

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
ISSN
2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

**MONEY AND MARRIAGE IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*:
A CRITICAL EXPLORATION**

HERGIE ALEXIS SÉGUÉDÉMÈ

Enseignant-Chercheur, à la Faculté des Lettres, Langues, Arts et Communication (FLLAC), UAC, Bénin,
Email hergiealexiss@gmail.com



Article Received: 10/09/2021

Article Accepted: 15/10/2021

Published online: 26/10/2021

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.9.4.58](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.9.4.58)

Abstract

This analysis points out the functions of money in the different processes leading to marriage in the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries as revealed in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Marriage is deemed necessary. It begins from first sight by the appearance and impression the partners have on each other and, from the consideration which is the reason leading people think that they could live together. The present article shed lights on the upper class' apparatuses such as the need of wealth, fortune, home, properties and material preservation as factors which replace the notion of 'true love or feeling' that links the characters of the novel. However, the authoress, through a perpetual mood of contradiction and irony, readable in they discourses challenges these conventional notions of money and marriage in the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries. The present paper explores critically with the use of Social Marxism and New historicism the relationship between Marriage and Money.

Keywords: marriage, classism; money; reason; impression.

Résumé

Cet article révèle le rôle de l'argent dans le processus conduisant au mariage du XVIII^e et au XIX^e siècle à travers "Orgueil et Préjugé" de Jane Austen. Le mariage est considéré comme étant nécessaire. Il tire sa source de l'apparence et aussi de l'impression que les gens ont l'un pour l'autre en Prenant corps dans la considération, la raison qui pousse les gens à penser qu'ils pourraient vivre ensemble. La présente recherche dévoile d'un point de vue historique tels que le besoin de richesse, la fortune, la maison, les propriétés et la préservation des désirs, les raisons incontournables qui recadre la notion d'« amour vrai ou sentiment» qui unit les personnages de l'œuvre. Toutefois, l'auteur défie les notions conventionnelles de l'argent et du mariage entre les XVIII^e et XIX^e siècle, sous l'angle de la contradiction et de l'ironie observables dans le discours des personnages du livre. La présente étude analyse de façon critique la relation entre le mariage et l'argent à travers le Marxisme social et le nouvel historicisme.

Mots clés : mariage ; classisme ; argent ; raison ; impression

Introduction

In literary productions, marriage, love and money seem to occupy largely their conceptual identities. As illustration, major literary works, be they in verses or in prose, pages have been inked to portray those concepts. Considering the literary history of England, especially in the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries, the issues of upper and lower classes, money and marriage, love and house have mostly been dealt with. Authors like Karl Marx, D.H Lawrence, Graham Greene, Ezra Pound, Charles Dickens, and so on, talked of those concepts in their works. Their viewpoints differ somehow about social classes, money, marriage or love. Some seem to recall on the adage which says that "feeling is different from materialism", whereas others conceive the fact of needing money to fuel marriage and love.

Jane Austen, one of the major figures in British literature, has given her point of view over marriage and money in one of her prose entitled *Pride and Prejudice*. Reading this literary production, it is unveiled that many marriages have been described with their evaluable results. Through its characters – male and female – one perceives that some have got married or sought for marriage as an alternative to escape lower class' poverty, while others contract it as a result of love and true feeling. To this effect, the authoress has challenged those conventional notions of love, marriage and money at her epoch. It is real that every society has its own culture, and that of England is full of class, gentry and land issues. The aim of this critical analysis is to read the novel at stake in order to decrypt at what extent do the different marriages in the work have come to be and end. This will be deciphered in relation to classes, love, feeling, impression, and money. The literary approach to text analysis of new historicism as propounded by Stephen Greenblatt and Karl Marx's Social Marxism ideology are used for the interpretation of snippets or strings of discourses extracted from the prose work. As such, the following questions will be answered:

- 1- What is the main ideology of Jane Austen?
- 2- To what extent do marriage and money correlate in the prose work?

- 3- Is there any challenge Jane is taking considering her time?

Setting the goal of the work, it is wise enough to understand what marriage and money are.

1- Marriage and money: Feeling, impression and appearance

1.1. Marriage and money

Defining money, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* states that it is a currency, legal tender, medium of exchange, specie, (hard) cash gained or inherited. It is also a resource, wealth, fortune, funds, capital, wherewithal, affluence, means, (liquid) assets, riches. Considering these definitions, it can be remarked that the common expression that has come out is money as a medium of exchange in the forms of bills and coins that someone may gain as income after works or inherit from somebody else. What is its literary conception?

