Marriage: A Formative Institution

Modelled by Five Major Marriages in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

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Abstract

Pride and Prejudice, by Jane Austen, features five main marriages that demonstrate the eighteenth century companionate marriage model in varying degrees. Many of the societal changes in the eighteenth and nineteenth century contributed to the rise of the companionate marriage, and these many changes are reflected in the rising genre—the novel. Specifically, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* incorporates the major themes of the novel as a genre, specifically, the rise of the individual and equality of souls, to show that the companionate model of marriage makes marriage a formational platform for two individuals. Austen clearly sets apart Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage as the strongest union because they prove to be better suited companions based on their willingness to make their marriage the foundation on which they form each other as individuals and as a couple. Through this textual study and by contrasting and comparing each marriage, Darcy and Elizabeth's marriage stands out because of their desire to make marriage a formational basis for their lives. While their marriage is a nineteenth-century fictional model, it holds truth that applies even today.

Marriage: A Formative Institution

Statistics piled a mile high could convince just about anyone to wait to get married—to wait for the time, the money, the titles, and degrees to join in matrimony. It is an ever growing trend: to go to college, graduate, pursue a career or further education and then, maybe if the relationship is serious enough, cohabitate when it conveniences both the individual's financial and occupational situation. In a world with increasingly higher school debts and greater pressure to climb the ladder of success, postponing marriage seems to be the better option when matrimony connotes a stumbling block rather than a foundational block on which to grow. The modern day's basis for marriage is highly hedonistic—an option only if it produces pleasure for the two parties (Thompson n.pag). This world, with all of its emphasis on the idea that personal identity must be fully formed prior to getting married, could not be more distant from the world that Jane Austen lived in and wrote about. In the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries, the marital construct was changing; eighteenth century Englishmen were beginning to do the unconventional. The traditional marriage model based on gaining land, fortune or excellent blood lines had a rival—a radical marriage model based on mutual love and respect—and this revolutionary model, termed the companionate marriage, was gaining more and more attention in society. The companionate marriage model is a reflection of the many changing ideas in the eighteenth century, and what can be gleaned from it is a model of marriage that can stand in any age.

To begin, the shifting political posture in England affected new laws that encouraged the companionate model. Of the companionate model's contagious effect, Laurence Stone says, "The many legal, political and educational changes that took place

in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were largely consequences of changes in ideas about the nature of marital relations" (325). The legal changes that Stone is referring to enabled women to choose for themselves their husbands, and consequently meant that women could make decisions on whom to marry based on their husband's religious beliefs. This legal change was significant, because it was inevitable that their husbands would play a major role in the shaping and growth of their own religious faith (Prior). Where there was religious compatibility, emotional and social compatibility was much more likely to follow, which consequently cultivated better and more equal grounds for love to precede and motivate marriage. Similarly, Stone calls on the changes within the upper class control of finances within the marriage as evidence for the prominence of the companionate marriage. He notes that wives' financial investments in marriage enhanced the position of the wife. Furthermore, her money could be invested into the estate whereby she received a personal income (330). These changes among others catalyzed the overall companionate mindset. Note that while marriage was once a catalyst for fortune, today it is viewed as a deterrent. Money is still a motivation for marriage today, but it looks different. People still postpone marriage until money—debt or the like—is less of an issue. However, viewing marriage with companionate mindset trumps other views on marriage—financially based or otherwise.

Likewise, the religious movements in society, specifically the Evangelical movement, not only fueled the political changes but ushered in the companionate marriage. The Evangelicals fought against many social abuses such as slavery, drunkenness, and sexual immorality. Matters of marriage and the home particularly concerned them: "The Evangelicals succeeded in establishing the home as the centre of

nineteenth-century English life. The Victorians' strong conviction that only within the bosom of the family could virtues be cultivated and the ideal life be led derived in very large measure from their influence" (Bradley 179). Adultery would have been especially common and nearly accepted amongst the upper class families—even more accepted than it is today barring class distinction. Joan Perkin states, "Upper-class women rarely had high expectations of romance or sexual fidelity in marriage" (55). In their efforts to protect the home and the institution of marriage, evangelicals attempted to fight the adulterous lifestyles of the aristocracy by proposing a bill that sought to put a limit on remarriage after a divorce took place due to infidelity (Bradley 97). These unions that were based on financial or social gain rather than mutual respect resulted in this mindset that infidelity was to be expected. Evangelicals fought to rid society of the complacent acceptance of this behavior and viewed marriage as grounds for ministry to the next generation.

The religious and political movements set the stage for the companionate ideal of marriage to permeate society. Stephanie Coontz, author of *Marriage, a History How Love Conquered Marriage*, summarizes the changing ideas: "By the end of the 1700s personal choice of partners had replaced arranged marriage as a social ideal, and individuals were encouraged to marry for love" (146). Thomas Gisborne (1758-1846), an evangelical and a member of the Clapham Sect, a human rights activist group, reveals this replacement of ideals:

> From those who contract marriages . . . through motives of interest or of ambition, it would be folly . . . to expect that such marriages, however they may answer the purposes of interest or of ambition, should terminate

> otherwise than in wretchedness. Wealth may be secured, rank may be obtained; but if wealth and rank are to be the main ingredients in the cup of matrimonial felicity, the sweetness of wine will be exhausted at once, and nothing remain but bitter and corrosive dregs. (173)

As he rightly asserts, matrimony without love is bitter and corrosive dregs. While "it was doubted that affection could and would naturally develop after marriage," people in the eighteenth century "began to put the prospects of emotional satisfaction before the ambition for increased income or status" (Stone 325). Daniel Defoe, who actively wrote on the purpose for and contemporary abuses in marriage, wrote that "matrimony without love is the cart before the horse" (Defoe 328). As women were allowed to choose to accept the proposal of one they loved rather than one who offered the most money, the horses started to pull the carts. Stone goes on to say the decision making that was given to women "had its effect in equalizing relationships between husband and wife" (325). Men and women now began to enter into the marriage state on more equal grounds than ever before, simply because women were allowed to choose a partner who would make a good social, emotional and religious companion. The companionate model enabled marriage to be a foundation for two people to grow as individuals. The mood was shifting.

