What Makes a Happy Marriage?
A Study of Choice in Four
Jane Austen Novels

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgement ........................................................................................................... 3

Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 4

Part I: Outward Factors

Chapter One: The Mercenary and the Unworldly ....................................................... 8

Chapter Two: Marriage and Class .................................................................................. 18

Part II: Inward Factors

Chapter Three: An Equal Mind ..................................................................................... 29

Chapter Four: Principles ............................................................................................... 40

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 50

Works Cited .................................................................................................................... 53
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1. Introduction

Jane Austen is one of the most respected novelists in English literature in the nineteenth century, and also, as Margaret Kirkham puts it, “the major comic artist in English of the age we call ‘Romantic’” (82) Austen’s novels have their own charm. The humour and light irony enable the readers to laugh at the absurdity of many characters, while they realize and think about the important and serious moral and social issues. Also, the psychological depth of the characterization of her heroines, the tight and sparkling tone, the witty dialogues and the satirical portrayal, all give rise to her great popularity. As Barbara Hardy once puts it: “Her accomplishments as a novelist sometimes even seem to be assimilated to her excellence as a needlewoman … her artistry provoked admiration rather than elucidation” (12). “F.R. Leavis placed Jane Austen as the inaugurator of the ‘great tradition’ of English nineteenth-century fiction” (Kirkham 81). She is very much loved by her readers throughout the world. To show the fondness of Jane Austen’s novels, the terms ‘Janeite’ and ‘Janeitism’ are even created to express “the self-consciously idolatrous enthusiasm for ‘Jane’ and every detail relative to her”, according to Claudia Johnson (211). Moreover, the countless versions of films based on her works show her as a great favor from generation to generation.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Gothic and sentimental novels with a kind of ‘horrific romance’ start to become prevailed in English literature. Austen’s novels, on the contrary, appear with the peaceful country lives of the middle-class and gentry from a few families. “Like all novelists writing in the third person, Jane Austen depends on a variety of viewpoints, a number of internal narrators who carry much of the narrative responsibility, formally and informally” (Hardy 66). Except for the setting, characters and voice particulars in her novels, she has her own concern group. Most of her well-known novels were written in her age of twenties, where she focused on many intelligent and young women about the same
age as herself, and their beginning of adult lives.

In her time, according to the British law, the property of a family was supposed to be inherited by the son or the nearest male heir. As a result, many women, who are with good education, but no certain amount of dowry, were not able to marry because of their poverty. Therefore, in order to acquire a financially secured life and a higher social status, marriage was seen as the only way for them to achieve these goals. All of Austen’s novels are about the choice of husband, the choice which mostly determines a woman’s life. Meanwhile, there are often additional choices by other minor characters, which function as foiled comments on the heroines.

Hence, Austen’s novels may be seen as Bildungsroman. The Bildungsroman is defined as ‘a novel which traces the spiritual, moral, psychological, or social development and growth of the main character towards maturity’. And most of Austen’s heroines fit the mold of the female Bildungsroman. Her heroines are all young woman who are about to enter their adult lives. The things they learn, the way they learn, and how they become mature and cleverer after they go through some certain events, are their own development and growth. Therefore, as Bildungsroman, the protagonist’s development becomes a vicarious development of her readers.

Given the social circumstance at that time, marriage has always been the object for Austen’s young ladies in her books. Although Austen was never married in her entire life, she expressed her outlook of marriage through her heroines. Nevertheless, the choice of spouse is far from simple. The nineteenth century marriages were determined mainly by social hierarchy. Men were supposed to support the family. People had to consider the future lives of their children when they got married. But marriage was, of course, a matter of individual choice. Character, preferences and attraction were also essential elements for life-long marriages.

All of Jane Austen’s novels ponder the factors that should guide this choice of partner in life. However, Jane Austen is the argument of this thesis, whereas all her novels revolve around the balance of all factors, individual novels seem to focus more or less on specific factors. In some external, social or economic factors are more
salient; while in others there are psychological concerns of compatibility or moral questions.

To understand Austen’s view of marriage, we will have to study some of her most profound works. The first part of the thesis will deal with external factors. Money, as we mentioned, has always been one of the most important outward factors for people to determine the choices of their spouses. That is the reason Austen’s very first novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, is chosen to begin with. Money issue is the main focus in this book. The two Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne, have different opinions in relation to money and happiness. Their marital choices will be examined in this chapter. In addition to money factor, rank is also a major social issue back then. People are supposed to marry in their own rank. What happens if a woman chooses to marry a man outside of her own rank? In chapter two, we will deal with this problem by study another of Austen’s novel, *Emma*. Emma Woodhouse, who belongs to high social rank, launches her several rank-oriented interference in relation to her friend, Harriet Smith’s marriage.

Except for outward factors, some inward factors, as will be examined in the second part of the thesis, also play deciding roles in the choice of a spouse. Such as *Pride and Prejudice*, one of Austen’s most playful works, which is centered on the question of equality of minds. The two good marriages between Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley, as well as Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy, show the importance of this inward factor plays when choosing a life-long partner. The fourth chapter, to talk about moral values, which is also an important inward factor in making marital choices in the Austen’s more serious work, *Mansfield Park*. Fanny Price, who is the only one with consistent principles and moral values, is praised by Austen.

With the deep study of so many different marriages, we will be able to see how important roles those factors play for people to establish happy lives. Furthermore, there will be some discussion of bad choices. The ones who ignore those factors, all end up with bad or unsatisfactory marriages.
Certainly, for over two centuries, there have been a great number of scholars who have analyzed Austen’s works. There are numerous studies concerning her writing style, the art of using rhetoric, her realistic skill, as well as the study of the themes, such as marriage, social and economic influences and many other aspects of her works. What makes this thesis different from other critical works is its focus on specific factors in each of four novels, which together can be said to form a clear picture of Jane Austen’s view of marriage.
Chapter One: The Mercenary and the Unworldly

*Sense and Sensibility* develops around two sisters with different personalities, Elinor Dashwood and Marianne Dashwood, and their love lives. Elinor Dashwood, the oldest daughter in the family who is nineteen years old, is the one with strong sense and ability of self-control. Elinor has been long attached to Edward Ferrars, the oldest son of a rich but selfish widow. On one hand, she is sure of Edward’s attachment to herself; but on the other hand, she has no idea of the reason of his reserved and ambiguous behaviour to her, until she finds out Edward has been trapped in an imprudent engagement to another young lady, Miss Lucy Steele, for four years. She controls her own sufferings, faces everyone and deals with everything with her good sense. In the end, Elinor and Edward are able to marry after all that they have been through.

Marianne Dashwood, a sensitive and attractive girl who is two years younger than Elinor, is “everything but prudent” (9). Her first strong attachment to John Willoughby, who attracts her in every way she fancies, ends up with her heart broken because Willoughby chooses money over love. Surviving from the severe pain of losing Willoughby, Marianne gets to see the true colour of that irresponsible man and realizes that it is Colonel Brandon who has always loved her and stood by her. Uniting both love and fortune, Marianne makes her second, yet more sensible choice and marries Colonel Brandon.

This chapter will mainly focus on the ‘money’ issue as dealt with in *Sense and Sensibility*. What role does money play in the choice of spouse, and in what degree? Money has always played an important part in matrimony. In this Austen’s very first novel, she focuses on different ways people deal with affection and money in relation to matrimony, with sense and sensibility to varying degrees.
In chapter seventeen, Elinor and Marianne discuss the relationship between money and happiness:

“Strange that it would!” cried Marianne. “What have wealth or grandeur to do with happiness?”

