

Criticisms of Marriage in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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## Abstract

In this thesis I will study criticisms of marriage in Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* by utilizing the theory of new historicism and the concept of satire in literature. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century women's position in the society was weak, and marriage was seen as a smart choice for women due to the financial stability and safety that marriage ensured. Women's formal education was not viewed as important as men's education was, so an unmarried woman without any inheritance had to rely on their relatives. As women were not as well-educated as men, there were few possibilities for women to employ themselves, which meant that they had to do jobs that lowered their position in the society even further. Traditionally, a marriage was viewed as something that was convenient and sensible. Many factors impacted on who was considered an appropriate partner and some of the factors included were money and connections. However, a change in the political and social climate offered a chance for a more modern view on marriage to gain popularity. This view emphasized the role of feelings in the pursuit of marriage.

The criticism of marriage in Austen's novel is presented through satire. A central element of satire is criticism often in the form of juxtaposition and irony, and the criticism is delivered with a sense of wit. In this story the juxtaposition is set between the two different views on marriage, where the traditional view is set as a standard that the more modern view is compared to. *Pride and Prejudice* criticizes the idea of traditional marriage where importance is placed on aspects such as possessions, connections and class. In other words, the book criticizes a marriage that is pursued merely for the sake of convenience of the arrangement.

Tässä työssä tutkin avioliittoon kohdistuvaa kritiikkiä Jane Austenin romaanissa *Ylpeys ja ennakkoluulo* hyödyntäen uushistorismin teoriaa ja satiirin käsitettä kirjallisuudessa. 1700-luvun loppupuolella ja 1800-luvun alkupuolella naisten heikon yhteiskunnallisen aseman johdosta avioliitto nähtiin viisaana elämänvalintana sen tuoman taloudellisen ja fyysisen turvan vuoksi. Naisten koulutusta ei nähty yhtä tärkeänä kuin miesten, mistä syystä naimattomat ja perinnöttömät naiset olivat riippuvaisia sukulaistensa avusta. Naisten heikompi koulutustaso tarkoitti, että heille oli tarjolla hyvin vähän mahdollisuuksia työllistää itsensä, ja heidän ammattinsa olivat usein sellaisia, jotka heikensivät heidän sosiaalista asemaansa entisestään. Perinteisesti avioliitto nähtiin siis käteväenä ja järkeväenä asiana. Sopivan puolison valintaan vaikuttivat useat eri tekijät, muun muassa varallisuus sekä suhteet. Tapahtuneet muutokset poliittisessa sekä sosiaalisessa ilmapiirissä tarjosivat kuitenkin

mahdollisuuden perinteisestä avioliiton luonteesta poikkeavalle näkemykselle. Tämä näkemys korosti tunteiden merkitystä avioliitossa ja uusi näkemys alkoi kerätä suosiota.

Austenin teoksessa avioliiton kritiikki esiintyy satiirin muodossa. Keskeinen satiirin elementti on kritiikki, joka on usein vastakkainasettelun ja ironian muodossa sisältäen nokkeluutta. Tässä teoksessa vastakkainasettelu on perinteisen ja modernimman avioliittokäsityksen välillä. Perinteinen avioliitto asetetaan standardiksi, johon modernimpaa käsitystä verrataan. Ylpeys ja ennakkoluulo kritisoi siis perinteistä avioliittoa, jossa tärkeänä pidetään varallisuutta, suhteita ja yhteiskuntaluokkaa. Toisin sanoen teos kritisoi avioliittoa, jota tavoitellaan vain kyseisen järjestelyn tuoman mukavuuden vuoksi.

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## 1 Introduction

Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813, referred to as PP from now on) tells the story of the Bennet sisters and their lives in England in the early nineteenth century. One of the main topics of the story is marriage, and the story begins with Mrs. Bennet wishing for one of her daughters to marry Mr. Bingley, a wealthy man who has just moved into an estate close to them. With Mr. Bingley, another wealthy man arrives in town, his friend Mr. Darcy, who is at first evaluated as a very proud and unagreeable man. Upon Mr. Darcy's and Elizabeth's first meeting they both find each other not agreeable and Elizabeth decides to not attempt to please him. The story, however, circles around marriage and relationships. A noticeable motivation in the story is Mrs. Bennet's wish to marry off her daughters, preferably to wealthy men, because none of the daughters will inherit their father's estate after his passing. Therefore, the family's only hope is that at least one of the daughters marries a man with a good income. The heroine of the story, Elizabeth, goes against her mother's wish of her marrying her father's cousin, Mr. Collins only because he is to inherit the estate, and a marriage between him and Elizabeth would save their family from destitution. Later on, the relationship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy becomes the center of the story and a love story develops between them.

*Pride and Prejudice* displays the laws, customs, and values of the era, as Austen's stories do. Many different topics come up often in the story, including marriage, money, education, and manners. My objective is to study the representation of marriage in this story through some of the central characters of the story. Studying this book's representations of marriage can give us insight to the norms and values of the society. I will focus on the ways that Austen uses the different characters to comment on the idea of marriage. I will start my research by discussing the theoretical framework that I will be working with as well as my methodology. After that I will be studying the society of the early nineteenth-century England and giving an overview of the laws and values related to marriage. This section summarizing the history of the English society in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century will work as my historical background information.

After this, my actual analysis will progress by examining the characterizations and the ways in which Austen presents different views on marriage. By analyzing historical literature through the theory of new historicism and the concept of satire, we might be able to gain an insight to how marriage was viewed and criticized at the time.

## 2 Research Materials

In this section I will briefly describe my primary source material, *Pride and Prejudice*, especially focusing on the story, characters, and their views on marriage.

*Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen is the story of Elizabeth Bennet, her family, and their lives in the early nineteenth-century England, more closely, in Hertfordshire. The Bennet family has five daughters, Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty and Lydia, they are all unmarried and it is Mrs. Bennet's greatest wish to find them appropriate husbands, as none of the daughters will inherit their father's estate after his passing, leaving the family without any financial support.