While the new generation transitioned into these religious, political and social changes, the rise of the novel starkly reflected and promoted the major trends occurring in eighteenth century society. Stone writes, "These same trends inevitably were reflected in the imaginative literature of the day, and were indeed partly responsible for the evolution of the novel" (228). The newness of the genre illuminated the freshness of the companionate model. Not only that, the novel itself opened up opportunity for women.

Nancy Armstrong observes that as the novel rose to respectability as a genre, it opened the door to women writers and "provided a mighty weapon in the arsenal of Enlightenment rhetoric, which aimed at liberating individuals from their political chains" (98). This new genre for the first time represented a realistic woman—not an angel, not a whore—but a flawed yet desirable woman, and female novelists, such as Jane Austen, were able to do just that. The proverbial chicken or the egg comes into play. Whether the emergence of a new genre inspired change or merely captured the fresh ideas that were already circulating throughout England is debatable. However, it is clear that the rise of the novel itself highly reflects the same values that the emergence of the companionate marriage ideal does.

Two of the major themes of *Pride and Prejudice* that are illuminated in companionate marriages include equality of souls and the rise of the individual. Equality of souls is a major theme not only found in emerging novels but also in developing societal values. A forerunner author of the novel, Daniel Defoe took a literary stance by modeling the companionate marriage in his works, and also propagated his opinions in society:

> Upon the whole, the matrimonial duty is all reciprocal; it is founded in love, it is performed in the height of affection; its most perfect accomplishment consists not in the union of the sexes, but in the *union of the souls*; uniting their desires, their ends, and consequently their endeavours, for completing their mutual felicity. (Defoe 327 emphasis added)

What was radical in Defoe's statement, then, is probably equally radical in the twenty-first century's estimation. The "union of souls" to which Defoe refers requires two people to unite their desires and endeavors. The uniting perhaps connotes sacrificing one's own desires, something not easily swallowed today. On average, Americans in the last decade married at the age of 27 for women and 29 for men (Knot Yet). When individuals have become so fixed on their own endeavors that by the time they get married the idea of changing or adjusting threatens all their life's efforts in attaining those goals. However, in Defoe's opinion, uniting desires, ends, and endeavors is meant to gain *mutual felicity*. Put simply, wedding together dreams and desires achieves mutual happiness—friendship. Those in Defoe's day would not have so enthusiastically used the statement, "I'm marrying my best friend," but friendship is the very thing which he deems essential for a successful marriage:

> Hence it follows that we have such few happy and successful matches. How much matrimony, how little love; how many coupled, how few joined; in a word, how much marriage, how little friendship. *O friendship! thou exalted felicity of life, thou glorious incorporation of souls*, thou heavenly image, thou polisher and finisher of the brightest part of mankind, how much art thou talked of, how little understood, how much pretended to, how little endeavoured for! (327, emphasis added)

The most equal of souls are friends. Friendship in marriage is assumed now, but it would not have been assumed in the eighteenth century. That is why this new and fresh idea was modeled in the rising novel.

The rise of the individual, another major theme found in the novel, permeated the companionate view on marriage also. Perkin points out that in the nineteenth century "marriage between partners of very different social rank disrupted social life, and unless the family was exceedingly rich it cared greatly what other people thought of their alliances" (61). However, what she fails to mention is that the idea of class mobility was developing, and an entire genre of literature was highlighting it. The novel centralizes the rise of the individual, rising out of obscurity and poverty and into distinction and respect. Stone writes, "In the seventeenth century there is clear iconographic and literary evidence for a new interest in the self, and for recognition of the uniqueness of the individual" (225). He credits the evangelical religious movements of the time with stimulating introspection because of the theology that dealt with the individual soul (225-226). This interest in self grew in intensity into the eighteen and nineteen hundreds as well. Never before was there such an emphasis on the development of the person and personal autonomy. Stone suggests that "the late eighteenth century sees the full development of the romantic novel whose central theme was the struggle of love and personal autonomy" (228), and an author of such romantic novels that deserves further study is none other than Jane Austen.

Her works' central themes investigate identity and how it plays into love and matrimony. Emerging at the cusp of dynamic times, her works reflect the revolutionary changes of the marital construct of the early nineteenth century. Ian Watt describes her as the joint that connects the changing marital ideas presented by novelists Samuel Richardson, the Father of the Modern Novel, and Henry Fielding (297-98). Although Austen was a female author in a time dominated by a male pen, she successfully

published four novels in her lifetime: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), and *Emma* (1816). Two additional novels were published posthumously in 1818: *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey.* These romantic novels demonstrate her mastery of the comedy of manners genre for which she is greatly known because of her ironic authorial voice. Her candid approach to everyday habits and customs enable the reader to access Austen and her society's general view on the common social conventions, especially marital relationships. In all of these novels, Austen surrounds her greatest dramatic development with the marriage relationship. The companionate marriage was relatively fresh in Austen's society, but she utilizes the two major themes of the novel, equality of souls and the rise of the individual, to create a basis for fictional marriages founded on mutual friendship and love. Austen connects these two themes to the companionate marriages in her novels.

Her works imply that if a couple enters marriage as equal souls they will be more able to form each other as individuals, therefore, arguing that this model of marriage is the most conducive for creating a foundation on which to be formed together. Austen could be considered a visionary for her times, because her novels explore marriages that break through tradition and ranks for the sake of marrying not a financial equal, but the "soul's equal"—one who will spur on their individual development. In particular, her second novel *Pride and Prejudice* features women choosing who they marry based on their personal desires. The choosing is key, because the choice reflects the individuals' view of and motivation for marriage, whether it is sexual pleasure, a fulfilled position or a whetstone, someone who sharpens. *Pride and Prejudice* presents these reasons for marrying, but not all are presented in the best light by Austen. With this in mind, the

companionate ideals in these five fictional yet enlightening marriages of the plot will advocate for a foundational model of marriage that can succeed in every era. By observing these five relationships, marriage succeeds when viewed as a formative institution—one that joins two individuals together at the budding stage in establishing their own identities and matures one another as they grow together.

