Money and Love
in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*

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In the western society of today we commonly agree that marriage should come as a result of love. However, such an attitude has not always been the norm. In the lifetime of Jane Austen, a middle-class woman did not often have the means to marry solely on the grounds of love; an awareness of the man’s ability to provide for her economically was also needed. Mary Wollstonecraft, an eighteenth century feminist, describes the position British women were in: “To rise in the world, and have the liberty of running from pleasure to pleasure, they must marry advantageously, and to this object their time is sacrificed, and their persons often legally prostituted” (as quoted in Jones xx). As Wollstonecraft describes, British women in the eighteenth century was very much dependant on men. In Jane Austen’s novel, we can see how women’s dependence on men affects the relationships. As Christopher Gillie writes in A Preface to Jane Austen: “A ‘good’ marriage, in the society Jane Austen depicts, is always one which enhances status, and status is primarily a matter of wealth” (121). The characters of Pride and Prejudice are torn between their need of financial support and their emotional wishes. Economy and class influences the choice of a partner greatly and it is not usually in a positive sense. The aim of this essay is to show in what ways economy and class are important factors for the courtship of the characters in the novel. My aim is also to show which marriages Austen describes as successful.

The laws controlling inheritance were not favourable for women in the late eighteenth century. Women’s economic inferiority in Pride and Prejudice is shown directly in the Bennet family’s economy. Due to an entail the Bennet daughters will not inherit their home (Austen 29). The entail is formed in such a way that the inheritor must be male and since the Bennet family only has daughters, the Longbourne estate will fall into the hands of Mr. Collins (cousin to Mr. Bennet) once Mr. Bennet passes away. Roger Gard writes: “The entail on the estate, directed away from women and toward the, well, the really creepy Collins, stands as a symbol and the reality of male oppression” (100). The entail described in Pride and Prejudice is especially provocative since Mr. Collins is a distant relative who has been on unfriendly terms with the Bennet family. The entail leaves the Bennet daughters with too little money to provide for themselves once their father dies; marriage is therefore of importance to gain economic stability. Of course, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet could have saved money in advance so that their daughters might be given more economic stability, but “[w]hen first Mr. Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless; for, of course, they were to have a son” (Austen 293). When Mr. Bennet realized that no son was to be had, he thought it too late to start saving (Austen 293).
The need for money puts pressure on the daughters to marry whoever proposes to them, but only if he is wealthy. Since the whole family is in danger of becoming poor, the search for a husband becomes more than a wish; it becomes a duty. To reject a man merely because of his personality is not always considered a just reason since it affects the whole family’s economy negatively. The most forceful pressure to marry comes from Mrs. Bennet, who is determined that her daughters shall marry a wealthy man even if they detest him. The subject of marriage is so important to her that it takes up her whole time: “The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news” (Austen 7). Mrs. Bennet is a nervous person who always complains about her “poor nerves” and agony (Austen 7). It is not surprising that she should feel that way, since she knows that money will be scarce if her husband dies. Edward Copeland (1997) writes that the pseudo-gentry woman is responsible for the economy, but ironically has no power by law to affect it (137). A pseudo-gentry family is a family that does not draw their income from the land. David Spring explains that even though they were not exactly gentry, they were “gentry of a sort”, primarily “because they sought strenuously to be taken for gentry” (Copeland 1995 89-90). The focus on women’s economical responsibility is also shown in Pride and Prejudice, where it is evident that Mrs. Bennet is the one who focuses most on money, while Mr. Bennet shows no signs of worrying about the economic situation of his family. Therefore, the pressure lies heavily on Mrs. Bennet and her capability of pushing her daughters into marriages.