“Grandeur has but little,” said Elinor, “but wealth has much to do with it.”

“Elinor, for shame!” said Marianne; “money can only give happiness where there is nothing else to give it. Beyond a competence, it can afford no real satisfaction as far as mere self is concerned.” (105)

From here we can see that the two sisters have totally different opinions about the role money plays in the course of pursuing happiness. Whom should we agree with? The novel shows us two extremes: the mercenary, who cares only for money; and those who do not care for money at all – whom we may call “the unworldly”. We will take a closer look at the two kinds of people, how they deal with marriage problems confronted with money issue and how some of them change from one extreme to another. So what is Austen’s answer to this argumentative question?

First let us take a look at the one extreme kind – the mercenary, best shown in three women: Mrs. John Dashwood, Mrs. Ferrars and Miss Lucy Steele. Mrs. John Dashwood, wife of Mr. John Dashwood who is the Dashwood sisters’ half-brother from their father’s first marriage, is a “narrow-minded and selfish” woman (7). She immediately takes over Norland after old Mr. Dashwood’s death and does not approve her husband’s intention of providing some financial support to Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters, although John Dashwood has promised his dying father to “do everything in his power to make them comfortable” (7). This is because she considers half-blood as “no relationship at all” (12). She also eliminates her husband’s plan of paying them an annuity. She even feels sorry about the furniture Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters carry away to their small distant cottage: “she could not help feeling it hard that as Mrs. Dashwood’s income would be so trifling in
comparison with their own, she should have any handsome article of furniture” (32). Here Mrs. John Dashwood’s mercenary quality is clearly shown. She has no sympathy for the miserable Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters. She takes over their house and is only anxious for them to leave as soon as possible. Her greed even makes her husband a more selfish person than he used to be. Greed for money makes her a cold-hearted and selfish person.

Mrs. Ferrars, Mrs. John Dashwood, Edward Ferrars and Robert Ferrars’ mother, a wealthy widow, is “a little, thin woman” with a countenance of “pride and ill nature” (262). She is furious with her oldest son Edward for his secret engagement with Lucy Steele, because she wishes him to marry either a wealthy lady or a lady of high rank, or both. Nothing else has any value for her. She first tempts Edward to marry a wealthy lady by offering him a Norfolk estate which “brings in a good thousand a year” but fails. She then threatens his certain poverty “if he still persisted in his low connection”, by “never see him again” and doing all she can to prevent him from acquiring any profession. (296) When she finally realizes that Edward will not break the engagement, she dismisses him forever. Her mercenary nature makes her rather lose a son, than being connected and sharing her fortune with a woman of neither money nor rank. As Judy Simons puts it: “Mrs. Ferrars’ callousness towards Edward, when her love is translated into monetary terms, is an extreme version of all that is most unnatural” (46). She rejects Edward, her own son, with a cold heart. She ignores his poverty and awkward situation and for sheer spite, settles a fortune on her second son, Robert. Even though she finally accepts Edward and Elinor’s marriage, she remains a completely mercenary person.

Lucy Steele is “ignorant and illiterate” (147). Being a young attractive girl with neither education nor too much fortune, Lucy has her own design for a secured life. When she is still secretly engaged with Edward Ferrars, she and her sister do their best to please Mrs. John Dashwood and Mrs. Ferrars, to pave the way for being the official Mrs. Edward Ferrars one day “in order to gain entrance into the fashionable world” (Simons, 48). When she learns that Mrs. Ferrars is quite angry about Edward’s secret engagement with her, and has made Edward’s younger brother
Robert Ferrars her sole heir, she adopts a new scheme. Robert becomes her new object to achieve the original goal. Edward eventually finds out her tricks and ends up “believing her capable of the utmost meanness of wanton nature” (408). Lucy’s mercenary instinct, all her greedy ambition is fully shown from the transference of her affection from Edward to Robert. She does anything she can to secure “every advantage of fortune, with no other sacrifice than that of time and conscience” (419). She finally achieves the goal of moving up several steps of social ladder by marrying Robert Ferrars.

To sum up, through Mrs. John Dashwood, Mrs. Ferrars and Lucy Steele, Jane Austen shows us how mercenary people can be. Among them, they ignore great sorrow in the family, reject a son, inflict poverty and misery, and even shift love from one person to another, all because of the only reason – money. Money makes them become cold-hearted and selfish creatures. They seize money, but let go of true hearts and real happiness.

Contrary to those mercenaries, there is another extreme in Sense and Sensibility – the unworldly, namely those who do not think of money at all, such as Marianne Dashwood and John Willoughby. From the quotation above of the conversation between Marianne and Elinor, we know that Marianne does not agree that there should be any money issue involved in true happiness. Instead, she prefers things spiritual, such as music and books. That is why Willoughby immediately captures her heart after a few days of their short acquaintance.

…when she heard him declare that of music and dancing he was passionately fond, she gave him such a look of approbation ...” “Their taste was strikingly alike. The same books, the same passages were idolized by each … He acquiesced in all her decisions, caught all her enthusiasm … (58)

Knowing Willoughby’s same interest and taste with hers, Marianne tells Elinor her certainty about Willoughby as a good man although their acquaintance has been formed for only one week. “It is not time or opportunity that is to determine intimacy; it is
disposition alone … of Willoughby my judgment has long been formed” (70). This is Marianne’s defence when Elinor cautions her about Willoughby. Marianne’s extreme romantic nature makes her to do everything by following her own heart, including falling in love with Willoughby. The things they do together are all about the pursuit of spiritual happiness. She ignores everything else, all practical and material considerations. Young and romantic Marianne cannot judge Willoughby with a clear mind. Her love for him is based on her unrealistic ideal which is unattainable. As a contemporary anonymous reviewer puts it: “Her sensibilities are all in the extreme” (in Littlewood 264). This unworldly felicity with no material foundation is doomed to failure. When she is rejected by Willoughby and learns of his engagement with another wealthy young lady, her whole world falls apart. All her previous assertions about happiness, money and Willoughby are now mocking her. She falls in love soon before she has a clear mind and good judgment, but it takes much more time for her to get over her love.

After recovering from a serious illness which almost kills her, Marianne realizes that her unrealistic mind should be restrained. She decides to be more like her sister, Elinor, who has more sense than she does. She tells Elinor:

My illness has made me think. It has given me leisure and calmness for serious recollection … I considered the past; I saw in my own behaviour since the beginning of our acquaintance with him last autumn nothing but a series of imprudence towards myself and want of kindness to others. I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave. (384)

Marianne finally realizes her extreme sensibility and her unworldly nature will not bring her any happiness but misery. That is also when she starts to see Colonel Brandon with a more sensible mind and finds that he is the one who has been always standing by her and is worthy of her love. With Colonel Brandon, she breaks away from the old Marianne, and becomes a new improved Marianne with both sense and sensibility. And Colonel Brandon’s fortune secures them a carefree life ever after.
As for the trouble-maker, John Willoughby, he too changes a great deal as the novel develops, from a romantic attractive man very much like Marianne, to a selfish mercenary. Although at the end he realizes his love for Marianne, there is no way to bring her back to his life again.