Throughout literatures, money has been given different values. Originally, money was conceptualized as an *Unconscious Equivalent of Feces* (Freud, 1908/1959); *The Inexhaustible Breast* (Kelvin, 1957); *Having Orientation* (Fromm, 1976); *Measures of Value* (Smith, 1776/1939); *Wealth* (Achebe, 1958; Olugbile, 1997); *Hygiene Factor* (Herzberg, Mausher, Syndernam, 1959); "motivator" (Lawler, 1971); "frame of reference" (Tang & Gilbert, 1995); *Life* (Egwu, 1996) and *Blood of all Organic Culture*" (Nnedum, 2003). These portraits given to money show that it is a language that everyone understand as it plays a special role in people's cultural and social life. So it is vital for the sustainability of any relationship. Throughout these literatures, one can infer that any human being should love and own it no matter what it may cost, for who has it has "life" (Egwu, 1996) and is motivated no matter what and how the odds in life one may face. What does this imply in marriage?

Leach (1985, p.186 cited by Seguedeme, 2018, p.25-26) conceives that marriage is "a union between a man and a woman so that children born to the woman are recognized as legitimate offspring of both partners". This clearly entails that a marriage is first a union. In some points, this may result from an agreement, a feeling from both partners. As such,

Dick (1964, p.7) opines that there are three levels which may be involved in selection of partners: the first is the one of socio-cultural values and norms (similarity of class and background), the second is the one of personal norms and values, conscious judgements, beliefs and expectations, and the third one is unconscious 'object-relational needs'. In regard to these conceptualizations, it comes out that marriage, as viewed in many cultures, is a result of agreement on certain points. This agreement comes from two words: appearance and impression. Let's have an overview on these concepts by showing how they are important.

1.2. Appearance and impression

The first sight we cast on a person portrays our feeling toward that person. That is our impression on his appearance. Human nature or habit is actually guided by this reality. In any relationship even before it begins, our impression, idea, feeling or opinion about our partner is firstly focused on her or his appearance. It is the way the man or the woman looks or seems. Before a man or a woman devotes himself or herself to the knowledge of his or her partner, the only route to that end is what he or she imagines the end could be. In other words, we never agree to what is against our expectation.

In the same line, marriage comes to be between a man and a woman when both partners feel realizable the relation in some points. For men, these points could be the possibility of finding heirs in the relationship. In the same vein, the woman could imagine that she would find security, wealth, love, peace and heirs in her relationship with the man. To this effect, it is rare to find people with different objective or vision to be together. This is understood in Zacharias' point of view. For him, a wife should be regarded as a kind of helper to a man (p.19). In other words, a man is in need of wife when He (God) wants a partner who could help him to accomplish God's work. That is why God intends the woman to be a partner fit for the man. Zacharias supports to this end that "so serious was the task of finding a compatible partner that even God did not find it easy. There was a seeking process and an elimination process" (p.19).

Marriage is then a kind of negotiation; exchange of goods and services. Thus, what is portrayed in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* regarding money (wealth, estate, fortune) and marriage?

2. Marriage: what for?

Reading *Pride and Prejudice*, there are tremendous and explicit reasons leading families or women to choose their husbands and vice versa. Here are some of their recapitulations.

2.1. Marriage for wealth, fortune and properties

It can be remarked that women are weak in the position relate to property. They are dependent much upon their husbands. As shown in the novel, women get married with the consideration of properties and security as foundation. This is because in the XVIIIth century, where social classes were in consideration, women generally had no financial or economic individuality. To get what they need in life, they had to marry a man of upper class. Consequently, women marry as wealthier men as possible. They marry for a comfortable home. They also tend to accept the proposal of a man with the consideration of his social status. Therefore, the income, fortune, and estate are the indications of having a good wealth and security in marriage. It is very explicitly expressed in Mrs. and Mr. Bennet's conversations. It is a pride for them to have their daughters married to higher class men. This is what is inferred in the following quotation:

Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it, that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week." "What is his name?" "Bingley." "Is he married or single?" "Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!" "How so? How can it affect them?" "My dear Mr. Bennet," replied his wife, "how can you be so tiresome! You

must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them. (p.2)

In the same vein, when Jane is engaged to Bingley whose income is five thousand per year, Mrs. Bennet, Jane's mother is much happier. And what she directly expresses after Jane's engagement with Bingley is related to Jane's fortune. However, when Mr. Bennet says that Jane will always exceed the income after her marriage with Bingley, his wife says:

Exceed their income! My dear Mr. Bennet," cried his wife, "what are you talking of? Why, he has four or five thousand a year, and very likely more." Then addressing her daughter, "Oh! My dear, dear Jane, I am so happy! I am sure I shan't get a wink of sleep all night. I knew how it would be. I always said it must be so, at last. I was sure you could not be so beautiful for nothing! (p.236)

Moreover, when Elizabeth is proposed to Mr. Darcy, who is a man, considered as having a very large fortune and wealth, her mother, Mrs. Bennet is over joy. She may have forgotten the fact that in the previous time, she has undervalued Darcy because she had considered him to be full of pride. She had even abused him almost wherever and whenever she met him. After his proposal, she finds her prayer in accomplishment and quickly changes her mind and expresses her joy as follows:

Good gracious! Lord bless me! Only think! Dear me! Mr. Darcy! Who would have thought it! And is it really true? Oh! My sweetest Lizzy! How rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane's is nothing to it—nothing at all. I am so pleased—so happy. Such a charming man!—so handsome! So tall!—Oh, my dear Lizzy! Pray apologise for my having disliked him so much before. I hope he will overlook it. Dear, dear Lizzy. A house in town! Everything that is charming! Three daughters married! Ten thousand a year! Oh, Lord! What will become of me? I shall go distracted." This was enough to prove that her approbation need not be doubted: and Elizabeth, rejoicing that such an effusion

was heard only by herself, soon went away. But before she had been three minutes in her own room, her mother followed her. "My dearest child," she cried, "I can think of nothing else! Ten thousand a year, and very likely more! 'Tis as good as a Lord! (p. 257-258)

It can be understood from these lines that Mrs. Bennet through her foolishness expresses the XVIIIth century England's class materialism. England has always valued and praised such class materialist things as "money"; "jewels"; "carriages"; "house in town" as portrayed by Mrs. Bennet. Till dates, this fact continues to be a major element in class divisions in the country. Mrs. Bennet overtly praises her joy and cannot content her feelings, seeing what her daughters and she will be gaining in such marriages with rich men Bingley and Darcy.

Sir William and Lady Lucas were speedily applied to for their consent; and it was bestowed with a most joyful alacrity. Mr. Collins's present circumstances made it a most eligible match for their daughter, to whom they could give little fortune; and his prospects of future wealth were exceedingly fair. Lady Lucas began directly to calculate, with more interest than the matter had ever excited before, how many years longer Mr. Bennet was likely to live; and Sir William gave it as his decided opinion, that whenever Mr. Collins should be in possession of the Longbourn estate, it would be highly expedient that both he and his wife should make their appearance at St. James's. The whole family, in short, were properly overjoyed on the occasion. (p. 85-86)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that families have a deep consideration for wealth. Parents tended to consider wealth and fortune of daughters or sons' before marriages. In fact, the appointed character is going to inherit the wealth of Mr. Bennet after his death because in the XVIIIth century tradition, when a family or couple did not have a male or a heir for their line, the man's wealth and properties should be returned to one of his

relatives (Collins as Mr. Bennet's cousin in the novel). Actually, this portrays the irreversible vow of Mrs. Bennet to find for her daughters rich men in order to avoid their misfortune in the future.

One could identify through the above quotation that Sir William and Lady Lucas consider more their "interest" in the "future wealth" that Collins is going to inherit after the death of Mr. Bennet. To this effect, they would spend "little fortune" for their daughter. This implies that money is a vital element in XVIIIth century relationship and consideration.

Another aspect of social relation and money portrayed by Austen is that of physical appearance and beauty in relation to attractiveness to wealth. According to Marsh,

The period between 1775 and 1817, the span of Jane Austen's life was punctuated by challenges to the traditional hierarchy of English class society. The equation of money in men and beauty in women is obviously an axiom Jane Austen is exposing to criticism by her literal acceptance of it. Beauty is however, negotiable and variable factor to be compensated for by money in case of women. The woman impoverished by unequal inheritance laws, needs financial security in marriage. As for a man with uncertain assets found to be willing to settle for a woman with money, no matter what her beauty. But while in women the pursuit of financial stability through marriage is to a certain extent accepted as a necessary urge, in men it results in a loss of credibility. (Marsh, 1998, 94).

