

# Marriage of Convenience in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, Emma and Persuasion

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Marriage of Convenience in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*

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## 1. Introduction

A woman that never married, and as many claimed never had a true romance in her life, wrote novels which culminated in marriages entered into for all the right reasons, for mutual respect and love. Reality was much different though. In eighteenth century Britain people married in order to secure their wealth, and in many cases of young women, to secure their survival and economic stability. And even though marriages of affection are celebrated in Jane Austen's novels, there are many couples in her stories which married for other reasons, namely those of convenience.

Austen's novels do not address the major political events of her time. Margaret Kennedy writes that "Austen was very fond of history, but she never seems to have felt that she was living through it." To her and the people surrounding her the war with the French was not something to worry about, casualties were small and it had very little effect upon most of the population (100). She did not write about men and their professions, conversations or their feelings. She wrote mainly about marriage. Elizabeth Barret Browning characterized her novels as "perfect as far as they go-that's certain. Only they don't go far." Ralph Waldo Emerson was even harsher when he remarked that:

The one problem in the mind of the writer...is marriageableness. All the interests in any character introduced is still this one, has he (or she) the money to marry with, and conditions, conforming? Tis the "nympholepsy of a found despair," say, rather, of an English boarding house. Suicide is more respectable. (qtd. in Gilbert & Gubar 109)

Kennedy points out that nobody dies in Austen's novels, religion is almost never mentioned and there are no catastrophes (101). Austen's novels describe domestic life. She led "a narrow and a limited life." She never travelled abroad and she knew little of the north of England. She was close only to her family members (23). She was closest to her sister and they exchanged letters frequently. According to the letters one can assume that the life she led was very like the life of her heroines. The sisters walked, rode, went on excursions, they sang, drew, read novels, did needlework, trimmed their bonnets, visited church and they enjoyed dancing. Dancing is a passion, as Kennedy puts it "bestowed on all her heroines" (24).

Austen never married, but in his essay *Jane Austen's Lovers*, Halperin writes that Jane Austen had “a succession of admirers, a number of chances to marry, and several disastrous romantic disappointments” (719). Her first love was Tom Lefroy, but the couple never married. “The two young people between them commanded nothing to live on and so the relationship ended” (721). Lefroy later married a rich Irish girl and became a very successful lawyer. In the years that followed Austen was admired by a number of men, but she never decided to tie the knot. “A major theme of *Persuasion* is that woman’s love is more enduring than man’s”, so according to Halperin “it is likely that she never entirely forgot Tom Lefroy” (722). She and her sister remained unmarried their whole lives. Kennedy writes that their brothers implied that they had offers, but that “they would not marry if there was no love” (26). Austen knew domestic life, she knew love, she knew marriage laws and the laws of entailment and primogeniture; her first novel develops around it. She wrote about what she knew and did not bother to touch on those themes she knew little or nothing about.

My thesis will be divided into two major parts. The first part will discuss the position of married women in society as well as the institution of marriage and marriage laws in eighteenth-century English history. In all Austen’s novels marriage is a predominant theme. In order to appreciate how the marriage functions in her novels, one has to understand the concept of marriage, as well as the role of women in the society in which Jane Austen lived. Eighteenth-century England witnessed some of the greatest changes in political as well as social realms of life. It witnessed major shifts in attitudes towards marriage due to what Lawrence Stone calls the growth of “affective individualism” and the emergence of the “the closed domesticated nuclear family”<sup>1</sup> type. Despite all the positive changes, women were still extremely unequal to men, especially in marriage. Once a woman got married, she practically lost her identity. The husband became the guardian of the wife under law, which placed women in the same category as children and mentally disabled family members. Men had all the authority and the sons inherited the wealth as well as the estate. Only in rare cases were women able to inherit or own property. Most women’s only option was to marry well or remain dependent on their male relatives for the rest of their lives. Divorce and all its legal aspects will be discussed as well.

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<sup>1</sup> See Lawrence Stone, *Family Sex and Marriage*

The second part of this thesis will discuss Jane Austen's novels. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* will be thoroughly examined and discussed. The thesis will focus on marriages in these three novels, but the emphasis will be put on marriages of convenience and the reason why such marriages existed in the first place. Austen herself criticized and even ridiculed such marriages in her novels, but they took place nevertheless and deserve attention.

## **2. Marriage and married women's rights in eighteenth century England**

In his book *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* Lawrence Stone distinguishes four types of marriages that existed in eighteenth-century Britain. The first type of marriage was decided entirely upon "parents, kin, and family friends, without the advice or consent of the bride or groom." It meant that the bride and groom's wishes were not taken into consideration, but the benefit of their families. The motive for such marriages was social, political and/or economic gain of the families involved. The second type of marriage was "based on personal affection, companionship and friendship, a well-balanced and calculated assessment of the chances of long-term compatibility, based on the fullest possible knowledge of the moral, intellectual and psychological qualities of the prospective spouse, tested by a lengthy period of courtship." The third type was based on "physical attraction, stimulated by some degree of mutual experimentation before marriage." The fourth type was based on "romantic love as portrayed in fiction and on the stage, a disturbance in the mental equilibrium resulting in an obsessive concentration upon the virtues of another person, a blindness to all his or her possible defects." In this case money or status were of no importance (Stone 181-183).

All four types of marriages existed in the eighteenth century, but the type based on personal affection, companionship and friendship became more and more prevalent due to the vast changes that took place within the family itself. The eighteenth century witnessed the rise of what Stone calls "The closed Domesticated Nuclear Family" and the rise of "Affective Individualism" (Stone Ch 6). The trend in middle- and upper-class families has shifted away from authoritarian relationships towards more affectionate ones with children gaining more freedom and spouses becoming equal partners in marriage. The interference of the relatives became lesser and the family further distanced itself from the community. The affective

relations between the spouses as well as between parents and their children deepened and that alone became “a powerful reason for the declining influence of kin and community.” The children were recognized as a category which was distinct from adults, “with its own special institutions like schools, and its own information circuits” (Stone 149-150). Despite all the positive changes in the spheres of marriage and family life, women were still greatly underprivileged in comparison to their husbands.

Eighteenth century England witnessed many changes concerning marriage. One has to mention the 1753 Lord Hardwicke’s Marriage Act, which as Stone puts it “at last brought coherence and logic to the laws governing marriage” (32). Tavor Bannet states that before the Marriage Act, it was believed that an exchange of promises between two people to spend their lives together as a married couple was enough to make a marriage valid. The ceremony in Church or before witnesses was viewed as a “public repetition and solemnization of that primary promissory and contractual act” (234). Stone writes that from 1754 only the marriage contracted in the church and not the “verbal spousals” was valid, all church marriages had to be recorded in the parish register and signed by all parties involved, all marriages which occurred at times or in places which were defined as illegal were not valid and underaged people could get married only with the consent of their parents or guardians. Runaway couples refusing to obey their parents’ wishes were now able to get married only in Scotland, especially in Gretna Green, where “the Act was did not apply” (Stone 32). As Tavor Bannet puts it the Bill was “designed to prevent rich heirs and heiresses of good family from being seduced into clandestine or runaway marriages with their social or economic inferiors” (234). Its goal was to prevent impulsive marriages which would end up in poverty or misery, marriages entered into for “instant gratification of greed or lust”, to disable minors from getting married without their parents’ consent, to prevent people who were under the influence of alcohol from marrying each other while in such a state, also to prevent secret or runaway marriages as well as forcible wedlock. The bill also tried to prevent the poor from getting married and producing more children than they could support as well as to diminish “the frequency of polygamy” where men married several times and abandoned their wives and children without any consequence or responsibility. Finally, marriages had to be “publicly performed and officially registered” (Tavor Bannet 239). Once a woman entered a marriage, now finally defined by law, she had to obey all the marriage laws which made her the husband’s inferior.

