their future spouse. However, it should be noted that even the main characters are well aware that without

[134] Jones, Hazel. *Jane Austen and Marriage*. MPG Books Ltd, 2009, p. 9.
[135] Id., p. 9.
[136] Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey (Webster's Thesaurus Edition).* ICON Classics, 2005, p. 231.

money, it is impossible to lead a comfortable life. Hopkins truthfully points out that "in Jane Austen's novels it may be wrong to marry for money, but it is silly to marry without it."[137]

4.5.1 Marriage of Convenience

Paris discusses Elizabeth and Jane Bennet's reaction to their friend Charlotte Lucas agreeing to marry the narrow-minded Mr. Collins. While Jane is, expectedly, more sympathetic towards Charlotte's decision, saying that Charlotte finds herself in different circumstances than the Bennet sisters, and that she wishes for her to be able to eventually find happiness with Collins, Elizabeth is not that understanding. She simply does not comprehend how such a clever and sensible woman like Charlotte could even think of accepting the proposal of someone like Mr. Collins. Paris concludes that both sisters are correct in a way. However, Elizabeth does not seem to take into consideration that Charlotte has fully given up on the idea of finding emotional fulfilment in her marriage and is simply looking for someone who is willing to offer her a comfortable home. She knows she cannot count on having many suitors, since she is not rich or conventionally beautiful.[138] Kica also comments on Charlotte's appearance being an obstacle for her, as she does not have the possibility of charming a wealthy man at the first sight, like other young women, who are considered pretty, plan to do when they attend balls and other social events. Charlotte has other qualities, such as her intelligence, but she is well aware that by society, women are not evaluated based on how smart they are.[139] Like Paris says, since "she does not expect to have much choice in the selection of a mate, she is determined to accept the

[137] Hopkins, Lisa. "Jane Austen and Money." *The Wordsworth Circle,* vol. 25, no. 2, 1994, pp. 76–78. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24043082, p. 76. Accessed 31 May 2023.
[138] Paris, Bernard, J. *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach*. Wayne State University Press, 1978, p. 113.
[139] Kica, Eljvira. "Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice." *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, vol. 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13, *IJSELL*, www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijsell/v5-i11/2.pdf, p. 5. Accessed 28 Apr. 2023.

first socially eligible offer."[140] After marrying him, Charlotte feels embarrassed when Mr. Collins makes inappropriate remarks, but she bears with it by ignoring them. When paying a visit to the newly-wed couple, Elizabeth studies how Charlotte behaves around her husband and quickly notices that whenever "Mr. Collins said anything of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed...Charlotte wisely did not hear."[141] Weinsheimer remarks that Charlotte was after all wrong about happiness in her marriage being a matter a chance, because whatever level of happiness she is able to enjoy living by the side of Mr. Collins, is not rooted in chance but rather entirely in her persistence to play blind where it concerns her husband and her willingness to pretend she is living a happy life.[142]

In *Sense and Sensibility*, there are at least two couples where one of the parties is driven by selfish motives when pursuing the other. We have John Willoughby, whose sole reason for taking any kind of interest in Miss Grey is her being a wealthy heiress who is going to help him solve his financial issues. Elinor immediately comes to this conclusion when discussing Willoughby's despicable behaviour to Marianne and his upcoming marriage to Miss Grey with Colonel Brandon: "Have you likewise heard that Miss Grey has fifty thousand pounds? In that, if in any thing, we may find an explanation."[143] At the end of the novel, Willoughby tries to make excuses for himself, telling Elinor that he never meant to hurt Marianne, talking disrespectfully about his wife and even admitting that he only married her out of financial necessity. Furthermore, there is a love triangle which includes the cunning Lucy Steele and the Ferrars brothers, who both fall for her intrigues, Edward four years ago when he was young and naive and Robert now, because Lucy correctly gauges his vain character and manages to flatter

[140] Paris, Bernard, J. *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach*. Wayne State University Press, 1978, p. 113.
[141] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 177.
[142] Weinsheimer, Joel. "Chance and the Hierarchy of Marriages in Pride and Prejudice." *ELH*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1972, pp. 404–19. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/2872192, p. 409. Accessed 19 Apr. 2023.
[143] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Sense and Sensibility*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 141.

her way into his favour. Ironically, Robert is only able to marry a girl without a fortune thanks to his mother's decision to make him the family heir instead of Edward. Lucy has not officially broken off her engagement to Edward by the time she impulsively marries his younger brother and Edward only finds out via a letter that is sent to him after the ceremony that he has been replaced and is free to marry whoever he wants.

Mr. and Mrs. Elton in *Emma* are another obvious example of a couple that gets together because their union is mutually beneficial for both of them. Mr. Elton feels humiliated by Emma's rejection of his proposal and immediately sets out for Bath to find a suitable bride for himself, which he manages to do in about a month. Miss Augusta Hawkins is in possession of "an independent fortune, of so many thousands as would always be called ten; a point of some dignity, as well as some convenience"[144] and it is apparent that Elton is very proud of his accomplishment after he returns to Highbury with his wife. The new Mrs. Elton is disliked by almost everybody she meets since she "emerges as arrogant, vulgar, and conceited, and […] starts to compete with Emma for the position of leading Highbury lady."[145] The marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Elton surprisingly seems to be working out well, despite them entering it with selfish motives on both sides, perhaps because of the similarities in their characters; they are both self-centred and think very highly of themselves.

Maria Bertram in *Mansfield Park* decides to accept Mr. Rushworth's proposal while her father Sir Thomas is in Antigua with the purpose of solving some problems on his plantations. Her aunt Mrs. Norris introduces Maria to James Rushworth, a very wealthy and thus desired young gentleman with a large property and an annual income of twelve thousand pounds. Maria is enthralled by the idea of becoming a mistress of the Sotherton Estate, being able to afford

[144] Austen, Jane and Stephen M. Parrish. *Emma*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 117.
[145] Baker, William. *Critical Companion to Jane Austen: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. Facts on File, 2008, p. 40.

anything she wants, being socially significant and leading a varied social life since her husband-to-be owns a house in London. And most of all, like Baker points out, she cannot wait to move out of Mansfield Park and that way escape the rules of her strict father.[146] It is clear that Maria and Rushworth's relationship is not built on a solid foundation. Rushworth only "fancies himself in love"[147] because he is attracted to Maria and wishes to get married soon and Maria "being now in her twenty-first year,… was beginning to think matrimony a duty."[148] Maria's indifference towards her fiancé becomes the clearer the more time she spends in the company of Henry Crawford, a known flirt who enjoys making women fall in love with him only to have the satisfaction of breaking their hearts in the end. The Bertram sisters are clueless about his true character and they both soon find themselves attached to Mr. Crawford. However, while Julia's affections are perfectly acceptable, Maria is an engaged lady and her inappropriate behaviour makes Mr. Rushworth quite desperate although he does not admit it. Knowing Maria is unobtainable makes Crawford more attracted to her than to her sister and he keeps acting as if she is single and he has the right to court her. Baker mentions that Sir Thomas is the only one of Maria's relatives who feels the need to discuss her apparent disinterest in her soon to be husband. He talks to his daughter and assures her that if she does not feel like marrying Mr. Rushworth anymore, there is still time to break the engagement off. However, Maria is so disappointed in Henry Crawford, who has not asked her to marry him instead of Rushworth, that she decides to take revenge on him and not give him the power to ruin what her life is about to become. She does not want her reputation to be stained in any way and lose the opportunity to marry a man of Rushworth's financial qualities because of a man who is obviously not as interested in her as he has made it seem.[149] After Maria confirms to her father that she wishes

[146] Baker, William. *Critical Companion to Jane Austen: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. Facts on File, 2008, p. 187.
[147] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Mansfield Park*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 29.
[148] Id., p. 29.
[149] Baker, William. *Critical Companion to Jane Austen: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. Facts on File, 2008, p. 187.

to maintain her engagement to Mr. Rushworth, Sir Thomas does not question her choice any further and is actually quite relieved that his daughter is not going to turn such a wealthy man down. Their marriage, nevertheless, does not last. Maria causes a huge scandal for her family when she decides to leave her husband and elope with Henry Crawford after a very short time of being married. This indicates that even though she was quite sure before that money and a good social standing would satisfy all her needs and that those are the most important things a woman should expect from a marriage, she changed her mind rather quickly and ended up preferring love, regardless of getting her reputation ruined forever by publicly getting a divorce because of her infidelity.

4.5.2 Marrying for Love

Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley are one of the couples in Jane Austen novels that represent people truly falling in love with each other and overcoming many obstacles to get together. Jane, the eldest Bennet sister, meets Mr. Bingley at the Meryton ball where he is introduced to the local society, along with his two sisters and his best friend, Mr. Darcy. Since Mr. Bingley is known to be a wealthy gentleman, he is immediately considered a good possible husband candidate by all the unwed ladies and their families. It also helps that he does not judge people based on their social background and treats everyone with the same respect. He "had soon made himself acquainted with all the principal people in the room; he was lively and unreserved, danced every dance…"[150] Bingley seems to be particularly interested in Jane as he keeps asking her to dance with him throughout the whole evening, to the incredible joy of Mrs. Bennet. After some time, it is obvious to everybody that Bingley has fallen in love with Jane,

[150] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 11.

but she, while returning his feelings, is so shy and reserved that nobody except for people who know her well, can be sure whether she loves him back or not, despite having spent a lot of time in their company. Charlotte Lucas notices that Jane's nature is an obstacle to Mr. Bingley's courtship and mentions it to her friend Elizabeth, voicing her opinion that "it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him."[151] It turns out that Charlotte is right in this case because although Bingley does not care about Jane's poor family connections, he does care about mutual love being present in a relationship and since it does not take long for Darcy to convince him that Jane is totally indifferent to him, he decides to leave Netherfield. His sister Caroline dreams of Bingley marrying Georgiana Darcy, but even though it would be very easy for him to start courting Georgiana due to her being the sister of his best friend and having other qualities like being a wealthy heiress with an honourable family background, Bingley never expresses any kind of interest in her. At the end, the conflict between Bingley and Jane is resolved by Darcy admitting to being wrong and leading his friend back to Miss Bennet. They end up in a happy and successful marriage with each other that is celebrated by everyone, with the possible exception of Bingley's arrogant sisters.