This progressive view of the novelist is depicted as follows:

His appearance was greatly in her favour; he had all the best part of beauty—a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address" (Austen, 2007, p.68) and "whatever he said, was said well; and whatever he did, done gracefully. Elizabeth went away with her head full of him. She

could think of nothing but of Mr. Wickham (p.51)

It can be remarked that Elizabeth once holds good feeling for Wickham, considering him to be the most agreeable man she has ever met. But meanwhile, when she had learned of Wickham's poverty-stricken situation she thinks it is too imprudent to fall in love with him. Elizabeth's attitude towards Wickham represents Austen's. A lower class' man is doomed not to be Austen's ideal man. On the other hand, Mr. Wickham is not at all a gentleman and that is easily seen from his conduct in the society: gambling was a serious problem of the time; that is why Jane is so worried when she finds out (Ch. 49) that Wickham was a gambler.

Whalan Pamela posit in *Understanding the Society in which Jane Austen Sets Pride and Prejudice* that:

The code of conduct of the gentleman of the period meant that a gambling debt was a debt of honor. It had to be paid before you paid tradesmen, the rent or any other legitimate debt. If you did not pay your gambling debts you forfeited your right to respect from your fellow officers and gentlemen. Wickham left tradesmen debts behind him but also gambling debts. He was not a gentleman. (2002, p.15)

2.2. Marriage for comfortable home

Comfortable home means a home where there is happiness, joy and needs are provided through money. In the case of getting good security, women marry for comfortable home. They need only good or fine house or estate that can give them comfort, take them out of poverty and the XVIIIth century slavery and long hour less paid works in factories. With this, they can enjoy their domestic works as wives for their husbands, as mother for their children and as good relatives for their husbands and families' connections. Charlotte is an example of this case. She marries only to get a comfortable home. When she meets Mr. Collins who has a fine house, good job and good connection including that of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, she just accepts his proposal only four days after Collins proposes to Elizabeth but is rejected. Charlotte

thinks that if Mr. Collins marries her, she will get everything she needs, include a comfortable home. She also thinks that she will get a chance of happiness in her marriage with Collins because of his property. She states her expectations to Elizabeth, her best friend as following:

I am not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connection, 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.

As it is seen above, Charlotte is not in love with Collins. She just need to escape poverty once she will be with Collins.

There are many other contradictory representations of comfortable home in the novel. To resort to this, one can relate to Elizabeth and Darcy. In fact, Elizabeth has rejected Darcy before because of his pride, arrogance, "haughty, reserved and fastidious and his manners, though well bred, were not inviting" (p.11). But Jane Austen, in an intelligent manner, has succeeded in holding her view about money and fortune no matter how the state and the psychology of the characters is. In the following lines, she describes:

They gradually ascended for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills;—and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place where nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in her admiration; and

at that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something.(p. 164)

As noticed above, no one can deny that Elizabeth's choice is partly because of Darcy's wealth and social status. After Elizabeth's first rejection, she is invited to visit Pemberley with her aunt and uncle. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and on that moment she felt that "to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" "With these rooms I might now have been familiarly acquainted! Instead of viewing them as a stranger, I might have rejoiced in them as my own, and welcome my uncle and aunt as visitors."

Ended, Elizabeth moves in Pemberley and gets married with Darcy. She lives in a comfortable, elegant and fascinating life. Their marriage results from dispelling mutual misunderstanding. But economic fundament is essential security for their successful marriage. When Elizabeth's sister, Jane asks her how long she have loved him. Elizabeth replies that "It has been coming on so gradually that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley." (Austen, 2007, p.338). Here, Pemberley metaphorically stands for wealth and family status. Even Elizabeth herself also admits that property and social status plays a significant role in their ideal marriage.

Moreover, Jane asked Elizabeth when she has devoted herself to love Darcy, she overtly confesses that her feeling starts to grow since she visits Pemberley. This suggests that Elizabeth who stands for prejudice in the prose work, and criticizing Darcy's pride and habits, has changed her mindset by the authoress to show that wealth and fortune can change XVIIIth century women's mind facing wealth and fortune. This is what Elizabeth confesses in the following sentences: "I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley" (p. 254).