Mrs. Bennet’s desperate need to find husbands to her daughters reflects in her social behavior. Mrs. Bennet has a way of changing her regard of people on the basis of how likely they are to bring wealth to her family. For example, when the ladies first acknowledge Mr. Darcy’s wealth, he is described as “much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration” (Austen 12). The admiration, however, is soon gone when they realize that he acts “above his company” (Austen 12). Mrs. Bennet detests Mr. Darcy until the very last pages of the novel, where she changes her mind. Until he marries Elizabeth, Mrs. Bennet can afford to dislike him, however, when he brings money to the family her regard for him improves instantly. When she hears about the marriage she is delighted and says,”how rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have!” (Austen 357). Clearly, Mrs. Bennet is a woman who associates happiness with money. Mrs. Bennet shows the same view when Elizabeth refuses to marry Mr. Collins. Even though she knows very well that Elizabeth has no feelings for him, she refuses to accept that Elizabeth will not marry him. Mr. Bennet has a talk with both Elizabeth and Mrs. Bennet, and there her determination is evident: “‘Your mother insists upon your accepting it. Is it not so, Mrs.
Bennet?’ ‘Yes, or I will never see her again’” (Austen 109). It is obvious that Mrs. Bennet does not put love in first place; money is what she is after, even if it results in her daughters’ unhappiness.

The importance of avoiding an imprudent marriage is shown when Mrs. Gardiner tries to talk sense into Elizabeth. Mrs. Gardiner’s fear is that Elizabeth should overlook economy. She says “I have nothing to say against him [Mr. Wickham]; he is a most interesting young man; and if he had the fortune he ought to have, I should think you could do no better. But as it is – you must not let your fancy run away with you” (Austen 143). Mrs. Gardiner also mentions that it is Elizabeth’s duty towards her family to marry a wealthy man. The quote is a sign of the pressure the women in *Pride and Prejudice* are under, even by aunts who are not in the immediate family. It also shows that an “interesting” personality is not enough to be an acceptable husband. To gain money by marrying is thus a requirement if the marriage should be defined as acceptable, while personality comes in second place.

Charlotte Lucas, a neighbour to the Bennet family, has the same opinions as Mrs. Bennet on the subject of marriage. Charlotte makes hints to Elizabeth that she should not think so much about love, but instead favour a good economy. When Elizabeth is about to dance with Mr. Darcy, Charlotte advises her to avoid being a “simpleton and allow her fancy for Mr. Wickham to make her appear unpleasant in the eyes of a man of ten times his consequence” (Austen 89). As we can see, Charlotte is not considerate of Elizabeth’s feelings about Mr. Darcy; she is instead concerned for her need of money, much like Mrs. Bennet.

The focus on economic security Charlotte has is so great that she disregards the importance of her husband’s personality. Yasmine Gooneratne explains: “Charlotte… sees [Mr. Collins] as a prize in a lottery rather than as a husband” (91), in other words, Charlotte does not care about the characteristics of Mr. Collins as much as him being a source of income. Charlotte argues that: “[h]appiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance” (Austen 24), which is an excuse for her to marry any man with a fortune. Charlotte also believes that it is important to show more affection than one really feels towards a man, in other words, to con him. Her reason for thinking so is that, “[i]f a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him” (Austen 23). Charlotte thinks that, “[i]n nine cases out of ten, a woman had better shew more affection than she feels” (Austen 23). It is evident that Charlotte does not mind lying about her emotions when it comes to finding a wealthy husband. Charlotte’s views are not surprising, when one regards her situation in life; she is twenty-seven years old (which was rather much for an unmarried woman at that time), her family is not eager to support her
economically, and her younger sisters also wish for her to get married so that they might get an earlier entrance into society (Gooneratne 91). As the oldest daughter in the family the pressure to marry is even greater on Charlotte; her younger sisters depend upon it since it is not seen as appropriate for the younger sisters to marry before her. Charlotte’s sisters’ early entrance into society might improve their chances of meeting men to marry and is of financial importance to the family.

One might think that Charlotte’s marriage to Mr. Collins would have turned out in disastrous ways, but the couple seems content. Charlotte explains that “I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins’s character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with his is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state” (123). Even Elizabeth, who was against the marriage, says that “My friend has an excellent understanding—though I am not certain that I consider her marrying Mr. Collins as the wisest thing she ever did. She seems perfectly happy, however, and in a prudential light, it is certainly a very good match for her” (174).