To begin, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet have a discontented marriage as a result of complacent acceptance of being ill-suited companions. Their marriage, though not plagued by cruelty or abuse, does not reflect the rising idea of the "companionate marriage" in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The companionate marriage was based on a "higher form of conjugal companionship, founded on mutual restraint, forbearance, and respect" (Hammerton 270). The Bennets' marriage does not exemplify respect or conjugal companionship (McKeon 524). It, in fact, features ridicule and disrespect. Although most of what is known of the early developments of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's marriage is reported by either the narrator or character's personal revelations, their actions through the course of the plot correspond to their history. Within the first chapter, it is evident that Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are discontented by each other. Austen describes Mrs. Bennet, saying, "The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news" (3). John Lauber notes that her character is shallow and weak: "she is helplessly dependent on her society" (517). Likewise, Austen describes Mr. Bennet's marriage state by frequently observing his being fatigued by the raptures of his wife (6). However unhappy, they are comfortable in their sedentary state of matrimony. They seem to be complacent, whether intentional or not, toward their marriage. Mr. Bennet does not seek change in his marriage, and perhaps Mrs. Bennet does not see the

need. There has been ample criticism written on the failures of Mr. Bennet as a father and husband, but Austen gives sufficient evidence that Mrs. Bennet shares the responsibility for those failures as well.

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's failures begin with their differing reasons for marriage, resulting in two self-seeking motivations for their relationship. Their original motivations did not follow the companionate model. Had they known what the other was seeking in marriage, they may have been able to amend the strife between them. However, it is fair to conclude that before they married, they knew each other very little. Christopher Brooke, author of *Jane Austen: Illusion and Reality,* concludes that "it is assumed that Mr. and Mrs. Bennet hardly knew one another before he proposed—and he only discovered what a silly, tiresome woman she was after the event" (74). Unfortunately, Mr. Bennet's discovery of her undeveloped identity only deepens, while his love for her remains shallow.

Mr. Bennet's initial and misguided reasons for marriage began with feelings of infatuation, but once that wore off, complacency hardened him. Mrs. Bennet was in the prime of her youth. She probably was attractive and had a spirited personality. Mr. Bennet perhaps near sighted by infatuation, did not look past the skin and see her mind. It seems that when Mr. and Mrs. Bennet married they were relatively undeveloped in their own sense of self. Austen writes,

> Her father, captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and

> confidence had vanished for ever; and all his domestic happiness were overthrown. But Mr Bennet was not of a disposition to seek comfort for the disappointment which his own imprudence had brought on, in any of those pleasures which too often console the unfortunate for their folly or their vice. He was fond of the country and of books; and from these tastes had arisen his principal enjoyments. (222)

In reality, Mr. Bennet gave up on his wife and picked up a book. He spends much of his time in his library. It is his reprieve. There he hides from his wife and finds his "principal enjoyment" (Jackson 160). Twenty three years pass with him in his library and her in her sitting room. He develops apart from Mrs. Bennet. She remains stagnant.

In contrast, Mrs. Bennet marries Mr. Bennet for financial security. Once that was found to be unsatisfactory, she is left to project her material values in marriage onto her daughters. Mr. Bennet is a gentleman, so he doesn't need to work to earn his living. Although it is clear that the estate is entailed away because of his failure to produce a male heir, Mr. Bennet, at the present time of the book, is in possession of the estate, Longbourn. On the other hand, Mrs. Bennet's family had professions and was considered in society to be poor connections. Her family's state invites criticism toward her daughters, especially the infamous Lady Catherine De Bourg. She directs her criticism specifically to Mrs. Bennet's daughter Elizabeth: "You *are* a gentleman's daughter. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition" (336). Mrs. Bennet's sister, Mrs. Phillips is a wife of an attorney in the small town of Merriton and Mrs. Bennet's brother Mr. Gardiner, a reputable tradesman, resides in Gracechurch Street, London. Mrs. Bennet's marriage definitely raised her

socially and deepened her pocket book in the long run, and as she influences her daughters to marry into a higher social rank, she illuminates her expedient values in marriage. For example, Mrs. Bennet bases her choice of husband for Elizabeth, Mr. Collins, on the financial provision he would secure for the family after the death of Mr. Bennet since the Longbourn estate is to be entailed to him. When Elizabeth refuses Mr. Collins'proposals, Mrs. Bennet insists on her marrying him despite Elizabeth's adamant dislike for the man. Here it is clear that Mrs. Bennet seeks only the financial comfort for herself and her daughter instead of the feelings of her daughter. Also, in the end of the novel, when she learns that Elizabeth is to marry Mr. Darcy, Mrs. Bennet delights in the financial conquest that they will benefit from enjoining to his ten thousand pound estate. Ironically, only chapters before, she detested Mr. Darcy and is appeased by their marriage for the money's sake. In her estimation, marriage is marriage (Lauber 517), whether it is to the foolish Mr. Collins or the proud Mr. Darcy.

Rather than treating their marriage as a foundation on which to grow, the Bennets depend on their children to fill that gap. Their lives revolve around their five daughters. Mr. Bennet highly depends on his two eldest daughters, especially Elizabeth, for his social needs to be met. Austen reveals that Mrs. Bennet likewise rests her happiness in the success of her daughters' marriages, and especially favors Lydia. Consequently, their daughters alone hold together Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's relationship. Because they rely on their daughters, they fail to grow together and likewise cheat themselves from having a trusted friend and ally with which to face the major conflicts of the plot. As a result, financial fears of the future creep into their household, and a daughter elopes with a libertine. In all of the havoc the family undergoes, Mr. Bennet does not seek out his wife

for discernment or comfort, nor does Mrs. Bennet trust in her husband to solve the issues. He does not need her to get through it all, but perhaps that is because he failed to make their marriage a foundation in his life.