2.3. Marriage for preservation

It was a common practice during Austen's time for women to marry a husband and save herself from spinsterhood or gain financial security, so she chooses wise for herself. In fact, she is already considered to be a burden to her family at her seven and twenty, and she needs to feel secure. She is not a woman who could afford to ignore the absolute necessity of an adequate income, so she sees the opportunity to be united to an easy to avoid husband when Elizabeth Bennet refuses Mr. Collins. of course, she honestly admits the materialism of her choice:

Mr. Collins was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want.(p.88)

Furthermore, Ana-Monica Cojocărescu has opined that "Charlotte Lucas's brothers can breathe a sigh of relief that their sister will not be a future burden on their finances." (2010: 97). This statement clearly supports Jones Hazel's view that "at the top of the social scale the aristocratic society of XVIIIth century, daughters in all ranks of society were in a particularly vulnerable position and the pressure on them to marry was of a different order, because their present and future economic security lay in male hands: fathers', brothers', husbands'." (2009: 3).

2.4. Exploring Marriage as matchmaking for wealth, fortune and classes, with Social Marxism

Social Marxism is a social, political, and economic theory which is created by Karl Marx.

It focuses on the struggle between capitalists and the working class. Marx wrote that the power relationships between capitalists and

workers were inherently explorative and would inevitably create class conflict. ¹

The theme of social class is the most represented in the novel including other themes like marriage. Parents always want to see their children happy. Thus, during their time, they are more involved in their matchmaking. So, money and class play an important role in the prose work. As Prewitt Brown (2004) points out, class and money are essential in *Pride and Prejudice*: "class and money are givens in [this novel]. They are to the novelist as the clay is to the potter, for they are not only the substance with which characters must structure their lives; they define character and British social life" (p. 70).

It can be identified throughout the prose work two kinds of marriage matchmaking for different reasons as well: marriage matchmaking between wealthier classes and marriage matchmaking between lower and upper classes. Let us see how these are done throughout the novel.

2.4.1. Marriage matchmaking between wealthier classes

In the novel, upper classes are described between Darcy and Miss de Bourgh to keep together and stand the fortunes of both families. This is partly social and class-based relations in British customs. This is represented as follows:

"Her daughter, Miss de Bourgh, will have a very large fortune, and it is believed that she and her cousin will unite the two estates." (p.59)

In fact, Darcy is considered as having a large fortune and respectful family in Derbyshire. He has a large estate named Pemberley. Likewise, Miss de Bourgh, the daughter of Lady Chaterine de Bourgh, is a woman of good fortune in Rosing. Darcy and Miss de Bourgh are cousins. They both have fortune and wealth in life. To keep the wealth, Lady de Bourgh Chaterine and Darcy's mother plan to unite them in a marriage.

¹ <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/marxism>, 6th April, 2021, 3:58 p.m

Moreover, Lady Chaterine has talked to Elizabeth about the matchmaking of Darcy and Miss de Bourgh after she hears Darcy ever proposes to Elizabeth to marry her. She warns Elizabeth in this way:

The engagement between them is of a peculiar kind. From their infancy, they have been intended for each other. It was the favourite wish of his mother, as well as of hers. While in their cradles, we planned the union...(p. 241)

Another talk is the overtly perception of class made by Lady de Bourgh as follows:

My daughter and my nephew are formed for each other. They are descended, on the maternal side, from the same noble line; and, on the father's, from respectable, honourable, and ancient—though untitled—families. Their fortune on both sides is splendid. They are destined for each other by the voice of every member of their respective houses; and what is to divide them? (p. 242)

From these lines, it can easily be remarked that class issue is planned from birth, even with people belonging to the same family with regard to their fortune, title, and respect in the society they are living in. Therefore, it is welcome for a man or a girl of upper class to marry a girl or a man from a poor or low class. Though they are not united by their own feelings to each other, they are perceivably united by their fortune; a reason to marry each other.

2.4.2. Marriage matchmaking between upper and lower classes

Jane Austen represents also the forbidden marriage between upper and lower classes in her novel. However, she has succeeded, through the character of Mrs. Bennet, in breaking that rule governing her time.

Mrs. Bennet is represented as a woman of mean understanding. She only has one main aim in her life; that is to find a good match with a large fortune for each of her five daughters. When she hears that Mr. Bennet will purchase Netherfield, a large estate, has quickly the idea of making Bingley

fall in love with Jane. This implies that the only things or means that they have to offer in return to Bingley is a physical attraction of Jane, who is now a kind of merchandise. Second, we can talk of feeling. Then, she does the matchmaking between them. For this purpose, she plans many things, the first is making an acquaintance with Bingley, second, make an invitation and last, give them a chance to be together. To this effect, she designs her plan because marriage between upper and lower classes is seen as a bad thing. So, she has to try hard to break that rule. These are portrayed swiftly in the novel as follows:

Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes. But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go, merely on that account, for in general, you know, they visit no newcomers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not (p. 2-3)

It can be considered from these quotations that Mrs. Bennet is really committed to get her daughter Jane married to Bingley as she is putting pressure over her husband Mr. Bennet with whom she has no male child. Moreover, she is asking for this acquaintance in order to invite later Bingley to fall in love with Jane, their daughter. So they could also enter into the line of the upper class when Jane will be with Bingley who has a large fortune.