According to Stretton, the basic rules which shaped married women's rights in the eighteenth century came from the 'Common Law'. The Common Law term for married women's legal status was 'coverture'. Coverture was based on the "doctrine of unity of person", which meant that a husband and a wife shared "a single legal identity" (124). It also meant that once a woman got married, all her property became her husband's. Real property remained in her possession, but as long as they were married the husband had all the control over it. The husband was made a "baron or a lord over his feme" which gave men all the power within the marriage. The husband could force his wife never to leave their home, also had the right to use "reasonable" force to correct her and was entitled to exercise his "conjugal rights" and have marital intercourse whenever he wanted it, even if the wife did not consent to it (Stretton 125).

Stretton states that only positive right the wife had was "the right to dower" if she survived the husband. Even if she brought no dower into the marriage, the woman had a right to "a life interest in one third of her husband's freehold lands" if he died before her. On the other hand, the right of dower was thought to be too generous by many, and some husbands created 'jointures' for their spouses instead. Jointures were written contracts, that guaranteed the wives a certain income after their husband's death which was significantly less than "the income from a third of their real property" (126).

'Equity', a different kind of law, was practiced alongside the Common Law. Equity courts considered married women as "separate persons for property matters" and were able to protect women's interests when it came to property. One of their most treasured innovations was a 'marriage settlement', in which husbands, before entering a marriage, had to agree that a particular property would be "kept to the wife's separate use." Some women also created trusts prior to getting married. They transferred their property to a third person who kept it only for their use. The husband was of course informed about it before the marriage took place. The marriage settlements signed before marriage sometimes also guaranteed that the husband would pay 'separate maintenance' to his wife if the marriage fell apart (Stretton 127-128). Lawrence Stone mentions that some marriage settlements specified the amount of 'pin-money', which was the wife's annual allowance (167). Susan Moller Okin nevertheless claims that it did not improve the wife's material status. It did enable her to make all the necessary purchases without having to go to her husband for money every time she had to buy something, but that it was meant to "keep up her appearance and that of the household



consistent with her husband's social and economic position." Also, all the money she saved out of her pin-money was thought to be her husband's. A widow could claim only one year's payments of pin-money from her husband's property and, once the wife died, "all claims for arrears died with her" (136). But Stretton stresses that not everybody was able to afford expensive lawyers for drawing up and enforcing such marriage settlements in courts and only a small number of women were able to protect themselves and their property with the help of such documents. Men found different ways to avoid Equity rules and had by far greater knowledge than women on legal matters concerning marriage. Majority of the eighteenth-century women were, Okin writes "hampered by their total ignorance regarding business matters and the failure of the business world to take them seriously" (135).

Thanks to coverture divorce was an almost impossible option. Stone remarks that marriage was "an indissoluble union, breakable only by death" (34). Stretton writes that legal divorce allowing remarriage in England was not available until 1857. Only "a private Act of Parliament", a very expensive process available only to men, was a means to get divorced. The church courts had jurisdiction on marriage before 1857, and their acceptable reasons for the annulment were "adultery, cruelty, bigamy, incest or sodomy." For a man, proof of adultery was reason enough to gain separation. Women on the other hand had to prove cruelty or other valid arguments as well if they tried to get separated from their spouses. But, as Stretton states, according to the Common Law, "the separation was not a divorce", so the couples even after the separation "remained legally married", and all the money a separated woman had, belonged again to the husband (127). Stone states that those who did indeed divorce and remarry again were either very rich people, or those who were very poor, but that the majority could not afford it because of the cost, as well as "the social stigma and the risks of prosecution of the other" (36). According to their laws the children belonged to the husband, and even when he died, his widow could not get custody over them, unless the husband made her their guardian in his will. If the wife decided to leave the husband, she was not allowed to take anything with her, her children and her property stayed with him. The husband had the right to take all the income she earned, as well as all the money that she was given by somebody else. Only a legal separation protected the wife, and even then, before 1839, "she had no claim upon her children unless her husband wanted to get rid of them" (Stone 222).

### **3. Marriage in Jane Austen's novels**

#### **3.1 Marriage in eighteenth-century Britain**

The eighteenth century witnessed many changes regarding family relationships as well as marriage. Stone writes that by 1660 it had been acknowledged that both sons and daughters should be given “the right of veto over a future spouse proposed to them by their parents.” Between 1600 and 1800, even more revolutionary change took place. Children were now enabled to choose their prospective spouses “with the parents retaining the right of veto.” The changes in the power to make decisions about marriage were the result of “a new recognition of the need for personal autonomy, and a new respect for the individual pursuit of happiness” (183).

In addition to this change in the attitude from obedience to independence, there were “three sociological conditions required for the development of relatively free individual mate selection based on psychological compatibility” (Stone 184). Firstly, since the family became rather independent of the relatives, “a grand family council of elders” was no longer in charge of making decisions about marriage. The decisions were based on the wishes of those involved. The second is the development of a tighter relationship between parents and their children, so that the parents put the happiness of their children before their own. The third condition was the willingness of the parents to allow their children to spend time with the members of the opposite sex on “neutral ground” and to establish their own “courting rituals” such as dancing, talking to each other, etc. The earliest evidence of these shifts can be traced in the “wealthy bourgeois and professional classes towards the end of the seventeenth century” (Stone 184-185).

Even the aristocracy were beginning to acknowledge the importance of “prior affection” (Stone 202). Some parents though still chose their children's future spouses. The new loving parent-child relations were successfully used by the parents to make their children do exactly what they planned for them to do all along (Stone 212). In the letter to his daughter Samuel Richardson lovingly objects to his daughter's decision to marry a Subaltern and writes:

You must believe, that your sister's unadvised marriage, which she must know would be disagreeable to me, gives me no small concern; and yet, I will assure you, that it arises more from my affection for her, than any other consideration. In her education I took all the pains and care my circumstances would admit, and often flattered myself with the hope, that the happy fruits of it would be made (to) appear in her prudent conduct. (qtd. in Jones 37-38)

According to Stone, many single women in the eighteenth century were rather frustrated, because this shift of motives for marriage from the concrete power, status and money to the one of affection benefited men more than women. It was still expected that men should be the ones to initiate the courtship. It meant that the male was free to follow his personal inclinations, whereas a woman chose between those who tried to court her. A woman could encourage or refuse, but could not instigate the courtship. Women again had to be the flexible and compliant ones, which caused their disappointment and frustration in the eighteenth century (249).

Stone writes that during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a great number of long-term “bachelors among younger sons of nobility and gentry” (242). Many were not able to start a family and at the same time maintain the lifestyle they were accustomed to. Because of that, a great number of bachelors, namely unmarried younger sons became soldiers or went to serve in the colonies, where white, respectable and rich women were sparse. This led to a “shortage of suitable males” in Britain and as the result of it “a new social phenomenon, the spinster lady who never married” came into scene. The number of unmarried women in Britain rose “from under five per cent of all upper-class girls in the sixteenth century to twenty-five percent in the eighteenth century” (Stone 242-243). Being a spinster in British society was an unwelcome and a derogatory position. Aída Díaz Bild writes that the “never-married woman became a figure of scorn, contempt and abuse” (56). Olwen Hufton states that in eighteenth-century Britain “all women lived in societies in which marriage and motherhood were regarded as the norm, spinsterhood and infertility as a blight” (355).

Stone writes that the three barriers to solving “the spinster problem” were “social snobbery”, the “non-vocational educational training of women” and “the lack of openings in the professions.” Women could not work even as clerks. The root cause of the spinster problem was the lack of appropriate education for females (245). The educated girls from

respectable families could only work as governesses. “Accomplished, portionless and homeless girls could become governesses in wealthy households to young children under seven.” But they suffered from “economic hardship and social stigma.” Severely underpaid, they had to work seven days a week and were more “a prisoner than any servant in the house.” An anonymous writer remarked that: “There are three classes of people in the world, men, women, and governesses” (Stone 244).