Willoughby has some money, “a pretty little estate of his own” (54-5). He is not rich, but is still possible for him to lead a comfortable life. Besides, he has an aunt “whose possessions he was to inherit” (54). His appearance and air, his residence, his behavior all make Marianne consider him as a well-bred wealthy man. But as revealed later in this novel by himself: “My fortune was never large, and I had always been expensive, always in the habit of associating with people of better income than myself. Every year since my coming of age … had added to my debts …” (355). He cannot afford his extravagant way of living, and his careless and irresponsible attitude to money leads to his financial crisis. By the time Willoughby meets Marianne, he is already heavily in debt.

Willoughby lacks responsibility not only in relation to money, but also to women. He is not very serious about Marianne at the beginning of their acquaintance. As he confesses at the end of the novel: “Careless of her happiness, thinking only of my own amusement, giving way to feelings which I had always been too much in the habit of indulging … to make myself pleasing to her without any design of returning her affection” (355). The way he treats Marianne is the same as what he did to Eliza, another poor girl who has been seduced by him, is pregnant with his child and abandoned by him. He enjoys attracting pretty young girls’ attention and never cares about taking any responsibility. He is glad to play the romantic role with Marianne, do whatever she likes or expects him to do, as long as there are no other serious problems bothering him. Though careless and irresponsible about women, he nevertheless finds himself in love with Marianne finally. He has been always the unworldly Willoughby when he is with Marianne – caring only for music and books. They do spend some really happy time together. “I found myself, by sensible degrees, sincerely fond of her, and the happiest hours of my life were what I spent with her when I felt my intentions
were strictly honourable and my feelings blameless” (356). He realizes his affection for Marianne is really from the bottom of his heart. And he is “fully determined on paying my addresses to her” (356). He does prepare to propose to Marianne.

However, the consequences of his carelessness catch up with him and prevent Willoughby from proposing to Marianne. His aunt finds out his past sin with Eliza and wants him to marry her. His refusal makes his aunt dismiss him and he loses his inheritance. That makes his embarrassed situation even worse. The unworldly Willoughby cannot bear the idea of poverty. “My affection for Marianne, my thorough conviction of her attachment to me – it was all insufficient to outweigh that dread of poverty…” (359) The proposal idea is dropped. His fear of being poor makes him abandon Marianne and their unworldly felicity. Instead, he decides to marry Miss Grey, a woman with a lot of money but no love and respect from him. “…it had been for some time my intention to reestablish my circumstances by marrying a woman of fortune” (356). He is well aware of his money problems – little fortune, and has been long trapped in debt. And he is also well aware of his handsome appearance and good behavior will be a big advantage and do him good in front of women. So he has been planning on improving his situation by means of a wealthy lady for a long time. His falling in love with Marianne is something unexpected. Since she is a girl with everything but fortune, it will not do. It is the very thing – fortune – that Willoughby is afraid of losing the most. So he chooses a mercenary marriage. He is financially secured, but it the meantime, he himself, the old unworldly Willoughby, becomes a mercenary too, just like Lucy Steele as we mentioned earlier, who also leaves the man who is worth loving and chooses a mercenary marriage. He sells himself and his principles in exchange for a wealthy and extravagant life. But he never gains any happiness from his marriage, and he is in constant sorrow about hurting and losing Marianne for the “stupid, rascally folly” of his own heart (360).

Having seen two extreme kinds of people we find that neither the mercenary nor the unworldly kind is able to lead a really happy life. So there must be a balance between these two kinds. Elinor, as well as the reformed Marianne, is Jane Austen’s
answer to the question of money. Possessing both sense and sensibility, Elinor sets a
good example for her sister Marianne and for all the readers as well. So how does
Elinor choose?

When Elinor begins to see Edward Ferrars as a future husband, she believes
him to be a choice of sense as well as sensibility. Edward is the “the eldest son of a
man who had died very rich”, although “the whole of his fortune depended on the will
of his mother” (19). Furthermore, he intends to take orders and hence to work for his
living. Besides money reasons, Edward himself is a good man: “his mind
well-informed, his enjoyment of books exceedingly great, his imagination lively, his
observation just and correct, and his taste delicate and pure” (25-6). When her heart
chooses him, her head agrees.

But their attachment does not run smoothly. There are two obstacles from
Edward’s side: his family disapproval becomes, what we may call, his head obstacle;
and his own reserve is what may be called his heart obstacle. When Lucy Steele
reveals her secret engagement to Edward, it makes Elinor’s hope of Edward as her
future husband even more impossible. However, she struggles to control herself, to
conceal her own feeling and to care for her family. “Elinor’s responsiveness enables
her both to be discriminating towards others and to have the related capacity of
entering into what others besides herself are feeling” (Hardy 19). She suffers the pain
of knowing Edward’s engagement with Lucy, but in the meantime, she can still be a
confidante for Lucy and a help for the suffering Marianne. Lucy’s final choice of
Robert and a mercenary marriage give Edward his liberty. He is free to propose to
Elinor, hence his heart obstacle is removed.

However, the head obstacle still remains. Edward has been disinherited by his
mother and is poor. Before he can marry Elinor, he needs to solve this critical
problem, because “they were neither of them quite enough in love to think that three
hundred and fifty pounds a year would supply them with the comforts of life” (411).
The affection between Elinor and Edward is different from the one between Marianne
and Willoughby: the latter think only of feelings, poetry, music etc, and never about
money; but the former are more realistic and sensible. They do care about feelings,
but they also understand that there will not be any true happiness without a financial foundation. Fortunately, they do get support both from Mrs. Ferrars and from Colonel Brandon. Mrs. Ferrars can only secure them “two hundred and fifty at the utmost” (417). But with the employment Colonel Brandon provides, it is possible for them to make a living. Therefore, the head obstacle is removed. They are not rich, but they can marry responsibly.

Elinor’s conduct and her marriage with Edward set a good example for Marianne, which together with her own sad experience, lead to her insight about marriage. She understands that a good marriage is based on a balance between head and heart, sense and sensibility, which makes her capable of appreciating the true worth of Colonel Brandon. His wise head and warm heart, his long-standing affection for her as well as his stable fortune, enable him to secure Marianne a good and happy life. Her second and more sensible choice of Colonel Brandon also answers Austen’s money question.

Money is the financial basis which cannot be ignored at all. But people like Mrs. Ferrars or Lucy Steele, who only care about money, would rather give up true feeling to fortune and rank, are mercenary selfish people. “It is for example the unworthy Lucy Steele who gains fortune and favour, but it is she who least deserves them” is Simons’ attitude towards mercenary Lucy (Simons 51). The other extreme kind, the unworldly Marianne who never thinks of money at all during her first attachment with Willoughby, is taught a lesson about responsibility. Elinor’s marriage with Edward is secured by a steady sufficient income, but what is more important, is their true feeling about each other. “They were brought together by mutual affection with the warmest approbation of their real friends; their intimate knowledge of each other seemed to make their happiness certain.” (411) Elinor, a girl with both sense and sensibility, gets her happy ending. Her story “demonstrates that good sense is not incompatible with sensibility” (Simons 44).

