

Contextual factors in  
pride and prejudice  
influence the  
characters. do you  
agree?...

[Literature](#), [Character](#)



There are many contextual factors in *Pride and Prejudice* that certainly influence the characters, in the way the characters behave and also in the way that they are viewed. A few of the main factors are money, marriage and the role of women and these can be seen as a few of the novel's themes. However, these factors do not always influence all of the characters. I will explore the different contextual factors in the novel and come to the conclusion as to whether I agree with the statement.

Money is a highly influential factor in *Pride and Prejudice*, so much so, that the narrator is very careful to give financial details of every character to ensure that the reader has an idea of the social standings of all the characters and their placement in society. As the Bennet family and the Lucas family have less money, this means they are of a lower class than most of the other families in the book, for example the Darcys and the Bingleys.

This means that the daughters in these families are less likely to be offered a proposal of marriage, as the classes tend not to mix and the possible crossing of social boundaries seems insurmountable. This can be shown in chapter 8, where Miss Bingley mock Elizabeth's behaviour and her family. Miss Bingley begins by stating, "I have an excessive regard for Jane Bennet, she is really a very sweet girl," to give the impression of being caring and thoughtful and continues to say, "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." In this quote, Miss Bingley conveys fact as an opinion which she uses to try and manipulate her brother's views. By stating

this, Miss Bingley shows that she feels Jane should not be allowed to wed Mr Bingley, as this would be crossing the social boundaries. This chapter also shows how Mr Bingley is not affected by money and the fact that Elizabeth has low connections, as this does not affect the way he perceives her.

By stating that " it would not matter if they had uncles enough to fill all Cheapside, it would not make one of them one jot less agreeable," it illustrates how Bingley is not swayed by other characters' status or appearance. Money can also influence the appearance of characters on the surface, as when Mr Darcy is introduced in chapter 3, he is described as being very favourable, based only on his social standing and his financial status.

The fact that Darcy earned 'ten thousand a year' meant that people looked at him " with great admiration for half the evening". It is only when people explored his character that they found him to be " proud and above his company", which allows the reader to see how money influences their perception of characters. Elizabeth could be described as one of the only characters with morals whose life is not completely influenced by money, but her conversation with Jane in chapter 59 that her character can in fact be affected by wealth.

Her comments to Jane that her love for Darcy began " from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley" and although Elizabeth is joking about this, the audience realises that there is an element of truthfulness in what she has said. She feels " some perturbation" on approaching Pemberley: "

her spirits were in a high flutter". When she sees the estate, " at that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something! " Elizabeth speaks of a present and a future, not of something past and concluded, which demonstrates how she could be persuaded by Darcy's estate to marry him.

This shows how Darcy's wealth is of great interest to Elizabeth, when she is confronted by its reality, that she can escape her life of being poor and having little money. The reader can also see that the idea of money influences Charlotte, " Lady Lucas began to directly calculate with more interest than the matter had ever excited before how many years longer Mr Bennet was likely to live". This shows Charlotte treats money higher in her opinion than the feelings of her friend when her father dies.

Charlotte, thinking up " kind schemes" for Elizabeth feels that Colonel Fitzwilliam was " beyond comparison the pleasantest man; he certainly admired her and his situation in life was most eligible; but, to counterbalance these advantages, Mr Darcy had considerable patronage in the church and his cousin could have none at all". This reveals the final twist in which Charlotte's thoughts move from the outcome that might suit her friend best, to that which would serve her own purposes through the advancement and enrichment of Mr Collins, which would undoubtedly earn her more money.

Property is shown to be a contextual factor that influences the characters as the females of the Bennet family are in real financial difficulty, as their house is to be entailed upon Mr Collins when Mr Bennet dies. This puts the Bennet

daughters into a difficult position as there is added pressure to marry well so they can be financially secure. This pressure is increased as Mrs Bennet wanted one of her daughters to marry Mr Collins so that the Bennet family would not lose the estate which has been in their family for many generations.

Property can also be seen as a beneficial factor that influences the perception of characters because at this time the larger the estate then more money was earned. This can be seen in the description of Mr Darcy in chapter 3, where the people at the ball thought very highly of him when they heard about the size of his estate in Derbyshire, which directly relates to his earnings. A contextual factor that influences all the women characters in the novel is marriage.