From all, that precede, it can be noticed that the authoress has painted different reasons that lead women, men and family to get married. However, to what historical extent has Jane Austen done this? What is her aim?

3. Exploring Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* with New Historicism and Discussion

3.1. Exploring Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* with New Historicism

According to Stephen Greenblatt

The work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class or creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society' (Greenblatt 1989: 12). The literary text, then, is always part and parcel of a much wider cultural, political, social, and economic dispensation. Far from being untouched by the historical moment of its creation, the literary text is directly involved in history.

New historicism is then one of the most useful conceptual theories that help to relate a text with a historical period. Besides, the text far from belonging to its author, also belongs to its audience.

In the frame of this work, one perceives that Austen does not passively accept the common features of marriages and human relationships of her own class. She often expresses, even though not very explicitly, her dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in connection with the women of her time.

To demonstrate the unfavourable position of unmarried women in society, Austen presents the very limited and unsatisfactory prospects of a spinster lady in the character of Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*. Charlotte's circumstances force her to marry an insensible and not very pleasant companion, Mr Collins, without any indication of affection. Through this character, Austen seems to indicate that if women could gain a proper education and had a meaningful occupation, they could have more choices in their lives. Their only future prospect would not be a marriage based on calculation concerning their improved status in society. Wollstonecraft elucidates the same truth that except for marriage "women have no other scheme to sharpen their faculties" (Wollstonecraft, 1975: 129).

Heroine, Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* produces a completely new type of a female character who is determined to marry only in accordance with her feelings and expectations, not seeking for shelter, fortune, wealth and estate. Elizabeth has the courage to resist her mother's pressure and to rebel against the conventional way

of thinking. She fights for her right of veto. She refuses Mr Collins's proposal even though it could be her last opportunity to get married and to secure her family's future. She wants to decide about her own life. Elizabeth is more active and self-assured than her sister Jane. She seems courageous enough to decline Mr Darcy's proposal partly because of her misleading information about him and because of his superior manners and statements insulting her and her family. By contrast, she is disposed to consider new information about him and to admit her own mistakes and delusions. She is the one who changes her first decision not to marry Mr Darcy and initiates his second proposal. This kind of dynamicity in a courtship on the side of a woman is not typical of British society of that time, as shown above, and that is where Austen manifests her views, not very frequent at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

As well, Elizabeth's attitude to a courtship and marriage is far from being an ideal of the woman of her time. She was largely praised for being submissive and obedient. She declares her unconventional opinions very openly – not only to her father and Mr Darcy but also to Lady Catherine, a member of the upper class. For instance, she maintains her rights when speaking with Lady Catherine who came to persuade her not to marry Mr Darcy. Elizabeth is also not afraid to argue with the man she loves, and she will certainly continue in the same way after her wedding.

With reference to the phenomenon of matchmaking analysed, Austen never admits that she is in favour of it. On the contrary, she frequently emphasises how the conditions concerning position of women and marriage existing in British society lead to humiliating measures, as matchmaking and husband hunting testify. She actually expresses the same attitude to the features degrading women as Mary Wollstonecraft does, "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" (Wollstonecraft, 1975: 130).

By her portrayal of married couples in the novel, Austen does not only exemplify bad

consequences of marriages of convenience (as it is in the case of Mr and Mrs Bennet), but also emphasises the importance of a prior affection together with good quality cognition of a prospective husband or wife in a courtship. That could lead to a future happiness and contentedness on the sides of both, husband and wife, resulting from a mutual understanding and respect in marriage. One could understand that the authoress view is more emphasized on freedom in choice of partner, unexpressed fight against class issue in courtship, fight against materialism and imprisonment of women's rights.