So both sisters end up in a happy and financially secure marriage. And although Elinor proves to be right in every way, Marianne also proves to be right in
one way, as we see in the discussion between her and Elinor at the beginning of this chapter over money and happiness: “money can only give happiness where there is nothing else to give it. Beyond a competence, it can afford no real satisfaction as far as mere self is concerned” (105). Only with a basic “competence” can true feeling lead to a happy marriage.
Chapter Two: Marriage and Class

As the title of the novel *Emma* indicates, the story develops around a young woman whose name is Emma. Unlike other heroines in Jane Austen’s novels who are either poor or of inferior social rank, “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence” (1). She resides permanently and comfortably in a small town called Hartfield with her father, Mr. Woodhouse, where everyone “looked up to them” (4). J.F. Burrows argues that for Emma, “whose ‘class-status’ is not at risk, the struggle that most matters is for self-definition and the chief need is to reconcile her own aspirations with the expectations of those closest to her” (189). Therefore, as Roger Gard puts it: “she makes the series of wonderful imaginative mistakes,” above all in her pursuit of match-making (159). Mr. Knightley, Emma’s brother-in-law and also long-standing friend, observes this with a cool eye, objecting to Emma’s interferences but in vain. However, Emma finally realizes Mr. Knightley’s good judgment and her own long-established attachment to him. The novel ends with three happy marriages, one of which is Emma’s own.

Rank or class is very much considered in choosing spouse in *Emma*, and it is also the main focus in this chapter. We will begin by analyzing Emma’s interference concerning her friend and protégée Harriet Smith. Harriet has two marital choices, Robert Martin and Mr. Elton, and Emma seriously misjudges the situation in contrast to Mr. Knightley’s good judgment. We will also consider the marriage between Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill, which shows an instance where people from different social ranks may marry happily if there is equality of minds.

Firstly, let us take a closer look on Emma’s machinations in relation to Harriet’s marriage. Harriet is introduced as “the natural daughter of somebody” at the beginning of the novel (23). Though pretty, her unknown parentage defines her social
status as inferior to Emma. Nevertheless, Emma is charmed by Harriet’s beauty and pleased with her manners. She also imagines Harriet being the daughter of an aristocrat and so sees a role for herself. With Harriet, Emma “would improve her … detach her from her bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society” and also “would form her opinions and manners” (24). Also, Harriet’s admiration for Emma and respect of her social status, makes her very ready to be guided by Emma in almost everything.

Emma and Harriet’s first discussion of rank is about Mr. Robert Martin, Harriet’s acquaintance who is a farmer with some fortune, and considered as “very good-humoured and obliging” by Harriet (29). Emma, however, thinks him as “coarse and unpolished” and “unfit to a girl who wanted only a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect” (24). Emma’s preconceived notion of Mr. Martin remains the same after her first meeting with him. When Harriet receives a letter from Mr. Martin with a proposal of marriage, she does not know what to do and wants Emma’s advice. Emma, who claims to give no opinion on such issue, has already made herself clear enough and dropped a hint of an absolute refusal. When Harriet finally determines to refuse Mr. Martin’s proposal, Emma feels very happy for her wise decision. She thinks Mr. Martin’s proposal will be degradation for Harriet, because of his low rank in Hartfield. His work must deprive him of books, but “his being illiterate and coarse need not disturb” Harriet and herself (36-7). She even thinks that she could never be a friend of Harriet were she to accept Mr. Martin’s proposal since she would then choose to throw herself “out of all good society” (61). She cannot bear the idea of being associated with a farmer’s wife. Arnold Kettle disapproves of Emma’s view of “human relationship in term of class snobbery and property qualifications” (116). He, who argues that the “limitation and the narrowness of the Hartfield world is the limitation of class society”, feels that Mr. Knightley’s influence brings Emma to a “more humane understanding” (119) (116). Booth and Burrows too approve of Knightley’s role in Emma’s development.

For Harriet, “she feels she should comply, albeit reluctantly, with Emma’s obvious preference for a refusal” (Burrows 118). Apparently, there is disappointment
to some extent on her side which is hard to avoid. But her reliance on Emma makes herself convinced by everything Emma says about Mr. Martin, although she can only respond “in a mortified voice” (35) or “with a degree of grave displeasure” sometimes (37). After her refusal of Mr. Martin’s proposal, she is “rather low all the evening” and says she might never be invited by the Martins anymore “in rather a sorrowful tone” (63). Before Emma puts the class notions in her mind, Harriet saw many merits in Mr. Martin and spent some really happy time with him. But Emma gradually persuades her of Mr. Martin’s disadvantages. Her taste is formed in accordance with Emma’s. Being a girl with pretty face but a weak mind, and also with a desire of ranking among people in good society, the refusal of Mr. Martin’s proposal is sad, but inevitable. At the same time, she feels glad of securing Emma’s friendship and intimacy with her.

Mr. Knightley sees the whole thing with a total different attitude. He thinks the refusal of such favorable proposal a great loss on Harriet’s side, rather than on Mr. Martin’s, and he blames Emma for her bad influence on Harriet. On one hand, Mr. Knightley holds a high opinion on Mr. Martin. He thinks him “an excellent young man”, “open, straightforward, and very well judging” (68). He points out Martin’s ability to support a family. On the other hand, he thinks Emma is unrealistic in placing Harriet too high on the social ladder. He agrees her prettiness and good temper, but she has neither “birth, nature” nor “education” good enough to hope for “any connection higher than Robert Martin” (70). The degradation from such marriage which Emma claims on Harriet’s side is none at all. “A degradation to illegitimacy and ignorance to be married to a respectable, intelligent, gentleman-farmer!” is Mr. Knightley’s opinion (71). He assures Emma of Harriet’s being “safe, respectable, and happy for ever” on marrying Robert Martin; and he reproaches Emma for ruining her friend’s good fortune (74).

Emma is disturbed by Mr. Knightley’s reproach, since she has “a sort of habitual respect for his judgment in general” (75). But as we learn from the beginning of the novel that: “The real evils, indeed, of Emma’s situations were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of
herself” (2). Being a rich young woman and mistress of a respectable family, Emma belongs to a high social class and is accustomed to being looked up to, being regarded with deference. Her disposition is thus very much related to her class superiority. She considers her thought as superior to anyone else’s as her rank is. Those are Emma’s disadvantages, and also the reason she argues with Mr. Knightley over Harriet’s marital choice. Although there is the habitual respect for Knightley’s good judgment, Emma has not realized any evil in her disposition, therefore she is unwilling to be confronted with objection from anyone, even from Mr. Knightley.

In the end, Harriet marries Robert Martin, which proves Mr. Knightley right in this matter. After several mistaken marital expectations, Harriet happily accepts Robert Martin’s second proposal. Harriet’s parentage becomes clear at the end of the novel and proves her to be “the daughter of a tradesman, rich enough to afford her the comfortable maintenance …” (584). Thus, her “blood of gentility” equals Mr. Martin’s social rank (584). They are financially secured. Above all, there has been a long-time true attachment between them. All these give Emma reasons to believe their having a happy life together. And they may expect more, “of security, stability, and improvement” in their marriage (584).

Apart from Robert Martin’s low rank and other disadvantages observed by Emma, there is another reason for her initial disapproval on Harriet’s accepting Robert Martin’s proposal. She has a secret hope of her dear friend’s marrying another man. It turns out that man has his own secret wishes too. As Walter Scott puts it: “We have the smiling and courteous vicar, who nourishes the ambitious hope of obtaining Miss Woodhouse’s hand” (65). Mr. Elton is the man we are talking about.