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet do not treat their marriage as the foundation on which to grow together in life and consequently failed to develop themselves and one another. Although Mr. and Mrs. Bennet greatly differed in their reasons for their marrying, their fraction might have been amended if they had tried to learn from another through the twenty three years of marriage: "Mr Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character" (3). Clearly, Mrs. Bennet put forth little effort to learn her husband's character. Mr. Bennet's "quick parts and sarcastic humour" (3) litter the pages of this book, but in none of those instances does Mrs. Bennet catch on to his witty character. However, though Mrs. Bennet may not be such a complex individual to learn, Mr. Bennet makes no effort to develop her mind and sharpen her into a more pleasing companion. Elizabeth explains that after Mr. Bennet's initial affection for Mrs. Bennet was drowned out by her "weak understanding and illiberal mind" (222), he failed to uphold his marriage, causing his children to suffer:

> Respect, esteem, and confidence had vanished for ever; and all his domestic happiness were overthrown . . . To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement. . . Elizabeth, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but . . . she . . . to banish from her thoughts that continual

> breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible. (223)

Elizabeth not only accuses Mr. Bennet of making his wife the butt of his life's joke, but allowing her foolishness to be the object of ridicule in her own household. He breaks decorum. He does not keep the oaths he took to honor and protect her. Even though Mrs. Bennet is a fool, her identity could have been improved if someone had taken the care to help her develop her mind and self. Mr. Bennet in the course of twenty three years had plenty opportunity to correct some of these weaknesses in his wife's character, at least enough to save her from the general disrespect she collects from her family as well as outsiders. Unfortunately, they remain disjointed and discontent till the very last pages of the novel.

While the Bennets entered into marriage underdeveloped and young in their ways, the Collinses enter into marriage overly developed and set in their ways. Because the Collinses marry comparatively later in life, they have developed a resistance to be molded and sharpened by another person. Theirs is a marriage of parallel living, one of roommates rather than soul mates. The lives they lead before marriage remain relatively unchanged after marriage. Both desire different things from the marriage, but neither is looking for a companion, a friend to walk through life with let alone someone to form them. Rather, they simply view a spouse as a functional and beneficial meeting of their individual needs. By the time Mr. Collins and Charlotte Lucas get married, they are set in their ways, matured to the point of not being able to give and take from each other. However, instead of breeding dissatisfaction or bitterness like the Bennets, they settle

into a distant and complacent relationship which is a result of their overly rational view of marriage.

Charlotte firmly roots her view of marriage in reason, and she marries out of necessity to secure her future. In the beginning of the book Charlotte is twenty-seven and still unmarried. In Austen's world singleness at that age would produce some anxiety about becoming an old maid (Austen 117). It seems that a combination of her anxiety and extreme pragmatism brings Charlotte Lucas to marry Mr. Collins. Austen develops Charlotte's pragmatic marital philosophy very clearly in the conversations she has with her confidant, Elizabeth. Early on in the story when Charlotte and Elizabeth notice the attachment that Mr. Bingley is forming for Jane Bennet, the former insists that Jane ought to secure Mr. Bingley even before she is sure of her feelings for him (Austen 19). Elizabeth rebuts, "Your plan is a good one . . . where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married; and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it" (19). Elizabeth excellently homes in on her friend's objective concerning marriage—to get a husband, and in Charlotte's case, any husband. Charlotte expresses her view of marriage explicitly: "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance . . ." (19). Elizabeth can only ironically reply, "You make me laugh, Charlotte; but it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself" (20). However, it is in this way that Charlotte exactly acts. Charlotte echoes her belief in chance after she accepts Mr. Collins' proposal:

> I am not romantic, you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I

> am convinced that my *chance of happiness* with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state. (120 emphasis added)

Charlotte not only reveals her fully developed self-confidence and identity, but also the deeper issue of her inflexibility when it comes to her husband. Rather than allowing herself to be formed by her relationship with her future husband, she is rigid:

> Mr Collins to be sure 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 of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. (117)

There seems to be little hope for Collins and Charlotte to enjoy happiness in marriage. It is not necessarily because Mr. Collins is insensible or Charlotte is entirely too sensible, but rather they refuse to be sharpened and molded by one another. The give and take of a relationship is what equates souls, is what makes friends, and Charlotte leaves no room to grow with her husband.

Mr. Collins'reasons for marriage are equally rooted in his self-serving purposes and allow for no pliability of his person. It seems that Lady Catherine De Burg, Mr. Collins' wealthy and influential patroness, has instructed him to marry a calm and practical woman who will be useful, and fulfilling Lady Catherine's wishes is his primary reason for marrying at all. In his first proposal to Elizabeth, he admits first that he wants to marry so that he will "set the example of matrimony in his parish" and that "it will add

very greatly to my happiness" (101). However, his real intention for marrying, and what he should have said first, is to follow "the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady" Lady Catherine DeBurg (101). Note that he does not mention it would add to the happiness of Elizabeth, but rather primarily himself. The fact also that only three days after his initial and unsuccessful proposal to Elizabeth he successfully proposes to Charlotte, further suggests his selfish and pragmatic reasons for marriage. Ironically, one of Collins' motives for marriage is to "set the example of matrimony"; however, he falsely presumes that any old marriage will set an example. Any marriage *will* set some kind of example, either positive or negative. It seems it really does not matter to him who he marries as long as she agrees to fit neatly into his lifestyle that revolves around pleasing Lady Catherine De Burg and himself.

Charlotte and Mr. Collins remain unchanged by their union, as they lead very separated lives. After the marriage has taken place, Elizabeth visits her good friend Charlotte to see how she is getting on as a newly-wed. She observes that both Mr. and Mrs. Collins get exactly what they want out of marriage—a comfortable roommate leading separate lives. Austen insinuates their distant marital relationship when, on a walk, Elizabeth observes how Charlotte encourages her husband to spend much of his time out of doors away from her:

> Elizabeth admired the command of countenance with which Charlotte talked of the healthfulness of the exercise, and owned she encouraged it as much as possible . . . When Mr Collins could be forgotten, there was really a great air of comfort throughout, and by Charlotte's evident enjoyment of it, Elizabeth supposed he must be often forgotten. (148-149)

It seems then that Charlotte actively seeks to lead a separate life from her husband, and Collins does not seem to mind. Elizabeth similarly observes that Charlotte purposefully arranges her sitting to be on the complete opposite side of the house than Mr. Collins' book room (158-59). Not only does Mr. Collins, like Mr. Bennet, employ the chief of his time separate from his wife, but Charlotte actively encourages him to do so and arranges her daily sitting arrangements in order to avoid him.