Just like her older sister, Elizabeth Bennet is a young woman of romantic ideals who clearly demonstrates that she would rather face the consequences of staying unmarried than marry a man for whom she has no feelings and respect. Naturally the best possible solution for her would be attracting someone who she can both love and who is considerably wealthy in addition to that. Paris compares her situation and principles with those of Darcy's cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam, who, as the younger son of an earl knows he must find a wealthy wife to be able to maintain his lifestyle: "Neither Elizabeth nor Colonel Fitzwilliam would marry *for*

[151] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 23-24.

money, but they must hope to fall in love with someone who *has* money."[152] Darcy and Elizabeth both struggle with different obstacles when it comes to the idea of their engagement. Darcy comes to admire and be attracted to Elizabeth the more the longer he knows her. Throughout the story, whenever he mentions something about or compliments the woman he is falling in love with, Caroline Bingley makes sure to try and refute his good opinion by offending the Bennet family, especially Elizabeth's silly mother. Darcy feels just how inferior Elizabeth's social background and family relations are compared to his own and is heavily convinced that he must try his best to forget her. He feels that such an engagement would be way below his standards and generally condemned. Paris compares Darcy's and Elizabeth's conflicts, saying that whilst Darcy loves Elizabeth, he must come to terms with the difference in the social aspects of their possible union. In the end he chooses love above social equality and decides to propose. Elizabeth's problem is actually the exact opposite. Although she and the whole Bennet family would benefit greatly from her marrying Darcy, she is not willing to become the wife of a man whom she cannot respect and care for. Until she begins to fall in love with Darcy later in the story, she cannot imagine herself accepting his offer.[153] She even rejects his first marriage proposal due to her dislike for him, although she is well aware of his having "ten thousand a year"[154] and a "large estate in Derbyshire."[155] It is apparent that her rejection is crucial to Mr. Darcy's character development. As Kica says, "when Elizabeth flatly [turns] down his marriage proposal and [tells] him that it was ungentlemanly, Darcy is startled into realizing just how arrogant and assuming he [has] been"[156], which makes him work on his manners and eventually helps him win Elizabeth's affection. Out of all Austen's heroines, Elizabeth marries the richest

[152] Paris, Bernard, J. *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach.* Wayne State University Press, 1978, p. 103.
[153] Id., p. 105.
[154] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 10.
[155] Id., p. 11.
[156] Kica, Eljvira. "Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice." *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, vol. 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13, IJSELL, www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijsell/v5-i11/2.pdf, p. 9. Accessed 20 June 2023.

and most socially significant man and like Hopkins says when comparing her future standard of living to other female protagonists, "whereas Catherine and Elinor will only ever be comfortable, Elizabeth will be seriously wealthy."[157]

Elinor Dashwood and Edward Ferrars fall in love with each other right in the first chapters of *Sense and Sensibility*, however, Edward is not able to confess his feelings for Elinor since he has been secretly bound to Lucy Steele for four years and it does not seem like Lucy is ever going to change her mind about going through with their marriage. Since nobody knows about this secret engagement, both Mrs. Ferrars and her daughter Fanny Dashwood are harshly against Elinor, with whom Edward has clearly become enamoured, when in reality, their anger should be directed towards Lucy. Fanny Dashwood insinuates to Elinor's mother that Elinor should not strive to impress Edward since he is socially way above her. When dining with both Miss Dashwoods later in the story, Mrs. Ferrars keeps turning the conversation to a certain Miss Morton, whom she wants as a bride for Edward because of her thirty thousand pounds. After Edward and Lucy are forced to come clean about their intentions, the arrogant Mrs. Ferrars reacts by immediately disinheriting her eldest son. Edward is so honourable that he never wavers in his decision to keep his world and marry Lucy although it means losing all his social and financial privileges. Eventually, things come to a happy ending when Lucy "flatters the foolish Robert Ferrars into marrying her"[158], setting Edward free. Even though Edward has been disinherited by his proud mother, the snobbish Mrs. Ferrars changes her mind after some time of getting used to the new situation and ends up gifting her son with ten thousand pounds, which is the same amount of money that his sister Fanny got for her dowry, but she makes no promises regarding any future help. The situation is described like this: "while Robert was inevitably endowed with a thousand pounds a year, not the smallest objection was made against Edward's

[157] Hopkins, Lisa. "Jane Austen and Money." *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1994, pp. 76–78. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24043082, p. 77. Accessed 28 June 2023.
[158] Le Faye, Deirdre. *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002, p. 175.

taking orders for the sake of two hundred and fifty at the utmost; nor was anything promised either for the present or in future, beyond the ten thousand pounds…"[159] However, Edward and Elinor end up leading a comfortable and happy life, with "an income quite sufficient to their wants."[160] Edward can finally become a clergyman like he has always wanted and he and Elinor move to the Delaford parsonage, generously offered to them by Colonel Brandon "and we can calculate in pounds sterling their later happiness when they do agree to marry on £850 to £900 a year."[161]

In contrast to her older sister Elinor, it is not quite clear why Marianne Dashwood agrees to marry Colonel Brandon at the end of *Sense and Sensibility*. Throughout the story, none of the characters seems to be particularly bothered by the great age difference between the seventeen year old Marianne and the thirty-five year old Colonel, except for Marianne herself. Mrs. Jennings resolutely decides at the beginning of the novel that Brandon has fallen in love with Marianne and she is thinking about how "it would be an excellent match, for *he* was rich, and *she* was handsome."[162] It is interesting that Austen does not give these two characters many scenes together and during the story, Brandon spends much more time talking to Elinor than her sister. This is even noticed by the girls' half-brother John Dashwood, who, having spent some time in their company, quickly comes to the conclusion that the Colonel has fallen in love with Elinor and starts persuading his eldest sister not to waste such an opportunity and try to encourage him in his efforts. While it is obvious that Marianne slowly comes to admire and even care for Brandon, she has not yet fallen in love with him by the time she agrees to become his wife. Austen describes the situation that Marianne finds herself in at the end like this: "With such a confederacy against her -- with a knowledge so intimate of his goodness -- with a

[159] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Sense and Sensibility*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 264.
[160] Id., p. 264.
[161] Copeland, Edward and Juliet McMaster, editors. *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 138.
[162] Id., p. 29.

conviction of his fond attachment to herself, which at last, though long after it was observable to everybody else, burst on her -- what could she do?"[163], which could be interpreted to mean that Marianne essentially gives in to the wishes of her family by becoming Mrs. Brandon. It is worth noting that Marianne undergoes a significant character development during the course of the novel and at the end, she comes to appreciate and value different things in a man than she used to. For a long time she is of the opinion that Brandon, being thirty-five, is too old to be her suitor and she does not welcome his obvious affection, on the contrary, she tries her best to ignore the Colonel's feelings and makes sure to avoid him every time he comes for a visit. At this time, she is also under the influence of John Willoughby, who does not even try to conceal his dislike for Brandon and Marianne is so smitten that she would agree with anything Willoughby says. Marianne is blinded by love and does not realise any of Willoughby's deflects, like him not proposing to her despite spending all his time with her, making constant hints about the love that he feels for her and taking her to his mansion to show her around, suggesting that she is soon about to become the mistress of the house. As Baker notes "Willoughby and Marianne continue to defy convention by openly displaying their mutual attraction, and an engagement is expected."[164] Austen essentially says that Marianne changes her mind and agrees to become Brandon's wife because she is aware that everybody around them wishes for it to happen and because she knows that Brandon is a man of good moral convictions and, unlike Willoughby, will be faithful to her. Austen describes their marriage as a happy one but specifically states that Marianne only falls in love with her husband in time, the reason being that she "could never love by halves."[165] Hinnant suggests that "whatever doubts we may harbour about this new relationship reveal the difficulty we have in embracing

[163] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Sense and Sensibility*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 267.
[164] Baker, William. *Critical Companion to Jane Austen: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. Facts on File, 2008, p. 430.
[165] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Sense and Sensibility*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 268.

narratives in which the sentimental heroine abandons her quest for an ideal lover and romance."[166]

Emma's courtship plot is quite straightforward and not really a difficult one, as Magee says "Emma and Knightley merely have to become aware of their love for one another and marry, and Emma's delusions are the only obstacle."[167] These delusions, however, make Emma so invested in the lives of other people that she does not have the time to properly study her own wishes and desires. In the first half of the novel, Emma makes it perfectly clear to Harriet that despite playing a matchmaker for many of the people she knows, she has never had any attention of getting married herself. She explains her reasons as follows:

> I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing! but I never have been in love;…And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield. (55)

We see that Emma does not face the usual difficulties that other Austen's heroines (and real women of that time) had to deal with. She is a wealthy heiress and unless Hartfield, the Woodhouse family estate, has an entailment on it that was not discussed in the novel, she can count on her father bequeathing it to her, most likely along with her sister Isabella. It is probable that when she marries Mr. Knightley and becomes the mistress of Donwell Abbey, Mr. Woodhouse may decide to will his country estate to Isabella (and consequently to her eldest son Henry) since she is married to Knightley's younger brother and lives in a house in London,

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[166] Hinnant, Charles H. "Jane Austen's 'Wild Imagination': Romance and the Courtship Plot in the Six Canonical Novels." *Narrative*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2006, pp. 294–310. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20107392, p. 298. Accessed 4 June 2023.