‘If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield,’ said Mrs Bennet to her husband, ‘and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for.’  
(PP, p. 19).

When a young, wealthy, handsome, and agreeable man, Mr. Bingley, moves into an estate in their area, Mrs. Bennet sees it as her mission to make sure that one of her daughters marries him. Soon a ball is held, where the Bennet girls are introduced to Mr. Bingley and his friend Mr. Darcy. Mr. Bingley is immediately taken with the family's eldest daughter, Jane, who is described throughout the story as being a very beautiful woman. Elizabeth meets Mr. Darcy for the first time at the ball as well, and during the ball Mr. Darcy turns out to be proud and disagreeable and his manners made him lose his popularity, even though at first his looks and income made him the talk of the ball. Afterwards Elizabeth hears him talking about her in an unkind manner, she finds him disagreeable as well. However, as the story goes on, different events lead up to Mr. Darcy proposing to Elizabeth even though there are objections to him marrying her and Elizabeth refuses his proposal as she does not love him and finds him disagreeable. Mr. Darcy does not give up on his feelings, and through explaining the misinterpretations of his character and actions, and by assisting her family in achieving a marriage between Lydia and Mr. Wickham, Mr. Darcy is able to make Elizabeth see him in a different light.

The story itself is a love story between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, but behind a romantic storyline it discusses various topics, such as marriage, love, manners, education, family, and money. However, the main topic of the book is marriage as it is a driving force in the plot and something that is often discussed in the story. What this story tells about marriage, is that there are different kinds of views

on marriage and these different viewpoints are displayed through the different characters in the story. Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Bennet, Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy, Miss Lucas, Mr. Collins all show different sides to what a marriage should be based on. Characters who support a more traditional view of marriage are Mrs. Bennet, Miss Lucas and Mr. Collins who all view a marriage rather as a contract and something that is sensible and not as a matter of feelings. People who view marriage more as a matter of feelings and something a person chooses to do, without a regard to the sensibility of that marriage in terms of class, money, and connections, are Mr. Bennet, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth.

### 3 Theory and Methodology

#### 3.1 New Historicism

In this thesis, my theoretical framework will consist of new historicism. In *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, John Brannigan introduces the two related theories as sharing a common understanding of literature texts as a product as well as a functional component of social and political formations (2016, p. 3). As theories, new historicism and cultural materialism do not only view literary texts as products of historical contexts, but they also study historical contexts through a wide variety of texts, such as legal documents, travel writings, anecdotes and literary texts (Brannigan, 2016, p. 3). Both new historicism and cultural materialism set out to renew our ideas of the past as well as offer us a way to revisit the past (Brannigan, 2016, p. 119). Brannigan explains that new historicism and cultural materialism view literature as “a constitutive part of the way a society orders and governs itself” (2016, p. 6). Further, Brannigan argues: “For new historicism and cultural materialism, the object of study is not the text and its context, not literature and its history, but rather literature *in* history” (2016, p. 3). In other words, viewing literature as a part of history in the making. So according to Brannigan, literary texts do not have to follow historical and cultural norms, as a matter of fact, they can include disruptions and contradictions of history (2016, p. 4).

Cultural materialism as a theory is more concerned about political aspects than new historicism (Dollimore & Sinfield, 1994). Cultural materialism acknowledges that cultural practice is never without any political significance (Dollimore & Sinfield, 1994), whereas Brannigan argues that new historicism as a criticism offers a space where power relations are made visible. For this argument Brannigan offers as an example Shakespeare’s play *Richard II*, which created anxiety in Queen Elizabeth as the play implies criticism of her (2016, p. 6). Through allegory, the play threatens to reveal the injustice of the monarch to the audience (Brannigan, 2016, p. 7). Therefore, new historicism can be applied to a reading of *Pride and Prejudice* by considering the different views on marriage and how those views are distinguished from each other through satire.

Hickling discusses Brannigan’s text as well as few other texts concerning new historicism and points out that new historicism often emphasizes marginalized groups, such as women and children as integral factors of the larger historical narrative (2018, p. 54). Hickling, as well as Brannigan, mentions that new historicism engages “in the emphasis on power relationships operating within the society of its time” (2018, p. 54). Hickling also quotes the *Oxford English Dictionary* to define new



historicism as: “a form of cultural analysis which examines the ways in which a cultural product (especially a literary text) interacts with and participates in its historical context, especially with reference to the power relations operating within the society of its time” (2018, p. 54). Even though new historicism may seem to be an ideal solution to examining history through literature, the theory has received criticism. Some of the criticism towards new historicism includes the claim that through new historicism “I can connect anything with anything” (Hickling, 2018, p. 54). Claiming that through new historicism anything that fits the analysis can be connected together. However, there is an argument for a need for new historicism, as there is a social world that is continuously being constructed and reconstructed by the texts it produces (Hickling, 2018, p. 54). New historicism is necessary as there is a belief that there is an emotional void that is left when historical events are “disconnected from the reality within which they actually happened” (Hickling, 2018, p. 54).

Due to the differences between new historicism and cultural materialism I will be focusing on new historicism as my theoretical framework. Examination of new historicism through Brannigan and Hickling illustrates a similarity in their views of new historicism, which is that in new historicism, the power relationships that occurred in the society during the time of a literary text, are acknowledged. Further, they both believe that literary texts are in an interaction with the society and are a part of how the society changes and evolves, as they are a product of the society itself.