### 3.2 Marriage in *Pride and Prejudice*

*Pride and Prejudice*, the book which Austen initially titled *First Impressions*, is the second of four novels that Austen published during her lifetime. It was published in 1813, and like all Jane Austen’s novels, it considers, as Moe states “what it means to marry well” (1075). It is a book about the social conventions of eighteenth-century Britain and the role of women in the society. Magee writes that “it featured young women entering society in search of a husband to provide them with virtually the only career then open to a woman—that is, marriage” (199).

In Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* five Bennet sisters and their friend Charlotte Lucas are all in need of a husband. The Bennets are the members of the rural gentry, and lead a comfortable life, but because of an entail, the family estate is to be inherited by William Collins, Mr Bennet’s nephew, who is the next male in line. It is no wonder that Mrs Bennet’s only preoccupation in life is to see her daughters well married. “The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news” (Austen, *Pride* 5). By the end of the novel three of her daughters are married, two of them quite handsomely and she happily exclaims:

...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... 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. (Austen, *Pride* 466)

Jane is the eldest and most beautiful of the Bennet sisters, so the expectation to marry is especially placed upon her. She is a sweet and good-natured girl who truly believes that there is goodness in everyone. The moment Mrs Bennet finds out that “a single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year” has moved into the neighbourhood, she sees the opportunity to marry one of her daughters, most preferably Jane, off to this man (Austen, *Pride* 3). From the moment they first meet, Bingley is smitten by her. Bingley confesses to Darcy that Jane “is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld!” (Austen, *Pride* 13) and admires her very straightforwardly. Jane on the other hand does not express her feelings as openly as Bingley does. She is shy, and though she admires Bingley she does not show it. She admits only to Elizabeth that she likes him very much. “He is just what a young man ought to be,” said she, ‘sensible, good-humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy manners!—so much ease, with such perfect good breeding!’ (Austen, *Pride* 17).

Her friend Charlotte remarks that it is “a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him” (Austen, *Pride* 26). Because of her shyness and her situation marriage almost never happens. Bingley’s sister, Mrs Hurst expresses her concerns when she says: “I have an excessive regard for Miss Jane Bennet, she is really a very sweet girl, and I wish with all my heart she were well settled. But with such a father and mother, and such low connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it” (Austen, *Pride* 44).

Bingley and Jane almost end up as victims of other people’s interventions. Mislead by her apparent lack of emotions and an obvious lack of fortune and connections Darcy persuades his friend not to marry her. By the end of the novel, the truth of her true feelings becomes known to Darcy as well as Bingley and they do marry after all, despite the wishes of his family. They marry for love.

Elizabeth Bennet is the heroine of the book. She is 21 years old, her father’s favourite, because she has inherited his intelligence. “Talkative, satirical, quick at interpreting appearances and articulating her judgements”, she is thus contrasted to her sensible quiet sister Jane (Gilbert & Gubar 157). She is as Moe states “an ambassador for novelistic generic acceptance and at the same time an agent of social reform. Elizabeth Bennet is the upwardly mobile bourgeois female subject who becomes responsible for the modernization of aristocratic culture into which she is accepted” (1081). She gets proposed to three times in the novel. Her first suitor is Mr Collins, who “was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of

nature had been but little assisted by education or society” (Austen, *Pride* 87). Since he is to inherit the Longbourn property, her mother is determined for them to get married. Nevertheless, Elizabeth refuses his proposal, since she could only marry a man she truly loves. She uses what Lawrence Stone calls her “right of veto” (183), and luckily is supported by her father. The second time she gets proposed to is by Mr Darcy. Wiesenfarth stresses that *Pride and Prejudice* “makes a case for a prudent marriage and against a mercenary one”. When Darcy first proposes to Elizabeth, she feels nothing but contempt for him, and even though his fortune and connections and willingness to disregard everything that went against her made him the best suitor possible, Elizabeth refuses him. Elizabeth thus refuses to marry for convenience, but when she accepts him the second time he proposes, she loves and admires him, so this time around she decides to marry him for all the right reasons. “The moral and emotional revolutions that they both experience by facing hard, unpleasant truths about themselves make them equal and complementary partners in marriage” (268-269).

Lydia Bennet, the youngest of the Bennet sisters, is only sixteen years old. She marries Mr Wickham, an army officer and a person of a despicable character. Mr Wickham had a promising future as a clergyman, but he willingly traded his position for a compensation of three thousand pounds. Once he gambled it all away his only option was to join the army. He was a very handsome man, admired by everybody. “The officers of the —shire were in general a very creditable, gentlemanlike set... but Mr. Wickham was as far beyond them all in person, countenance, air, and walk” (Austen, *Pride* 95). Once he came to Meryton, his favourite was Elizabeth. But even though everybody at that time was completely oblivious to his real character, and he was generally believed to be quite admirable and gentlemanlike, Mrs Gardiner, Elizabeth’s aunt cautions Elizabeth against encouraging Wickham’s affections because marriage between them would be clearly unwise. It would not be smart to marry a man who is even poorer than she is. “Such a marriage”, writes Wiesenfarth, “would require unreasonable sacrifices on the part of her family” (263). When he neglects Elizabeth in favour of Miss King, a girl who is to inherit ten thousand pounds, Mrs. Gardiner implies that Wickham is a mercenary: “But my dear Elizabeth, ‘she added, ‘what sort of girl is Miss King? I should be sorry to think our friend mercenary” (Austen, *Pride* 192). Later in the novel, we find out that Wickham tried to trick Georgiana Darcy into marrying him. His reason for proposing to a girl, who was only sixteen at the time, was of course her thirty thousand pounds that she was bringing into the marriage. Luckily Mr Darcy, Georgiana’s brother found out about it before the marriage took place and put an end

to it. After Wickham and Lydia's elopement, the family first assumes that the young couple fled to Gretna Green. Lydia was underage, and the only place for them to get married without her parents' consent was in Scotland since, as Stone informs us, in Gretna Green 1753 Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act "did not apply" (32). Mr Darcy and Lydia's uncle Mr Gardiner, track them down and force Mr Wickham to marry Lydia. Elizabeth argued that the marriage cannot take place because there is no money to tempt Wickham. But as Wiesenfarth states: "Darcy supplies the money, Wickham is tempted, and Lydia is married" (268). According to Mordecai Wickham and Lydia "yield almost completely to personal claims." There is definitely sexual attraction between them, but Lydia's other motives for this elopement are "freedom and excitement", while Wickham grabs the chance to run away from his debts while hoping for a satisfying "marriage settlement" (276).

Charlotte Lucas and Mr Collins' marriage is one of the best examples of marriage of convenience in all Jane Austen's novels. Charlotte is Elizabeth Bennet's dearest friend, but unlike Elizabeth she is not pretty and is already twenty-seven years old. On the verge of spinsterhood, Charlotte Lucas' situation is one of the best examples of the sad reality poor unmarried women in eighteenth century Britain had to endure. Mr Collins' intention to find himself a wife was his main reason for coming to Longbourn, and after Elizabeth's refusal he searched elsewhere. His intentions to get married were of a practical, and not a romantic nature. He was instructed by his patroness Lady Catherine de Bourgh to marry. She advises him to: "Choose properly, choose a gentlewoman for MY sake; and for your OWN, let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way" (Austen, *Pride* 133). Charlotte is more than willing to encourage this courtship, even though: "Mr. Collins... was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary" (Austen, *Pride* 155). After finding out that her friend is engaged to Mr. Collins Elizabeth is enraged. She shares with Jane that: "Mr. Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded... the woman who married him cannot have a proper way of thinking" (Austen, *Pride* 170). Charlotte on the other hand defends her decision by saying: "I am not romantic... 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" (Austen, *Pride* 158). Though Elizabeth openly disapproves of this marriage, Charlotte's family is overjoyed:

Sir William and Lady Lucas were speedily applied to for their consent...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... The whole family, in short, were properly overjoyed on the occasion. The younger girls formed hopes of COMING OUT a year or two sooner than they might otherwise have done; and the boys were relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte's dying an old maid. (Austen, *Pride* 154-155)

Mordecai asserts that "the relationship between Mr Collins and Charlotte presents a total abandonment of personal claims in favour of social claims, but their individual adjustments are distinctly different." Collins is in need of a wife, for as clergyman, he needs to set an appropriate example in his parish and submit to his patroness' wishes. Charlotte will accept such an awful man because he is the only alternative to destitution and exclusion from society. Charlotte's relationship with Elizabeth proves that she is intelligent, sensible, and that she has principles. "Thus, her loneliness with Collins is the central pathos of her marriage; for Collins has lost nothing by the marriage because he had nothing to lose" (276).