Greed and selfishness are common personality traits in *Pride and Prejudice*. Miss Bingley exemplifies greed when she wishes that her brother and Georgiana (Mr. Darcy’s younger sister) should marry each other. Her intention is to greaten her own family’s fortune, and as Elizabeth puts it: “she is the more anxious to get Miss Darcy for her brother, from the notion that when there has been one intermarriage, she may have less trouble in achieving a second” (Austen 116-117), in other words, Miss Bingley concludes that her chance of marrying Mr. Darcy increases. Luckily, Elizabeth is aware of what greed the want of large fortune can cause, while Jane thinks that everyone acts in an altruistic way. Jane says: “They can only wish his happiness, and if he is attached to me, no other woman can secure it” (Austen 134). Elizabeth responds, “Your first position is false. They may wish many things besides his happiness; they may wish his increase of wealth and consequence; they may wish him to marry a girl who has all the importance of money, great connections, and pride” (Austen 134). Elizabeth’s knowledge of their greed thus affects the courtship between Jane and Mr. Bingley, since she is able to understand how Miss Bingley thinks. Mrs. Bennet is also full of greed, and though she has reasons for pushing her daughters into marriages that are financially advantageous, she does not at all care about their emotions as long as they gain money. She might not be greedy solely for her own sake; she is greedy for her daughters to have large fortunes. As Mrs. Bennet thinks to herself,
she should undoubtedly see her daughters settled at Netherfield, in the course of three or four months. Of having another daughter married to Mr. Collins, she thought with equal certainty, and with considerable, though not equal pleasure. Elizabeth was the least dear to her of all her children; and though the man and the match were quite good enough for her, the worth of each was eclipsed by Mr. Bingley and Netherfield (Austen 101).

It is clear that Mrs. Bennet does not care at all for Elizabeth’s emotions, and that she cares more about Jane’s marriage since it brings more fortune to the family. Thus, her will is not only to push her daughters into marriages; the ultimate goal is to make them marry as soon and profitably as possible.

Suspicion and the danger of marrying a partner who is only after the money are other problems that arise on account of money. Mr. Darcy, who has a large fortune, is well aware of this danger and it affects his social relations greatly. For instance, he tries to ignore his feelings for Elizabeth as long as possible because of the family’s economic situation and social class. Mrs. Bennet’s obvious focus on money, which she makes no efforts to hide, adds to his suspicion as well. As we can see, lack of money does not stand in the way of an emotionally fulfilling marriage in only one direction; inequality between two persons might be a hinder for both the unwealthy partner as well as the wealthy one.

As a consequence of his suspicion, Mr. Darcy tries to separate Mr. Bingley and Jane. Mr. Darcy believes that Jane might be after Mr. Bingley’s money, and his suspicion is strengthened both by Jane’s need of marrying economically well, and also by Jane’s way of behaving towards Mr. Bingley. Unlike Charlotte, Jane is very subtle in her way of showing affection, a personality trait that makes Mr. Darcy believe that she does not care for his friend: “I remained convinced from the evening’s scrutiny, that though she received his attentions with pleasure, she did not invite them by any participation of sentiment” (Austen 192).

Moreover, it is not only Jane’s situation and personality that makes Mr. Darcy so suspicious; he has seen similar situations before which have nearly ended in devastating ways. Mr. Wickham has tried to elope with Mr. Darcy’s little sister Georgiana, a memory which makes Mr. Darcy even more aware of the danger of marrying a person who is only after fortune. Mr. Bingley, who is not as wealthy as Mr. Darcy and therefore does not belong to the same high social class as him, sees him as a mentor and trusts his advice not to engage further in Jane. Robert P. Irvine writes that Mr. Bingley’s “readiness to accept Darcy’s judgment on all matters without displaying the deference that would openly admit his inferiority are not
simply character traits but the result of his transitional social status” (58). Mr. Bingley’s inferiority to Mr. Darcy makes the power balance in their relationship unequal so that Mr. Darcy’s opinions have more weight than Mr. Bingley’s own feelings.