### 3.2 Satire

In this thesis I will be focusing on the aspects of satire in the story and the characters that work as criticisms of marriage. An important component of satire is a standard that a reader can compare the subject to (Quintero, 2007, p. 3). Quintero argues that in order for a reader to perceive something as ridiculous or faulted they must understand what the opposite case would be (2007, p. 3). Quintero further argues that we cannot understand what is wrong with the world without knowing how the world should be or how it can be fixed (2007, p. 3). The writer of satire attempts to sway the reader toward: “a condition of what the satirist believes should be” (Quintero, 2007, p. 3). Or in other words, the writer is attempting to persuade the reader to take a certain view on a subject (Gilmore, 2018). The role of a satirist is to persuade and convince in order to make their readers to agree with their idea of what behavior and which person is condemned as evil (Pollard, 1970, p. 1). Quintero adds that whether the standard which the writer is trying to sell to us is the universal truth does not matter, as what matters is that both the writer and the reader share the same idea of that standard (2007, p. 3).

Besides having a standard that the subject can be compared to, satire utilizes different literary tools. Quintero mentions radical juxtaposition as one of the common techniques used in literary satire (2007, p. 4). Some other common tools to create satire are irony, paradox, antithesis (Highet, 1962, p. 18). Quintero points out that some form of insult is necessary for something to be satiric, however, a mere direct insult is not satiric, but an insult that is delivered through irony, metaphor and with a sense of wit (2007, p. 6). Essentially, Quintero defines criticism of something or someone as the central element of satire.

## 4 Historical Background

To be able to analyze historical views on marriage, we have to know information about the time period in which those views took place. Factors that are important to understand in a historical context are some of the topics that are related to marriage, such as inheritance, class system of England and the role of women in the society. Because even though the story is a love story, underlying there is a discussion about the society. The time period that is going to be examined is the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, because this is the time period that the story is set in, as Jane Austen wrote about the society of her time (Teachman, 1997, p. 3). Debra Teachman explains that Austen is known for writing about the reality of life and how she saw the lives of people in small English towns and villages, so we can consider her stories depicting the life of her time realistically, at least in the social classes that she wrote about (1997, p. 10). Topics that are often connected in the story are marriage, money, and class.

### 4.1 History in *Pride and Prejudice*

Starting with inheritance, which is a dilemma that in its own way drives the story forward. In the story, the estate of Elizabeth's father, Mr. Bennet, will not pass to her wife or daughters, but to his cousin Mr. Collins. Therefore, in the case of Mr. Bennet's death, his family will not be able to support themselves and this is the driving force behind Mrs. Bennet's wish to find respectable husbands for her daughters. In the eighteenth- and nineteenth -century England, law and custom dictated that a man's estate was to be inherited by the oldest son, but if the case was that a man had no sons, the inheritance was to be divided equally among the father's daughters, and if the wife was still alive, she would be entitled to a portion of the inheritance as well (Teachman, 1997, p. 28). This, however, only happens if a man dies without a will, in the case of a will, strict settlements and entails take place and this is the case with the Bennet family (Teachman, 1997, p. 28). Teachman explains that this is due to the fact that Mr. Bennet was not the actual owner of the estate, he was in the position of a life tenant, who was able to live on the property and to receive income from it, all under a strict settlement. Therefore, the estate was to be inherited by the closest male relative, and not by his daughters as it would be under common law (1997, p. 28).

Understanding the laws behind inheritance helps to interpret the relationship between marriage and money, as marriage was often seen as a matter of property as much as it was seen as a matter of love

and companionship (Teachman, 1997, p. 38). An illustration of this relationship can be found in the opening line of *Pride and Prejudice*:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife (PP, p. 11).

This line displays well the attitudes and values that come up repeatedly in the book and shows how money and marriage are often linked together in some way. A man with great fortune must be looking for a wife, and a woman would be looking for a man with a good income. In fact, Teachman argues that women were even instructed on what they should be looking for in a potential husband, which was the task for most young ladies at the time, finding an appropriate man and marrying him (1997, p. 54). Teachman defines that a good husband would have been one that would provide for her and treat her respectfully, and that the way to attract such a man, was by being proper, respectful and by having common sense (1997, p. 54). An ongoing belief still in the nineteenth century was that by joining two people together also tied together their families and fortunes, this is why the concept of marriage as a business action in terms of money, was widely acceptable (Teachman, 1997, p. 53). During this time period economic activity was seen as: “the selfish pursuit of profit, with human relationships reduced to mutually beneficial contracts” (Irvine, 2005, p. 24). The social importance of feeling was re-evaluated (Irvine, 2005, p. 24). This traditional view of marriage was still very popular, but at the same time, the idea of marrying for love was encouraged by the political and social climate that began emphasizing people as individuals with their own feelings and emotions, these opposing views of what a marriage should be based on often caused conflict among family members (Teachman, 1997, pp. 53–54). However, in the case of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy’s union, when Mr. Darcy goes to ask for her father’s consent for their marriage, Mr. Bennet acknowledges that Mr. Darcy would be a smart match but questions whether that is going to make Elizabeth happy.

He is rich, to be sure, and you may have more fine clothes and fine carriages than Jane. But will they make you happy? (PP, p. 467).

All her father’s objections to Mr. Darcy, which were mostly about his personality, were nothing to him, as he only wanted to know that Elizabeth really cared for him. Mr. Bennet realizes that the traditional view on marriage dictates that this union would be a smart match, however, he emphasizes her daughter’s happiness. Not only did the climate encourage the idea of people as individuals, but

the climate even began to change the idea of what was most important in a woman (Armstrong, 1987, p. 3).