To summarize, four marriages take place in the course of the novel. Jane and Elizabeth's marriages are based on prior affection, respect and understanding, Lydia marries Wickham because of infatuation and physical attraction and Charlotte marries the man she does not love, but through that marriage she gains financial security and avoids the gloomy future of staying an old maid for the rest of her life. Even though both Elizabeth and Jane marry for love, they are not their husbands' equals when it comes to social status and wealth so both their marriages are to a certain extent marriages of convenience. Elizabeth herself admits that she realized that she was in love with Darcy the moment she saw Pemberley. While she and the Gardiners admired the estate she felt: "...that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something" (Austen, *Pride* 301). Upon marrying Lydia, all Wickham's debts are paid off and thanks to that marriage he acquires a good position in the military away from Brighton and Pemberley, where, by the end of the novel everybody is well acquainted with his true despicable character. Lydia on the other hand profits not only because she gets to marry the one she loves, but her now rich sisters financially support her every time she is in need of money. Collins marries a good woman who fulfils both her duties as a housewife, and is a best possible neighbour to Lady Catherine, and Charlotte becomes a mistress of her own house, and achieves what she always wanted, financial stability and independence. Their



future happiness is uncertain, but Charlotte Lucas believes that “Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance” (Austen, *Pride* 27).

### 3.3 Marriage in *Emma*

*Emma*, Jane Austen’s fourth novel, was published in 1815 in three volumes and it is set in Highbury, England. The novel opens with the sentence: “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her” (Austen, *Emma* 4). Thaden states that people who read Austen’s previous work would automatically be “alerted that they are now in a different world, or rather the same world viewed from an entirely different perspective” (48). Emma, who is at the top of the social ladder of her circle, has no desire to marry or to change her situation. She is, one could say, the only child, she has control over the entire household, she is worshiped by her father and governess and “has the power to avoid anyone who does not care to flatter her” (48). Emma was raised by her governess, she highly respects and loves her, yet she spent her whole life doing: “just what she liked; highly esteeming Miss Taylor’s judgment, but directed chiefly by her own” (Austen, *Emma* 4). Although Emma is not a typical Jane Austen heroine; she is rich, young and does not have to marry in order to gain financial security, there is a number of other female characters in the novel that highlight the difficulties facing women without financial independence. Even though Emma has no aspirations to marry, the novel was, after all, written by Austen. Four marriages take place in the course of the novel and by the end of it, even Emma says ‘I do’.

Miss Taylor, Emma’s governess, married Mr Weston who “was a man of unexceptionable character, easy fortune, suitable age, and pleasant manners” (Austen, *Emma*, 5). Mr Weston was “born of a respectable family, which for the last two or three generations had been rising into gentility and property” (Austen, *Emma* 16). Fowkes Tobin writes that “Miss Taylor thus moves from a position that despite Emma’s affection and friendship, still holds the stigma of service, to a position of ‘independence’ as a mistress of her own house” (414). Mr Knightley acknowledges how very advantageous this marriage is when he says: “how very acceptable it must be, at Miss Taylor’s time of life, to be settled in a home of her

own, and how important to her to be secure of a comfortable provision” (Austen, *Emma* 12). This was Mr Weston’s second marriage, his first wife died after three years of marriage, and their union was an unhappy one. The second marriage proved to be a perfect match, for Mr Weston:

had never been an unhappy man; his own temper had secured him from that, even in his first marriage; but his second must shew him how delightful a well-judging and truly amiable woman could be, and must give him the pleasantest proof of its being a great deal better to choose than to be chosen, to excite gratitude than to feel it.  
(Austen, *Emma* 18)

Mr and Mrs Weston’s marriage is a perfect example of what Lawrence Stone calls “the companionate marriage” (217). It proves that if there is no respect, friendship and mutual understanding, money cannot bring happiness. Their story is a story of marital bliss; she is his successful second attempt for love, he is her escape from the life of uncertainty and poverty and by the end of the novel their love story triumphs with the birth of their daughter.

Harriet Smith is a girl of seventeen and very beautiful. She is “short, plump, and fair, with a fine bloom, blue eyes, light hair, regular features, and a look of great sweetness” (Austen, *Emma* 26-27). From the moment they get acquainted first, Emma likes Harriet for her beauty, but also because Harriet is:

... altogether very engaging—not inconveniently shy, not unwilling to talk—and yet so far from pushing, shewing so proper and becoming a deference, seeming so pleasantly grateful for being admitted to Hartfield, and so artlessly impressed by the appearance of everything in so superior a style to what she had been used to, that she must have good sense, and deserve encouragement. (Austen, *Emma* 26-27)

Naive and easily manipulated, Harriet becomes the victim of Emma’s matchmaking attempts to find her a husband way above her social rank. Harriet is an illegitimate child of nobody knows who, but when she gets proposed by Mr Martin, a respectable young farmer, Emma persuades her that she must expect more from life, for “a young farmer, whether on horseback or on foot, is the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity” (Austen, *Emma* 34), therefore it should not raise her friend’s curiosity either. Emma is persuaded that Harriet is a gentleman’s daughter and advises her: “...you must support your claim to that station by

everything within your own power, or there will be plenty of people who would take pleasure in degrading you” (Austen, *Emma* 36). A series of failed attempts and disappointments follow. Emma’s first choice for her friend’s future husband falls on Mr Elton, the village vicar. Mr Elton, on the other hand had much higher aspirations; he wanted to marry Emma, but when questioned about his attachment to Harriet he angrily replied: “I wish her extremely well: and, no doubt, there are men who might not object to—Everybody has their level: but as for myself, I am not, I think, quite so much at a loss. I need not so totally despair of an equal alliance, as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith!” (Austen, *Emma* 162). After the whole Mr Elton debacle, Emma tries to encourage the courtship between Harriet and Frank Churchill, but neither Mr Churchill nor Harriet desires such a relationship, since he is in love with Miss Jane Fairfax, and Harriet, encouraged by Emma to aim high starts developing feelings for Mr Knightley, but this infatuation too is of a short duration. By the end of the novel Harriet and Mr Martin do marry, not only because they love each other, but because of her situation, she cannot expect a nobleman to marry her and Mr Martin, only a farmer, is her only prospect. Though lovely and beautiful, she is nevertheless an illegitimate child of an anonymous father, whose financial support would eventually diminish, if not sooner than most likely after his death. According to Mr Knightley, Mr Martin was “... not her (Harriet’s) equal indeed, for he is as much her superior in sense as in situation” (Austen, *Emma* 74). Had she not married Mr Martin, she would probably end up a poor old maid, ridiculed and pitied by everybody.

Unlike Emma, Jane Fairfax is the typical Austen heroine “growing up with no advantages of connection or improvement to be engrafted on what nature had given her in a pleasing person, good understanding, and warm-hearted, well-meaning relations” (Austen, *Emma* 197). Thaden writes that Jane “must endure the constant company of the well-meaning, but socially despised and ludicrous relatives.” She also must endure quietly while a “flirt of high social standing plays with the man she loves.” Jane also “displays the diffidence necessary to her social position, a reserve that makes her unattractive to so many readers” (55). Jane is an orphan, the only child of Mrs Bates’s youngest daughter. When she lost her parents, Colonel Campbell, her father’s dear friend and his family offered to be entirely in charge of her education. Ever since she was nine years old she has lived with his family. The plan was that she should become a governess because the money she inherited from her father could not secure her independence. Though Colonel Campbell’s income was substantial, his fortune was “moderate and must be all his daughter’s; but, by giving her an education, he hoped to be supplying the means of respectable subsistence hereafter” (Austen,

*Emma* 198). Jane is a beautiful, intelligent and accomplished young woman, incredibly skilled piano player and a talented singer. Jane and Emma never develop a real friendship, because as Fowkes Tobin states, Emma knows that “without her inherited status and wealth, she would fall short in comparison with Miss Fairfax” (415). By the end of the novel, Jane marries Mr Churchill, but they keep the whole engagement a secret, because Mr Churchill’s aunt, whose estate and wealth he is to inherit, would never agree to such an unequal marriage.