A perfect example of this is in Charlotte Lucas marrying Mr Collins, as she does not marry for love, she marries him to be financially secure and to have a place in society. This can be seen in the quote by the narrator describing Charlotte, " who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment". This shows that Charlotte married only for an estate and money, so that she could establish herself in society as women were looked down upon if they were not married.

As the life expectancy for women in the early 1800's was around the mid to late 30s and Charlotte was 28, she saw that marriage was the only honourable provision for a woman in her position and wealth. Although Elizabeth and Charlotte were close friends, they had very different views.

Elizabeth felt that " it was a long time before she became at all reconciled to the idea of an unsuitable match. She had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own". Charlotte was prepared to marry for money and financial security and she thought that " happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance".

In the 1800's society influenced the characters of the novel as marriage was essential for women, they were entirely dependant on men to look after them and if women were not married, they were thought to be excluded from society. However, this did not affect Elizabeth as she turned down two respectable proposals of marriage, from Mr Collins and Mr Darcy. The former proposal is deemed to be more acceptable and her family is more understanding of this as Mr Collins is pompous and boastful, and an all round unfavourable character.

However, Mrs Bennet was upset when Elizabeth declined his proposal as it is her duty as a mother to marry all her daughters off and help them to set up her lives. Mr Bennet opposed his wife's views and suggested to Elizabeth that, " Your mother will never speak to you again if you do not marry Mr Collins, and I will never speak to you again if you do". This led to Mr Collins withdrawing his offer and marrying Charlotte. The latter proposal was certainly very easy for Elizabeth to refuse as she explained to him that after knowing him for a month, " I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry. Although, we can see that wealth does affect Elizabeth's judgement as after the proposal is made, she feels some guilt for not accepting the proposal as it would mean a better life

for her and it would please her mother and her family. Even though Darcy admits how he admires and loves Elizabeth, he is still influenced by the fact that she is of a lower class and "his sense of her inferiority - of its being degradation" and before his proposal he would have convinced himself that this could not happen and admits he has repressed his feelings.

However, in spite of this, Darcy is still prepared to marry Elizabeth and cross the social boundaries, which shows that money and Elizabeth's "low connections" do not influence him fully. The pressure of marriage affects many of the characters, but it does not affect Jane or Mr Bingley, as they overcome the separation of the classes and are married because they are truly in love with one another. Jane and Bingley represent the coming together of two handsome, like-minded and kind-hearted people.

Their eventual marriage is delightful and a relief to the reader as they have been many obstacles in their way of marriage. The main reason of their separation was caused by the persuasion of Darcy because he thinks that Jane is not in love with his friend Bingley. The reader knows that part of the reason why he persuades Bingley is because he does not feel Jane is worthy enough for his friend. This is ironic as he then proposes to Elizabeth who detests him. In chapter 8 there is a discussion of the accomplishments of young ladies.

Bingley has a lot of admiration for women's ability to "paint tables, cover screens and net purses", but Darcy wants more than this and even more than the list Caroline Bingley provides of "music, singing drawing, dancing

and modern languages," plus " something in her air and manner of walking". If men expect all those accomplishments for the women to have, then the Bennet daughters and many other women in their position will have little hope of marrying well.

However, as seen in chapter 29 when Lady Catherine quizzes Elizabeth with many questions about her family and finds that none of them can draw she is very surprised, " What, none of you? " and also that only one of her sisters can play the piano and sing. This demonstrates that women do not always need a long list of accomplishments in order to be married, for Mr Darcy was not concerned about her lack of abilities, but only cared about her " liveliness of mind" and the spirited freedom of her thinking about her world, even in spite of the pressures cause by its snobbery and narrowness of society.

In conclusion, the contextual factors do influence many of the characters in the novel, but some of these characters are able to overcome the pressures of society and cross the social boundaries. By using Elizabeth as a main character, Austen is able to highlight these factors as she is not influenced by them and causes others around her to rebel against the norm. The main character highlights what is expected of women and the 'norms and values' in society during the nineteenth century by behaving in an unacceptable way.

The fact that in chapter eight, when Elizabeth walks to Netherfield to visit her sister, and her appearance is deemed improper by the Bingley sisters, " her petticoat, six inches deep in mud", is one of the main reasons why Darcy



falls in love with Elizabeth, shows that some men prefer women with an independence of mind and a free spirit. This is not in agreement with society, where it is believed women should depend on men and all act very similar with no specific purpose as they are just possessions of men.