On all of these accounts it seems that Mr. and Mrs. Collinses' marriage results in exactly what they were seeking—a practical provision that would not indent their lives in the slightest. They exemplify a very practical and even financially well-suited couple, but remain unimpressionable to one another. Charlotte's words from the beginning capture their marital relationship perfectly:

> Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar beforehand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life. (19-20)

Charlotte and Collins follow this rule explicitly. They do "continue to grow sufficiently unlike" in their thoughts and feelings throughout the course of their marriage. Their marriage is not a foundation on which they mature together in life, but an enabler in which to continue on as they were. Charlotte proposes that "it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person," but perhaps she should have said it is better to know as little as possible of the person at all with whom you are to pass your life.

Charlotte, as Elizabeth observes, blinds and deafens herself to her husband's defects or rather deafens herself to him in general: "When Mr Collins said any thing of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed, which certainly was not unseldom, she involuntarily turned her eye on Charlotte. Once or twice she could discern a faint blush; but in general Charlotte wisely did not hear" (148). Clearly for the parson and his wife, getting married was an afterthought in the grand scheme of things. Their marriage is merely convenient, filling a material and social need.

While the Collinses' marriage shows no signs of development whatsoever, the Wickhams' marriage features stunted growth or a continuance in their immature ways. Lydia, at the young age of 16, and Wickham, equally immature in behavior though not in age, get married, serving as an excellent example that Austen does not merely advocate for individuals to enter into marriage wholly unformed. Rather, Austen suggests that the individual should be formed to some extent before marrying, yet open to growth as an individual with his or her spouse. Lydia and Wickham are young in their self-development. However their chief motivations are self-serving and pleasure-seeking, which does not set up for a successful marriage environment. It is in fact because of their immature and selfish wants that they end up marrying at all.

On the other side of the spectrum, Lydia is noticeably underdeveloped in her person at the time she gets married. Lydia is the age of sixteen when she runs away with Wickham. Her motives and mind reveal the naiveté of her age. She delights in pleasuring herself whether it be through dancing, out-doing her sister Kitty, or flirting with eligible men in the regiment. Lydia has a poor grasp on who she is, for she flits from man to man

and when she is denied her way, falls into hysterics. Elizabeth bemoans her sister's shallow aspirations:

> But she is very young . . . and for the last half year, nay, for a twelvemonth, she has been given up to nothing but amusement and vanity. She has been allowed to dispose of her time in the most idle and frivolous manner, and to adopt any opinions that came in her way. Since the –shire were first quartered in Meryton, nothing but love, flirtation, and officers have been in her head. (265)

Her mind is unformed and reflects that of her mother's, which could stand to reason why Mrs. Bennet favors her youngest daughter above all the others. Regardless, the fact that Lydia believes that Wickham intended to marry her upon the elopement further portrays her ignorance and childish person. Lydia reveals her ignorance in a letter to her friend:

> You need not send them word at Longbourn of my going, if you do not like it, for it will make the surprise the greater, when I write to them and sign my name Lydia Wickham. What a good joke it will be! I can hardly write for laughing. (273)

Lydia's sincere ignorance and immaturity peak in this short letter. She is dangerously impressionable and hardly impressive. The unfolding of her and Wickham's marriage rather reveals how little a hold she has on his heart and how little influence she has on his character.

While Lydia is chiefly undeveloped, Wickham seems to be all too set in his own ways. Upon first meeting Wickham, his character is pleasing, and though it seems he had suffered many wrongs in his youth, he developed into a youthful autonomous man.

However, as the plot unfurls, the reader finds otherwise. Mr. Darcy's account of him in his letter to Elizabeth reveals Wickham's selfish endeavors: "The vicious propensities – the want of principle, which he was careful to guard from the knowledge of his best friend, could not escape the observation of a young man of nearly the same age with himself, and who had opportunities of seeing him in unguarded moments" (189). Mr. Darcy goes on to say that Mr. Wickham refused to make the church his profession, which had been a provision made for him by the late Mr. Darcy. The most revealing of his faulty character is Wickham's libertine spirit. Darcy shares how Wickham nearly eloped with his younger sister Georgiana Darcy in order to gain some kind of fortune and revenge against Mr. Darcy (190). As the story progresses and in the midst of Wickham's elopement with Lydia, more sensational gossip regarding his low character is spread: "He was declared to be in debt to every tradesman in the place, and his intrigues, all honoured with the title of seduction, had been extended into every tradesman's family" (276). Wickham has clearly and concretely developed habits throughout his life. His patterned past does not bode well for the future and promises no alteration of course.

Lydia and Wickham's reasons for marriage simply satisfy their own selfish desires—either romantic or sexual—rather than meet the other's need for a fit companion. Mordecai Marcus puts it bluntly:

> At the opposite extreme to Collins and Charlotte stand Wickham and Lydia, who yield almost completely to personal claims. Their chief motivation appears to be sexual passion, but other motives are visible. Lydia seeks freedom and excitement. Wickham avails himself of a chance

> to flee his creditors, and he also seems to have some hopes for an agreeable marriage settlement. (276)

Like the Collinses, their marriage is an afterthought as well. The binding contract comes only after all the marital deeds had been done. In fact their redeeming marriage only comes about through the influence of others. Wickham had not even planned on marrying Lydia, none the less making their marriage a foundation on which to grow and make a better life with his wife. It is not until Mr. Darcy sways him by paying off all of his debts that they marry. Wickham runs off with Lydia to satisfy his only lustful desire, for it is known that she has no money or connections that would make her a desirable objective. Yet, Elizabeth believes him to be egotistic enough to risk his honor and her virtue. Her wishes were always to command attention of an officer and marriage seemed to be the best opportunity to gain that. In no way do Lydia or Wickham intend to correct the flaws in each other's characters.