Moreover, the importance of money can make men see women as commodities. When looking at both Mr. Collins’ and Mr. Darcy’s proposals to Elizabeth, it is evident that they both feel certain that she will accept their offer of marriage. Mr. Collins, for example, refuses to take no for an answer and says, “it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made to you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications. As I must therefore conclude that you are not serious in your rejection of me…” (Austen 106). Evidently, Mr. Collins believes that Elizabeth’s emotions are irrelevant in comparison with her need of money, and also that she should be grateful that any man would want her, since she does not have a secure economy. Mr. Darcy’s certainty of her acceptance of marriage is also evident. Austen writes that Elizabeth “could easily see that he had no doubt of a favourable answer” (185). Mr. Darcy is at the moment aware of Elizabeth’s dislike of him, but even that does not make him doubt his chances of marrying her. Thus, he believes that Elizabeth will ignore her emotions because of her economic status.

The gap between middle class and upper class is obvious in *Pride and Prejudice*, and both Miss Bingley and Catherine De Bourgh act arrogantly and think highly of themselves because of their social status and wealth. Miss Bingley often teases and makes remarks about the imprudence of a marriage between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth: “She often tried to provoke Darcy into disliking her guest [Elizabeth], by talking of their supposed marriage, and planning his happiness in such an alliance” (Austen 51). Her tone in planning his “happiness” is ironic and teasing, and while she is describing the inappropriateness of marrying a middle class-girl, she is also, by doing so, recommending herself as a better partner, since she has a larger fortune and a higher social rank. Wanting to marry Mr. Darcy, it is important for her to make Elizabeth seem as undesirable a partner as possible. Since Miss Bingley already has a wealthy economy, her greatest reason for wanting to marry Mr. Darcy is not his money alone; it is because his money has stayed in his family for generations and therefore will heighten her social rank. As Juliet McMaster writes, “money, like wine, isn’t considered quite respectable until it has aged a little” (123). For Miss Bingley money is to her advantage, it puts her in a higher social class, which makes it easier for her to marry a man like Mr. Darcy.

Relatives eager to maintain the proper class distinctions appear throughout the book. One of the most heated relatives is Lady Catherine De Bourgh, who is the aunt of Mr. Darcy.
Lady De Bourgh has met Elizabeth while she was visiting Mr. and Mrs. Collins. At that time, she seemed to have nothing at all against Elizabeth. Her feelings rapidly change when she hears the rumor that her nephew, Mr. Darcy, has proposed to Elizabeth. According to Mr. Darcy’s family, he had intended to marry his cousin, which happens to be Lady De Bourgh’s daughter. She says that the marriage is not “to be prevented by a young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family!” (Austen 336).

Clearly, she does not approve of their marriage, and she mentions reasons as “inferior birth” and class-issues. When looking at the situation in an economic light, it is also clear that a marriage between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy would stop both her daughter’s fortune from increasing, as well as Mr. Darcy’s.

Class and economy are so closely intertwined that Lady De Bourgh believes that a person cannot maintain their class without also being rich. Elizabeth does not have the same view and declares: “He [Mr. Darcy] is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter; so far we are equal” (Austen 337). Miss Bingley also confuses class and descent with personality, especially when judging Mr. Wickham. At a ball she tells Elizabeth: “I pity you, Miss Eliza, for the discovery of your favourite’s [Mr. Wickham’s] guilt, but really considering his descent, one could not expect much better” (Austen 93). Elizabeth once again criticizes this view by responding: “His guilt and his descent appear by your account to be the same” (Austen 93). John Odmark writes that there are “two related systems of values by which characters are judged: social conventions and moral virtues” (10). While Miss Bingley seems to judge solely according to social conventions, Elizabeth tends to judge people based on their moral virtues. Mr. Darcy, like Elizabeth, believes that class is not merely a matter of economy. By marrying Elizabeth and rejecting his cousin he shows that it is better to marry a woman with the right personality than a wealthy, but sickly cousin to whom he has no romantic feelings. Yasmine Gooneratne is convinced that Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy while “[p]erpetually in unspoken opposition … are in fact very much alike in their critical attitude to society” (95), which is what makes it possible for them to unite in the end.

Lady De Bourgh also believes that her money and her class will give her the power to dictate over other people. Marvin Mudrick writes: “Like Mr. Collins, Lady Catherine is chiefly amusing because of the incongruity between the importance she assumes to herself and the actual influence she exercises upon the story” (103). It is amusing, since Lady De Bourgh believes that her fortune along with her higher class will give her the power to decide who her nephew will marry; which she fails miserably with. Mr. Darcy, who does not bind
himself to what his aunt believes to be social decorum, is perfectly indifferent to all the power
Lady De Bourgh imagines to possess.

