

# Jane Austen: romance and finance

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At the time in which Austen was writing women were under enormous pressure to marry for the purpose of securing their financial futures.

Therefore, marriage, though romanticised, was in many ways a financial transaction and social alliance rather than a matter of love. Although Jane Austen did not condone loveless marriages (she stayed single all her life), she did approve of matches having equality in various aspects, including wealth, social status, love and mind. Austen strongly believed in not marrying for the wrong reasons.

With reference to money this meant that a person Austen would disapprove of would be someone who married purely for the gain of wealth. Perhaps those who are well off anyway, but want a greater financial security in life, or those who were of mediocre wealth who married for money to avoid being a poor spinster in later life. An example of someone who wishes to marry for money in 'Pride and Prejudice' would be Caroline Bingley. Caroline Bingley, by way of her brother's good fortune is a wealthy character, with a dowry of, "twenty thousand pounds" Her financial interest in marrying Mr. Darcy would be for the gain of a greater financial standing.

Miss Bingley shows little true affection or understanding for his character, indeed Miss Bingley says to him, "You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many evenings in this manner- in such society" The assumption made here is that Miss Bingley thinks herself to have the same status and therefore feelings as Mr. Darcy. We are told later on that Miss Bingley whilst reading a book in Mr. Darcy's company, "... quite exhausted by the attempt to be amused with her own book, which she had only chosen because it was the second volume of his... This shows us that Miss Bingley

has few of the same interests or indeed the same superior mind as Darcy, making the match unsuitable, for in Jane Austen's view a couple should generally not only have equality in status but in mind as well. This relationship is comparable to that of the Eltons in 'Emma'.

Mrs. Elton, formerly Miss Augusta Hawkins is from a trade background in Bristol, is one of the characters that Jane Austen classifies as 'neuveau riche'. Mrs. Elton is married to Mr. Elton, who at the beginning of the novel appears to be a relatively handsome, agreeable village vicar but who quickly becomes a character who is presented as being proud, conceited, and superficial. This match of these characters in a financial manner is considered, by Austen to be suitable. Mr Knightley says to Emma, " Elton knows the value of a good income as well as anybody, Elton may talk sentimentally, but he will act rationally. " By marrying Mrs Elton he is gaining a good financial source. She has a brother with a large fortune residing at 'Maple Grove' and thanks to her brother's good fortune she is financially secure.

However this is where Jane Austen's view on the match becomes negative. At the ball at Randall's, Mrs Weston suggests that Mr Elton dance with Harriet but he refuses profusely within her range of hearing, " his wife who was standing immediately above her, was not only listening also, but even encouraging him by significant glances. " This quote shows that Mrs Elton is a poor match for Mr Elton as she encourages him to be cruel to Miss Smith. Indeed through Emma's thoughts later on in the novel, Jane Austen informs us that Mr Elton, " was growing very like her [his wife]".

This implies that Austen believes that a marriage between two people should be a productive one. Not one in which the couple encourage the bad mannerisms in each other. Jane Austen also portrays the foolishness of not taking money in to consideration when choosing a partner. Austen shows the reader here that money is not an irrelevant matter in marriage. This idea is shown through the marriage of Mr Collins and Miss Lucas in 'Pride and Prejudice' Charlotte Lucas says to Elizabeth Bennet, " Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. This shows the practical side to Austen's view of marriage, sometimes marriage must be a practicality and financial gain is an important factor in making the choice of who to marry. Later on the reader is told that Miss Lucas accepted the proposal she received from Mr Collins, "... solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment" This shows the logicity behind the acceptance of Mr Collins marriage, without it Miss Lucas, although she would not have to work, would have to look after her parents in their elderly state as a spinster.

However we also hear Jane Austen's opinion on this matter later on when Mrs Gardiner advises Lizzy, saying, " Do not involve yourself, or endeavour to involve him in an affection which for the want of fortune would make so very imprudent. " Later in life a woman would rely on her husband's income when her own dowry had run out. A man with little income had few prospects for a woman and so the match would be unwise and thoughtless. Austen presents the point here that it is difficult for a woman to find the line between marrying purely for financial gain and not being improvident and choosing a man without some money to his name.