For the Wickhams, marriage is not a foundational institution meant to mature and provide companionship for they remain the same people after their vows as they were before. The bad habits and immaturities of their character that they had before were exacerbated by their marriage. Rather than encouraging one another to grow up and out of the selfish activities that dictated their single lives, they make allowances for them in their marriage. Clearly, Wickham has not grown out of his excessive spending habits nor has Lydia helped him to live any more frugally. Elizabeth describes the unraveling of their marriage, saying that they, continuing to be "so extravagant in their wants, and heedless of the future," always asked Elizabeth and Jane to discharge their debts whenever they moved to another home, but at each new location began "spending more

than they ought" (366). Learning nothing from the financial strain that they experienced right before getting married, they remain unchanged by the trials that they face together. Because they fail to band together and grow from their misfortunes, they eventually grow apart. They do not get better together. There is no rise of themselves as individuals. Rather, Lydia and Wickham lose their identities in their vices instead of building their identities together which is why their commitment to each other quickly disintegrates: "His affection for her soon sunk into indifference; hers lasted a little longer; and in spite of her youth and her manners, she retained all the claims to reputation which her marriage had given her" (366). The immoral flagrancy that got them into trouble in the first place actually begins to sever them. However, it is not only Lydia that Austen insinuates that is unfaithful: "Lydia was occasionally a visitor there, when her husband was gone to enjoy himself in London or Bath" (366). They both slip back into their old lifestyles. The Wickhams' marriage is not a foundation for growing old together or for growing at all, either in sagacity or fondness, for it is not even binding. It barely causes them to blink.

While Austen exploits several marriages and their weaknesses, she also features marriages that exhibit certain strengths that she seems to celebrate rather than mock: specifically Jane and Mr. Bingley's marriage as well as Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy's marriage. Austen's attitude towardher characters is often revealed in satiric authorial tone. Although she approaches the next marriage, that of Jane and Mr. Bingley's, with a twinge of humor, she more candidly reveals the honest faults and strengths of their relationship. From the beginning both Jane and Mr. Bingley are quite moldable by their friends. While their impressionability negatively affects their relationship at first, it

enables them to learn from one another and establish a healthy growing relationship in the end.

Although Jane proves to be a pliable character, she allows her peers to negatively form her identity. Her sister Elizabeth is the only one of her family that is privy to her council and her more intimate self. With Elizabeth alone she confides her feelings about Mr. Bingley shortly after making his acquaintance, suggesting that Jane is more reserved by nature (11-12). Unfortunately, Jane allows less loyal peers to influence her character. Her new found friends, Ms. Caroline Bingley and Louisa Hurst, have a high hand in shaping Jane, specifically Jane's relationship with their brother. Caroline Bingley writes Jane a letter that their party of friends has left for London to strategically plant doubt in her mind about Mr. Bingley's feelings for her:

> Mr Darcy is impatient to see his sister, and to confess the truth, *we* are scarcely less eager to meet her again. I really do not think Georgiana Darcy has her equal for beauty, elegance, and accomplishments; and the affection she inspires in Louisa and myself, is heightened into something still more interesting, from the hope we dare to entertain of her being hereafter our sister . . . My brother admires her greatly already, he will have frequent opportunity now of seeing her on the most intimate footing, her relations all with the connection as much as his own, and a sister's partiality is not misleading me, I think, when I call Charles most capable of engaging any woman's heart. With all these circumstances to favour an attachment, and nothing to prevent it, am I wrong, my dearest Jane, in

> indulging the hope of an event which will secure the happiness of so many? (112-13)

When this disappointing news comes, Jane does all she can to shrug it off. Elizabeth begs her to not think so highly of Caroline Bingley's report, and though Jane respects her sister's words very much, the idea that Bingley does not have feelings for her evidently affects Jane painfully (113-114). Mordecai Marcus observes that "Jane's diffidence toward Bingley and her quickness to believe that he has lost interest in her show inability to assert personal claims and to resist excessive social claims" (277). Simply, Jane is allowing society to overbearingly form her identity.

Similarly, Mr. Bingley also allows himself to be heavily governed by his sisters and close friend, Mr. Darcy, which proves to injure his relationship to Jane. Soon after Bingley is suspected of developing feelings for Jane, his sisters and friend clearly show their disproval. Of course, their disapproval is based on the financial inequality of the match. Louisa and Caroline criticize and pity the inferiority of Jane's circumstances in their brother's presence:

> "I have an excessive regard for 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."
>
> "I think I have heard you say, that their uncle is an attorney in Meryton."
>
> "Yes; and they have another, who lives somewhere near Cheapside." (32-33)

Notice that their criticism does not pertain to insufficiencies between Bingley and Jane that would make them poor companions. Marcus makes a comparable assessment of Bingley's character: "Bingley similarly lacks self-confidence, and he yields easily to criticism of Jane's social position" (277). Although Bingley rebuts that had they "uncles enough to fill *all* Cheapside . . . it would not make them one jot less agreeable" (33), it takes the bulk of the story for him to actually reject his peers' influence and gain self-confidence to form his life with Jane. As for Mr. Darcy's relationship to his good friend, clearly his sway over Bingley, although well-meaning, overextends to manipulation. In his letter to Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy admits to her that he confronted Bingley of "the certain evils of such a choice" as Jane (187). Darcy concludes that "Bingley . . . with a stronger dependence on my judgment than on his own" changed his mind about Jane (188). Mr. Bingley, steered by friend's judgment rather than his own, does not actually begin to shape his future until the last few chapters of the book. Although, his character was negatively influenced, he does prove to be pliable which bodes well for his relationship with Jane. It implies that he is willing and apt to let marriage be a formable keystone in his life.

Once Bingley and Jane reject their influencers, they are able to open themselves up to the formable relationship they have with each other. Both Jane and Bingley promise to be flexible toward each other in their marriage. Bingley clearly has the final say when it comes to his sisters and Darcy's opinion about his prospective bride, and Jane finally and forthrightly admits to her sister her feelings for Bingley: "Jane could have no reserves from Elizabeth, where confidence would give pleasure; and instantly embracing her, acknowledge, with the liveliest emotion that she was the happiest creature in the

world" (326-327). Jane even goes so far as to assert the fault of Bingley's sister's deceit in concealing Jane from Bingley when she had come to London:

> It must have been his sister's doing. They were certainly no friends to his acquaintance with me . . . But when they see, as I trust they will, that their brother is happy with me, they will learn to be contented, and we shall be on good terms again; though we can never be what we once were to each other. (329-330)

To which Elizabeth exclaims: "That is the most unforgiving speech . . . that I ever heard you utter. Good girl! It would vex me, indeed, to see you again the dupe of Miss Bingley's pretended regard!" (330). Elizabeth can only reflect that Bingley's proposal "is the end of all his friend's anxious circumspection! Of all his sister's falsehood and contrivance! the happiest, wisest, most reasonable end!" (327). Along their journey, Bingley and Jane gain a little experience to give them some footing as they step into their marriage. They have become comfortable in their own skin, but by no means have they become calloused to further growing. In fact, their union is just the first stepping stone to building a strong relationship. Mr. Bennet congratulates his daughter on her engagement saying, "I have not a doubt of your doing very well together. Your tempers are by no means unlike. You are each of you so complying, that nothing will ever be resolved on; so easy that every servant will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always exceed your income" (328). Though he exaggerates, for Bingley and Jane quite quickly resolve on quitting Netherfield as it is too close to her family, Mr. Bennet has accurately observed the couple's compliance. The lack of compliance is what perhaps gives the next couple an edge.