Mr and Mrs Weston, oblivious to Frank’s secret engagement, plan for Frank to marry Emma and he shamelessly pretends to be interested in her in order to conceal his engagement with Jane. Jane suffers deeply because of his behaviour, and after being repeatedly humiliated by him, is as Gilbert and Gubar state “driven to a gesture of revolt; the pathetic decision to endure the ‘slave-trade’ of becoming a governess rather than wait for Frank Churchill to become her husband” (158). Luckily for all, Frank’s aunt dies, and he is finally free to marry the woman he loves. Nevertheless, through his actions, he proves to be quite unworthy of her affections. Mr Knightley, upon finding out about their upcoming marriage declares:

And is he to be rewarded with that sweet young woman?— Jane, Jane, you will be a miserable creature... Assured of the love of such a woman—the disinterested love, for Jane Fairfax’s character vouches for her disinterestedness; everything in his favour,— equality of situation—I mean, as far as regards society, and all the habits and manners that are important; equality in every point but one— and that one, since the purity of her heart is not to be doubted, such as must increase his felicity, for it will be his to bestow the only advantages she wants. (Austen, *Emma* 522-524)

Jane and Mr Churchill’s marriage is still quite atypical of that period. Although companionate marriage was on the rise, people still married within their social class, and such cases as theirs were still rather improbable.

Emma Woodhouse, the heroine of the novel, unlike all other Austen heroines does not have the wish to marry. She explains to her friend Harriet:

I am not only, not going to be married, at present, but have very little intention of ever marrying at all... I cannot really change for the better. If I were to marry, I must expect to repent it... Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want... it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous

public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid... but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else. (Austen, *Emma* 103-104)

Emma is a passionate reader of novels and has as stated by Gilbert and Gubar “at her disposal worn-out, hackneyed stories of romance that she is smart enough to resist in her own life, but wants to manipulate people as if they were characters in her own stories” (158). Though resolute not to marry herself, Emma is determined to find the best possible husband for her friend Harriet to marry, yet she is quite unsuccessful at it. The fairy-tale marriage she has planned for her friend never takes place.

Her first ‘crush’ in the novel is Frank Churchill. Though previously determined against it, she believes that she is in love. “This sensation of listlessness, weariness, stupidity, this disinclination to sit down and employ myself, this feeling of every thing’s being dull and insipid about the house!— I must be in love” (Austen, *Emma* 317-318). Luckily for Emma, these affections are of a short duration since Frank Churchill never intended to marry her and was flirting with her only to conceal his true feelings for Miss Fairfax. While busy with her matchmaking and flirting with Frank Churchill, Emma fails to notice Mr Knightley’s affections. Mr Knightley is an old friend of Emma’s family, sixteen years older than Emma, and he knows Emma’s character and personality very well. Mr Knightley is the only character in the novel who openly criticizes Emma for her impolite behaviour. He scolds and corrects her behaviour, but still loves her, despite her many faults. McMaster writes that “throughout the novel, Mr. Knightley evinces pride when Emma judges correctly and disappointment when she is mistaken. He is reforming her for their eventual union and rejoices in her moral accomplishments” (qtd. in Lambdin & Lambdin 108). Emma is unaware of the seriousness of her feelings until she faces the danger of losing Mr Knightley to another woman:

Emma’s eyes were instantly withdrawn; and she sat silently meditating, in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes. A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress. She touched— she admitted—she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley, than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return?

It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself! (Austen, *Emma* 499)

Emma and Mr Knightley marry for love. Mr Knightley fell in love with Emma when she was only thirteen years old, Emma has respected him her whole life and by the end of the novel, she realizes that she is in love with him. Their marriage is an example of what Stone calls “the companionate marriage” (Stone Ch 8).

Miss Augusta Hawkins is a minor character who marries Mr Elton. Mr Elton was the village vicar and “a very pretty young man” (Austen, *Emma* 15). He was not a wealthy man but was highly esteemed by everyone in Highbury. From the moment he proposes to Emma, it is obvious that he wants to marry well. After refusing him Emma concludes that Mr Elton is:

...proud, assuming, conceited; very full of his own claims, and little concerned about the feelings of others... He wanted to marry well, and having the arrogance to raise his eyes to her, pretended to be in love... He only wanted to aggrandise and enrich himself; and if Miss Woodhouse of Hartfield, the heiress of thirty thousand pounds, were not quite so easily obtained as he had fancied, he would soon try for Miss Somebody else with twenty, or with ten. (Austen, *Emma* 165-166)

Shortly after he was refused by Emma, he travels to Bath and soon returns engaged to Miss Hawkins who:

...in addition to all usual advantages of perfect beauty and merit, was in possession of an independent fortune, of so many thousands as would always be called ten; a point of some dignity, as well as some convenience: the story told well; he had not thrown himself away—he had gained a woman of £10,000 or thereabouts; and he had gained her with such delightful rapidity. (Austen, *Emma* 220-221)

Miss Hawkins marries the respectable village vicar, Mr Elton marries money. Their courtship was of such a short duration that it cannot be said that their marriage was based on love, when they barely knew each other. This is a typical example of marriage of convenience where money and social advancement are the primary, if not the only reasons for entering a marriage.

To summarize, four marriages take place in the course of the novel. By the end of the story, it becomes obvious to the reader that each of the marriages is “an appropriate union of personalities.” Emma and Mr Knightley’s marriage is the most fulfilling because “it links two ultimately good characters whose personality traits lend support to each other: Emma brings out Mr Knightley’s subdued passion, and he helps her refine her good sense. Their union is all the more appealing because, unlike some of the marriages that were necessitated by economic demands, Emma’s fate was not inevitable” (Lambdin & Lambdin 106). All the marriages, except for Miss Hawkins and Mr Elton’s are based on love. Their marriage is the one of convenience. Augusta is rich and needs a husband who will elevate her social status, Mr Elton, a respected member of Highbury, wants a rich wife and in Augusta Hawkins he gets just what he needs. Their union is a practical one, but it might even lead to mutual understanding and love. Or not; only time will tell.

### **3.4 Marriage in *Persuasion***

*Persuasion*, written in 1815-16 and published two years later, was Jane Austen’s last completed novel (Rzepka 100). The novel tells the story of Anne Elliot, a twenty-seven-year-old daughter of Sir Walter Elliot of Kellynch Hall. Eight years before the story begins Anne had, under the persuasion of a dear friend, a kind and well meaning, but also as Rzepka puts it “aristocratically biased” Lady Russell refused the proposal of a handsome, but poor lieutenant Frederick Wentworth, even though they were madly in love with each other (101). Today, Wentworth is a highly respected captain, worth twenty-five thousand pounds, and comes back from war in search of a wife. After months of running into each other and renewing the feelings once lost, Anne and Fredrick are reunited, but not before he almost ends up in a loveless marriage with Louisa Musgrove, and Anne almost gets persuaded into marrying her cousin, and the heir of the Kellynch estate, William Elliot. Three marriages take place in the course of the novel, but one additional marriage, namely the marriage of William Elliot that took place before the story begins, will also be discussed.