Emma has her reasons for her match-making between Mr. Elton and Harriet. She thinks him as “good-humoured, cheerful, obliging, and gentle” (37). In addition to these merits, Mr. Elton is “without low connections”, has a presumably sufficient income, and will not consider the birth of Harriet, all of which make Emma think the match a most suitable one (38). While Emma is busy instilling the idea of such a perfect match into Harriet’s mind and creates every opportunity for Mr. Elton and
Harriet to develop their mutual feelings, Mr. Elton, on the contrary, considers her efforts as an encouragement from Emma on her own account. He praises Harriet’s beauty only to please Emma; he takes Harriet’s picture to be framed in London only for Emma’s sake. But Emma has not the least idea of Mr. Elton’s inclination for her. Instead, she assures Harriet of a most promising match, where its “probability and its eligibility have really so equalled each other” (86). The probability is from the observation of Mr. Elton’s continuous gallant behaviour to Harriet and Harriet’s increasing confidence and hope; the eligibility is based on Mr. Elton’s social status: a vicar generally respected with no “low connections”, and Harriet’s position as Emma’s best friend, as well as Harriet’s presumed “noble” birth, all of which elevate her social rank accordingly. Her certainty on this matter is so unshakeable that when Mr. Knightley starts to question this attachment, she can not agree to him at all.

Mr. Knightley agrees that Mr. Elton as “a very good sort of man, and a very respectable vicar … but not at all likely to make an imprudent match. He knows the value of a good income as well as anybody”, that he “may talk sentimentally, but he will act rationally” (76). Mr. Knightley has met Mr. Elton in some male circles and knows his great desire of being acquainted with people with large fortunes. In Mr. Knightley’s view, there is no way that Elton would consider Harriet, who has neither money nor social background as a desirable wife. He tells Emma “if Elton is the man, I think it will be all labour in vain” (76).

Mr. Knightley is proved right again. It turns out that Mr. Elton has never taken Harriet into consideration. Instead, his object has always been Emma. Being rejected by Emma, and insulted by the idea of Emma’s expectation of him marrying Harriet Smith, Elton leaves the town and is immediately engaged to another lady with a respectable and independent fortune of “£ 10,000, or thereabouts” (215). His mercenary choice proves Mr. Knightley’s previous judgment of him correct. Meanwhile, because of “the misunderstanding surrounding Mr. Elton and his ambitious marital design on Emma”, she is very much humiliated too (Gard 161). Emma thinks “in fortune and consequence she was greatly his superior”, and Elton,
who is nobody compared to her social status, “only wanted to aggrandize and enrich himself” with his marital design (162). Here we see Emma’s awareness of class. Her sense of class superiority makes her feel humiliated by the proposal from a man who is inferior to her in all ways. She thinks Mr. Elton is by no means to be her equal. Moreover, her own “failure of see Elton properly – blinded typically not by Cupid but by the Harriet project” vexes her more deeply than ever (Gard 163). She finally recognizes Elton as being “a mock-modest affectation of submissiveness” (Burrows 187). And she also recognizes her own foolishness and bad interference on Harriet: “Deceived myself, I did very miserably deceive you; and it will be a painful reflection to me for ever” (318).

However, Harriet deals with the truth with a calmer mind. She feels that the “affection of such a man as Mr. Elton would have been too great a distinction. She never could have deserved him” (169). Well aware of her poor situation, she is undoubtedly disappointed, but feels less miserable than Emma does. She blindly follows Emma’s advice, turns the right man down, sets high expectations on the man with no interest in her, and is disappointed by the truth, which Mr. Knightley has long been observed. W. A. Craik notes Harriet’s “‘hesitations, contradiction and tautology’ and aptly comments that ‘they reveal exactly the mind that never opposes an argument, but is never really swayed from its own original opinion’” (118)

Nonetheless, having spent a great deal of time with Emma and been influenced by her class awareness, Harriet “was less humble, and had fewer scruples than formerly” (499). She sets her eyes on the infinite superior Mr. Knightley. On one hand, Emma is astonished by Harriet’s bold imagination, on the other hand, she thinks herself has something to do with Harriet’s changes. “If Harriet, from being humble, were grown vain, it was her doing too” (500). She holds some guilty feeling towards Harriet. So she encourages Harriet with her inappropriate wishes, though unwillingly. But deep inside her heart, Emma thinks the match between Harriet and Mr. Knightley an impossible one. Because on Mr. Knightley side, it is “Such a debasement” (498). She secretly hopes Mr. Knightley will never agree a marriage which will sink him that
deep. Her class awareness makes her believe that only her equals to Mr. Knightley, and he must share the same idea with hers. As she expects, though out of true affection, rather than class equality, Mr. Knightley has always been in love with Emma. And with the acceptance of Mr. Martin’s second proposal of marriage, Harriet avoids the wretchedness from a wrong expectation of marriage again.

Having seen Emma’s mistaken efforts on Harriet’s marriage, let us turn to another interesting couple, whose attachment is completely hidden from everyone, except the observant Mr. Knightley – Mr. Frank Churchill and Miss Jane Fairfax.

Jane Fairfax is an orphan, born in Highbury – the same town with Emma’s residence, lives with her aunt and grandmother “with no advantage of connection or improvement” (191). Fortunately, she falls into good hands. One of her father’s friends takes on the responsibility for raising her. So she goes to live with the family of Colonel Campbell in London. Grown up in good society with an excellent education, Jane’s “heart and understanding has received every advantage of discipline and culture” (192). In possession of both outward attraction – “very pleasing beauty” and “remarkably elegant” behaviour and inward virtues – clever mind and great musical talent, she is a favourite of everyone, except Emma who is a little jealous of her, and holds a prejudiced opinion against her reserve and cold manners.

Jane’s secret lover, Frank Churchill, is the son of Mr. Weston. But since his mother’s death, he lives with his aunt and uncle, takes their surname Churchill and becomes the legal heir of their fortune. His expected visit to his father in Highbury is postponed, but he earns a good reputation among most people because of his civilly and handsomely written letters to Mr. and Mrs. Weston explaining and apologizing for the delay. Highbury blames delay of a tyrannical aunt, Mrs. Churchill, a very tyrannical rich woman. Emma, who claims never to think of marriage, determines to like Frank and even imagines him as a perfect match for herself with regard to age, character and connection. When seeing him in person, she is even more convinced: “a very good-looking young man – height, air, address, all were unexceptional … he looked quick and sensible” (225).
However, as Frank’s being more acquainted with the people in Highbury, some of his bad sides are gradually revealed. He has been long engaged to Jane Fairfax secretly, but because of the tyrannical aunt, both of them keep this relationship in dark. It is not an easy thing for Jane, and it leads to some reserve in her manner. Frank, on the contrary, seems to enjoy the deception. He goes to London, with the excuse of having his hair cut, arranging for a piano to be sent to Jane anonymously, which makes her situation even harder. “His dandyism is revealed not just by the action itself, but also by the way in which he justifies it” (Sales 144). The triviality of the errand disturbs even Emma’s good opinion of him a little. Not only that, when he learns of Emma’s dislike of Jane, he even makes fun of Jane, comments on her pale complexion and later on her odd way of doing her hair. His disrespect for his fiancée is not suitable for a true gentleman. Mr. Knightley makes his comment on Frank even more severe: “Just the trifling, silly fellow I took him for” (245).

Worse than that, Frank even flirts with Emma publicly and privately. He is, as Sales notes, “a disruptive figure who nevertheless has easy access to exclusive places” (144). Emma, who is thought a young woman superior to anyone, is led on by Frank’s ambiguous behaviour with her, convinced that he is in love with her. Everyone thinks he is courting Emma, including Emma herself; but no one knows he is actually attached to another young woman among them. Frank is no doubt a trouble-maker.