In the eyes of the society, married women were often viewed almost as children, as they were often compared with children and the insane, both types of people who were believed to be unfit to take care of themselves (Teachman, 1997, p. 39). A married couple was treated as one under the law, nearly all of the woman's property became his, and the husband's home became hers (Teachman, 1997, p. 38). Even though after marriage, a man and a woman were seen as one, it was more of the case that the woman was joined to the man. In the matter of property this meant that the wife no longer had her own legal identity under the civil law and for that reason, all rights to her possessions were transferred to her husband (Teachman, 1997, p. 38). As a woman no longer has a legal identity of her own, she cannot sue without her husband agreeing with her, whether the injury was caused to her by someone else or her husband, even though women were allowed to ask the courts to intervene in the case of the latter, but it was rare that a woman was able to successfully stand up against their husband's mistreatment (Teachman, 1997, pp. 39–40). The law also defined that a husband could "correct" his wife, once again referring to women as children or servants (Teachman, 1997, p. 40).

Teachman states that according to law, a woman is under the husband's protection after their marriage (1997, p. 41). Some of the responsibilities of the husband include providing for her, paying any debts that she might have had prior to the marriage, as he has been merged with her as well as her circumstances (Teachman, 1997, p. 41). Even though both women and men had different roles and responsibilities in the contract of marriage in the eighteenth- and nineteenth century, it could be argued that men had more advantages in a marriage. Women were perhaps entitled to be protected and provided for, but they were also not entitled to some freedoms, such as having their own legal identities or property. Especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth century men were far superior in terms of legal power (Teachman, 1997, p. 40).

Not only could men be seen as superior to women, but families could also be superior to other families. Studying the class system of England in the nineteenth century is important as it had an impact on different areas of people's lives, and it has a connection to many of the themes in the book, such as money, marriage and education. In the early nineteenth century, it was common for people of the same social standing, to socialize with other people who had the same social ranking as they did, aristocrats, the gentry, tradespeople, the working poor and the not working poor, all socialized within their own social group (Teachman, 1997, p. 3). This, however, did not mean that one could not move

between the social classes, a tradesman who earned enough income could rise to the level of the gentry, and vice versa, the loss of money or good name, could lead into one losing their social status (Teachman, 1997, p. 3). Some social markers that measured a person's social status were their income, whether they have an estate, carriage, or horses, how many servants they have and how they travel (Ashfaq & Khattak, 2014, p. 34). Interestingly, social standing was not only determined by an individual, but by their family, meaning that one person in a family could make the entire family lose their good name, this was almost the case with the Bennet's family (Teachman, 1997, p. 3). When Elizabeth's sister, Lydia, decides to run away with Mr. Wickham, this decision impacted her sisters as well, as no one would wish to marry them after their sister had done something that was not socially acceptable during that time.

Teachman points out that even though marriage is stated as the mission of most young women in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century, what is often forgotten is that some women of that time never married, including the author of *Pride and Prejudice* herself, Jane Austen (1997, p. 85). The role of the unmarried women in the society is also an important subject, as the life for single women and widows was vastly different from those of who were married (Teachman, 1997, p. 85). One of the reasons that drove women into marriages, was to improve poverty, as the death of a woman's parents would leave a daughter without any financial support if she was not an heiress (Teachman, 1997, p. 87). Women who never married were also expected to be celibate, live their lives in a way that served others and if they did not earn their own income, they were expected to minimize their needs into an amount that was minimum for a respectable life, otherwise they had to rely on their male relatives for financial support (Teachman, 1997, p. 87). At the time there were few means for women to earn their own income respectfully and they were often forced to take jobs that lowered their position socially even further, they worked as governesses, schoolteachers and as companions to the aged and ill (Teachman, 1997, p. 87).

A topic that is also discussed briefly in the story, is the matter of education. The concept of formal education was extremely different from what it is today, and the amount of education a child received depended on multiple different factors, such as the value that the family put on education, the social standing and financial situation of the family, and the gender of the child in question (Teachman, 1997, p. 109). The general opinion, however, was that the education of girls was less important than the education of boys and university level education was not an option for women, as they were ineligible to attend due to their sex (Teachman, 1997, p. 109). Women's education mainly took place at their homes and their teachers were their mothers or governesses, but regardless of the woman's

social class, their education consisted mostly of topics other than academics (Teachman, 1997, p. 110). For a woman of the upper gentry or aristocracy education consisted of the ability to read and perform basic calculations, but mostly of artistic subjects, such as: “playing the piano, singing, embroidering, dancing, drawing and painting” (Teachman, 1997, p. 110). Whereas for women of the lower gentry and the working classes, education included housekeeping skills, such as cooking and sewing, and some amounts of more artistic subjects (Teachman, 1997, p. 110). Regardless of their social class, a woman’s education aimed for her either learning skills on how to become a good wife or how to become marriageable, meaning even if they were not going to be cooking, or cleaning their house, they should be able to supervise their servants on those tasks (Teachman, 1997, p. 110). Academic education was regarded as a luxury that was not viewed as important as teaching young women about moral behavior, proper attitudes, proper dress and appropriate marriage partners (Teachman, 1997, p. 110). None of these subject that were taught to the young women of that time aimed to teach them skills that they would need to be able to support themselves, but they were rather training for their life as housewives, this fact creates a link between education and marriage. As women were not able to support themselves due to the lack of formal education, a marriage was the best alternative for them as they would then be supported by their husbands.

The different topics that are displayed in the story, can be easily linked together, either through the laws or the values of that era. These topics impacted and guided the lives of the people in their time, and they are linked together in various ways. Marriage is perhaps one of the main topics of the story, but it was also the focus of the society in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as well. Understanding the laws and customs behind marriage, money and class help us to understand the motivations that drove women into marriages.