Naivety and a lack of self-awareness complicate the view on what an ideal marriage
should be like. Elizabeth’s opinion of marriages that are based solely on financial
considerations is, due to her lack of self-awareness, complex. Throughout the novel she says
that she despises marriages that are based on nothing else than economy. But she makes one
exception: when she hears the rumour that Mr. Wickham is planning to marry Miss King, a
wealthy woman with little else to recommend her, Elizabeth does not object to it at all.
“[Elizabeth] did not quarrel with him for his wish of independence. Nothing, on the contrary,
could be more natural; and while able to suppose that it cost him a few struggles to relinquish
her, she was ready to allow it a wise and desirable measure for both, and could very sincerely
wish him happy” (Austen 147). The reason for Elizabeth’s sudden change of opinion is her
own vanity. Elizabeth does not want to believe that she has been rejected for her personality,
and she likes to believe that “she would have been his only choice, had fortune permitted it”
(Austen 147). Her change in opinion shows Elizabeth’s lack of self awareness, since she has
told Jane that “[y]ou shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle
and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and
insensibility of danger, security for happiness” (Austen 133), which is exactly what she has
done for Mr. Wickham. It is apparent that Elizabeth most of the time considers marriages that
are based on economy foolish, but when her own vanity blinds her, as in the case above, her
opinions are ambiguous.

The marriage between Lydia Bennet and Mr. Wickham clearly brings up the dangers
of being naive about one’s financial needs. Lydia, a girl of only fifteen years of age, believes
she is in love with Mr. Wickham and decides to elope with him so that they can marry each
other. Unfortunately, Mr. Wickham has no intention of marrying her at all, partly because he
cannot afford to do so. Elizabeth thinks that “His [Mr. Wickham’s] attentions to Miss King
were now the consequence of views solely and hatefully mercenary; and the mediocrity of her
fortune proved no longer the moderation of his wishes, but his eagerness to grasp anything”
(201). As his relationship with Miss King shows, Mr. Wickham does not think long-term; he
needs money to pay off his debts and he does not care how he gets hold of them. Lydia, who
acts according to her emotions, is not concerned about Mr. Wickham’s economy; she is more
interested in the excitement of being in a romantic relationship. Luckily for Mr. Wickham,
Mr. Darcy is able to pay him the money he needs to pay his debts, but he will only give him
the money if he marries Lydia. Lydia is taking a great risk by becoming a lover to a man she
is not married to, and had not Mr. Wickham married her, the shame would have been even more immense for both her and her family. His feelings towards Lydia are described as “not equal to Lydia’s for him” (Austen 301) and at the end of the novel “[h]is affection for her [had] sunk into indifference” (Austen 366). The marriage is unhappy in several respects, it gains neither Lydia nor Mr. Wickham emotionally in the long run, and also, the reputation of the Bennet family is stained which makes it even harder for the other daughters to marry a wealthy man. When Elizabeth hears of the wedding she cries: “And for this we are to be thankful. That they should marry, small as is their chance of happiness, and wretched as is his character, we are forced to rejoice!” (Austen 288). As Odmark argues: “Wickham’s forced marriage to Lydia may satisfy social convention and overjoy Mrs Bennet, but the moral issue is not so easily done away with” (11). Elizabeth is not only worried about her younger sister’s welfare, but she is also afraid that the imprudent marriage will stop Mr. Darcy from ever proposing to her again, which is unfortunate for Elizabeth, but also for her whole family who needs at least one marriage where the husband is wealthy.