The final marriage—Darcy and Elizabeth's—trumps all others because Darcy and Elizabeth sharpen each other, sometimes painfully, making the most equal of souls and the most arisen of individuals. This last marriage is the blood of the novel, the marriage that all the other marriages bring together. Marcus observes that the novel's several marriages "function, sometimes ironically, to bring together Darcy and Elizabeth," and Austen's thematic differences in the marriages are meant to emphasize the "adjustment between Darcy and Elizabeth" (275). The adjustments that Darcy and Elizabeth undergo are by far the most extensive of all the characters. These characters have major character flaws that act as one of the central conflicts in the story. However, Andrew Wright observes how these flaws are actually what draws them together: "To say that Darcy is proud and Elizabeth prejudiced is to tell but half the story. Pride and prejudice are faults; but they are also the necessary defects of desirable merits: self-respect and intelligence" (205). The confrontation of these defects prompts Elizabeth and Darcy to transform them into desirable merits which melds Darcy and Elizabeth together.

Elizabeth addresses Darcy's defects by her unbridled criticism of them. When Darcy is introduced, he leaves the reader with nothing more than some rude comments toward Elizabeth with an air of pride: "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me,* and I am in no humour at present to consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men" (9). His general pompous philosophy of himself is best explained in his repartee with Elizabeth. Ms. Bingley accuses him of being without defect to which he replies,

> Perhaps that is not possible for any one. But it has been the study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a strong understanding

> to ridicule . . . I have faults enough, but they are not, I hope, of understanding. My temper I dare not vouch for . . . I cannot forget the follies and vices of others so soon as I ought, nor their offences against myself . . . My temper would perhaps be called resentful. My good opinion, once lost, is lost for ever. (54)

Elizabeth can only cry, "*That* is a failing indeed" (54). However his "study of life" falls apart when she rejects his first marriage proposal. Her accusations of his character cut to his very studied and gentleman-like bones when she says,

> From the very beginning, from the first moment . . . of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation . . . I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry. (182)

These sharp and biting words jar him awake to his faults and make him desperate to change.

At the same time, Darcy confronts Elizabeth's major character flaws, an action which reveals that her identity has room to grow. At their first meeting, Darcy offends Elizabeth when he rates her appearance as "tolerable" (9). Later Elizabeth confides to her friend Charlotte: "I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*" (17). Elizabeth self-admits that she is guilty of pride; however, she is unaware of the prejudice that is breeding below. In one of their conversations at Netherfield, they examine each other's characters and Elizabeth charges him:

> "And *your* defect is a propensity to hate every body."
>
> "And yours", he replied, with a smile, "is wilfully to misunderstand them." (54).

Her wilful misunderstanding leads her to a blinded prejudice that shuts her eyes to any redeeming qualities in Darcy and to imagine the best of qualities in a less deserving benefactor. Her prejudice peaks in her regard for Mr. Wickham. In only their second meeting, he feeds the fire and spews forth his fabricated story of the injustices he suffered under Darcy (74-76). When Elizabeth consults this new information with Jane, the latter is the one that resists assuming the worst. Jane is actually the rational one. Elizabeth's assumption, however, is what causes her to question herself when she finds out the truth. Chapters later, when she is visiting the Collinses' home, she runs into Darcy, and he proposes to her for the first time. In one of her strong objections she says that "my opinion of you was decided. Your character was unfolded in the recital which I received many months ago from Mr Wickhaddm. On this subject, what can you have to say?" (181). It is then deliciously ironic that he has much to say on that subject. The next day she receives her reality check in the form of the letter when she learns of the libertine and disgraceful ways of Wickham:

> She grew absolutely ashamed of herself.—Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd. 'How despicably have I acted!' she cried.—'I, who have prided myself on my discernment . . . Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly

> . . . I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment I never knew myself. (196)

Her jolting epiphany gives her a second chance to not only come to know herself and her flaws, but to come to understand Darcy in a new light.

However, their confrontation of each other convicts them to grow out of their flaws and consequently with each other. The change in Elizabeth and Darcy begins almost immediately after the climactic proposal. W. A Craik observes a shift in the second part of the novel where Elizabeth's will is halted and she is forced to reassess herself as well as Darcy: "After she has realized the errors her prejudice has led her into, her judgment is directed inwards on herself rather than outwards on to other people, and more of the action takes place in her own mind, less in actual events" (79). Although Darcy's letter causes Elizabeth to doubt herself like she never had before, he helps her to know herself better. However, it is not until they meet again at Pemberley that honest self-awareness materializes. When Elizabeth and her Aunt and Uncle Gardiner accidently run into Mr.Darcy when touring the grounds, Elizabeth is shocked by his change of manners. Before Darcy was quick to snub anyone who was of a lower class than he, but instead he amiably entertains Elizabeth and her family. He invites Mr. Gardiner to fish in his pond and have them over for dinner. Elizabeth observes in herself a complete change: "Such a change in a man of so much pride excited not only astonishment but gratitude . . . She respected, she esteemed, she was grateful to him, she felt a real interest in his welfare" (248). Elizabeth realizes that she truly cares about him and is grateful for the change that she might have inspired. However, she is yet to find how much gratitude she would have for Darcy. His change crescendos when, through his means, he redeems

Elizabeth's lost sister Lydia and makes Wickham marry her after their elopement. Not only does he pay a large amount of money to bring about the marriage, but he does so secretly, desiring no praise. He voices his internal transformation after Elizabeth accepts his second proposal, and he reflects on his past behavior:

> I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. As a child, I was taught what was *right,* but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit . . . Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! What do I now owe you? You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you I was properly humbled. (349)

Darcy learns from Elizabeth, and for this reason, Marcus crowns their marriage with the highest position: "Most important of all, Darcy's and Elizabeth's differences from Bingley and Jane suggest to us the power of will which Darcy and Elizabeth develop, the ability to educate themselves which lies at the heart of the novel" (278). It seems, unbeknownst to Elizabeth, she was his whetstone—his sharpener. Craik concurs, "He develops like Elizabeth from complacency to self-knowledge and reformation. He is her equal, and reforms her in the same process as she reforms him (66). Therefore this bare and humbling self-knowledge that is split wide open by one another's confrontation brings them to level ground. They stand as two souls equal as ever.