Even though it seems like women did not have any other choice but to get married, PP reveals that women still made a choice, but the choice was based on different factors. Weinsheimer suggests that in PP decision and action: “are determined by a variously composed mixture of choice and chance, and only as a given character increases his knowledge of self and others does choice begin to predominate” (1972, p. 404). So even though whether or not to get married was not even a question for women, a choice could be made in who they wanted to marry and why. The possibility to make a choice might have been impacted by chance, but women were still more in charge of the situation than what it might have seemed. Miss Lucas’ attempt to find a husband is a great example of this type of a situation, as: “those who most credit chance, most employ art” (Weinsheimer, 1972, p. 408). Various turns make it possible for Miss Lucas to become the wife of Mr. Collins, some of which

include her connection to the Bennet family, Mr. Collins' position as the heir of the Bennet property, as well as Elizabeth's rejection of Mr. Collins' proposal. Miss Lucas employs her intelligence and, in a way, persuades Mr. Collins to propose to her, as she knew that he was looking for a wife.



## 5 Analysis

Before beginning the individual analyses of different characters and their views on marriage, I will first discuss the well-known opening line of the story.

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. (PP, p. 11)

This opening line is a statement made by the narrator of the story, who states this as a fact that is universally acknowledged at least in the families living around the Netherfield Park, the new home of Mr. Bingley. In *Pride and Prejudice* the narrator is a third-person omniscient narrator, meaning that they are not a character in the story, but they merely describe the events and the feelings of the characters. In the story the narrator has a big role in the characterization of the story, as it is often the narrator who describes the characters and their personalities.

The Bennet family is among those, who assume and hope that Mr. Bingley is to marry one of their daughters. The first word that catches my attention is the use of the word “universally”, the use of this word creates the feeling that this in fact is the norm that is accepted by everyone in the story. What is interesting about this passage is that it offers a juxtaposition to the rest of the story. The story and the setting circles around women looking for husbands and women needing or wanting a husband for various reasons. However, this passage suggests that it is in fact the men who are in want of a wife and not the other way around, which is interesting as the story’s main character is a woman. As Elizabeth is the main character of the story, much of the story is about her, her sisters’ and her friends’ feelings and thoughts. Due to this it is difficult to evaluate the validity of the narrator’s claim, as the claim is from a male’s perspective, while the story is not. Had this story been written with a male as the main character, it would be easier to examine this claim, as the story would have focused more on the thoughts and relationships of men. However, the following passage offers even more insight into this juxtaposition:

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of someone or other of their daughters. (PP, p. 11)

In this passage as well, contrary to the laws and norms of the era, it is the men who are referred to as property, more specifically, the property of women. Especially the word “property”, shifts the power relationship the other way around and it seems as if the women are in control. The word “property” also offers a metaphor of men being a possession, to convey how strongly the families feel that their own daughter should be the one to “have” this man, as if a person is property that can be owned by someone. However, the shift in the power relationships in this passage awakens the question whether this is in fact set as a universal truth, or if it is set there to mock what is viewed as a universal truth. Through studying what the different characters in the story base their decisions of marrying someone, more insight can be gained into what the story sets out to achieve.

### 5.1 Mrs. Bennet

Mrs. Bennet is described by the narrator as: “a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper” (PP, p. 14). The narrator also states that Mrs. Bennet’s mission is to marry off her daughters (PP, p. 14). The description of Mrs. Bennet seems to be formulated in a negative light as she is not mentioned to have any positive traits. Other than her personality being painted somewhat simple, the description of her character begins with the personal pronoun “her” as presented in italics:

*Her* mind was less difficult to develop. (PP, p. 14)

Referring to her in this manner emphasizes the narrator’s feelings towards Mrs. Bennet and lets the reader know not to think highly of her character. As the narrator’s description of Mrs. Bennet’s character is preceded by the description of Mr. Bennet’s character, they compare Mrs. Bennet to Mr. Bennet, and refer to her character as being simple.

Mrs. Bennet wishes that her daughters marry to secure their financial future, as they will not have any money to their name after their father’s passing. The reasoning behind her wishing that her daughters marry well is sensible as she wants them to be financially secured. Therefore, Mrs. Bennet’s views on marriage are more traditional, as she is viewing potential suitors in terms of their possessions. Even though Mrs. Bennet does examine a man’s suitability for a husband, throughout the story we can see her encouraging her daughter to marry a man no matter what her daughter’s feelings are towards that suitor. She encourages Elizabeth into accepting Mr. Collins’ proposal, as he is the one to inherit their father’s estate, so this marriage could secure their family’s future in terms of money.

Similarly, when Lydia runs away with a man called Mr. Wickham, their mother is just pleased that she is to be married, even though he might not have been a smart match for her daughter. Mrs. Bennet places importance on the financial aspects of the relationship more than she does on the emotions of her daughters.

Another point that displays Mrs. Bennet's character and her viewpoint on marriage can be assessed through the value that she places on each of her daughters. Throughout the story Mrs. Bennet promotes her eldest daughter Jane over any of her other daughters, as she is described by her to be a very beautiful woman. In a passage where she compares Elizabeth to some of her daughters, it is clearly noticeable that she prefers the two over Elizabeth:

Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good humoured as Lydia. (PP, p. 14)

This shows the characteristics that Mrs. Bennet views as valuable, as it could be argued that Elizabeth is perhaps the one that reads the most, or Mary the one who is most talented, as she plays the piano and sings. But the fact that Mrs. Bennet does not view Elizabeth even half as beautiful or half as good humored as Lydia, implies that Mrs. Bennet does not think that Elizabeth is particularly beautiful or good humored. The repetition in this passage particularly emphasizes Mrs. Bennet's opinion of her daughters and their merits. Based on her opinion on her daughters, it could be further argued that Mrs. Bennet values a more traditional marriage where a woman is valued based on her looks and not by her achievements, as she values her daughters with those attributes more than she does those who are more achieved in terms of arts and improving themselves.

## 5.2 Mr. Bennet

Another viewpoint to marriage is presented through Mr. Bennet. He is described by the narrator as followed:

Mr. Bennet was so odd mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice. (PP, p. 14)

The description of Mr. Bennet's character is not particularly positive, as was not Mrs. Bennet's, however, it does imply that the narrator values Mr. Bennet's intellect more than his wife's. All though

it appears that even the narrator has difficulties defining his character, as they state that his personality is a strange mixture of different qualities. The passage continues with the description of his wife's character which, according to the narrator: "was less difficult to develop" (PP, p. 14). The fact that her character was less difficult to define conveys that Mr. Bennet was less simple than what her wife was.