3.2. Discussion

According to Armstrong Nancy, finding a husband was the greatest task for women of the upper and middle class in the XIXth century (Armstrong Nancy, 2001: 113). At that time, they could, to a certain extent, choose whom they would marry, which was a major progress compared to the XVth century for example. The important thing was for their future husband to be either of the same or of a higher rank than them. Armstrong (2001) opines that "because women generally did not have many rights, they saw marriage as their means of social validation" (p.13). They had no personal possessions and could acquire them only in rare cases. In those, as they were unmarried everything was their father's property which was to be inherited only by male heirs after his death. Besides, as soon as they got married, the dowry they bring into marriage became their husband's. Therefore, the only way to become socially accomplished was to marry a rich man. Likewise, a rich man cannot be deemed socially accomplished if he remains unmarried. Austen clearly depicts these concerns in her novel by introducing them with the famous first sentence: "*It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife*" (p. 2). Marriage is thus established as the central concern of the upper classes.

Women were supposed to choose a man who could financially support them and not the one they wanted or loved. This was a common truth and it can be said that girls were taught to think that way from early on. It is not uncommon to find female

characters openly discussing this in the novel since for most of them this was their sole concern. Mrs. Bennet is a typical example. Everything she wants is for her daughters to marry someone with a great fortune. Austen immediately reveals that: "*the business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news*" (p. 4). Similarly, after Elizabeth turns down Mr. Collins' proposal, her mother sees it as the most inappropriate thing since Mr. Collins was to inherit their land after their father passes away. She laments it as if Elizabeth caused their financial downfall the second she refused him. It can be remarked that marriage is, in Jane Austen's time, a way of survival as well as a way of keeping status.

The narrator further states that marriage "*was the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it*" (p. 74-75). Miss Lucas admits these reasons to Elizabeth later, who does not hide her surprise. Charlotte explains she only wants a comfortable home and pictures Mr. Collins a good opportunity for her "considering [his] character, connection, and situation in life" (Austen 76). Having in mind that she is led by the thought of preserving her social status it is difficult to say whether she has to be judged or not because she is not the only one who does it.

Miss Bingley similarly conforms to these social conventions. She attempts with all her feminine powers to attract Darcy in order to have him thinking of her as a potential wife. Since she belongs to the upper class, she is not even thinking of marrying someone poorer than her. According to her, Darcy is a most agreeable man, a perfect match. He is handsome, well-educated, has nice manners, and moreover he is very rich.

Furthermore, though Elizabeth is not led solely by the idea of marrying a wealthy person regardless of his manners, she does exclaim after she sees Darcy's estate "that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" (p. 141). She

seems to be quite rational and sensible, but admits that it would be nice to live on an estate like Pemberley. Armstrong in this view states that *Pride and Prejudice* is one of those novels that say: "Marry a man with whom you were emotionally compatible if you could, but marry a man of material means you must, (...) or else face the degradation of impoverishment or, worse, the need to work for a living" (Armstrong Nancy, 2001: 97).

Indeed, the biggest fear of women of the upper class in Austen's time according to Armstrong (2001) was not marrying a rich person because it would cause their social and economic degradation. This is only a reason more to believe that marriage was a means of social as well as financial security. Men were also susceptible to this idea, as exemplified by Wickham. He tried more than once to marry a rich girl and the first one we find out about is Darcy's sister. Later on, he wants to marry Miss King, to whom "he paid (...) not the smallest attention till her grandfather's death made her mistress of this fortune" (p. 91), and at the end, when he escapes with Lydia, he is willing to marry her only after Darcy discharges his debts and pays him a certain amount of money. In the same vein, Colonel Fitzwilliam, on one occasion, openly discusses with Elizabeth his reasons for marrying a wealthy woman. As Prewitt Brown (2004) sums it up, "brought up to lead an aristocratic life and honestly unwilling to give it up, he needs a moneyed marriage to maintain the expensive leisure to which he is accustomed. He cannot afford the luxury of falling in love with a poor woman" (69). This explains why people at the time want to marry for money; they are used to living in the lap of luxury and are not willing to discharge it.

By her portrayal of married couples in the novel, Austen does not only exemplify bad consequences of marriages of convenience (as it is in the case of Mr and Mrs Bennet), but also emphasises the importance of a prior affection together with good quality cognition of a prospective husband or wife in a courtship. That could lead to a future happiness and contentedness on the sides of both husband and wife, resulting from a mutual understanding and respect in marriage. One could understand that the authoress

view is more emphasized on freedom in choice of partner, unexpressed fight against class issue in courtship, fight against materialism and imprisonment of women's rights.