Mr. Bennet is another character that chooses to disregard the need of money. Instead, he chooses to focus on personality and intellectual compatibility between the married couple. Mr. Bennet “married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her” (Austen 228). Deidre Le Faye explains that he “has become lazy and cynical, disappointed in his marriage” (185). His own ill choice of a wife has taught him the relevance of compatibility in a marriage. The negative result of his view is that he ignores his family’s need of money. Throughout the book he makes no attempts to convince his daughters into marrying wealthy men, instead he advises them not to in case they do not wish for it themselves. Mr. Bennet’s view on marriage is quite the opposite to that of Mrs. Bennet. For example, Elizabeth says: “My father, however, is partial to Mr. Wickham” (Austen 143). At first glance, Mr. Wickham has a fine personality, and that is, according to Mr. Bennet’s view, of more importance than money. He also becomes worried when he hears that Elizabeth is about to marry Mr. Darcy. His worry is that Elizabeth chooses to disregard her feelings, and that is not at all positive even if the marriage brings a large fortune to the family. He says to Elizabeth: “He is rich, to be sure, and you may have more fine clothes and fine carriages than Jane. But will they make you happy?” (Austen 356). The main point that Mr. Bennet puts forward is that money does not make one happy, and that emotional and intellectual compatibility should not be ignored.

As we have seen, most of the characters in Pride and Prejudice seem to choose between love and money while Jane and Elizabeth mix the two categories. That both
daughters are determined to marry for love is evident throughout the book. According to Gooneratne Elizabeth “is morally superior to her society, and we will see her resist all attempts to make her accept that society’s valuation of her as a saleable article, available to the first comer at a certain fixed price” (88). Elizabeth is also cautious in selecting a husband due to the imperfect marriage her parents are in. She has daily proof of the importance personality has in a marriage when she sees her father’s dislike of his wife. Gooneratne explains: “Elizabeth’s caution and extreme fastidiousness on the question of marriage originates from her acute sense of the inequalities, perpetually before her eyes, of her parent’s marriage” (88). When Elizabeth realizes that Mr. Darcy might actually be a suitable husband for her it is not only because of his money. Austen writes that Elizabeth “began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes” (294). Jane, as well, is not focused on money, but desires to marry Mr. Bingley because of his personality. She describes him as “sensible, good humoured, lively” (Austen 16).

In the end, there are two marriages that include both romantic love and financial considerations: the marriage between Elizabeth and Darcy, and the marriage between Jane and Mr. Bingley. Since these marriages include both love and money they are the marriages that bring most joy to the bride and family. However, there are troubles in creating such complete marriages as these; for example, both Jane and Elizabeth have taken a risk by being critical and selective in their choice of a husband. Mr. Collins says to Elizabeth: “it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made to you” (Austen 106). Mr. Collins’ statement is unfortunately true, and Elizabeth is taking a risk by rejecting both him and Mr. Darcy. The chance of the daughters never becoming married is a great danger to the whole family, and Jane and Elizabeth are in no financial position to be too choosy. Even if Elizabeth has shown no signs of wanting to marry only for the sake of money, she is well aware of the problem. She says, "If I have very good luck, I may meet with another Mr. Collins in time” (331), which expresses that she is nearly giving up her dream of true love. On the other hand, Elizabeth has the advantage of youth, and therefore her situation is not as alarming as for example Charlotte’s.

Even if money has been a problem in the courtship of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, it has also brought them closer. Elizabeth is aware of the imprudence a marriage to her would be for Mr. Darcy, and the fact that he has the will to marry her despite her economic situation, is to her proof in itself of his love for her. Elizabeth’s thoughts after Mr. Darcy has proposed to her is that he must be “so much in love as to wish to marry her in spite of all the objections which
had made him prevent his friend’s marrying her sister, and which must appear at least with equal force in his own case” (Austen 189).

While Elizabeth taking a risk by rejecting her proposals, Jane is taking a risk by being subtle in showing her emotions. Elizabeth knows why:

…to her [Elizabeth] it was equally evident that Jane was yielding to the preference which she had begun to entertain for him from the first, and was in a way to be very much in love; but she considered with pleasure that it was not likely to be discovered by the world in general, since Jane united with great strength of feeling, a composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner, which would guard her from the suspicions of the impertinent. (Austen 22)