[167] Magee, William H. "Instrument of Growth: The Courtship and Marriage Plot in Jane Austen's Novels." The Journal of Narrative Technique, vol. 17, no. 2, 1987, pp. 198–208. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225182, p. 202. Accessed 20 June 2023.

but Emma is, of course, not aware that any of this is going to happen. She does not feel the need to find a husband to move out of her parents' house since her father lets her manage Hartfield and she is rich enough not to consider it necessary to marry into wealth. Austen does not go into detail about how much money exactly is earned by Mr. Knightley, but she makes it clear that as a member of the landed gentry and the owner of Donwell Abbey, he is considerably rich. The marriage of Emma Woodhouse and George Knightley thus "unites two characters already occupying the highest social station in Highbury and it enables Mr. Knightley…to merge with Emma, the heiress of thirty thousand pounds."[168]

Harriet Smith and Robert Martin in *Emma* get married out of love but only at the end of the novel because Harriet is completely under Emma's influence during the whole story. Harriet Smith is a seventeen year old girl who was enrolled in Mrs. Goddard's girl school in the village of Highbury by her parents whose identity is unknown. When Emma Woodhouse chooses her as a friend and companion, Harriet's whole world changes. She feels extremely grateful that someone of Emma's social standing pays attention to her and she does everything that Emma says and idealizes everything that she does. Harriet comes to depend on Emma's judgement so heavily that she is unsure whether or not she should accept Robert Martin's marriage proposal and feels that she must console her friend on the matter before writing back to him. After Emma makes it absolutely clear that she does not agree with Harriet accepting the proposal, she says that she would hate to influence her, to which Harriet replies: "Oh! no, I am sure you are a great deal too kind to -- but if you would just advise me what I had best do -- No, no, I do not mean that -- As you say, one's mind ought to be quite made up -- One should not be hesitating -- It is a very serious thing. It will be safer to say 'No', perhaps. Do you think I had better say 'No?'?"[169] Since Emma is convinced that a farmer like Mr. Martin is not good enough for

[168] Grossman, Jonathan H. "The Labor of the Leisured in Emma: Class, Manners, and Austen." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 54, no. 2, 1999, pp. 143–64. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.2307/2903098, p. 145. Accessed 24 Apr. 2023.
[169] Austen, Jane and Stephen M. Parrish. *Emma*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 33.

someone that she has adopted as her friend, she subtly navigates Harriet to turn him down and makes her believe that she is soon going to receive another proposal, from Mr. Elton, who she firmly believes would make a much better match for Harriet. Having gone through some major disappointments, when it was revealed that both men that she became captivated by, namely Mr. Elton and Mr. Knightley, were actually interested in Emma instead of her, Harriet finally decides to think for herself and makes the decision to accept the repeated proposal of Robert Martin.

Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill meet and fall in love in Weymouth before the novel begins and are in a secret engagement throughout the whole story of *Emma*. The life condition of Jane Fairfax is not great as she "was orphaned as a child and informally adopted by Colonel Campbell, a man who because his fortune was only moderate had no means to make her independent and could only give her an education which would enable her to support herself as a governess."[170] Now that Miss Campbell, Jane's adoptive sister has gotten married and gone to Ireland with her husband, Jane chooses to return to Highbury to keep her grandmother and aunt company. As an orphan without a fortune, Jane is extremely lucky to have managed to capture the love of a wealthy young man like Frank, because otherwise she would have no choice but to succumb to the social expectations of her time and start working as a governess, which was one of the only respectable jobs available for women in Jane's conditions. Although she is beautiful, clever and talented to the point that Emma's jealousy of her makes her not like Jane and not want to associate with her, Jane is viewed in a very different light by society than Emma, because she belongs to a lower class. Napolitan describes how much better the life of someone like Emma Woodhouse was, simply because she was lucky enough to be born to a rich father who happened to be a part of the landed gentry: "Women in Emma's social class

[170] Tobin, Mary-Elisabeth Fowkes. "Aiding Impoverished Gentlewomen: Power and Class in 'Emma.'" *Criticism*, vol. 30, no. 4, 1988, pp. 413–30. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23112083, p. 414. Accessed 27 June 2023.

position have the independence to make any choice in life their desire, and get any suitor they desire while women in Jane's class must sell herself, and make sacrifices to achieve a desirable existence."[171] Although Jane is lucky to receive a marriage proposal, which would enable her to live a life in comfort, there is the great obstacle in the form of Frank's aunt, who expects her nephew to marry in accordance with his own social status. Jane and Frank have no other option but to conceal their feelings for each other until there is some hope for them, which they expect most likely will not happen until after Mrs. Churchill dies. In the end, just when Jane has lost hope of ever marrying Frank and decided to accept a decent job offer, they both get incredibly lucky since Frank's aunt ends up passing away at a most convenient time and they are free to finally marry.

Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* gets attached to Edmund Bertram as soon as she is brought to Mansfield to live with her aunt and uncle. Her love is most likely born out of gratitude as her cousin Edmund is the only one who starts paying attention to her and showing her kindness and affection. Her female cousins Maria and Julia make fun of how uneducated she is, Sir Thomas scares her and her aunt Mrs. Norris thrives on humiliating her for the reason that she comes from a poor family. Fanny's mother married against the wishes of her family and in contrast to social expectations, she chose a "Lieutenant of Marines, without education, fortune, or connections…she could hardly have made a more untoward choice"[172] and her sisters at Mansfield have not been in contact with her ever since. Moler argues that Fanny ends up developing a "'poor-relation mentality' as a result of the psychological pressures of her position at Mansfield Park."[173] Edmund is the only one who goes out of his way to make sure that Fanny feels comfortable at her new home and it is practically impossible for Fanny not to

[171] Napolitan, Eric. "Jane Fairfax: The True Heroine of Emma." *Ericnapolitan.Net*, 16 Jan. 2021, ericnapolitan.net/?p=31. Accessed 28 June 2023.
[172] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Mansfield Park*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 5.
[173] Moler, Kenneth L. "Miss Price All Alone: Metaphors of Distance in 'Mansfield Park.'" *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1985, pp. 189–93. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29532340, p. 189. Accessed 28 June 2023.

fall in love with him since he happens to be the first person in her life to ever treat her like she is important. She puts Edmund on a pedestal in her head and nobody can ever come close to being as good as him. She would never confess to Edmund that her affections for him are bigger than those of a cousin and she intends to keep it a secret forever. Fanny is essentially the most moral character in the novel and just based on her honourable character traits, it is easy to estimate that she would never marry for financial reasons. We do not know how exactly she thinks about her future, but since she is so deeply in love with Edmund that she cannot imagine ever loving somebody else and does not even dare to hope that he could ever return her feelings, she likely does not actively think about having to get married in the future (not yet anyway). She is not swayed by Henry Crawford's flirting attempts and does not think twice about rejecting his marriage proposal although he is very desirable in terms of wealth (his income is four thousand pounds a year) and social status. Edmund spends the entirety of the story under the spell of Crawford's sister Mary but once he finally realizes how morally corrupt she is, he starts seeing Fanny in a different light and after some time they marry and live in the Thornton Lacey parsonage, which is described by Crawford earlier in the novel as a "solid, roomy, mansion-like looking house, such as one might suppose a respectable old country family had lived in from generation to generation, through two centuries at least, and were now spending from two to three thousand a year in."[174]

Northanger Abbey's Catherine Morland is a young naive girl, who goes out in society for the very first time when her neighbours Mr. and Mrs. Allen offer to take her to Bath with them. As a daughter of a clergyman, Catherine has lived in the countryside all her life and it is only in Bath during the ball season that she begins to learn more about social conventions, about friendships (which is why she is so easily manipulated by Isabella) and naturally about

[174] Moler, Kenneth L. "Miss Price All Alone: Metaphors of Distance in 'Mansfield Park.'" *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1985, pp. 189–93. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29532340, p. 167. Accessed 28 June 2023.

courtship. Her principles are moral and her heart is in the right place for she declares that "to marry for money I think the wickedest thing in existence"[175] and she indeed does not evaluate Henry based on his family connections but based on his character and keeps seeking his company not out of calculation but because of the immediate fondness that she finds herself feeling for him. Hopkins describes Catherine by saying that she obviously does not care about money too much and therefore does not really take it into consideration, which, nevertheless, largely contributes to her naivete as she never thinks of the possibility that Isabella could betray her brother when it is revealed that he is not as rich as she thought and does not suspect anything weird in General Tilney's overly polite behaviour to her.[176] The General, Henry's father, is under the false impression that the wealthy Allens are going to considerably increase the amount of Catherine's dowry and for that reason alone, he tries to do his best to be attentive to her and bring her closer to his son. When he finds out that Catherine is nowhere near as wealthy as he imagined, he gets so angry with her that he immediately banishes her from the Abbey. Luckily for Catherine, Henry is already deeply in love with her and rides all the way to Fullerton to propose to her. They live comfortably and "we… understand how Henry Tilney… is just the right man for Catherine when the happy couple retire to their cottage at Woodston on his clergyman's income…, plus her marriage portion of £3,000, which, invested in the government funds, of course, adds a £150 a year to their income."[177]

Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* get their second chance at love eight years after Anne let herself be persuaded to turn down Frederick's marriage proposal. Back then, Lady Russell felt that Anne would be foolish to marry a man without a good social standing and secured fortune: "Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind,

[175] Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey (Webster's Thesaurus Edition).* ICON Classics, 2005, p. 122.
[176] Hopkins, Lisa. "Jane Austen and Money." *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1994, pp. 76–78. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24043082, p. 76. Accessed 28 June 2023.
[177] Copeland, Edward and Juliet McMaster, editors. *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 138.

to…involve herself at nineteen in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession…would be, indeed, a throwing away"[178], advised her to break the engagement off and Anne was not strong-willed enough to stand by her decision and in doing so, go against the wishes of those closest to her. It is quite ironic that Wentworth goes on to become a sailor and is later appointed captain and makes a good fortune. However, because of his wounded pride, he never reaches out to Anne again. As Paris says, "Wentworth is the chief blocking force both to Anne's happiness and to his own. He could have married her as soon as his fortune was made; but he was prevented from repeating his offer by his pride, which was hurt, and by his mistaken conception of her character."[179] Anne did love Wentworth when he first proposed to her, but she trusted Lady Russell's judgement more than she trusted her own. It is entirely possible that she also subconsciously agreed with Lady Russell's reasons for disapproving of the match, as the decision (although influenced) was in the end still hers to make, but if so, she does not mention it anywhere in the narrative. When the two protagonists eventually marry, there has been "an exchange of roles"[180], as Hopkins puts it, in their financial situations, for Anne's father has carelessly spent so much money that the family is forced to move out of the family estate while Wentworth is now a very rich man.