Mr. Bennet presents a view on marriage that is based on love, rather than what is sensible to do. Mr. Bennet's views on marriage can be seen through her opinions on her daughter's relationships, as she does evaluate the suitors as well as her daughters' feelings towards the men. While Mrs. Bennet pushes for Elizabeth to marry Mr. Collins, Mr. Bennet is supporting her daughter when she rejects this proposal as she does not love him:

Your mother will never see you again if you do *not* marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*. (PP, p. 146)

Italics are here used to emphasize the two different options that are offered to Elizabeth, to do what is sensible or to do what feels right. Either to follow a more traditional view on marriage or one that is based on feelings. Another time when Mr. Bennet shows his support for a marriage based on feelings is when he supports Elizabeth's and Mr. Darcy's marriage, even though initially he does not care for Mr. Darcy:

We all know him to be a proud, unpleasant sort of man; but this would be nothing if you really liked him. (PP, p. 468)

What is important to Mr. Bennet is that her daughter really loves the man he is going to marry. Elizabeth's suitors, both Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy would have been smart matches in terms of financial security, however, Mr. Bennet wants to be sure that her daughter is choosing a man that she really loves and one that is truly deserving of her.

Mr. Bennet values her daughters differently based on their assets, as does her wife, for him however, the assets that he values are different from those of his wife. Elizabeth being Mr. Bennet's favorite daughter is no mystery, as it is stated by the narrator, Mrs. Bennet, and by Mr. Bennet himself:

They have none of them much to recommend them,' replied he; 'they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters.'  
(PP, p. 14)

What Mr. Bennet values about her favorite daughter is her quickness, or in other words her mind and her intelligence, as he does not feel like she is as silly and ignorant as other girls, including her other daughters. Even after Mr. Bennet has given her blessing to Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy's union, he mentions that he could not have given her blessing to anyone less worthy, conveying that he views Elizabeth as the one who truly deserves a partner who is worthy (PP, p. 469). Nevertheless, Mr. Bennet can be defined to be a supporter of a marriage based on love, and not on financial or class-based aspects.

### 5.3 Mr. Collins

Mr. Collins is a young clergyman who is to inherit his cousin's, Mr. Bennet's, estate after his passing. He is described to be a grave and stately man with very formal manners, his serious character fits well with his profession, as he is a man of faith (PP, p. 88). Due to the fact that Mr. Collins is to inherit Mr. Bennet's property, leaving her wife and daughters without the means to support themselves, he wishes to make amends by marrying one of his daughters (PP, p. 95). But Mr. Collins himself gives three reasons for his wish of finding a wife, first of which is that as a clergyman he feels that he should be an example of matrimony. His second reason is that he believes that a marriage would add to his happiness. And finally, he was advised by his patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, to find a mistress for his parsonage (PP, pp. 138–139). Even though he sets out to find a wife from among Mr. Bennet's daughters, he does have some qualities that he is looking for in a potential wife. After Elizabeth refuses his proposal, soon enough Mr. Collins is engaged with Elizabeth's friend Miss Charlotte Lucas. The quick change from Elizabeth to Miss Lucas shows that perhaps his attachment to Elizabeth was not that strong in the first place, and that Mr. Collins does in fact view marriage as more of a convenient arrangement.

Another factor proving that Mr. Collins views marriage as an arrangement, is what he that he can offer to his future wife. While proposing to Elizabeth, he mentions that the kindness of Lady Catherine as not one of the least great advantages that he has to offer (PP, p. 139). He later continues to argue his worthiness:

My situation in life, my connections with the family of De Bourgh, and my relationship to your own, are circumstances highly in my favour (PP, p. 143).

What is noticeable about this passage is that while Mr. Collins is trying to convince Elizabeth to accept his proposal, he does not mention any points that are related to his character or his feelings. He does not try to impress Elizabeth with his feelings, but rather advertises other factors that he believes make him worthy. By his wish of marrying one of her cousins, his reasons for marrying and what he believes makes him a worthy man, it can be concluded that Mr. Collins does support a more traditional marriage based on aspects other than feelings, such as money and connections.

#### 5.4 Miss Lucas

Close to Mr. Collins' view on marriage, is her wife's idea of what a marriage is based on, or at least what she bases her own relationship with Mr. Collins. Miss Lucas is the eldest daughter of her family and a dear friend of Elizabeth and by the narrator she is described to be sensible and intelligent (PP, p. 30). However, being 27 years old and still unmarried, Mrs. Bennet has quite a different opinion of her character:

I was so vexed to see him stand up with her; but, however, he did not admire her at all: indeed, nobody can, you know; (PP, p. 24)

Stating that nobody can admire her, even though she might be sensible and intelligent, Mrs. Bennet clearly believes that Miss Lucas does not have bright prospects in terms of a marriage. And she is in fact described as not handsome (PP, p. 162). Further, even Miss Lucas' own family is afraid that she is going to end up as an old maid, as 27 years old was already quite old to still be unmarried (PP, p. 161)

Not only is Miss Lucas viewed as someone who would not be married ever, but her own views on marriage are quite grim as well. She herself states that being happy in a marriage is a matter of luck (PP, p. 36). She also does not think highly of marriage or men, however, after accepting Mr. Collins' proposal, she admits to herself that marriage was her object, even if she does not find Mr. Collins agreeable (PP, p. 161). She goes on to explain to Elizabeth the reasons for her accepting Mr. Collins' proposal:

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 him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state. (PP, pp. 164–165)

What is interesting about this statement is that the statement is actually quite close to Mr. Collins' list of things that he believes he has to offer, which means that Mr. Collins either gave the same speech to Miss Lucas, or that she actually has very similar views as Mr. Collins does. The parts that she refers to in the exact same manner are his situation in life and connections. The repetition of the same factors by both the characters emphasizes them as something that are common understandings between them. Therefore, Miss Lucas' view on marriage is very similar to Mr. Collins', as she does not expect great happiness from the relationship itself but rather on the arrangement and all the perks that it entails. Miss Lucas does willingly encourage Mr. Collins even though she does not regard him as a very sensible man (PP, p. 159). She is ready to overlook her own feelings for the greater good that a marriage has to offer her financially and socially.

