

# The relationship between charlotte lucas and mr collins essay sample

[Life](#), [Relationships](#)



Throughout 'Pride and Prejudice' Jane Austen conveys the theme of marriage as being of paramount importance. The theme is introduced in the novel's opening line with the ironic generalisation; "it is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." This suggests that the sole purpose for marriage was to increase the character's social and financial ranking. The quote mentions nothing of love but promotes the idea that marriage is merely to create security, and nothing else. The novel tells of a number of marriages which take place, the first of which is between Collins and Charlotte Lucas.

At the time in which the novel was written it was almost considered indispensable for a young woman like Charlotte to get married. Otherwise she would have to remain dependant on her family and live without any social credibility or financial security, or be forced to seek a position as a governess of a rich family or become a teacher at a boarding school, which was not looked on particularly favourably either. Marriage gave a woman independence, security and a position in society. Spinsterhood, unless the woman was very rich, was not highly thought of. Charlotte herself reflects, marriage "was the only honourable provision for a well-educated woman of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want." It is ironic that although all of Jane Austen's novels have marriage as the main theme, she herself was not married.

Charlotte is strong, steady, and good. She genuinely cares for Elizabeth and takes joy in the prospect of Elizabeth's high advancement through marriage

with Darcy. Charlotte is an intelligent character with maturity, poise, penetrating observation and superior understanding. Her father's life in trade, politics and high society has provided her a wide exposure which amplifies her understanding further. Her younger sister Maria and her father are both vacuous individuals. Charlotte however has the intelligence and insight to perceive Darcy's glances at Elizabeth are expressions of interest in her. Also, she perceives the danger that Bingley will fail to recognize Jane's attraction to him due to her lack of flirtation.

She says " Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on." After marrying Collins, Charlotte becomes instrumental in bringing Elizabeth and Darcy together at Hunsford, which expresses her affection and goodwill for Elizabeth. Her solicitude for Elizabeth is at least partially explained by her very ordinary and mercenary social values. She has no faith in romantic love or emotional relationship in marriage. She justifies why she takes this view in a conversation with Elizabeth; " I'm twenty - seven years old, I've no money and no prospects. I'm already a burden to my parents and I'm frightened." Charlotte's age and " plain" appearance give her a stronger urgency to get married. She feels obliged to grasp every opportunity she can possibly get, in fear of spending the rest of her life in spinsterhood. Personally she aspires only for security through marriage and looks up to all those with money and status. She finds Lady Catherine " a very respectable, sensible woman." Charlotte's close friendship with Elizabeth was socially elevating and pleasing to her. Aid to Elizabeth's social advancement is service to the social values she cherishes.

Mr Collins is best described by Elizabeth, as a “ conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man”. He is man of the church, but seems more concerned with his patron, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, than God. Despite being unintelligent he persists to be overly formal and long-winded in his speech and manner, both in person and letters, making him look quite ridiculous. Having just recently attained a living as parson at Rosings Park, Collins is absolutely overwhelmed by his own accomplishments and his association with Lady Catherine. Although he pretends to be humble, he shows that he is very self-opinionated (he is somewhat less bumptious in the presence of Lady Catherine however). Collins is very superficial; he lacks true ‘ depth’ or genuine emotion.

This is demonstrated first when he changes his fixation from Jane to Elizabeth instantaneously, described as “ done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire”, and again when he proposed to Charlotte less than a week after his vain attempts at acquiring Elizabeth! One might also say he is not particularly Christian in his actions, as can be observed when he advises Mr Bennet to forgive Lydia but disown her. To Collins, his future inheritance, present living and his patroness are great assets, which made him bold enough to propose to Elizabeth and confident that she would accept. When all his strengths are summarily rebuffed by one who possesses none of them, his confidence is momentarily shaken and he dares not propose to another member of the family. Seeking the security of more modest aspirations, he proposes to Charlotte instead.

In the midst of the uproar over Collin's proposal to Elizabeth and her subsequent refusal, Charlotte Lucas visits the Bennets and learns of the events. After Mr Collins withdraws his offer, Charlotte begins spending more time with him. When the Bennets dine with the Lucases, Charlotte tolerates Mr Collins well, she is described "so kind as to listen to Mr Collins". Elizabeth appreciates this and when she thanks her, Charlotte schemingly "assured her friend of her satisfaction in being useful", when her real intentions actually lay elsewhere. The object of her kindness was in fact "nothing less than to secure her from any return of Mr. Collins's addresses, by engaging them towards herself." Elizabeth and the rest of the Bennets were completely unaware at this stage that Charlotte hoped to win Mr Collins over and get a proposal for herself. Evidently, her plan was successful as Collins returns to the Lucases home the next morning and proposes. She accepts, not for love of course, but for security.