Henrietta Musgrove is a nineteen-year-old girl, daughter of Mr and Mrs Musgrove. Henrietta and her sister Louisa were “fashionable, happy, and merry. Their dress had every

advantage, their faces were rather pretty, their spirits extremely good, their manner unembarrassed and pleasant; they were of consequence at home, and favourites abroad” (Austen, *Persuasion* 47- 48). Both sisters were for some time quite smitten with Captain Wentworth, but Henrietta marries Mr Charles Hayter. He is a very amiable, pleasing young man and:

... while the Musgroves were in the first class of society in the country, the young Hayters would, from their parents’ inferior, retired, and unpolished way of living, and their own defective education, have been hardly in any class at all, but for their connexion with Uppercross, this eldest son of course excepted, who had chosen to be a scholar and a gentleman, and who was very superior in cultivation and manners to all the rest... Charles’s attentions to Henrietta had been observed by her father and mother without any disapprobation. ‘It would not be a great match for her; but if Henrietta liked him,’— and Henrietta did seem to like him. (Austen, *Persuasion* 88-89)

The Musgroves are far from a snobbish family, and when the couple decided to marry Charles Musgrove only noted that: “My father would be well pleased if the gentlemen were richer, but he has no other fault to find” (Austen, *Persuasion* 261).

The only person who feels strongly against this match is Mary Musgrove, Henrietta’s sister-in-law. Mary, just like her father and sister Elizabeth, ‘suffers’ from what Henrietta’s sister Louisa calls “the Elliot pride” (Austen, *Persuasion* 106). Mary believes that a member of her family should never stoop so low as to marry somebody below their financial and social status. She remarks:

I cannot think him at all a fit match for Henrietta; and considering the alliances which the Musgroves have made, she has no right to throw herself away. I do not think any young woman has a right to make a choice that may be disagreeable and inconvenient to the principal part of her family, and be giving bad connections to those who have not been used to them. And, pray, who is Charles Hayter? Nothing but a country curate. A most improper match for Miss Musgrove of Uppercross. (Austen, *Persuasion* 90-91)



The marriage of Henrietta and Charles Hayter is a marriage between two people who have known each other their entire lives and have gradually developed deeper feelings for one another. Marrying a man below her rank does not seem to bother Louisa, because she wants to marry for love. By the end of the novel “Charles Hayter had been applied to by a friend to hold a living for a youth who could not possibly claim it under many years” (Austen, *Persuasion* 260). Charles and Henrietta will be provided for, they will be living in a church parsonage on a reasonable income, and Charles will eventually inherit his father’s estate. Their marriage will not be extravagant, but they will be able to lead a happy and fulfilling life. The Musgroves are the representatives of the eighteenth-century type of family that puts their children’s happiness in marriage before their own financial gain (Stone Ch 6).

Louisa Musgrove, Henrietta’s twenty-year-old sister marries Captain Benwick. “Henrietta was perhaps the prettiest, Louisa had the higher spirits” (Austen, *Persuasion* 89). Captain Benwick was “an excellent young man and an officer...He had been engaged to Captain Harville’s sister, and was now mourning her loss” (Austen, *Persuasion* 116). “He had a pleasing face and a melancholy air, just as he ought to have, and drew back from conversation” (Austen, *Persuasion* 117). Until their engagement, everybody is convinced that Louisa would marry Captain Wentworth. Her character is completely different from Anne Elliot’s character; she is a happy, determined girl, not easily persuaded and always acts upon her own desires and beliefs. She has everything that Wentworth wanted Anne to have. Up until the Cobb accident, when “his own previous opinion as to the universal felicity and advantage of firmness of character” so often displayed in Louisa’s behaviour proves to be inferior to a “persuadable temper”, which “might sometimes be as much in favour of happiness as a very resolute character” (Austen, *Persuasion* 141). Louisa and Benwick’s marriage shocks everybody. They seem totally incompatible:

Captain Benwick and Louisa Musgrove! The high-spirited, joyous-talking Louisa Musgrove, and the dejected, thinking, feeling, reading, Captain Benwick, seemed each of them everything that would not suit the other. Their minds most dissimilar!” But Anne concludes that the situation had brought them together: “They must have been depending almost entirely on each other, and Louisa, just recovering from illness, had been in an interesting state, and Captain Benwick was not inconsolable. (Austen, *Persuasion* 199-200)

Zietlov writes that: “Louisa’s capricious high spirits are equitably matched by a trait in Benwick’s character: his inconstancy” (190). Benwick so quickly forgets the past that his brother-in-law sadly concludes: “Poor Fanny! she would not have forgotten him so soon!” (Austen, *Persuasion* 280). There is no way to know if the marriage between the two will be a happy one. But Anne believes that:

they would soon grow more alike. He would gain cheerfulness, and she would learn to be an enthusiast for Scott and Lord Byron...of course they had fallen in love over poetry...The day at Lyme, the fall from the Cobb, might influence her health, her nerves, her courage, her character to the end of her life, as thoroughly as it appeared to have influenced her fate. (Austen, *Persuasion* 200)

Anne Elliot marries Captain Wentworth. Eight years before the story begins, Anne and Wentworth meet. “He was, at that time, a remarkably fine young man, with a great deal of intelligence, spirit, and brilliancy; and Anne an extremely pretty girl, with gentleness, modesty, taste, and feeling” (Austen, *Persuasion* 30). They fall deeply in love, he proposes, and she happily accepts. But their happiness is of short duration:

Sir Walter, on being applied to, without actually withholding his consent, or saying it should never be, gave it all the negative of great astonishment, great coldness, great silence, and a professed resolution of doing nothing for his daughter. He thought it a very degrading alliance; and Lady Russell, though with more tempered and pardonable pride, received it as a most unfortunate one... Anne Elliot, so young; known to so few, to be snatched off by a stranger without alliance or fortune; or rather sunk by him into a state of most wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependence! (Austen, *Persuasion* 30-31)

Eight years later, because of their extravagant way of living, Elliots are forced to rent their estate, and as it happens, the new residents are the Crofts. Mrs Croft is Wentworth’s sister, and so the captain returns into Anne’s life. Due to extreme luck, that has been following him his whole career, Captain Wentworth is today a highly esteemed and incredibly rich man, quite handsome, but full of resentment: “He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill, deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others” (Austen, *Persuasion* 73). His intention is to

find a wife and he pays attentions to capricious Louisa Musgrove. When they visit Lyme and Louisa, as stubborn as ever, almost gets herself killed, Anne is the one possessing all the calmness of mind while dealing with the accident. Captain Wentworth realizes that Anne is the one for him:

There, he had learnt to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will, between the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind. There he had seen everything to exalt in his estimation the woman he had lost; and there begun to deplore the pride, the folly, the madness of resentment, which had kept him from trying to regain her when thrown in his way. (Austen, *Persuasion* 292)

Wentworth realizes that he still loves Anne, but he also becomes aware that though he had not proposed to Louisa, his attentions to her make him obliged to marry her: "I was no longer at my own disposal. I was hers in honour if she wished it... I had not considered that my excessive intimacy must have its danger of ill consequence in many ways... I had been grossly wrong, and must abide the consequences" (Austen, *Persuasion* 292). Luckily Wentworth gets released from his commitment to Louisa when she gets engaged to Captain Benwick. After overhearing a conversation between Anne and Captain Harville when Anne says to her friend: "All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one; you need not covet it), is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone" (Austen, *Persuasion* 284), Wentworth concludes that Anne must still love him. He proposes to her again and she accepts. Though very much against the marriage when discussed eight years before, Anne's family agrees to it this time. "Sir Walter made no objection, and Elizabeth did nothing worse than look cold and unconcerned. Captain Wentworth, with five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him, was no longer nobody" (Austen, *Persuasion* 299).