4.5.3 Married to Maintain a Good Reputation

In *Pride and Prejudice*'s Lydia Bennet Jane Austen presents an example of a young girl who is very heavily influenced by the expectations of society and especially by her mother who

[178] Austen, Jane and Patricia Meyer Spacks. *Persuasion*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1995, pp. 18-19.
[179] Paris, Bernard, J. *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach*. Wayne State University Press, 1978, p. 144.
[180] Hopkins, Lisa. "Jane Austen and Money." *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1994, pp. 76–78. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24043082, p. 78. Accessed 27 June 2023.

constantly emphasizes them. All Mrs. Bennet fancies to talk about are possible husband candidates for her daughters and therefore Lydia believes that the biggest achievement a woman can possibly accomplish in life is to find herself somebody to marry. Lydia perceives her wedding as a great triumph, she feels as though she has won a competition against her sisters and now acts like she is superior to them all: "[Elizabeth] then joined them soon enough to see Lydia, with anxious parade, walk up to her mother's right hand, and hear her say to her eldest sister, "Ah, Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman!""[181] When she visits Longbourn after marrying Wickham, Lydia does not seem to understand that by eloping she has done something unforgivably foolish and that she was very close to ruining the reputation of her whole family forever. Mrs. Bennet regards Lydia's elopement as silly and irresponsible as long as she is convinced that the chances of her other daughters to find husbands have been ruined, nevertheless, the moment she learns about Lydia being discovered by her uncle and her upcoming wedding with George Wickham, she starts bursting with joy and ignoring everything that could have happened had Wickham not been persuaded and bribed into marrying her youngest daughter. Lydia is a fifteen year old naive girl, so fascinated by the fact that she is a wedded woman and so in love with the idea of having a husband that she does not know or care about Wickham's true character and his gambling problems. She does not recognise his obvious deflects, like running away with her not only without being married to her but also without promising to marry her at all. Kica talks about how Wickham never had the intention of marrying Lydia because he had made a lot of debts and thus wanted a rich bride whose money would help solve his financial issues. He is only imagining a brief affair that will end soon, but he has to give all his plans up when Darcy offers to pay all his debts under the condition that he fulfils his duty and saves Lydia's reputation by

[181] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 350.

marrying her as soon as possible. He does not really have a choice.[182] Morgan aptly describes Wickham as "socially unacceptable, but for moral reasons rather than economic ones, not because he has no possessions but because he has no principles."[183] In the end, it is very obvious that Lydia will never be able to find true happiness by the side of her husband, which is the price she has to pay for acting so irresponsible.

4.5.4 Married in Haste

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* represent marriages where the couple marries rather spontaneously and one of the parties falls out of love with their spouse over time because they happened to wrongly estimate their character before they got married. The Bennets have been together for at least twenty years when the novel begins, and during that time, Mr. Bennet has managed to lose all the love and respect that he once might have felt for his wife. At first he was smitten with Mrs. Bennet's beauty and cheerful character, and only learnt after the wedding that in reality she was "a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper… the business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news."[184] Kica mentions that "Mrs. Bennet's behaviour does more to harm her daughters' chances at finding husbands than it does help"[185] which is basically confirmed by Darcy who lets Elizabeth know just how inappropriate her mother's behaviour in public is. Mr. Bennet is so disappointed with his choice of wife that he ends up resigning his duties as husband

[182] Kica, Eljvira. "Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice." *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, vol. 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13, *IJSELL*, www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijsell/v5-i11/2.pdf, p. 6. Accessed 22 Apr. 2023.
[183] Morgan, Susan. "Intelligence in 'Pride and Prejudice.'" *Modern Philology*, vol. 73, no. 1, 1975, pp. 54–68. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/436104, p. 56. Accessed 22 Apr. 2023.
[184] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 5.
[185] Kica, Eljvira. "Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice." *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, vol. 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13, *IJSELL*, www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijsell/v5-i11/2.pdf, p. 10. Accessed 29 June 2023.

and father and spends most of the time behind the closed doors of his library, which is rather irresponsible of him. He does not care to correct his wife or help her adopt more acceptable manners, nor does he discipline his daughters, which he comes to regret deeply after Lydia elopes with Wickham. Because he knows what it is like from experience, the main thing he cares about regarding his daughters' marriages, is that they will marry somebody they can love and respect. He supports Elizabeth in her decision to decline Mr. Collins' proposal and when she tells him about her engagement to Darcy, he advices her not to marry for money since he is unaware of her love for him: "You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life."[186]

Another example of such a couple would be Mr. and Mrs. Palmer from *Sense and Sensibility*. Charlotte Palmer is described as a good-hearted but foolish young woman who laughs at everything, even at her husband's sullen temper and ironic remarks:

> Charlotte laughed heartily to think that her husband could not get rid of her; and…said, she did not care how cross he was to her, as they must live together…It was impossible for any one to be more thoroughly good-natured, or more determined to be happy than Mrs. Palmer. The studied indifference, insolence, and discontent of her husband gave her no pain: and when he scolded or abused her, she was highly diverted. (82)

Elinor thinks to herself that the constant annoyance with everything and the insulting comments that Mr. Palmer constantly makes when talking to or about his wife must surely stem from "finding, like many others of his sex, that through some unaccountable bias in favour of beauty, he was the husband of a very silly woman."[187]

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[186] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 418.
[187] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Sense and Sensibility*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 82.

In *Persuasion* we learn that Charles Musgrove, who is "the eldest son of a man, whose landed property and general importance, were second, in that country, only to Sir Walter's, and of good character and appearance"[188] only proposed to Mary Elliot because her older sister Anne turned him down. Since Charles is socially desirable, Mary does not hesitate to marry him herself, but their marriage cannot exactly be described as a happy one. Mary is a hypochondriac who believes herself to suffer with a new illness every day and she demands that somebody take care of her constantly, which is the reason for Anne's frequent visits. Charles does his best to ignore his wife's outbursts and chooses to spend a lot of time hunting outside, leaving her alone at home, which she always complains about.

4.6 The Role of Women in Society

In the highly influential documents called *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, which were written by Sir William Blackstone between 1765 and 1769, it is mentioned 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."[189] Perkin comments on this, saying that in conclusion a woman's whole personality merged with her husband's and she was basically considered an 'unperson'. She then goes on to describe the very limited advantages that women had in their marriages. A wife could not, for example, be blamed for any crimes she committed in the presence of her husband (except for something serious like high treason or murder), for it was generally presupposed that she acted because she was put under pressure by her spouse. If she made any debts, the husband automatically

[188] Austen, Jane and Patricia Meyer Spacks. *Persuasion*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1995, p. 20.
[189] Perkin, Joan. *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England*. Routledge, 1989, pp. 1-2.

became the one obliged to settle them, whether his wife lived with him by the time she gained access to the money or not, in which case the man had the right to take necessary legal steps like making a public announcement in the newspaper to renounce his responsibility to pay them. It was also a man's duty to financially provide for his wife as long as she shared 'bed and board', which she was legally bound to do anyway.[190] Perkin also touches upon the subject of marital violence, pointing out that a man was not allowed to mistreat his wife beyond what was considered to be 'reasonable', "which stretched in those days of corporal punishment to the actual beating of wives […] provided it fell short of life and limb."[191] However, in such extreme cases, there was a possibility for the woman to go to court and present her demand to be legally divorced from her husband because as Edwin Maddy states in his *Digest of cases argued and determined in the arches and prerogative courts […]* from 1835, "the danger of life, limb, or health is usually inserted as the ground upon which the Court has proceeded to a separation."[192] A husband could not bequeath his wife's personal items like clothes and jewellery to anybody or dispose of them without her consenting to it, although other than this, he was entitled to all of her assets, including her money, with the exception of what her friends and family could hold for her as private moneys. Also, any child that the wife gave birth to during the course of her marriage, was automatically assumed to be her husband's, regardless of how unlikely the circumstances were, unless the husband had concrete proof of her adultery with another man, then he was able to bring a 'criminal conversation' lawsuit against said man.[193]

Handler and Segal use Maria Betram from *Mansfield Park* as an example of a woman who wishes to get married in order to free herself from the dependence that bounds her to her

[190] Perkin, Joan. *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England*. Routledge, 1989, p. 2.
[191] Id., p. 2.
[192] Maddy, Edwin. *Digest of Cases Argued and Determined in the Arches and Prerogative Courts of Canterbury, the Consistory Court of London, and the High Court of Delegates and Contained in the Reports of Sir George Lee, Phillimore, Addams, and Haggard.* Saunders and Benning, 1835, p. 104.
[193] Perkin, Joan. *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England*. Routledge, 1989, p. 2.

father, however the only way for her to escape is by instead submitting herself to another dependence, namely that on her husband. Nevertheless, as they state, the husband taking over the responsibility from the father was commonly viewed to be for the better, because "the relative dependence of a wife, as 'the mistress of a family', is the highest situation that a woman can aspire to, for, with the exception of the rare cases in which they control estates, women have no means, other than marriage, to establish themselves."[194]

As Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* aptly points out: "In marriage, the man is supposed to provide for the support of the woman, the woman to make the home agreeable to the man; he is to purvey, and she is to smile."[195] Many women would probably have found their positions as housewives very advantageous as they were able to plan all their daily activities according to their liking and in a way that would enable them to take care of as many things as possible. They could, for example, organize how much time they could spend playing with and raising their children so that they still had enough time to do all the household chores.[196] Of course, women who married into the landed gentry, like most Jane Austen heroines, had governesses for their children and helped run their households by, among other things, consulting important matters with their housekeeper, making sure they had enough servants and everything was going well, dealing with expense records (although the mistress of the house would likely just double check what the housekeeper had recorded). They also had other duties, for example visiting the sick and poor in the neighbourhood a few times a week or making sure all invites have been sent out when planning social events like balls or dinners. In contrast to that, Hill describes the responsibilities of women married to mere cottagers who didn't own any