Charlotte was concerned about telling her dear Elizabeth. Would she understand? Charlotte doubted it. Elizabeth's ideals did not match her own, and she feared Elizabeth, and Jane also, may never feel comfortable with her relationship to their kinsman, who would one day be master of the Longbourn estate. Charlotte wisely resolves to inform Elizabeth of the engagement herself. Elizabeth's reaction to the news is one of shock and also disappointment; "Engaged to Mr. Collins! My dear Charlotte-impossible!" After her initial disbelief, Elizabeth regains composure and strives to be polite to her old friend, but it is obvious she believes their relationship will be somewhat altered.

Charlotte supports her decision by reminding Elizabeth that she is not the type to marry for love, " I am not a romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home". This seemingly hard-hearted attitude is pre-justified by Charlotte's practical but totally unromantic advice to Elizabeth earlier when discussing Jane's relationship with Bingley, " happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance.....it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life". Elizabeth's dismay is made evident by the narrator; " she had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she had not supposed it to be possible that, when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage." In contrast to this Jane makes a more tolerant and optimistic evaluation of Charlotte's acceptance of Collin's proposal, she is described as saying " less of her astonishment than of her earnest desire for their happiness".

In Elizabeth's visit to Hunsford there is a finely ironic account of Mr Collins' formality, which is obviously aimed at showing Elizabeth what she has missed by not marrying him. However, she also notes Charlotte's sensitivity to her husband's blunders, how Charlotte never complains about her choice to yield the prospect of love or affection, and how she will not criticise her dim-witted husband in front of others. This all suggests that their relationship is working thus far at a practical and rational level at least, despite its seemingly unconventional, unromantic nature (although their marriage was much more typical of the nineteenth century norm than that of Elizabeth and Darcy), and Charlotte does not appear incontent.

Yet the reader cannot help but wonder if Charlotte is able to maintain this stoicism all through the rest of her life with Collins, when she hides in a room with a poorer view so that he will not enter, and sends him to the garden so that she does not have to talk to him. One wonders if indeed, any happiness can be found once the “novelty” is lost, and here, Austen warns that romances straying too far from expectations are not likely to be romances at all. (But they can be “comfortable”.) Although Elizabeth comprehends Charlotte’s reasoning in her union with Collins, she is vexed by her friend’s chosen path, and doubts her long term happiness with him. This is evidenced in Elizabeth’s thoughts as she ends her visit; “Poor Charlotte! – it was melancholy to leave her to such society- But she had chosen it with her eyes open; and though evidently regretting that her visitors were to go, she did not seem to ask for compassion. Her home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns, had not yet lost their charms.”

Despite Elizabeth’s concerns, I believe Charlotte’s decision to marry the obnoxious Mr Collins was in fact a wise one. Charlotte understands her social position; she prospects objectively and accepts Collins as the best she can expect. Because of her plain appearance and quiet manners, she is least taken note of by others. She can be attracted to a man who is universally despised, simply because she is one who is universally neglected. In this regard, Charlotte can be fully confident of her husband’s loyalty. All things considered, she handles her husband well. She is aware of his lack of breeding and of his ability to take over conversations, this we know from her

encouraging him to pay some attention to his garden, and thus ensuring that she has some relief from his company. It is hardly the basis for a marriage, but Charlotte has gone into it with her eyes open, and her evenness of temper and admirable organisations and restraint provide another comment on the nature of this marriage itself.

I believe that the “novelty” of her new life waring off will not be a problem for Charlotte in the future of this marriage as she never had any romantic expectations and therefore will suffer no disappointment. She knew exactly what she was doing and was happy to take advantage of the opportunity to get married when it presented itself. Charlotte now has wealth, security and a place in society. These positive aspects of her relationship with Collins are certain in her future. These positive aspects can only be enhanced further down the line, for instance, when the couple inherit the Bennett’s estate. I believe Collin’s bumptious, annoying character is unlikely to get any worse and therefore in the future Charlotte is likely to grow in proficiency at enduring her husband’s inadequacies, if they do not diminish as time goes on. Charlotte’s consistency of character is the signifcant factor to the future success of their relationship; she will focus on the positive aspects of her practical relationship and not become dejected by the absence of love and mutual understanding in her marriage.