This is contrastable with the marriage of Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill in 'Emma'. Frank Churchill disregards the fact that Jane has no money, and wishes to marry her nonetheless. This situation is portrayed by Austen through the use of her 'Cinderella plots.' This is a term used when a woman marries above their class, Jane, who is facing the threat of a life of, "penance and mortification" as a governess is saved by both the financial and social status of Frank Churchill. In these plots lines the woman is generally shown to be intellectually astute, so as to match up to her husband.

Jane is extremely accomplished in music and manners as well as having a, "an excellent education. Living constantly with right-minded people and well-informed people, her heart and understanding had received every advantage of discipline and culture" this infers that Austen approved of this match, despite the fact that money has been disregarded in the relationship. Arranged marriages feature in Austen's work. The finance and romance conundrum of these is a point of interest expressed through many of the main protagonists.

Austen portrays the belief that 'money should marry money'. The match between Mr Darcy and Miss Anne de Bourgh made only in Lady Catherine de Bourgh's mind shows this point of view. Miss Anne de Bourgh is the daughter of a noble woman and so in this era should be marrying a rich aristocratic man such as Mr Darcy. Indeed Elizabeth exclaims, " She will make him a very proper wife. " This is possibly the truth but Austen encourages the reader to view the idea of this match with some irony. Miss de Bourgh is a very quiet young lady, unable to hold a lively conversation or debate.

She is, "sickly" looking and unaccomplished, as stated by her mother when she says, "If I had ever learnt [to play the piano] I would have been a great proficient, so would Anne, had her health allowed it". This description of Miss de Bourgh shows Austen with a low opinion of her. Mr Darcy would never have married the kind of person who matched his social or financial status, unless they matched him in his intellectual dominance as well. This arranged match is contrastable with that of Mr Knightley and Emma Woodhouse in 'Emma'. In this match Austen gives the reader her approval.

The couple are shown to compliment each other, Mr Knightley is said to be, "one of the few people who could find fault in Emma Woodhouse" this shows the idea that although Mr Knightley is not under the view that Emma is perfect, he still likes and admires her greatly. The fact that Emma has a £30,000 dowry and Mr Knightley is a rich aristocrat also shows the suitability of the match. They are similar in many ways and the fact that Emma doesn't need to marry to secure her future shows that their marriage is purely for love and admiration of one another's qualities.

The gentle nature in which he reproaches her about Miss Bates and how much admiration he shows for her at her remorse is shown in the actions, "He took her hand... and certainly was on the point of carrying it to his lips" and later when he addresses her, "Emma, my love..." I feel that the idea of 'money marrying money' is a strong Austen point. She both agrees and disagrees with the idea. Those who have money and wish to marry someone else with money should also look for equality of mind and standing in order to secure a worthy relationship.

The idea of finance being considered whilst a man chooses his wife is also portrayed by Austen in many of her novels. Mr Wickham in 'Pride and Prejudice' is said to have wanted to marry Miss Georgiana Darcy, a young lady with a great fortune behind her name. However when this affection on his behalf is abruptly ended by her brother Mr Fitzwilliam Darcy, Mr Wickham looks for an alternative wife. Settling on Elizabeth Bennett this encourages the idea of Mr Wickham being a 'male fortune seeker'.

Having little money of his own it is Mr Wickham who is looking for financial gain through marriage, which Lizzy consequently denies him. Austen disapproves of this idea, perhaps not surprisingly so because in Regency England men were supposed to provide for the woman, as apposed to the other way around. This match is comparable to that of Mr and Mrs Elton. Mr Elton first proposes to Emma Woodhouse, a young woman with a thirty thousand pound dowry, when refused he looks for a alternate source of money. When Emma suggests that he might like Harriet, a poor and illegitimate woman with little money to her name.

Eventually Mr Elton marries a woman named Augusta Hawkins, a woman with a ten thousand pound dowry. This shows that Mr Elton considered the gain of financial wealth through his choice of wife very important in the match. Jane Austen shows many different situations in which finance should affect your choice of who to marry. In many of these situations she frowns upon those who seek money through marriage, Mr Elton and Miss Bingley are fine examples of these people, and the irony with which their characters are portrayed shows the disdain that Austen feels towards them.

However Austen also shows the foolishness of not considering finance in a match, pointing out that in later life a woman will be reliant on the wealth of the man that she has chosen to marry and so she should choose carefully. I believe that although Austen would like to frown on those who look for financial support over love she sees the sensibility and logic in doing so. Austen who remained single for all her life shows an insightful view to the problems of finance and romance in the 18th century.