[194] Handler, Richard, and Daniel A. Segal. "Hierarchies of Choice: The Social Construction of Rank in Jane Austen." *American Ethnologist*, vol. 12, no. 4, 1985, pp. 691–706. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/644177, p. 694. Accessed 24 Apr. 2023.
[195] Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey (Webster's Thesaurus Edition).* ICON Classics, 2005, p. 74.
[196] Hill, Bridget. *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England*: *Women's History*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005, p. 45.

land or at best only a small piece of it. In the case of the latter, the wife would contribute by working outside the home, doing all kinds of different things from sowing to harvesting crops. If the husband was not in possession of any land at all, she could still work in the garden to, for example, grow vegetables and fruits. Her domestic duties included preparing food and cleaning up, and of course she had to take care of the children.[197] Women in the Regency period would normally expect a new addition to the family as soon as possible after getting married and each additional child after about a year and a half. Mrs. Austen also had her first three sons in three consecutive years and the next four offspring were born between 1771 and 1775. Four years later, at the age of forty, she gave birth to her youngest son, who was also her last child. Although the Austens ended up having eight children, they were still considered quite a small family according to the standard number of children that families used to have in that time.[198]

Opinions about whether Jane Austen was a feminist or not are very diverse among critics. Some say that she should be viewed as a conservative who respects the social values of her time and stays true to them while the feminist studies usually claim that she clearly tries to undercut the premises of the English society by presenting the disadvantages and frustrations that women at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century had to deal with. But even some of the feminists find themselves somewhere in the middle of these two stances, since they often criticize Austen for not expressing more feminism in her works[199] and thus "cowardly [accommodating] with the patriarchal order."[200]

[197] Hill, Bridget. *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England*: *Women's History*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005, p. 34.
[198] Le Faye, Deirdre. *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002, p. 116.
[199] Morrison, Sarah R. "Of Woman Borne: Male Experience and Feminine Truth in Jane Austen's Novels." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1994, pp. 337–49. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29533008, p. 337. Accessed 31 May 2023.
[200] Id., p. 337.

5 A Woman's Reputation

"When one thinks of the nineteenth century, the subject of etiquette comes rapidly to mind. One cannot help but to identify the era by its strictures, rules and codes of behaviour. To be certain, social rules did apply to both ladies and gentlemen, and touched upon almost every area of daily life."[201] The main difference between men and women somehow breaking said rules was the reaction of the society. For example, if a man was involved in a scandal with a woman to whom he was not married, he did not need to fear the condemnation of society as much as the woman who was in fact only as guilty as he was (and in some cases innocent and taken advantage of because of her naivety). The good reputation of a woman in Regency England was very easily scared indeed and in some cases it got ruined forever, if the transgression of the lady was great enough. This is reflected in Jane Austen's novels as well. In *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* respectively, she describes the elopements of Lydia Bennet with George Wickham and Maria Bertram with Henry Crawford and how the society views and responds to them.

The Bennet family is extremely lucky that Mr. Darcy is willing to search for Lydia and Wickham after they disappear without a trace. He is able to find them relatively quickly since he is familiar with the kind of places where Wickham would most likely take refuge. We can notice that Lydia's reputation is only in danger for a fairly short amount of time, however the gossiping in the neighbourhood starts almost immediately as the news continues spreading. The Bennet ladies, along with their mother, are scared that because of their youngest sister, all their prospects for ever getting married advantageously have disappeared. Mr. Collins also learns about the situation, thanks to his relations to the Lucas family. He writes a letter to Mr. Bennet,

[201] Hughes, Kristine. *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in Regency and Victorian England: From 1811-1901*. Writer's Digest Books, 1998, p. 174.

making is absolutely clear to what extent he condemns what happened with Lydia, expressing his satisfaction over the fact that he did not end up marrying Elizabeth and being a part of the Bennet family and of course he does not forget to include the opinion of Lady Catherine de Bourgh:

> The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this… you are grievously to be pitied … for who, as Lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family?... And this consideration leads me moreover to reflect with augmented satisfaction on a certain event of last November, for had it been otherwise, I must have been involved in all your sorrow and disgrace. Let me advise you then… to throw off your unworthy child from your affection for ever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offence. (327)

Maria Betram in *Mansfield Park* causes a huge scandal for her family and scars her reputation forever when she carelessly decides to run away from her husband's home with Henry Crawford, who keeps flirting with her throughout the whole novel. As the Bertrams and Rushworths are both socially significant families, an announcement of their elopement appears in the local newspaper. Just like Lydia Bennet, Maria believes in the somewhat honourable intentions of her seducer, but when it turns out that Crawford never actually intended to marry her, she is forced to return home as a divorced woman who has now been excluded from polite society and on top of that, exiled from Mansfield and her family. She must live away from home, together with her aunt Norris and with her prospects ruined forever. Austen says about their cohabitation: "shut up together with little society, on one side no affection, on the other, no judgment, it may be reasonably supposed that their tempers became their mutual punishment."[202] Here it is apparent how women were the only ones who had to endure the

[202] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Mansfield Park*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 315.

consequences for such mistakes, because while Maria ends up being condemned by everyone, Henry can continue enjoying the same privileges that he has always had. Austen herself points that out: "That punishment, the public punishment of disgrace, should in a just measure attend his share of the offence, is, we know, not one of the barriers, which society gives to virtue. In this world, the penalty is less equal than could be wished."[203] Nobody in *Mansfield Park* seems to be particularly concerned about the reputation of Julia Bertram after she runs away with Mr. Yates. It is, of course, a big mistake on Julia's part, however it pales in comparison to what her sister Maria has caused so she is not the main object of social condemnation. It also helps that Julia is an unwed lady when it happens and she immediately marries her companion. Not much is known about the feelings of Julia, other than the fact that she escapes London in a hurry after learning about the scandal that her sister has caused and that in the end, she decides to hear out the man, whom she may not love but who has always showed his interest for her, being, in this regard, the complete opposite of Henry Crawford.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen presents a different case of a careless man. John Willoughby, who saves Marianne Dashwood when she sprains her ankle and continues to seek her company, does not have enough respect for the young woman to court her the right way. Marianne does not behave the way that she should and wilfully defies the social norms by spending all her time with Willoughby and blatantly displaying her interest in him. Willoughby does not seem to care that all their friends and family are talking about them being too obviously in love and intimate with each other. Le Faye mentions how despite the social conventions of that time, Willoughby takes Marianne to visit his aunt's mansion without introducing the two ladies to each other and without having somebody to accompany them[204], which seems quite reckless especially since a woman's reputation is very easily ruined. Elinor deems it suspicious

[203] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Mansfield Park*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 318.
[204] Le Faye, Deirdre. *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002, p. 169.

that none of them talks about being engaged because based on the way they act towards each other, she estimates that they surely must be. Later in London she finds out that even the society there is talking about her sister's engagement from Colonel Brandon: "Your sister's engagement to Mr. Willoughby is very generally known...their marriage is universally talked of."[205] In marrying a rich heiress instead, Willoughby does not ruin Marianne's future prospects but he does embarrass her in front of everyone. Towards the end of the novel, Willoughby admits to Elinor that although he ended up falling in love with her, he did not have honourable intentions with Marianne when he first met her, which thoroughly corresponds with the way that he acted.

6 An Unmarried Woman

In the times of Jane Austen, it was considered an anomaly for a woman to stay unmarried, whatever reason she might have had for it. According to society, the purpose of every woman was to become a wife and consequently a mother and anything that went against those expectations was frown upon.[206] As Hill puts it, "women were understood either married or to be married."[207] When a woman remained without a husband, she had some privileges that married wives could not enjoy, for example, she had a legal identity and also had the right to own property, however, essentially 'old maids' were considered social outcasts, along with widows, who were husbandless as well.[208]

In *Emma*, Jane Austen makes sure to represent the living, social and economic conditions of a wide range of female characters, taking about fourteen different women of

[205] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Sense and Sensibility*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 123.
[206] Hill, Bridget. *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England*: *Women's History*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005, p. 221.
[207] Id., p. 221.
[208] Id., pp. 221-222.

various social ranks only in the first eight chapters of the novel.[209] She created characters who find themselves on the outskirts of society like widows and spinsters and shows the conditions that they must live in. Tobin describes the attention that Jane Austen pays to these issues in the following way:

> Austen explores the plight of the impoverished gentlewoman, not just the… saving and their constant worry about their future and financial security, but also their depression over their loss of social status and the shame they experience at all the small indignities accompanying their social exclusion. Herself a spinster, who like Miss Bates was the daughter of a clergyman and who also lived with her widowed mother in a 'small way', Austen was acutely aware of how economically vulnerable and socially powerless women were in this society. Miss Bates…Jane Fairfax, Mrs. Goddard…had real life counterparts, representing a large segment of nineteenth-century British society – women of the middle and lower upper classes who without fortune and independence either lived in a genteel poverty or worked as governesses or teachers. (415)

Miss Bates in *Emma* is a middle-aged woman who lives with and takes care of her old mother, the local vicar's widow. We can tell that she finds herself at the margins of society as she lacks both money and social significance, which is the reason she often receives help from her wealthier neighbours. Because Miss Bates has no children of her own and her niece Jane Fairfax has lost both her parents when she was very young, Miss Bates and her mother have brought the girl up and then sent her off to live with Colonel Campbell and his wife so that she would have a chance to get education and spend time in a better company. Miss Bates is quite well-known in the village of Highbury and receives a lot of visitors, including Emma, whose father often invites her to Hartfield in an effort to include her in the Highbury society, and Mr.

[209] Tobin, Mary-Elisabeth Fowkes. "Aiding Impoverished Gentlewomen: Power and Class in 'Emma.'" *Criticism*, vol. 30, no. 4, 1988, pp. 413–30. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23112083, p. 414. Accessed 24 Apr. 2023.