Fortunately, Frank is able to reveal his long term engagement eventually. The reason for Frank to publicize his engagement is because of his aunt’s death. During his absence from Highbury on attending his sick aunt, Emma discovers that she is not so much attached to Frank and resolves to be on her guard and be only a normal friend to him. As confessed by Frank in his letter to Mrs. Weston at the end of the novel, Emma is just his “ostensible object” to “assist a concealment” to him (529).

Once Frank and Jane’s engagement is known, everyone approves of it. Emma has “no doubt of their being happy together”; Mr. Knightley also thinks Frank is a lucky man “to have drawn such a prize” so early in life (517). So do the people in Highbury, who have been so ill used, are “all delighted to forgive him” and “eager to promote his happiness” (518). Even the narrator agrees the match “the very best thing
that Frank could possibly have done” through the thought of Mr. Weston (484).

Surprisingly, the consensus about this match is more or less against the criticism of the inequality between classes of the previous ones. Frank is clearly socially more superior. He is the son of a gentleman; whereas Jane is the daughter of “Lieut. Fairfax of the – regiment of infantry”, and becomes an orphan at three years old (191). Frank is also much wealthier, since he is the heir of the Churchills – “people of large fortune” (366). Jane must support herself as a governess – since she is “an unprovided woman with no prospects in life” (Kettle 117). A governess’ occupation will certainly move her down the social ladder. As Emma says: “A single woman with a very narrow income must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid … but a single woman of good fortune is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else” (100-01).

So why do people approve a match with such great disparity? Firstly, Jane has been raised in a good family and received an excellent education, “her heart and understanding had received every advantage of discipline and culture” (192). She also has many accomplishments and is admired by everyone; while Frank is gifted, but too idle. He does not have a formal occupation, but seems to concern himself with his own amusement mostly. Secondly, Jane has all the elegant manners, “a very well-behaved young lady”, “a sweet, interesting creature” (202, 336). Frank is more careless and inconsiderate, embarrassing Jane with a secret gift, and flirting with Emma in front of everyone, without thinking how much Jane might suffer, and careless of Emma’s peace of mind.

Most importantly, Jane is the one with high morals, whereas much of Frank’s questionable conduct seems to cast doubt on his morals. That is why when their secret engagement is announced, people blame him more for the deception. Emma thinks it “a system of hypocrisy and deceit, espionage and treachery” (482). His inappropriate conduct has not been gentleman-like, and not in line with his social rank. But he shows repentance, saying to Emma: “What an impudent dog I was! How could I dare ——” (579). He realizes that he has made mistakes, manipulated people. Thus it is easy for people to see Jane as the superior one. With her “amiable, sweet, very
accomplished and superior” qualities, she will improve Frank, as Kettle describes: “a young man whose total quality is a good deal less than admirable”, to the full extent (124) (117). With Frank’s fortune and social rank, Jane is able to live the life she deserves and “a right to move in the first circle” (360). And by marrying Jane, who is more moral and better behaved, Frank will be improved and a real gentleman eventually. As Emma states: “It is fit that the fortune should be on his side, for I think the merit will be all on hers” (507).

Nevertheless, there is true affection and attachment between Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill. They both hide their secret engagement for a long period and suffer a great deal from the pain of deceiving their family members and friends who love them. As Emma says about Jane: “She loves him, then, excessively, I suppose … Her affection must have overpowered her judgment” (506). Put thus her prejudice aside, Emma can see Jane more objectively. She understands that Jane, being a clever and honest girl, would not do such a disgraceful thing making fool of everyone, if it were not for a true love. As for Frank, his choice is obviously disinterested based on his love in Jane herself.

With true affection between them both, and complementary to each other, they are able to build a happy life together.

In conclusion, Emma is one of Austen’s greatest achievements. Emma Woodhouse has made many mistakes in interfering Harriet Smith’s marital choice. Because of Harriet’s social status, Emma directs her to refuse Robert Martin’s proposal of marriage in favour of Mr. Elton, in the hope of raising her in a society, causes a humiliation to all involved. In the end, she realizes the true value of Mr. Martin and agrees he is Harriet’s equal. Class is the main outward factor that leads Emma to a wrong way. Her initial motive of elevating Harriet to a higher class by way of marriage proves to be a vain attempt. She also learns the foolishness of her own conduct.

Emma’s mistakes are all observed by Mr. Knightley. His good judgment is finally appreciated by Emma. He becomes both a teacher and a lover, and Emma is
willing to learn from him, be improved by him and share her happiness with him. As Booth declares: “The chief corrective is Knightley. His commentary on Emma’s errors is a natural expression of his love” (143). It is Mr. Knightley, who “appeals to duty, good sense and filial affection and speaks … tells some austere truths and deflates some of Emma’s idle fancies…” (Burrows 201). Thus Emma gains a more realistic view on the importance of class and rank and to act with more humility and responsibility in her efforts to promote the happiness of others.

As for Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill, they transcend the class limitations. Frank, as the socially superior one, marries Jane, who is morally more superior to him. Through this marriage, Jane will improve her poor situation and return to good society; in the meantime, with the good influence of Jane’s merits, Frank will certainly become a mature gentleman. In spite of the disparity in rank and fortune, there is equality of minds and temper between them, which matters more and leads them to a happy marriage. In the next chapter we will further study the equality of minds, as one of important inward factors to affect people’s marital choices, as reflected in the novel *Pride and Prejudice*. 
Part II

Chapter Three: An Equal Mind

As one of Jane Austen’s most popular and successful novels, *Pride and Prejudice* develops mainly around a twenty-year-old young woman called Elizabeth Bennet, who is the second of the Bennets’ five daughters. Elizabeth is an attractive woman with lively spirit and a witty mind. She also tends to judge people from the first impression, which leads her to hold a prejudiced opinion towards Mr. Darcy during their first acquaintance. Mr. Darcy, eight years older than Elizabeth, tall, handsome and wealthy, disgusts her with his arrogant manner at the beginning of the novel, but is attracted by her strong personality. With the equality of their minds, Elizabeth gradually realizes Darcy is a man worthy of being respected and loved. Darcy finally overcomes Elizabeth’s prejudice and wins her true love. A similar marriage, which is also based on equality of minds, is that between Elizabeth’s elder sister, Jane Bennet, a beautiful woman with sweet temper, and Charles Bingley, a good-tempered rich man, who is also Darcy’s best friend.

Compared to the two elder Bennet sisters’ good marriages, there are, at the same time, some marriages based on bad choices. There is no equality of minds among those couples. Charlotte Lucas, an intelligent woman, who is also Elizabeth’s best friend, marries William Collins, a clergyman who lacks judgment and manners. Likewise, there is the marriage between Lydia Bennet and George Wickham, the former being a silly and untamed young woman, who elopes with the latter, a man of superficial charm and mercenary nature.

Outward factors, such as money and class as discussed in last two chapters which play important roles in marital choices, are not the major concern in Elizabeth and Jane’s choices. Both factors are in place before these two young women permit themselves to take an interest in the two men. Hence we now move on to study the
inward factors. Equality of minds, as being one of the most important inward factors to secure happy marriages, is best shown in this novel, and will also be the main focus in this chapter. We will first study the two good marriages among the elder Bennet sisters and their handsome, wealthy and gentlemanlike lovers – Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy. Then we will take a look at the two bad marriages where there is no equality of minds between the couples: Charlotte Lucas and William Collins; as well as Lydia Bennet and George Wickham.