Darcy and Elizabeth's marriage represents the strongest model of companionate marriage because they make their relationship the foundation on which to form each other. They lay this foundation by embracing the concept of equality of souls which in

turn causes their own individuals to rise together. Laura Mooneyham proposes that Elizabeth and Darcy are both protagonists and antagonists in that "their struggle is as much against each other as it is against the pressures of society or family" (45). However, she argues that their struggle causes them to both change, making them "more fully equal in this sense than any other of Austen's protagonists" (45). Their marriage is not better because they never fight. The opposite is true. It is the outright anger and misunderstanding that so often frequents relationships that makes the foundation of their relationship so stable. They "struggle . . . against each other," as Mooneyham puts it, but they change and form each other through the struggle. Although strong and independent alone, together they make each other better. The sharpening aspect of their relationship, however, is what sparks their love for one another. Weinsheimer observes that "the central marriage of *Pride and Prejudice* is based not alone on reason and the growing mutual understanding between Darcy and Elizabeth, but also on a thoroughly spontaneous affection" (416). Bloom declares, "The marriage is happy, Austen shows, because they are equal in sense and intelligence" (21). However, it is more than happiness that makes Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage the strongest. Happiness is whimsical, isolated to easy times, but as they have already proved they will grow together in the hardest and harshest of times.

Austen's portrayal of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* captures the truth that although marriage is difficult, it is binding and even rewarding when one chooses to make it a foundational step. It is not about chance. It is a choice. The Bennets married young and had all the opportunity to make their marriage the cornerstone of their lives together, but they chose to stand apart and upon their daughters to get through life. The

Collinses married at an older age, after they had lived a good portion of their lives with their own individuals as their foundation. Rather than starting over and building on their experience and personal growth, they chose to continue on as they were—separate, autonomous souls. The Wickhams, like the Bennets, married before their individual identities had time to establish; however, their vows were passing words on their lips. They chose to base their marriage in unbridled passion and folly. The Bingleys, although after a painful process of eliminating negative influencers, chose to make their marriage a foundation on which to cling together and grow with one another—braving the judgment of lesser opinions. The distinction between the Bingleys' and Darcys' marriages lies in the choice. Not only do Darcy and Elizabeth choose to overcome the many social and economic obstacles to make their marriage work, they choose to overcome their individual faults. They choose each other by choosing to humble themselves and work through their flaws. Marilyn Butler summarizes their humbling journey saying, "For both, but in our eyes more essentially for Elizabeth, it represents the arrival at true criticism of the self via correct, humbling assessment of another" (215). She also goes on to highlight that marriage turns out to be a "fulfillment of a personal moral quest" in which the protagonist erred in his or her first choice in love, but by the end of the novel, through humble assessment and judgment of self, chooses a more prudent partner (214-215). Elizabeth follows Butler's model when she sets her heart first on Wickham, but after the humbling confrontation with Darcy, chooses to love someone more deserving. Butler concludes, "The personal implication in every case . . . is that by the act of choice the erring lover gives up his or her youthful waywardness; all at once, it seems time to grow up" (214-215). Elizabeth, the erring lover, chooses to grow up, thereby choosing

Darcy. They both choose to grow up and continue to grow up together for as long as they both shall live. Perhaps the reason Darcy and Elizabeth's marriage is so commended is because their choice was not easy.

Pride and Prejudice does not paint a satisfying and beneficial marriage as easily attained, but something that requires constant sharpening which can sometimes be painful. June Sturrock suggests that *Pride and Prejudice* avoids an unrealistic and shallow feel to it by "the sense that pervades this novel that marriage is infinitely difficult and debatable" (22). While the reader understands that Darcy and Elizabeth's marriage will be fulfilling and filled with joy, there is not a picture-perfect happily-ever-after conclusion. There still exist dysfunctional in-laws, the stressful situation of Lydia and Wickham's marriage, and the nameless grief that life inevitably brings. In those moments, their marriage cannot cease to be the foundation on which they stand. If their marriage is the foundation they can navigate struggles by allowing those struggles to form them and forge them together. Elizabeth insinuates the formable relationship they can have when she realizes that their marriage "was an union that must have been to the advantage of both" (293). Before Darcy's second proposal, she imagines the outcome of their marriage, weighing her strengths and weaknesses with his and concluding that "his mind might have been softened, his manners improved" and that she too would "have received benefit of greater importance" (293). The benefit of greater importance is a life-long benefit, for they would continue to sharpen each other. Prior to their marriage they have already improved each other, and will persist in doing so throughout their marriage.

Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship serves as a model that when marriage is made as a foundational step in two people's livse there will be an enduring and loving

companionship. Sturrock writes, “Austen implies first that marriage should be based on respect, esteem and confidence, all of which comes about from intellectual equality” (23). However, Sturrock does not go far enough. More than intellectual equality, the learning process opens their eyes to see that they have met their soul’s equal—the soul who will form them into a stronger individual and who will be their foundation for growth. Mark Regnerus would probably agree, as he argues this point: “Marriage actually works best as a formative institution, not an institution you enter once you think you're fully formed. We learn marriage, just as we learn language, and to the teachable, some lessons just come easier earlier in life.” Of the five marriages presented, Darcy and Elizabeth stand as the most teachable. But it is the teaching and learning, giving and taking, and humbling of one another that binds them—that will continue to bind them.

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