Knightley, who tries to help by always bringing or sending gifts. Austen ironically points out that Miss Bates "enjoyed a most uncommon degree of popularity for a woman neither young, handsome, rich or married"[210] Since Miss Bates does not have any possessions and is not equal to Emma in terms of social class, Emma is not careful enough when talking to her and whilst all the characters are having a picknick at Boxhill, she ends up making an insulting remark towards her in front of everybody. Like Baker mentions, this makes Miss Bates quite an important figure in the novel, as it is because of her that Emma finally fully realizes that she has been selfish and arrogant and at times acting inappropriately.[211] Even Emma Woodhouse herself is unmarried at the beginning of the novel and unwaveringly plans on staying so. Emma is very comfortable being a single lady because her social position is very favourable and her financial means more than sufficient. When her friend Harriet asks her why she has not married yet, Emma replies that without love she has no reason to want to change her situation since she is already very well off. Emma defends her stance to wanting to stay unmarried as a woman despite the social pressure of her time, but is very much aware that it is purely thanks to her financial situation that she can afford to think like this: "I shall not be a poor old maid; and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid!...but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else."[212]

As a daughter of a baronet, Elizabeth Elliot in *Persuasion* has always been financially well off and the mistress of the house. Nevertheless, unlike Emma, she made plans to get married to her father's presumptive heir William Elliot when she was younger. She was left disappointed when Mr. Elliot did not fancy her and ended up marrying another rich woman, but

[210] Austen, Jane and Stephen M. Parrish. *Emma*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 11.
[211] Baker, William. *Critical Companion to Jane Austen: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. Facts on File, 2008, p. 51.
[212] Austen, Jane and Stephen M. Parrish. *Emma*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, pp. 55-56.

as the novel begins, we learn that he is now a widower, which revives Elizabeth's hopes. Elizabeth feels the social pressure to get married much more intensely than Emma, most likely because she is eight years older: "She had the consciousness of being nine-and-twenty, to give her some regrets and some apprehensions. She was fully satisfied of being still quite as handsome as ever; but she felt her approach to the years of danger, and would have rejoiced to be certain of being properly solicited by baronet-blood within the next twelve-month or two."[213]

There was a chance for unmarried women to become governesses to be able to financially support themselves. In *Emma* the inconsiderate Mrs. Elton presses Jane Fairfax to accept the position in the house of a certain Mrs. Smallridge who is in need of a governess for her three young daughters. The constant urging of Mrs. Elton makes Jane feel really uncomfortable as she happens to be secretly engaged to Frank Churchill and therefore does not need to be looking for a job at all. This occupation was usually not too pleasant as the governesses of that time had many responsibilities and received little in return. Whalan notes that a governess had to be available to the family twenty-four hours every day, her annual holiday only lasted about a week and on top of that, she had a really small salary, which would never allow her to get rich or save much money for her retirement in the future. Also, sometimes the employers were not considerate and did not care to treat her well so the job could become a real misery.[214] As Pool mentions: "Although the governess was expected to have the education and mien of a 'lady', she was treated as a servant."[215] The job of a governess was finished when the middle and upper class children no longer needed her educating, for example after being sent to private tutors or colleges, or after 'coming out' in the case of girls.[216] It was indeed not

[213] Austen, Jane and Patricia Meyer Spacks. *Persuasion*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1995, p. 6.
[214] Whalan, Pamela. "The Social Background of Pride and Prejudice." *Excellence in Literature*, 4 February 2015, https://www.excellence-in-literature.com/social-background-of-pride-and-prejudice-by-pamela-whalan/#earning. Accessed 28 June 2023.
[215] Pool, Daniel. *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew: From Fox Hunting to Whist: The Facts of Daily Life in Nineteenth-Century England*. Simon & Schuster, 1993, p. 225.
[216] Id., p. 224.

easy and Jane Fairfax in *Emma* expresses her disdain for the occupation when asked why she is yet to start searching for a job in the following way: "I am not at all afraid of being long unemployed. There are places in town, offices, where inquiry would soon produce something—Offices for the sale—not quite of human flesh—but of human intellect."[217]

6.1 A Refused Proposal

Jane Austen was excellent at observing the human nature and throughout the 1970s up until the end of her life, she grew even more critical of the relationships that came to her attention. She understood that respect, friendship and love were all essential components of any successful relationship, but on the other hand, she also learned how difficult it was to find a man who possessed both the ability to arouse the required level of love and the crucial requirement of a respectable income. The financial motive was clearly insufficient to persuade Jane to get married; she ended up refusing a rich suitor named Harris Bigg-Wither despite the fact that she was almost twenty-seven years old at the time and was very well aware that if she turned him down, she would have difficulty finding another husband for herself.[218] At first, she was tempted to live independently of her family and gain financial security and therefore accepted his proposal, however, she ended up changing her mind the next morning and broke the engagement off. It turned out that she was being sincere when she once pointed out how she "would rather be teacher at a school (and I can think of nothing worse) than marry a man I did not like."[219] She also later explained to her niece in one of her letters that "anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection"[220] Todd notes that her decision

[217] Austen, Jane and Stephen M. Parrish. *Emma*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 196.
[218] Jones, Hazel. *Jane Austen and Marriage*. MPG Books Ltd, 2009, p. 5.
[219] Tomalin, Claire. *Jane Austen: A Life.* Penguin Books, 1998, p. 38.
[220] Todd, Janet. *Jane Austen in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 8.

was quite remarkable since she surely knew that she was essentially choosing to stay unmarried forever.[221]

In her novels, Austen created strong female heroines who are not afraid to prioritize their feelings over the expectations of the society and to stay true to their principles just like she did in real life. In the words of Tauchert, "the heroine's strongest action in these narratives, given the codes of civility is to assert her will by saying 'no'."[222] and in Austen's fiction we can indeed find quite a few marriage proposals that do not end well for the gentlemen, in contrast to what would probably be expected by society.

One of the best known failed marriage proposals in all of literature is that of Mr. Collins to Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. Collins is of the opinion that he can afford to come to Longbourn with the purpose of choosing the prettiest of his cousins for a wife since he is a man with a steady income, fairly good social connections and also the future heir of their father. After Mrs. Bennet assures him that Jane might be soon engaged elsewhere, he sets his sights on Elizabeth, who is considered the second prettiest of the sisters and does not think twice about proposing to her even though he has only spent a short amount of time in her company. The way that he presents himself is ridiculous because as he knows there is no real affection on either side, he focuses on explaining to Elizabeth why he decided to get married (his reason being the insistence of Lady Catherine and his desire to be viewed as an example by the people in his parish) and why he chose her as his bride. When Elizabeth rejects him, he does not respect her decision and even though she tries to interrupt him several times, he utterly ignores her objections. At no point is Elizabeth tempted to accept his offer. Her reasoning is aptly described by Kica: "Focusing on the unhappy marriage of her parents and on the happy marriage of her

[221] Todd, Janet. *Jane Austen in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 8.
[222] Tauchert, Ashley. *Romancing Jane Austen: Narrative, Realism, and the Possibility of a Happy Ending*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 80.

uncle's marriage, Elizabeth [judges] marriage differently… She is represented as a person, who does not make choices based on security but based on love and affection. She has the courage to refuse her mother's pressure to marry for money and not for love."[223]

Mansfield Park's Fanny Price refuses the proposal of Henry Crawford for two reasons, she carefully observes the way that he has treated both of her cousins, especially Maria when she was to marry Mr. Rushworth in a short time, and more importantly, her heart has been long engaged elsewhere as she has been in love with her cousin Edmund for many years. When Sir Thomas learns from Crawford that Fanny has been proposed to and has not yet accepted him, he cannot believe that his niece would reject such an advantageous opportunity to attach herself to a wealthy man who is on top of that a good friend of the whole family. He gets the angrier with Fanny the longer the seemingly weak and submissive girl continues to stand her ground. When all his arguments about the advantages that this possible union would undoubtedly bring his niece fail, he resorts to trying to make Fanny feel guilty and ungrateful for not listening to him and doing what he advices her to do. Cooner comments on the situation like this: "When Sir Thomas castigates her for her ingratitude to him in her refusal to marry according to his notions of prudence and propriety, he equates her submission to his wishes with proper gratitude"[224] Just like Crawford, he expects Fanny's shy and obedient nature not to be able to withstand all his admonishing and to eventually give in to the wishes of them both. However, Fanny proves just how strong she really is. She turns out to be very adamant in her moral convictions and even though she has always been insecure and a little afraid of her uncle, she never once wavers in her decision not to marry Mr. Crawford. Her rejection has its consequences as Sir Thomas decides to punish her by sending her back home where she came

[223] Kica, Eljvira. "Unmarried and Married in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice." *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, vol. 5, no. 11, 2017, pp. 4-13, *IJSELL*, www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijsell/v5-i11/2.pdf, p. 10. Accessed 29 June 2023.
[224] Cooner Lambdin, Laura, and Robert Thomas Lambdin. *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*. Greenwood Press, 2000, p. 68.

from, with the intend of awaking regret in her: “His prime motive in sending her away, had very little to do with the propriety of her seeing her parents again, and nothing at all with any idea of making her happy. He certainly wished her to go willingly, but he as certainly wished her to be heartily sick of Portsmouth before her visit ended.”[225] Similarly to Collins, but in an even worse way, Crawford does not respect Fanny’s refusal and keeps seeking her company and making her uncomfortable up until his elopement with Maria.

There happen to be a few couples in Jane Austen novels, where the woman initially turns the man down but ends up accepting his offer at the end of the story after undergoing some important character development. Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* lets prejudice cloud her judgement of Darcy from their very first meeting and eventually figures out that she has been rather narrow-minded and should make sure that she is objective and fair-minded before resolutely forming her opinions on people. Harriet Smith and Robert Martin in *Emma* and Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* must also overcome many obstacles to get together. In Harriet’s case it is Emma’s great influence on her, because of which Harriet is easily convinced that she is way above her real social status and that although she is poor, she should aim high when choosing a husband since she is friends with Emma. Harriet who seems to be very smitten with Robert at the beginning of the novel decides not to accept his marriage proposal solely because she believes in Emma’s good judgement more than her own. In a similar way, Anne Elliot learns that she should have been stronger and more adamant in her love for Wentworth and stood up for herself when everybody criticized her choice. Since Austen always awards her heroines with happy endings, they all have a chance to learn from their mistakes and make everything right in the end.

[225] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Mansfield Park*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 250.