Conclusion

This research work sets out to explore the concept of money (wealth, fortune, estate) in a relationship, especially in marriages of XVIIIth and XIXth centuries. It intends to decode the link between marriage and money from historical and Social Marxist perspectives. *Pride and Prejudice* evolves from a cultural angle, then studying it solely out of this could betray the context. In this sense, the conceptualisation of money, wealth or fortune has a major rank in the daily life of XVIIIth and XIXth centuries' people. It portrays their class, and class is related to the eyes society cast on people, be they men or women (Armstrong, 2001). The prose work depicts many relationships and it is shown that female as well as male characters have their own reasons in engaging in a relationship.

Throughout the fictional work, the authoress, effortlessly, describes four marriages with different motives. One can read the relationship between Charlotte and Collins, driven mainly by Charlotte's look for security, comfortable shelter, a higher social position and a better wealth. As for the man, he just needs a wife so as to be no longer single. It can be remarked from this relation that both partners have their own aim, one for wealth and estate, the other for wife to spare him from singlehood. The second marriage is between Lydia and Wickham. The arrogant Lydia, like her mother, is driven by thought of saving the family's fortune. In the same vein, the handsome Wickham is looking for fortune as he does not actually have any feeling for the girl. He just entices her with his good looking face in order to inherit her family's fortune when Mr. Bennet dies. The third marriage is between Jane and Mr. Bingley. Though in Jane's family's view, the first impression is to get her marry Mr. Bingley so that they could benefit from the upper class. Nevertheless, on the long run, those partners have experienced love. This is seen through the different fallings they have gone through; the struggle of Bingley's sisters to matchmake Mrs. Darcy for their brother because the

later belong to the same class as they do and Jane to another class. The fourth marriage is set between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy. As the heroine of the novel, Jane Austen places in Elizabeth what she conceives to be a true relationship or marriage.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen expresses, even though not very explicitly, her dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in connection with the women of her time. In her point of view, they are demeaned in status, in right, in gender and represented just as matrimonial instrument of keeping line of men. From New historicism the result we came across is that Jane Austen deplors women's weaknesses and depicts their submissiveness in relationship and in society. From Social Marxism, it can be said that marriage is driven by taste, goal, and gain, and not in most part by feeling alone. The endeavour of Jane Austen to depict this is associated with class, which is the most prevailing issue in Great Britain. To conclude, women's condition and position in Britain at that time were unfavourable for their growth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. New Delhi: UBS Publishers' Distributors Pvt. Ltd, 1994.

Armstrong Nancy. "Gender and the Victorian novel" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Ed. Deirdre David. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 97-124.

Bressler, C. E. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc, 2003.

Davis, G. *The History of Money*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002

Dicks, H. *Marital Tensions*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964.

Egwu, U. E. "Metaphors in Aid of Indigenous Organizations Theorizing and Form in Nigeria" in *IFE Psychology: An International Journal*, 1996

Fox, Robert, C. *Elizabeth Bennet: Prejudice or Vanity? Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, University of California Press, 1962.

Freud, S. *Character and Anal Erotism* in J. Strachery (Ed and Trans) Complete Psychological Words. London: Hogarth Press, 1959

Fromm, E. *To Have or to Be?* New York: Harper and Row in Gannom, M. J. *Cultural Metaphors Readings, Research, Translation*, 1976

Greenblatt, S. J. "What is the Historical of Literature." *Critical Inquiry* 23 (Spring 1997): 460-481.

Nichols, M. *Aile terapisi [Family therapy]* (O. Gündüz, Çev.) İstanbul: Kaknüs Psikoloji. 2013

Nnedum et al. "Materialism and Meaning of Money" in *International Research Journal of Finance and Economics*, 2011

Prewitt, B. J. "Class and Money." *Bloom's Period Studies: The Victorian Novel*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2004. PDF. (69-89).

Sherry James. "The limits of society" in *Rico University*, 1979,

Stone, L. *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641*. Abridged Edition. London: Oxford UP, 1967. PDF.

Swidler, A., & Watkins, S. C. Ties of dependence: AIDS and transactional sex in rural Malawi. *Studies in Family Planning*, 2007, 38(3), 147-162.

Tanee Fomum, Zacharias. *Enjoy the choice of your marriage partner*. Yaounde: Christian Publishing House, 5th edition, 2008.

Tanner, Tony. *Jane Austen*, Harvard University Press, 1986.

Wilson Edmund. "A critical analysis of Marxism and literature by Edmund Wilson" in *Journal of Business Management and Social Sciences Research*, 2014.

Wollstonecraft, M. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975.

Hornby, H. S. *Oxford Advanced learner's Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 8th edition, 1996.

Webography

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/marxism>, 6th April, 2021, 3:58 p.m