This might be positive in the sense that she does not reveal her feelings until she knows Mr. Bingley’s character better, but it has obvious negative effects. For example, her subtlety makes Mr. Bingley feel as if she does not care for him at all, which is not true. When Mr. Darcy tries to convince Mr. Bingley that Jane feels no affection for him, her subtlety is not to her favour and it makes Mr. Darcy’s plan easier to succeed with. Marvin Mudrick believes: “It is her [Mrs. Bennet’s] irrepressible vulgarity in discussing Jane’s prospective marriage to Bingley which convinces Darcy that any alliance with Mrs. Bennet’s family—for his friend or for himself—would be imprudent and degrading” (96). Surely, Mrs. Bennet’s vulgarity is a negative part of a supposed marriage between Jane and Mr. Bingley, but a mother’s inability to keep quiet is not the main reason for Mr. Darcy to keep them apart. The main reason is, as stated above, her lack of money as well as her lower social class. Moreover, Mrs. Bennet’s gossiping is much due to the unequal financial situations her family and the Bingley’s are in; one of the subjects she brags about is how “Jane’s marrying so greatly must throw them in the way of other rich men” (Austen 97). Mr. Darcy is not only concerned that Jane’s mother is talkative; he is concerned that the family only sees Mr. Bingley as a way to bring money to the family.

To sum up, the relationships in the novel are highly influenced by economy and class. Wealthy persons, like Mr. Darcy, run the risk of marrying women that do not sincerely love them, but who only marry them because of their wealth. Mr. Darcy’s suspiciousness causes him to be unsure about how women really feel for him. In cases like these, money influences the relationships greatly.
Furthermore, women without a wealthy family have to think about their relationships as a way of earning money. This leads to that many men think of women as commodities. Both Mr. Collins’ and Mr. Darcy’s surprise when Elizabeth rejects their proposals indicates that they think that their money alone will be enough to persuade a woman to marry them.

Another factor in marriage is the families of the bride and groom. The Bennet sisters need to marry wealthy, not only for their own sake, but for their family’s welfare. Charlotte is another example of a woman that is under pressure to marry as quickly as possible due to her family’s situation. Even the wealthy characters in the novel face problems because of their relatives. Mr. Bingley’s family wants him to marry a wealthy upper class girl and Mr. Darcy’s aunt is desperately trying to make him marry her sickly (but wealthy) daughter.

One can divide the marriages depicted in the book into three categories: marriages based on economic considerations; marriages based on infatuation; and marriages based on emotional and economic considerations. In the first category, marriages based on economic considerations, we can find the marriage between Charlotte and Mr. Collins. The marriage is not a complete disaster even though it lacks romance and compatibility in character. Even Elizabeth, who was against Charlotte’s marriage to Mr. Collins, changes her opinion when she sees that her friend appears to live happily within the marriage. Moreover, Charlotte does not have the advantage of youth and she cannot afford to be choosy. With Charlotte’s marriage Austen shows that some people can be content with living in an economically secure marriage even though the couple has no romantic feelings for each other.

All marriages that are based on financial considerations do not work as well as in Charlotte’s case. Even though Charlotte thinks that economy is important, she is not greedy in the sense that she wants to be rich or that she wants to spend her money in foolish ways. Mr. Wickham, however, shows greed and irresponsibleness. Mr. Wickham’s only reason for marrying Lydia is that he might attain money enough to pay his debts. The couple will unlikely live happily together, especially regarding that both their characters are naïve and short term thinking.

Marriages based on infatuation are not portrayed positively in the novel. The marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet is an example of this, as well as the marriage between Lydia and Mr. Wickham. Mr. Bennet married his wife too early when he had yet not come to know her “weak understanding and illiberal mind” (Austen 228). Lydia marries because of her feelings for Mr. Wickham. The problem is that she does not know his character as well as she needs to, in other words, she has done the same mistake as her father. Austen shows us that it
is important to know your spouse’s character before marrying them and not let the feeling of infatuation take over.

The last category, marriages that involve both economic and emotional consideration, includes the marriage of Jane and Mr. Bingley as well as the marriage between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy. Both of these marriages are ideal for the women. They can now belong to a higher social class with economic stability as well as be emotionally and intellectually satisfied. The men, however, suffer from an economic loss by marrying women who cannot add to their wealth. Moreover, the class distinction is not preserved in these marriages which may lead to socially uncomfortable situations and upset relatives (for example Lady Catherine De Bourgh). On the other hand, these men will be married to women who they love and are compatible with. For these men love and a suitable personality are worth more than preserving their class and fortune. Therefore, the marriages can be seen as successful for both the women and the men.
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