The attachment between Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley first emerges at the beginning of the novel. Both of them make a very good impression on each other on their first acquaintance. Bingley appears to be a good-looking gentleman with “a pleasant countenance, and easy, unaffected manners” (11). Jane, at the same time, is also admired by Bingley with her pretty face and sweet temper. Furthermore, both Jane and Bingley are amiable and modest. Jane is an empathetic woman who is always willing to see the good side on everyone; while Bingley, with his high regard for his best friend – Mr. Darcy, is accustomed to trust in whatever Darcy says. As Jocelyn Harries states: “Bingley’s attachment to Jane, and his ready compliance with Darcy’s opinion of her, precipitate the plot” (85).

However, not everyone thinks this attachment a pleasant thing. Unlike Jane’s mother, Mrs. Bennet, who rejoices with Bingley’s easy-going personality and large fortune – nearly an hundred thousand pounds inherited from his father, Bingley’s sister, Caroline Bingley, thinks Jane is inferior to Bingley and does not approve of this attachment. Just when everyone, including Jane herself, believes Bingley is going to propose marriage to Jane, his sudden departure surprises them and disappoints Jane and her family very much. It is Mr. Darcy who prevents Bingley from making his proposal. Darcy thinks Bingley’s marriage to Jane a disgrace considering her mother and younger sisters’ foolish behaviours. But the most important reason is, as a contemporary anonymous reviewer puts it: “Mr. Bingley has great respect for his friend’s judgment; and, being given to understand, that Jane did not return his passion, absents himself from Netherfield, and leaves Jane to wear the willow” (in Southam
45). There is steady friendship between Bingley and Darcy. “In understanding, Darcy was the superior. Bingley was by no means deficient, but Darcy was clever” (16). Therefore, Bingley always values Darcy’s opinion, and because of his own modesty, it is easy for him to trust Darcy’s judgment. As Darcy later explains the interference in his letter to Elizabeth:

Bingley has great natural modesty, with a stronger dependence on my judgment than on his own. To convince him, therefore, that he had deceived himself, was no very difficult point. To persuade him against returning into Hertfordshire, when that conviction had been given, was scarcely the work of a moment. (168)

Convinced that Jane is not in love with him, Bingley chooses to leave to avoid an unsuitable marriage.

Jane is undoubtedly upset about Bingley’s leaving. But her same modest disposition makes her believe that Bingley was never in love with her, and she tries to persuade herself and Elizabeth of her own indifference: “He may live in my memory as the most amiable man of my acquaintance, but that is all. I have nothing either to hope or fear, and nothing to reproach him with … I have not that pain” (116). Also, on receiving Miss Bingley’s letter, Jane is more convinced of Bingley’s indifference to herself and his wishes to establish another attachment with Darcy’s younger sister. She tells Elizabeth that: “it has not been more than an error of fancy on my side, and that it has done no harm to any one but myself” (116). “It is often nothing but our own vanity that deceives us. Women fancy admiration means more than it does” (118). Jane thinks it is her own fancy and vanity that have deceived her. Now with Mr. Bingley’s sudden leave, she trusts in Miss Bingley’s reasonable assumption and believes she and Bingley are not in love at all.

When they meet again after a long time separation, Jane tries to keep showing her indifference to Bingley, but in vain. As Elizabeth has observed long ago, Jane “still cherished a very tender affection for Bingley” (191). Bingley, on the other hand, also feels the same way about Jane as before: “He found her as handsome as she had been last year; as good-natured, and as unaffected …” (281). Even Darcy confesses to
Elizabeth that Bingley’s attachment to Jane “was unabated” (309). Hence, they are separated by their own modesty, they both trust in others easily.

With the misunderstandings cleared up, they are engaged. Their marriage, as Elizabeth sees it, has “for basis the excellent understanding and super-excellent disposition of Jane, and a general similarity of feeling and taste between her and himself” (289). Jane admires Bingley from the beginning as a “sensible, good-humoured, lively” man (14). Bingley also admires Jane’s beauty and temper. Their mutual respect and good understanding allow them to build a happy marriage together. “Good sense, and solid judgment, a natural complacency of temper, a desire of obliging, and an easiness to be obliged, which result in the silent, the serene happiness” (Harris 99). This is true equality of minds.

Compared to Jane and Bingley’s marriage, the one between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy is more dramatic and shows even better the importance of equality of minds between a couple. Elizabeth’s plain face does not draw Darcy’s attention at the beginning until he suddenly finds “it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes” (21). Darcy’s first good impression, “fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien”, together with his large fortune – “ten thousand a year”, is soon overshadowed by his proud and arrogant manners which disgust everyone, including Elizabeth (11). Her prejudiced mind leads her to dislike Darcy, especially when she learns of Darcy’s separation of Jane and Bingley. Her misjudgment of Darcy’s character, as Kenneth L. Moler puts it, her “overreaction to his pride and reserve”, “makes her unable to see what lies beneath it. This leads, in the early parts of the novel, to many amusing bits of dialogue where Elizabeth and Darcy talk at cross-purposes” (26). We can find their intelligent dialogue discussing “defect” as follows:

“There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil, a natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome.”

“And your defect is a propensity to hate everybody.”
“And yours,” he replied with a smile, “is willfully to misunderstand them.” (51)

Darcy’s pride stems from his reserved manner to those people he is unfamiliar with. But his housekeeper defends him to Elizabeth later on her visit to his house, Pemberley: “it is only because he does not rattle away like other young men” (207). In fact, Darcy is very much praised by his close friends and people who have known him for a long time. His defect seen as “a propensity to hate everybody” by Elizabeth is just her overreaction to his proud reserve compared to his amiable friend, Mr. Bingley. And Darcy sees Elizabeth’s propensity to misunderstand people willfully in a more amusing way, since he says those words “with a smile”. Both of them talk at “cross-purposes” which also show their equal intelligence and witty minds.

The equality of their minds is also shown in their better understanding of each other and themselves. Having realized Darcy’s good reason for interfering with Jane and Bingley’s marriage, and his being wronged by Wickham’s accusation against him, Elizabeth feels ashamed of being “blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd” (176). She understands her own vanity has been her folly. In the meantime, she also feels for Darcy: “his disappointed feelings became the object of compassion. His attachment excited gratitude, his general character respect” (179). Darcy’s understanding is also improved. After his first failed proposal of marriage to Elizabeth, he becomes aware of his own pride. As he confesses to Elizabeth at the end of the novel:

The recollection of what I then said, of my conduct, my manners, my expressions during the whole of it, is now, and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me. Your reproof, so well applied, I shall never forget: ‘had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner.’ Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me; though it was some time, I confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice. (306)

Darcy is taught a lesson by Elizabeth, “hard indeed at first, but most
advantageous” (308). From this lesson, Darcy realizes how badly his pride can hurt people. He “admits that he has been selfish, uncorrected of temper, proud, conceited, spoilt, overbearing and thinking meanly of those beyond the family circle, but blames his aristocratic education much…” (Harris 126). As he says: “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” (307). His aristocratic education is the main reason for his arrogance, but with his intelligence and strong love to Elizabeth, he is willing to improve. In the end, he understands Elizabeth’s reason of refusal, wins her respect and devotion with his improved manner, and proposes a marriage again in a more proper way. In this way, both of them are able to recognize their mistakes and rectify them.