7 Men as Fortune Hunters

Naturally, it was not only women who chased after money and good social standing. When a woman was very wealthy, she had to be careful not to fall in the trap of a fortune hunter. In the year of 1809, a so-called lovers' handbook was published, dealing with the themes of courtship, mainly advising unmarried people to be very careful when choosing their future spouse. This handbook included a letter titled *From a Gentleman to a young Lady of Superior Fortune*, in which the writer attempts to warn wealthy heiresses from falling for men's deceit and allowing them to gain access to all of their money.[226] Mary Wollstonecraft acknowledged that there were "quite as many male coquets as female, and they are far more pernicious pests to society, as their sphere of action is larger, and they are less exposed to the censure of the world."[227] Henry Crawford from *Mansfield Park*, who is the perfect example of a man who behaves like that, says of marriage: "I am of a cautious temper, and unwilling to risk my happiness in a hurry. Nobody can think more highly of the matrimonial state than myself. I consider the blessing of a wife as most justly described in those discreet lines of the poet, "Heaven's *last* best gift."[228] He is a known flirt who likes making women smitten with him and always moves on to target somebody else once he succeeds. He learns his lesson to an extant when he recklessly decides to gain the affection of Fanny just to break her heart, but quickly finds out that she is no going to participate in his game and ends up falling in unrequited love with her.

Such dishonest traits can also be seen in Mr. Wickham, who first plans an elopement with Georgiana Darcy to get his hands on the Darcy property, which does not end well for him, and later enjoys flirting with Elizabeth Bennet until he very quickly turns his attention to miss

[226] Jones, Hazel. *Jane Austen and Marriage*. MPG Books Ltd, 2009, p. 9.
[227] Id., p. 13.
[228] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Mansfield Park*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 32.

Mary King, a young woman who happens to have recently inherited ten thousand pounds. Fortunately, miss King's uncle finds out what type of man Wickham is and that he is heavily indebted and manages to step in and save his niece in time by sending her away.

John Willoughby breaks the bond that ties him to Marianne Dashwood as soon as his aunt starts threatening him with disinheritance. He pushes his feelings aside without second thoughts and immediately leaves for London, where he has the chance of attracting a rich lady, who could help him solve his financial problems. He is not in love with miss Grey, whom he ends up marrying, he only attaches himself to her for the reason that she can provide him enough money for his liking and he is thus able to maintain the life-style that he has always been used to. After Willoughby, already married to miss Grey, learns about Marianne's possibly life-threatening illness towards the end of the novel, he rushes to apologise to her, but Elinor does not let him see her. He then starts explaining his situation to Elinor instead, expecting to cleanse himself in her eyes: "If you *can* pity me, pity my situation as it was *then*. With my head and heart full of your sister, I was forced to play the happy lover to another woman!"[229] As Easton points out, it feels as if Willoughby is trying to disguise or even deny all his misconducts, such as abandoning the pregnant Eliza (the young ward of Colonel Brandon), causing Marianne's terrible suffering or essentially committing a fraud upon the unsuspecting Miss Grey by indulging in self-pity and declarations of his love for Marianne.[230]

Mr. Elton in *Emma* is trying to court Emma Woodhouse because of her belonging to a high social class and being very rich. He is quite positive about his chances to succeed since from his point of view, Emma treats him with apparent affection and is eager to spend as much time with him as possible. Because Emma has decided that Mr. Elton likes Harriet and is now

[229] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Sense and Sensibility*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 232.
[230] Easton, Celia A. "'Sense and Sensibility' and the Joke of Substitution." *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1993, pp. 114–26. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225383, p. 118. Accessed 5 June 2023.

entirely convinced about it, she experiences an enormous shock when Mr. Elton starts proposing to her instead of her friend. She expresses her dismay and disbelief and does not allow him to continue. Mr. Elton is absolutely stunned as well upon hearing about Emma's conviction that he has fallen in love with Harriet Smith, a young foolish girl without a fortune, who is, on top of that, someone's illegitimate daughter. He seems to be offended by the fact that Emma could even think of him and Harriet as a possible match:

> "Never, madam," cried he, affronted in his turn: "never, I assure you. *I* think seriously of Miss Smith!—Miss Smith is a very good sort of girl; and I should be happy to see her respectably settled. I wish her extremely well: and, no doubt, there are men who might not object to—Every body has their level: but as for myself, I am not, I think, quite so much at a loss. I need not so totally despair of an equal alliance, as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith!—No, madam, my visits to Hartfield have been for yourself only." (86)

Emma could have easily predicted this turn of events since Mr. Knightley warned her about Elton's intentions earlier in the novel, telling her that judging by the way Elton expresses himself when he is among men, "I am convinced that he does not mean to throw himself away. I have heard him speak with great animation of a large family of young ladies that his sisters are intimate with, who have all twenty thousand pounds apiece."[231]

In *Northanger Abbey*, both John Thorpe and his sister Isabella plan to marry into the Morland family for selfish reasons. After a very sly conversation with Catherine, John convinces himself that since Catherine is staying in Bath with Mr. and Mrs. Allen who do not have any children of their own, they must have chosen her as their heiress and be planning to

[231] Austen, Jane and Stephen M. Parrish. *Emma*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 42.

eventually bequeath all their money to her. He is not ashamed to confirm this knowledge directly with Catherine, although she in her naivety has no idea what he is really asking about:

> "Old Allen is as rich as a Jew—is not he?" Catherine did not understand him—and he repeated his question, adding in explanation, "Old Allen, the man you are with." "Oh! Mr. Allen, you mean. Yes, I believe, he is very rich." "And no children at all?" "No—not any." "A famous thing for his next heirs. He is your godfather, is not he?" "My godfather! No." "But you are always very much with them." "Yes, very much." "Aye, that is what I meant…" (60)

From that moment on, John starts to court Catherine by mainly trying to prevent her from spending time with Henry Tilney, whom she has clearly come to fancy. Like Gallon remarks, Thorpe is unafraid to resort to lies and other wicked methods (like not stopping his carriage when Catherine wants to get out as she sees Mr. Tilney and his sister on the street) to keep Catherine out of Tilney's company, which only reveals the cruelty hidden behind what at first appears to be mere vulgarity and foolishness.[232] He later makes the mistake of boasting about Catherine in front of General Tilney, who immediately wishes for the young woman to marry his son Henry instead and invites her to accompany the family to Northanger Abbey.

8 Male and Female Characters in Contrast

Men were the heirs to family estates and if they happened to have an older brother, they had the possibility to take up a profession according to their liking. Women did not have such privileges. They stayed at home until they married and if they did not manage to find a husband,

[232] Gallon, D. N. "Comedy in 'Northanger Abbey.'" *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 63, no. 4, 1968, pp. 802–09. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/3723737, p. 804. Accessed 6 June 2023.

they either became a financial burden for their families, like Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice,* or had the possibility of becoming a governess, like Jane Fairfax in *Emma* intends to do when she gives up the hope of marrying Frank Churchill. Elizabeth Elliot in *Persuasion* is a little bit of a different case. While staying unmarried, her family used to be very wealthy and since her mother died and she is her father's favourite child and keeps him company, she does not feel quite as bad about not having a husband as Charlotte Lucas does. However she was very upset and insulted when Mr. Elliot, whom she intended to marry some time ago, ended up not proposing and marrying somebody else. Now that he is a widower, Elizabeth hopes to catch his attention again and succeed this time.

In *Sense and Sensibility,* the main female characters must deal with the loss of their home, all their possessions and the life style they are used to after their father's death. Although Mr. Dashwood's uncle did bequeath his property to him, he had a stipulation saying that Mr. Dashwood's eldest son John should inherit everything after him and for this reason, Henry Dashwood is not able to provide for his wife and three daughters. Before he dies, he asks John to take care of them and his son makes a promise to him that he will. At first he intends to keep this promise and give them three thousand pounds. However he is selfish in nature and when his wife Fanny expresses unwillingness to share anything with his sisters and stepmother, he quickly begins to change his mind. Fanny tries her best to convince John that his late father surely did not mean what he said before he died: "Had he been in his right senses, he could not have thought of such a thing as begging you to give away half your fortune from your own child"[233], although unlike John's sisters, their little son Henry is very well secured and they both are aware of it. John ends up convincing himself that Fanny is right and decides not to provide his relatives with any material assistance at all. Since the well-being of Elinor, Marianne and Margaret depends entirely on the goodwill of their half-brother, they must now

[233] Austen, Jane and Claudia L. Johnson. *Sense and Sensibility*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 9.

get used to living in more modest circumstances. They are not given any money by John and thus become "comparatively poor, with only £500 a year between them."[234]

Men were also allowed to play selective. They were the ones with the right to choose a bride for themselves and propose a marriage. The only thing a woman could do was refuse them, but since women needed husbands in order to lead a comfortable life, be financially secured and have a home of their own, this was very often not the case. We see this in *Pride and Prejudice* where both Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy respectively ask for Elizabeth's hand in marriage, absolutely sure about her acceptance. Mr. Collins is completely unable to fathom the idea of a woman Elizabeth's age and especially social circumstances rejecting his offer which he himself deems very generous on his part. He is so utterly convinced of his immediate succeeding that he comes off very disrespectful towards Elizabeth's own wishes. She needs to turn down his proposal five times before he wavers in his conviction a little bit, which she feels very uncomfortable about. He even makes sure to remind her that refusing to marry him is illogical in her situation and she "should take it into farther consideration that in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications."[235] Mr. Collins also plays selective earlier in the novel, upon his arrival, when he immediately chooses Jane as his future wife because he likes her the most out of all the Bennet sisters. When Mrs. Bennet informs him about Jane's presumable upcoming engagement, he is able to keep choosing whoever he wants. Mr. Darcy is perhaps even more certain of his success with Elizabeth, given how socially desired he is as a possible husband and how aware he is of his significance. While he does not insist on his proposal after Elizabeth initially rejects him, he still demands an explanation from her, despite the fact that he

[234] Le Faye, Deirdre. *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002, p. 158.
[235] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 121-122.