During the course of the story, while mourning her lost love, Anne gets proposed to by Charles Musgrove, but refuses him and he ends up marrying her sister Mary. Her second suitor is Mr. Elliot, the heir of the Kellynch estate and her father's title. Mr. Elliot is "quite as good-looking... his countenance improved by speaking, and his manners were so exactly what they ought to be, so polished, easy, so particularly agreeable, that she could compare them in excellence to only one person's manners. They were not the same, but they were, perhaps, equally good" (Austen, *Persuasion* 169). This is the marriage everybody believes

quite advantageous. From the first moment they meet at Lyme, he admires her. By marrying him, Anne would become future Mrs. Elliot, and the mistress of Kellynch Hall, and it all seems endearing to her, but it could not be, because she loves Captain Wentworth. After he almost proposes to her, she decides to avoid him, and feels sorry for him, but upon getting to know his real character all the pity is gone, and she feels contempt and disgust towards him.

Zietlow states that Wentworth gets an improved Anne, “instead of a young girl swept off her feet by ardent confidence in a dashing, handsome naval officer, he gets a mature, experienced woman, who is fully able to see and feel all the reasons that he is the fit agent of her worldly happiness” (191). Magee remarks that Anne would suit Charles Musgrove better than her sister Mary, but she was right to refuse this “idle, empty-headed scion of the landed gentry”. Through the marriage with William Elliot, she “could revive her dear mother's title of Lady Elliot in her own person”, but she feels that Mr Elliot only wants to improve his class status and wealth in marriage. Instead, she waits for the man who values her qualities and loves her for who she really is (203). “Anne matures over the years by rejecting socially desirable matches in favour of one based on reciprocal and durable love” (207).

Mr. William Walter Elliot, the future owner of the Kellynch estate and the title, is a widower. His marriage took place before the novel begins, but it must be mentioned, since it was a marriage of convenience. Elizabeth Elliot, Anne’s older sister believed that her and Mr Elliot’s marriage would be a perfect match. But:

The heir presumptive, the very William Walter Elliot, Esq., whose rights had been so generously supported by her father, had disappointed her. She had, while a very young girl, as soon as she had known him to be, in the event of her having no brother, the future baronet, meant to marry him, and her father had always meant that she should. Instead of pushing his fortune in the line marked out for the heir of the house of Elliot, he had purchased independence by uniting himself to a rich woman of inferior birth. (Austen, *Persuasion* 9)

Anne learns about his true character and marriage from her old friend, Mrs Smith. Mrs Smith and her late husband were Mr. Elliot’s friends back then. She explains to Anne that Mr Elliot:

at that period of his life, had one object in view: to make his fortune, and by a rather quicker process than the law. He was determined to make it by marriage. He was determined, at least, not to mar it by an imprudent marriage; and I know it was his belief ... that your father and sister, in their civilities and invitations, were designing a match between the heir and the young lady, and it was impossible that such a match should have answered his ideas of wealth and independence. (Austen, *Persuasion* 240-241)

Mr. Elliot married a woman of inferior birth, but his only objective was money, for “when one lives in the world, a man or woman’s marrying for money is too common to strike one as it ought” (Austen, *Persuasion* 241). Mrs Elliot was a fine and educated woman, but she fell in love with the wrong man. “He was very unkind to his first wife. They were wretched together. But she was too ignorant and giddy for respect, and he had never loved her” (Austen, *Persuasion* 253). He had no respect for his family or heritage. “His chance for the Kellynch estate was something, but all the honour of the family he held as cheap as dirt.” But the time “had worked a very material change in Mr Elliot’s opinions as to the value of a baronetcy” and “he has been gradually learning to pin his happiness upon the consequence he is heir to” (Austen, *Persuasion*, 242-248). He was a stranger to his family, but after realizing that a certain Mrs Clay, who was “a clever, insinuating, handsome woman, poor and plausible” (Austen, *Persuasion* 247) is slowly but successfully climbing her way up to becoming the new Lady Elliot, he reappears with the only intention to ruin her plans and secure his future title as a baronet. After his plan to marry Anne fails, he leaves Bath and by the end of the book we learn that he and Mrs Clay are together:

Mrs Clay’s affections had overpowered her interest, and she had sacrificed, for the young man’s sake, the possibility of scheming longer for Sir Walter. She has abilities, however, as well as affections; and it is now a doubtful point whether his cunning, or hers, may finally carry the day; whether, after preventing her from being the wife of Sir Walter, he may not be wheedled and caressed at last into making her the wife of Sir William. (Austen, *Persuasion* 302)

To summarize, three marriages take place in the course of the novel. Anne Elliot marries Captain Wentworth, the only man she has ever loved. Wentworth loves her too and their marriage is the one based on love and mutual respect. The fact that he is now a rich man, elevates him in the eyes of her family and friends, and their marriage seems perfect in

every aspect. Henrietta Musgrove marries Charles Hayter, the cousin of her family. They have known each other their entire lives and have gradually fallen in love. He is below her rank, but has a bright future in front of him and the support of the woman he loves. Louisa Musgrove marries Captain Benwick. Though quite dissimilar, they find love after facing death; Benwick mourns the death of his fiancée, and Louisa almost dies in an accident. After a horrible trauma to her head, she is now as timid as Benwick and he, with Louisa by his side will again learn to be happy. Mr William Walter Elliot who married for money, ends up with Mrs Clay and their future is quite uncertain. People who marry seem to have chosen well for themselves and they marry for the right reasons too. And as Zietlow writes: “It seems only proper that the novel’s two corrupt, black-hearted scoundrels, shrewd and discerning though they are, should wind up in one another’s clutches” (191).

#### **4. Marriage of convenience in Jane Austen’s novels**

Though all Jane Austen’s novels celebrate that very best type of marriage, the one based on mutual respect, love and compatibility, and though the society of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries celebrated the companionate marriage as the ideal of conjugal happiness, marriages of convenience were still rather common in everyday life as well as in the world of novels. Women were of course in a more vulnerable position, since their financial security lay in the hands of men; first their father’s, then their husband’s or, if they never married, their male relatives, but men too married conveniently. Jane Austen’s heroines married for love, but in every novel she wrote, we got to know other, minor characters who were induced to marry for other, more pragmatic reasons.

Jane Austen’s novels, writes Moretti, exclude most of United Kingdom and cover a space smaller even than England, “Lancashire, the North, the industrial revolution-all missing” (13). For her, writes Nicholson, “rural England was the real England, where the gentleman’s park was simply a refinement to the surrounding fields, and his lake the village pond writ large” (174). Austen did not write about the poor or the working classes. Austen’s heroines live in the rural parts of England. They do not work and are not poor, but they are

not wealthy either. Her heroines are gentlemen's daughters and belong to the rural gentry or upper-middle class, and as the members of these classes they get to meet rich and respectable bachelors. Such setting is necessary in Jane Austen's novels for marriages of convenience to take place, for where there is no money, one cannot marry conveniently.

It was mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, that Austen never married and did not want to marry somebody she did not love, so it is no wonder that the same attitudes towards marriage are instilled in the minds and hearts of her heroines. She is quite critical of the characters who marry for convenience. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth and Charlotte are best friends, yet as Moe states, their friendship is "unrecoverable" by the end of the novel. Elizabeth forgives Darcy his arrogance, she also forgives Bingley's spinelessness, Lydia's unscrupulousness as well as Kitty's "small-mindedness" but she cannot forgive Charlotte. To Elizabeth, Charlotte's marriage is a "form of deviancy" (1084-1096). She goes so far as to say that "the woman who married him (Mr Collins) cannot have a proper way of thinking" (Austen, *Pride* 170), and that she "could never address her without feeling that all the comfort of intimacy was over" (Austen, *Pride* 184). For Elizabeth, Charlotte's "deviancy in one area of her life disqualifies her in another" and she can no longer be intimate with someone who "pawns her freedom for a prudent marriage" (Moe 1097).