### 5.5 Mr. Darcy

Mr. Darcy offers an interesting case, where at first, he might appear as someone who only looks at people in terms of their rank, connections and manners, but in the end he actually does display more feelings than perhaps any other character in the story. Upon first proposing to Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy begins with expressing his feelings:

In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you. (PP, p. 243)

The struggle that he refers to is the fact that he acknowledges her inferiority, and after he has confessed his love, he goes on to list the factors that have hindered him from expressing them (PP, p. 244). At first it seems a bit odd to mention the factors that you do not find agreeable about the other person, but in this story, someone ignoring matters of class and possessions does create the sense that he truly loves her. Even in his second proposal, he still talks about his feelings and wishes (PP, p. 455). Interestingly, at first Mr. Darcy stated that he was not tempted by Elizabeth as he did not view her as particularly beautiful, and when he finds out more about her family and connections, they only add to his view of her as not tempting. However, Mr. Darcy still ends up developing feelings towards her, even though he felt her to be disagreeable to him in every sense.

Mr. Darcy's observations on everyone around him, including Elizabeth and her family, create the feeling that he is a supporter of a more traditional view of marriage. Not only do his opinions make it seem as he believes in a marriage as an arrangement, but he was originally to be married with his cousin, a marriage that was planned since they were young. However, Mr. Darcy himself does not value this commitment that has been arranged by their parents and so he goes forward with his feelings towards Elizabeth. Mr. Darcy's displays of his emotions are among the most emotional ones and considering all his declarations of love he does show that he values love more than money, connections, and rank by birth.

## 5.6 Elizabeth Bennet

Finally, there is the heroine of the story, Elizabeth. Elizabeth is perhaps the one that can be seen evaluating other people's relationships the most. Elizabeth is witty and outspoken, and this often leads to her speaking exactly what is on her mind, which is often critique of other people's views and actions. Some of the characters that Elizabeth critiques are Mrs. Bennet, Miss Lucas, and Lydia. Elizabeth does not value her mother's wish of marrying off her daughters to whoever is willing, and for the same reason she judges Miss Lucas, as she marries Mr. Collins only for the sake of achieving a marriage. Lydia on the other hand is critiqued for being silly and flirting with officers and eventually eloping with Mr. Wickham and marrying him right away. Elizabeth's judgements on other people make it seem as if she herself is very sensible and bases her evaluations and opinions on reason only, however, her decisions are impacted by feelings as well. Butler notes that at one point while Elizabeth is evaluating her previous treatment of Mr. Darcy, she: "prides herself on her individualism and trusts her perceptions, never recognizing that her judgements are really grounded in her feelings" (Butler, 1987, p. 243).

Elizabeth herself, refuses two marriage proposals, these proposals would both have been smart matches and especially marriage with Mr. Darcy would have been sensible in terms of money. However, Elizabeth is not willing to marry a man merely for the sake of money or connections, and she even states that she is aware that her view on marriage is completely different than Miss Lucas' (PP, p. 165). Elizabeth does not share Miss Lucas' lack of appreciation towards men and marriage, she is not opposed to marriage, but neither is she pursuing marriage if there is no happiness to be gained from it. When Elizabeth ends up agreeing to Mr. Darcy's second proposal, this happens only after her mind has been changed about his character and she has developed feelings towards him. At



first Elizabeth finds Mr. Darcy particularly unagreeable based on his manners, however, after declaring that she could never marry a man like him, she begins to develop feelings for him. Saying no to Mr. Darcy's first proposal shows that Elizabeth truly values a person's character and respects her own feelings. Therefore, Elizabeth is one that values a marriage that is based on feelings, and not on convenience or arrangement.

### 5.7 Aspects of Satire in *Pride and Prejudice*

Analyzing all the different views on marriage as well as the opening line of the story, aspects of satire are revealed in the story. *Pride and Prejudice* offers two aspects that can be compared, the two juxtaposing views on marriage. Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins and Miss Lucas all are characters who view marriage traditionally as an arrangement or something practical and sensible. The conveniences of these types of marriages are often related to money, class, or connections. Many of these characters display an extreme case of pursue for convenience, as the convenience can even out shadow the person's flaws.

The opening line of the story offers a statement, which claims it as a universal truth that a wealthy man must be looking for a wife. The story, however, offers mostly examples of women looking for a husband, rather than the men being the ones in want of a partner. The fact that the story is presented through women and their views, makes it hard to evaluate the validity of this claim. In satire "the nature of truth itself may become uncertain and confused" (Knight, 2004, p. 31). As is the case with the opening line, even though it is stated as a universal truth, as the story goes on it becomes more uncertain whether the statement is in fact true or not. Satire often presents juxtapositions to criticize absurdities of the society, in PP these juxtapositions are between the two contrasting views on marriage (Knight, 2004, p. 31). What is stated as the truth includes the claim that money and marriage are two elements that are linked together, as the statement claims that wealthy men who are looking for a wife. However, surely it was not only the wealthy men who were looking for partners. This is the standard that the other view on marriage is compared to, as the other view does not include the aspect of money, connections, or class. The juxtaposing view emphasizes the role of feelings in marriage as well as in selecting a partner and by doing that it criticizes the opposing view. A common factor between different techniques of satire is that they are tools for the writer to use to persuade the reader to take a certain view on a subject (Gilmore, 2018). These views on marriage are displayed through the characters' opinions and relationships.

