

# Jane austen's views on marriage in pride and prejudice

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Jane Austen explores the ideals and differences of marriage during the eighteenth century throughout her novel *Pride and Prejudice*. In the novel, when sensible and practical Charlotte decides to accept Mr. Collins' proposal and marry him, she is only satisfied, and we can see that it was the only honorable provision for a young woman of small fortune during this time. Austen toils with the notions of a companionate marriage (one that prioritizes affection) and a marriage of alliance (one that prioritizes business) and their progressive applicability to the entity of marriage in the eighteenth century, but ultimately concedes to monetary importance.

Charlotte Lucas makes a wise and logical choice when agreeing to marry Mr. Collins.

“ I see what you are feeling—you must be surprised, very much surprised,—so lately as Mr. Collins was wishing to marry you. But when you have had the time to think it all over, I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collin'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.”(96)

However, Elizabeth projects absurdity onto the relationship. Charlotte can “ see” Elizabeth's feelings which is peculiar considering feelings are to be felt not seen. Elizabeth is puzzled, she does not understand how Charlotte was able to marry for pure financial need over love but unfortunately, this is the societal reality. Charlotte explains to Elizabeth that she has not married Mr. Collins because she loves him, she is not a romantic, but a sensible and

intelligent woman of a certain age that needs a sustainable life of comfort. She has been conditioned by society to think this way. Marriage during this time was a woman's ticket to security. She is in need of a home and Mr. Collins can provide this to her because he will inherit the Longbourn estate one day. If Charlotte does not marry Mr. Collins she will have to depend on her father until he dies and then she would be left with nothing because daughters do not inherit property. Charlotte marries a man she does not love because she does not wish to become an old maid and Mr. Collins is the first man to show interest in making her his wife. Charlotte represents the reality of this time, she does not have an idealistic approach to love and her acceptance of Mr. Collins' proposal proves that. Due to Charlotte's plain appearance she was not in a position to disregard social conventions. Compared to Elizabeth and Jane Bennet, Charlotte is not known for her beauty but her brain. This is used to portray that she had to have a more realistic approach to love and marriage than the other women did because she wasn't as beautiful. She is plain but for good reason because beauty warranted a more idealistic perspective on marriage. Her brain was used to allow her to make clear decisions that would provide her with positive outcomes for her future. Her marriage with Mr. Collins is not self-deception as she marries with her eyes open. For this reason, she does not consider her marriage a mistake though it is loveless. A companionate marriage was not a realistic ideal to many people, it is not a wrong decision as she will be judged by money and comfort in her society. Her announcement gives the idea of her helplessness, as she cannot complain about her suffering for her desire and social reality are at odds. Her acceptance of Mr. Collins' proposal is not

complete disgrace but acceptance of harsh reality. Since she is not in love with Mr. Collins, she will not be disheartened to discover his selfish nature. If a woman was seen to be unmarried at a certain age, she was not worthy of getting a husband in all her life. Hence, her determination to marry Mr. Collins despite her friend's disapproval, proves herself a strong-willed person. Charlotte apprehends that marriage based on true love may not work because of financial security but in a loveless marriage at least money can save it. Her marriage is her realistic ideal and through this partnership with Mr. Collins she is able to escape social pressure and humiliation as well as social isolation.

Charlotte Lucas was worried about being single. She saw marriage as an opportunity and she was conscious about the fleeting options she had at her age.

“ Daughters almost never inherit, of course, and, like the Bennets in *Pride and Prejudice* or the Dashwood sisters in *Sense and Sensibility*, might even lose their home after their father's death to a sometimes quite remote male relative, through the system of 'entail'.... best hope of financial and social security is to marry well...” (Appendix A)

This passage illuminates the idea that women had to marry in order to survive. An unmarried woman's social standing would also be harmed by her living alone, outside of the sphere of her family's influence. If a single woman who had never been married was not living with her family, she should at least be living with a sustainable chaperone. And in general, becoming an “

old maid" was not considered a desirable fate, so when Charlotte Lucas, at age 27, marries Mr. Collins, her family is relieved. Mr. Collins is entailed to inherit the Longbourn estate so this will be how he provides for Charlotte and himself. Love to Charlotte was secondary to the urgent need for financial security. Monetary importance was that of the highest throughout this time period. Women were to go from their father's house to their husband's house. They were to marry and to marry well. This put a lot of pressure on parents to make sure they raised well-bred and graceful young ladies. If they failed to do so their daughters would be in jeopardy, no parent wants to see that happen so they do everything in their power to prevent such from surfacing. Social standing was made visible through material objects, young girls were taught this at a young age. Also, what how they looked and what they acted like was more important than the emotional side of the situation, Emotions were secondary, not only to Charlotte but also to Mr. Collins. Emotions got in the way of the end goal, financial security and social standing safety.

Charlotte's marriage to Mr. Collins is an arrangement of convenience, he needed a suitable wife, she needed a husband, love is not part of the equation.

" 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 contrive 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”(16)

Being in love in marriage for Charlotte is like rolling dice. If it happens it is purely out of luck. She believes love is irrelevant to marriage and thinks a woman ought to limit her intimacy with her husband in order to avoid the inevitable disappointments. Charlotte is a pragmatic lady who believes that a woman needs to take initiative and act fast in order to secure her relationship. By taking the time to get to know the other person it slows down the securing process. Whether she marries a man tomorrow or spends a year getting to know him, it will not guarantee a happy marriage. This indicates that Charlotte sees a husband as a commodity or means to an end. Charlotte is aware that if her expectations for a man are too high, she risks becoming a struggling spinster. If she lowers her standards, though, she may not find love but at least she will be comfortable. What makes this evident is Mr. Collins' behavior and attitude that is painted in the novel as arrogant and selfish. He is a clergyman and with that title comes with the responsibility to take a wife, so because of this Mr. Collins seeks a wife because it is the right thing to do. He wants to do everything in his power to look good for Lady De Bourgh and to ensure that he will be able to inherit the Longbourn estate. At first, he forces his proposal onto Elizabeth but she declines so because of this, he then jumps ship over to Charlotte because he is desperate. He is desperate because without a wife he won't be seen in the same way as he would with a wife in this society. He wants to set an example to the rest of his parish and the only way to do so is to take action. This is why just three

days after his proposal to Elizabeth, he proposes to Charlotte. He too is aware that she is a woman of a certain age that needs him as much as he needs her. He thinks that by proposing to her they will both be able to benefit from the marriage which will lead to happiness for the both of them. Charlotte is more realistic than he is in this regard because he is not as aware of the terms of happiness as she is. Charlotte is aware of his less than desirable behavior but because she does not have high expectations for the relationship, she is able to overlook his faults because although he has a few motives as to why he wants to marry, she only has one. Charlotte and Mr. Collins use each other to get ahead in society, which neglects romance all together. Each of them are aware of this and that is why they both marry without thinking about it twice. It is the ever-present most important step to surety.

Jane Austen's views on marriage are highlighted throughout the use of Charlotte and Mr. Collins to describe the driving emphasis on Marriage of Alliance and monetary relevance during the eighteenth century. Marriage was the pivotal approach to societal and financial assurance for young women. The marriage of alliance was one that provided a sustainable, safe, and dependable lifestyle for women in society. A woman like Charlotte had everything to gain from this because without it she would be cast off and unable to provide for herself because women were not able to work the same jobs as men and were not able to inherit property. Women had to move forward in their relationships with men with lower expectations to avoid disaster because marriage was the way for a woman to earn her own

wings. They had to be logical, practical, realistic, and had to disregard their emotions in order to live a life outside of their father's home.