Emma's first impression of Mrs Elton was that she was "absolutely insufferable". After their first meeting she exclaims:

Knightley!—never seen him in her life before, and call him Knightley!—and discover that he is a gentleman! A little upstart, vulgar being, with her Mr. E., and her caro sposo, and her resources, and all her airs of pert pretension and underbred finery. Actually to discover that Mr. Knightley is a gentleman! I doubt whether he will return the compliment, and discover her to be a lady. (Austen, *Emma* 337)

As Roger states, Mrs Elton's speech is "a pointer towards her affectation and vulgarity" but the term *caro sposo*<sup>2</sup> was also an outdated term in the time when the story takes place. Her

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<sup>2</sup> See Rogers, *Mrs Elton, Burneys, Thrales, and Noels*; The use of *caro sposo/cara sposa* and their variants seems to have been at its height in the 1770s and 1780s, tailing off in the late 1790s.

attempts to sound smart reveal that not only is she uncivil, but she is also “out of date with fashionable slang” (70).

Another example of Mrs Elton’s ignorance is her “misapplying a stock notion” when she says that Surry is the garden of England. After Emma asserts that many counties are so called, she interrupts her by saying: “No, I fancy not... I never heard any county but Surry called so” (Austen, *Emma* 331). As Rogers writes, the phrase *Garden of England* was coined by Thomas Fuller and it was applied to Hertfordshire. In the later years the title had been assumed by Kent (74).

Mrs Clay is a poor, divorced mother of two and “a clever young woman, who understood the art of pleasing—the art of pleasing, at least, at Kellynch Hall” (Austen, *Persuasion* 18). Throughout the story she is seen as a gold-digging and pretentious person, trying to climb her way up in society through marriage of convenience with Mr Walter Elliot. Her plan is thwarted by William Elliot; he seduces her and by the end of the novel she becomes his mistress. According to the story, her “affections overpowered her interest” (Austen, *Persuasion* 302), but we also learn that her chances of becoming the wife of Sir William are not bad. The moment she chooses love over ambition her luck changes, and there is a possible happy end for her and her children after all.

Wickham and William Elliot, at first seem quite handsome, amiable and admirable men, willing and knowing how to please everybody around them. As the stories progress, we learn that Wickham is a mercenary, who has spent his adult life chasing after rich women’s money, and who by the end of the novel elopes with a sixteen-year-old Lydia with no intention of marrying her whatsoever. He only agrees to marry her, after he gets more than handsomely paid to do it. William Elliot, as described by Mrs Smith is:

a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; whom for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk of his general character. He has no feeling for others. Those whom he has been the chief cause of leading into ruin, he can neglect and desert without the smallest compunction. He is totally beyond the reach of any sentiment of justice or compassion. Oh! he is black at heart, hollow and black! (Austen, *Persuasion* 238-239)



Mr Collins and Mr Elton are both clergymen. Mr Elton marries Augusta Hawkins, an annoying, but rich woman. He thinks highly of himself, and when Emma, who believes that he has intentions to marry Harriet confronts him about it, he angrily and disgustingly refuses any possibility of him ever stooping so low as to marry an illegitimate child with no money or connections, only because she is a pretty and a nice girl. On the other hand, he believes himself quite worthy of Emma, who is socially and financially far above his rank. Mr Collins marries Charlotte Lucas because Lady Catherine instructed him to; it almost seems like an errand he had to run. At first, he appears as a silly, annoying, yet rather benign character, but the letter he sends to Mr Bennet after Lydia's elopement reveals just what kind of a horrible person he is. In the letter he writes to a grieving parent he states that: "The death of your (Mr Bennet's) daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this" (Austen, *Pride* 364), and proves himself to be a heartless and cruel person.

All the characters in Jane Austen's novels who marry for convenience are either cruel, heartless, cunning, uneducated or "cannot have a proper way of thinking" (Austen, *Pride* 170). They are generally bad people, whereas those who marry for love grow and improve themselves as the stories progress; Darcy's arrogant pride softens, Elizabeth learns that one should not judge people solely on first impressions, Emma, with the help of her moral tutor Mr Knightley becomes more aware of her own shortcomings, snobbishness and lack of understanding, and Knightley learns to appreciate Emma, despite her many faults. Captain Wentworth relinquishes all the anger and resentment he felt towards Anne and learns to acknowledge that her personality traits, he once thought so undesirable, are the ones that make her his perfect woman. Anne grows from a reluctant and easily persuadable girl into a woman who knows exactly what she wants and there is nobody who could make her do anything against her own wishes and beliefs.

Though the future is unknown, it is not hard to imagine whose marriage will be a happy and prosperous one and who is facing years of unhappiness and resentment; marriages already existing in the novels show us with almost a certainty what could be expected. Take for example the Gardiners and the Bennets in *Pride and Prejudice*. Mr and Mrs Bennet's marriage is a disaster. Their personalities are totally different and they have nothing in common whatsoever, except for their children. Their relationship is filled with resentment and apathy. Mrs Bennet is a woman whose priorities in life are getting "her daughters married...visiting and news" (Austen, *Pride* 5). She is foolish, occasionally overly emotional

and not so bright. She was once a beautiful woman, and her beauty won her a gentleman. Mr Bennet who, unlike Mrs Bennet, is a very smart man, spends his life hiding from his wife and her “poor nerves” (Austen, *Pride* 4) reading in his library. His only recourse is his sarcasm, which he every so often uses to ridicule his wife and their silly daughters.

The Gardiners are perfect for each other. Mr Gardiner is “a sensible, gentlemanlike man, greatly superior to his sister as well by nature as education” and his wife “an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman” (Austen, *Pride* 175). Their marriage is based on love and respect. Mr Bennet spends his mature years barely tolerating his wife and the Gardiners enjoy their travels and time spent together and are an example of what a loving marriage should look like.

In *Persuasion* Admiral and Mrs. Croft’s marriage provides an example of a happy, healthy and loving relationship. Seeing them together, always supporting each other, makes Anne remember the relationship she once had with Captain Wentworth. Their relationship is the proof that marriages thrive when spouses deal together with all the obstacles that life presents them with. The Elliots, Anne’s parents on the other hand had a very unhappy marriage. Mr Elliot is the epitome of vanity: “Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot’s character; vanity of person and of situation. He had been remarkably handsome in his youth; and, at fifty-four, was still a very fine man” (Austen, *Persuasion* 4). Mrs Elliot, on the other hand was:

an excellent woman, sensible and amiable; whose judgement and conduct, if they might be pardoned the youthful infatuation which made her Lady Elliot, had never required indulgence afterwards.—She had humoured, or softened, or concealed his failings, and promoted his real respectability for seventeen years; and though not the very happiest being in the world herself, had found enough in her duties, her friends, and her children, to attach her to life, and make it no matter of indifference to her when she was called on to quit them. (Austen, *Persuasion* 5)

Mrs Elliot married a pretty-faced baronet, spent her life trying to make him respectable in the eyes of their friends and society, but was miserable her entire marriage. As Gilbert and Gubar write, Mrs Elliot “lived invisibly, unloved within Sir Walters’s house” (176), and then she died. Their marriage, as the novel suggests, was a long-lasting, but an unhappy one.

To conclude, in a rather black and white depiction of marriages in her novels, where only companionate marriages thrive and those of convenience, fleeting affection, sexual attraction and the like are destined for failure, Jane Austen tries to demonstrate that nothing but love should induce people to marry. Marriages between people who love and respect each other should be the only type of marriage, because love, compatibility and mutual respect are the recipe for happiness. Marriages of convenience exist only to prove that point.

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## **Abstract**

Eighteenth-century England witnessed some of the greatest changes in political, but also social realms of life. It witnessed major shifts in attitudes towards marriage, but though marriages based on personal affection, companionship and friendship were on the rise, people still married in order to secure their wealth, and in cases of many young women to secure their survival and economic stability. This thesis will discuss Jane Austen's novels. In all Austen's novels marriage is a predominant theme. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* will be thoroughly examined and discussed. The thesis will focus on marriages in these three novels, but the emphasis will be put on marriages of convenience and the reason why such marriages existed in the first place. Austen herself criticized and even ridiculed such marriages in her novels, but they took place nevertheless and deserve attention.

Key words: Jane Austen, marriage laws, marriage of convenience