has just insulted her and her entire family by talking about how aware he is of "her inferiority -- of its being a degradation -- of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination."[236] The same circumstance can be found in *Mansfield Park* when Henry Crawford stubbornly insists on getting Fanny Price to marry him despite her obvious lack of interest in him and her feeling very awkward and uncomfortable around him. Just like Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*, Crawford is not at all bothered by Fanny's continuous rejections of his love. On the contrary, he believes he can make her change her mind if he tries hard enough. He intentionally asks Sir Thomas for Fanny's hand in marriage when it becomes clear that she is not going to accept his proposal, because he knows Fanny's docile character and is sure that if her uncle uses his authority on her, she will not be able to opposite him. When that fails too, he pays the whole Price family a visit when Fanny is staying with them for a while and basically gives her no other choice than to introduce him to her parents. Ultimately, as Henry Tilney from *Northanger Abbey* observes: "Man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal."[237]

Men are not only allowed to be selective when choosing a wife but also when deciding which lady they want to ask to dance with them. Even when the relationship between the gentleman and the lady is very friendly, like that of Mr. Knightley and Emma, she cannot be the one to ask him, however, she has the power to make *him* ask *her*: ""Whom are you going to dance with?" asked Mr. Knightley. She hesitated a moment and then replied, "With you, if you will ask me." "Will you?" said he, offering his hand."[238]

Despite women not technically being able to propose, there were still ways to make things go their way. If a woman was clever enough and able to discreetly manipulate the man

[236] Austen, Jane and Pat Rogers. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*: *Pride and Prejudice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 211.
[237] Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey (Webster's Thesaurus Edition).* ICON Classics, 2005, p. 73.
[238] Austen, Jane and Stephen M. Parrish. *Emma*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1999, p. 216.

that she wanted, she could make him propose and sometimes even believe that everything was his idea. The best examples of said behaviour are Charlotte Lucas, Lucy Steele and Isabella Thorpe. All three ladies are able to arrange being proposed to by skilfully navigating the men they aim to attach to themselves. Lucy Steele even manages to succeed twice in a row. When it becomes certain that her fiancé Edward is going to be disinherited by his proud mother who cannot accept the fact that her son got engaged to a poor and socially insignificant woman like Lucy, she smartly decides to break the engagement off and go after Edward's younger brother Robert, who is now going to inherit everything that was supposed to go to Edward. Appealing to his vanity by constant flattering and encouraging him to talk about himself, her plan works and Robert Ferrars, who not long ago disapproved of Edward's choice of bride, decides to marry the same woman himself.

9 Conclusion

The goal of this diploma thesis was to consider to what extent the differences between social classes in Regency England influence the choices of both the male and female characters created in the six completed novels by Jane Austen, when faced with the necessity of (or desire for) choosing a life partner and getting married.

As we know from her letters, Austen hated the idea of loveless marriages and could not imagine anything worse than not being able to respect one's life partner. This is probably the reason why she allows all her protagonists to eventually marry the person they love while simultaneously making the matches at least somewhat economically advantageous for both of the parties. Of course, the protagonists of the individual novels are not the only couples who get married in her stories. Austen makes sure to present all sorts of marriages, not just the successfully happy ones, but also some that are motivated purely by social and financial reasons or not very well thought out, because that was, after all, the reality of her time.

Austen herself received at least one marriage proposal during her life-time, however, she decided not to accept it due to her not being emotionally attached to her suitor. Just like she ended up preferring love to the social and economic advantages of getting married, which she, as a daughter of a country clergyman, so desperately needed to be able to live a comfortable life, Austen created female characters who are strong-willed and faithful to their principles when facing the opportunity of marrying rich men they might not like, but who are considered to be very desirable matches in terms of wealth by the society around them. Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* famously turns down two marriage proposals because of her not being interested in her suitors and Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* might be anxious and eager to please other people most of the time but when it comes to the idea of compromising her own moral values, then she, despite her fear, becomes just as stubborn as Elizabeth and refuses to marry

Henry Crawford. Austen shows her female readers that there is no need to settle for the first man who expresses interest in them and that it is absolutely necessary to wait for somebody one can love, respect and appreciate in order to achieve marital happiness.

On the other hand, all her characters are well aware that one needs a certain level of financial security for everything to work out and for the two partners to be able to live comfortably together. Through characters like Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot, Austen makes it clear that she deems it just as unreasonable to marry without any financial means, as it is to marry without love, for one certainly cannot live on love alone. Elinor is a very clever young woman, who would certainly like to marry for love, however, she knows that without money, no two people could be truly happy from a long-term perspective and clearly expresses her opinion on that matter, to which her sister Marianne immediately objects. When Elinor challenges her to share her own idea of a content marriage, it turns out that Marianne actually agrees with her without even realizing it. Anne Elliot is the only female character in Austen novels who was once willing to sacrifice her love because, as a baronet's daughter, she was supposed to marry into better circumstances than the young Frederick Wentworth was able to offer her at the time. However, her character arc revolves around her realizing that she made a mistake and suffering because of letting herself be persuaded to let go of her love because of social prejudice when she was younger.

The real-life women of England's Georgian Era were undeniably driven to marry by different motives than their male counterparts. They knew that if they were to be respected and recognized by society, they needed a husband in order to achieve that. Many women thus had no choice but to marry the first man who asked for their hand in marriage because it could have been the only chance they would ever get to leave their parents' house and gain financial independency. Of course, just like today, people generally hoped to manage to find a partner

they would fall in love with, however, the most important aspect, especially for women, was to consider their own social standing and financial situation and the expectations they were or were not thus entitled to make in regards to marriage. For example, Harriet Smith, manipulated and encouraged by her friend Emma, is at first grateful to Robert Martin for expressing his love for her, but gradually starts thinking that she could marry more advantageously, turning her attention to Mr. Elton and then Mr. Knightley. We see through Emma that Elton gets terribly offended by the idea of stooping down and settling for Harriet, a woman without money and social standing who does not even know who her parents are. It was to be expected that a lady blessed with a large dowry would have no shortage of suitors, unlike women from the middle and lower classes who often could not afford to choose a husband according to their own wishes and basically had to be grateful to anyone who proposed to them because it meant that they were offered a home and to be taken care of financially. The best example out of all Austen's characters would be Charlotte Lucas who inconspicuously tries to make Mr. Collins propose to her since she is aware of his searching for a wife and recently being rejected by her friend Elizabeth. Being twenty-seven years old, Charlotte is considered an 'old-maid' by society and she feels to be a financial burden for her parents and brothers. That is why she hopes to succeed with Mr. Collins and when he does end up asking for her hand, she gratefully accepts despite her future husband being a silly pompous man, who cannot match her in terms of intelligence and whom she does not like in the slightest. There are a few female characters who are rich, like Maria Bertram or Emma Woodhouse, and a few who come from a good family background but are impoverished due to unfortunate circumstances, for example Anne Elliot or Elinor and Marianne Dashwood. As a daughter of a baronet belonging to the landed gentry Maria is expected to marry within her own class and when Mr. Rushworth, a slow-witted but wealthy landowner proposes to her, she immediately accepts and consequently ends up being so unhappy, because she does not love him, that she runs away from her husband and loses her

good reputation forever. Emma Woodhouse is the only Austen heroine who does not plan on getting married at all since she finds herself in a very favourable social and economic position due to her practically being the mistress of the house and most likely one of the future heiresses to her father. However, when Mr. Elton proposes to her, she makes it clear that she would not consider marrying below her own social class.

Being the heirs and successors of their families, men would often place as much importance on who they chose to marry as women did. If they happened to be younger sons who chose a certain profession but had not (yet) managed to work themselves into wealth, it could have very well be a matter of survival for them to marry rich, since they would not be able to afford a comfortable life if they married a woman without a fortune, like Colonel Fitzwilliam in *Pride and Prejudice* complains about. If, on the other hand, they happened to be the eldest sons of their families and has the certainty of one day inheriting (or had already inherited) the family estate and fortune, it was often a sense of responsibility to their parents, siblings and even distant relations, as well as to the high society they belonged to, which made them want to marry well. It was also often just a matter of pride, which we see in Mr. Darcy or Mr. Elton, who may not be as wealthy as Darcy but is well aware that as a financially secured man with a steady income he does not have to settle for somebody who is socially below him and even attempts to court Emma, a wealthy heiress who belongs to a higher class and more respectable family than him.

However, throughout her novels, Austen masterfully depicts not only the constraints imposed by class distinctions but also the transformative power of love that is able to transcend these socially imposed boundaries, because as long as at least one of the partners has money, there should be no reason for a couple not to marry if they are truly in love. In her novels, it is always the male protagonists who are richer than their wives. The most equal marriage in terms

of wealth would be that of Emma and Mr. Knightley, who come from the two richest families of their shared community. *Pride and Prejudice*'s Mr. Darcy may technically be a part of the landed gentry like Mr. Bennet, however due to him being way wealthier, owning more land and being the grandson of an earl, Lady Catherine is entirely against him marrying one of Mr. Bennet's daughters, especially considering the former social class and relations of their mother. Just like Darcy, Henry Tilney from *Northanger Abbey* and Edward Ferrars from *Sense and Sensibility* both marry against the wishes of their snobbish relatives. All these financially unequal couples end up happily married at the end of their respective stories since Austen wants to point out that if a couple has some money to live comfortably, it is not necessary for both of them to be rich but for both of them to love each other in order to be content in their life together.

It can thus be concluded that social differences had a significantly deep impact on both men and women of the Regency Era and consequently on both the male and female characters in Jane Austen's novels, when it came to the idea of choosing somebody to marry. And, of course, not only then. The social distinctions between people had an immense influence on all interpersonal relationships of the time. As we can see in Austen's works, which social class a character belongs to essentially shapes who they are as a person and, to an extent, impacts everything about them, be it their choices, general behaviour or social relationships. Social standing also has the power to determine how they are viewed by other people, whether they are accepted by society and whether or not they even have the chance to marry according to their own wishes. Jane Austen, one of the most celebrated novelists of all time, is able to succinctly portray human nature within the context of social class, which makes her novels not only enduring classics but also valuable sources of insight into the historical and sociological aspects of her time.

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