Mrs. Bennet wishing that her daughters would marry to ensure their future and Miss Lucas marrying because she sees marriage as her goal, are both examples where a marriage is strived for with little notion of happiness. Similarly, Mr. Collins is looking to get married due to his opinion that he should be married to show an example and he is ready to marry a woman that has some of the characteristics that he is looking for, whether he has actual feelings towards this woman, is secondary. The subject that these views can be compared to are the ones where a marriage is viewed as a matter of feelings that are based on things other than convenience. Mr. Bennet wants Elizabeth to marry someone who she loves, so he is not opposed to Elizabeth rejecting Mr. Collins. He also gives his blessing to Mr. Darcy only after he is sure that Elizabeth truly loves her, and she is not marrying him just for the sake of money. Mr. Darcy on the other hand does not at first view Elizabeth as an agreeable partner, but his feelings soon take over and he is ready to ignore all the factors about her that were at first not considered suitable. Lastly, Elizabeth is the one that criticizes the marriages that are based on convenience, and hence she herself rejects proposals that had nothing else to offer her but convenience of matters such as money and connections.

The comparison of views on marriage with extreme examples is not the only factor that helps the reader comprehend what is wrong and what is right, but the story also compares characters. Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Bennet are characters who can be seen juxtaposing each other in many ways, through the narrator's description and their own opinions. The narrator's description of the two of them shows clearly the other one presented in a more favorable light, as Mr. Bennet is described quicker and wittier, whereas Mrs. Bennet is compared as someone whose mind is less difficult to define, and frankly, someone less intelligent. Their differences can also be seen through the daughter who they appreciate the most, the daughter who Mrs. Bennet thinks most highly of is Jane and for Mr. Bennet that daughter is Elizabeth. The difference between the appreciation is that Mrs. Bennet values Jane for external factors, such as her looks, whereas Mr. Bennet values Elizabeth for internal factors, such as her wit.

The irony in Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy's love story also plays into the satirical nature of the story. Irony can be detected when the outcome of a situation is incongruous with what was expected to happen in the story (Elleström, 2002, p. 51). Elleström states that these types of situations are more generally understood as ones that include contradictions and sharp contrasts (2002, p. 51). Both Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy show hard criticism towards each other as well as other people. The irony is that Mr. Darcy declares that Elizabeth is not the sort of woman who would tempt her; however, he ends up developing feelings for her regardless. Elizabeth on the other hand makes it known that

she does not care for him no matter how large his property is, and she even turns down his marriage proposal. Elizabeth even states that Mr. Darcy is the last man to whom she could be prevailed upon to marry, yet, in the end Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are married (PP, p. 248). As it first seems as if both of them despise each other, the last thing that you would expect is that they will be in love with each other by the end of the story. Their first impressions of their own feelings towards each other change ironically from views that are based on critical judgement, into ones that are filled with feelings and love. The feelings that they develop for each other make them overlook the vices that previously hindered their feelings. Throwing the both of them under criticism for judging each other so quickly based on traditional aspects of love, such as class, connections and manners, shows ridicule even to the main characters' actions as they are the ones who are an example of a couple who truly are in love with each other.

## 6 Conclusion

Examination of the historical context of *Pride and Prejudice*, especially the laws and customs related to marriage, inheritance, class system of England and the role of women in the society, offers an insight that reveals two different views on marriage. Inheritance, class, and the role of women in the society are all factors that impacted views on marriage and especially, which different reasons drove people into marrying a particular person. Marriage was in fact a favorable option for women, as their position in the society was not the same as a man's position was. The two views on marriage that are revealed are a traditional one, which views marriage as a contract made for convenience and based on the before mentioned factors. The other one, is a newer view that had started to gain popularity, a marriage based on love and feelings.

Through satire, Jane Austen criticizes what a marriage was considered to be in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In the beginning of the story the narrator states as a universal truth that a wealthy man must be looking for a wife and that other people view those men as the rightful property of their daughters. This is the standard that Austen sets to be mocked through satire. Quintero describes satire as something that requires a standard that the reader can compare the subject to, another essential aspect of satire is criticism of something. The criticism is usually offered through juxtaposition, irony, and wit. The juxtaposition in this story is the two different views on the nature of marriage. These views are presented through the characters in this story, the characters that support a more traditional view on marriage are Mrs. Bennet, Miss Lucas, and Mr. Collins. Whereas the characters who support a never view on marriage are Mr. Bennet, Mr. Darcy, and Elizabeth. Mrs. Bennet, Miss Lucas, and Mr. Collins are all looking at marriage through the sense of convenience that it offers, and they pay little regard to the feelings involved in the relationship. Mr. Bennet, Mr. Darcy, and Elizabeth, however, all view marriage in terms of feelings as well and they emphasize the feelings of love when talking about marriage, even though they do recognize the possibilities of convenience as well. Extreme examples of both kinds of marriages offers a comparison that gives an example of what is right and what is wrong. Another juxtaposition in the story are characters who are almost complete opposites. The satire in the story is clearly visible through the different types of juxtapositions, but the story also has irony in it that plays into the satirical nature of the story. Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy's relationship offers irony, as both declare in the beginning of the story that they are not tempted by the other one or that they are the last person that they would be the last person that they could ever marry. The irony is that they end up falling in love with each other no matter how their cold their feelings for each other were in the beginning of the story.

Jane Austen criticizes what the idea of marriage was in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. She does this through satire that sets out to mock the claim that there is a universal truth that states that a wealthy man must be on want of a wife. This statement and the traditional view on marriage are criticized by offering a juxtaposing view on marriage, one that is focused on feelings and love.

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