Moreover, the equality of their minds is shown in their independence in relation to society as well as themselves. Before Elizabeth refuses Darcy’s first proposal, she turns down another one from her cousin, Mr. Collins. Neither Collins’ steady income, nor the fact that he is heir of the whole Bennet property can induce Elizabeth to accept a silly man as her husband. Although Mr. Collins is a good match socially, Elizabeth, as an independent woman, does not compromise for social position. As Christopher Gillie states:

Elizabeth Bennet … has an independence of mind and a disposition to take control of her relationships which from the inertia of her father, the foolishness of her mother, the intelligence she inherits from the former, and the active temperament she inherits from the latter (97).

Mr. Darcy too, resists his wealthy aunt’s pressure, and makes his choice as an independent person. He refuses to marry his cousin and proposes to Elizabeth, the woman he really loves. Both of them show their independence when they criticize themselves. Elizabeth repents her prejudiced opinion against Darcy; Darcy also criticizes his proud manner that hurts Elizabeth, whom he cares about. Their independence in relation to society and themselves shows the equality of their minds.
Besides the equality of minds of Elizabeth and Darcy, there is mutual respect which develops gradually. After his first proud proposal, Darcy learns to show more respect to Elizabeth’s family members. When Elizabeth, together with her uncle and aunt, meet Darcy unexpectedly at Darcy’s house, Pemberley, he civilly inquires after her family and Elizabeth is astonished at his changed manner: “Never in her life had she seen his manners so little dignified, never had he spoken with such gentleness as on this unexpected meeting” (210). Darcy even kindly asks Elizabeth to introduce her uncle and aunt to him, which “seeking the acquaintance of some of those very people against whom his pride had revolted in his offer to herself” surprises Elizabeth in a great deal (211). His “more than civil” and “really attentive” behaviour flatters and pleases Elizabeth, as well as her relatives (214).

Elizabeth does not respect Darcy until she reads his letter. The respect is “created by the conviction of his valuable qualities …” (220). His sincere and firm friendship with Mr. Bingley, his generosity to Wickham and selfless help to Elizabeth’s family, all give credit to him.

Furthermore, the Pemberley visit reinforces her respect. Darcy’s respectful manners, as Elizabeth has already noticed, remain unchanged there. The beautiful and nicely-decorated house and park impress Elizabeth with his excellent taste. Moreover, the testimony from Darcy’s housekeep, who praises him as “the best landlord and the best master that ever lived”, helps remove Elizabeth’s doubts (207). As Mary Lascelles puts it:

The Pemberley visit is to supplement this revised impression of Darcy with evidence as to character … It is more to the purpose that here Darcy and Elizabeth see one another for the first time in favourable – even flattering – circumstances: he at his best on his own estate … and she among congenial companions (163).

Therefore, with the improvement of manners from Darcy and removed prejudice from Elizabeth, a mutual respect is finally built between them.

All problems resolved, all prejudiced removed, therefore, they are able to
get married. It is a marriage with the security of large fortune. But more importantly, it is a marriage built on the basis of mutual respect and admiration between Elizabeth and Darcy. Just as Mr. Bennet says to Elizabeth:

I know your disposition … that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband, unless you looked up to him as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. (314)

As a young woman with an intelligent and witty mind, Elizabeth can only love and respect someone who has equal brilliance. And Darcy also admires the liveliness of her mind. They are “very complicated combinations of high intelligence, discriminating taste, emotional sensitivity …” (Moler 6).

The equality of their minds and intelligence is the foundation of their happiness. But there are also differences. Darcy is a man with reserved and formal manners and quiet disposition. His warm and modest heart is covered by his seemingly proud and even severe appearance. Elizabeth, on the contrary, is more lively and light-hearted. She has more open and spontaneous manners. Hence, there is a certain complementarity between them. As Elizabeth’s aunt observes in the letter to her: “His understanding and opinions all please me; he wants nothing but a little more liveliness, and that, if he marry prudently, his wife may teach him” (271). That is why Darcy later tells Elizabeth he admires her liveliness exceedingly. As Yasmine Gooneratne puts it: “Her wit and her liveliness attract him, and he learns to respect her individuality and finally to love her …” (83). Elizabeth too realizes that she and Darcy could improve and learn from each other by their marriage, at a point when she believes that she has lost him:

His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both – by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved; and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received
benefit of greater importance. (259)

Elizabeth is well aware of both of their advantages and shortcomings. And through their marriage, they are both able to become better people than they used to be.

So these two good marriages have similarities: there are equality of minds, mutual respect and true affection between the couples. But Elizabeth and Darcy may benefit more from their marriage than Jane and Bingley do. Perhaps that is why Elizabeth says: “I am happier even than Jane; she only smiles, I laugh” (319). But one reader feels firmly convinced of both couples’ happy marital lives ever after.

Having seen two good marriages, let us take a look at what happens to the two bad marriages. Firstly, there is the marriage between Charlotte Lucas and William Collins. Mr. Collins, being a clergyman and heir of the Bennet property, leaves a bad impression as “a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility” on his first visiting to the Bennet family (61). His stupidity, pompousness and narrow mind disgust Elizabeth, and consequently, his proposal of marriage to her is turned down. But only three days after the first proposal to Elizabeth, he shifts his attention quickly to her best friend, Charlotte Lucas, and succeeds in his second proposal. Charlotte, who accepts Collins “solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment”, does not care “how soon that establishment were gained” (105).

What we need to understand here is that, Charlotte is not as foolish as Mr. Collins. She is actually “a sensible, intelligent young woman” (17). But her penniless background and low social status make her by no means a desirable wife in marital market. Being Elizabeth’s good friend, she shares her good sense, and is able to see Collins’ shortcomings as Elizabeth does. Nevertheless, she still chooses to marry him. Her behaviour is explained by Austen:

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.

(106)

Marriage, under that circumstance, is the only way for a single woman like Charlotte to acquire a secured life. Although she can neither love nor respect Collins as her husband, she is saved from being an old maid through the marriage.

It is a marriage with no equality of minds. Collins does not have equal intelligence to Charlotte’s. There is definitely no true affection and mutual respect between them, and we see her arranging her life so as to see as little as possible of her husband. Thus Charlotte’s mercenary choice brings her no happiness equal to Elizabeth and Jane’s. “Charlotte Lucas gets as much and as little as she sought, but Elizabeth and Jane gain comfort and happiness, both” (Harris 101).

As for the other bad marriage between Lydia Bennet and George Wickham, there are some differences and similarities compared to the one between Charlotte and Collins. Lydia is a “self-willed and careless” girl, “ignorant, idle, and vain” (180). The sexual attraction between her and Wickham results in their elopement. But unlike Collins, Wickham is a man with neither profession nor fortune, but a huge amount of gambling debts. Therefore, just like mercenary Charlotte, he “will never marry a woman without some money” (234). It is only with Darcy’s financial help, that he agrees to marry Lydia.

Nonetheless, there is also no equality of minds between them. Lydia is “shallow, mindlessly merry, delighted with trivia” (Harris 92). And Wickham is a gamester, who pursues easy fortune in every possible way. Lydia is attracted only by Wickham’s handsome face and seemingly agreeable manners and Wickham has no respect for Lydia’s disposition and mind. We can not help wondering: “how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who
were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue” (259). With no equality of mind, no mutual respect, their marriage has nothing valuable left but money.

Equality of mind, as one of the most important inward factors in marital choices, brings sincere and lasting happiness to the elder Bennet sisters and their husbands. As for the marriages without it, like Charlotte’s and Wickham’s, though they are financially secured, they will never be able to respect and love their spouses. Therefore, they will never experience true felicity from their mercenary marriages.
Chapter Four: Principles

The novel *Mansfield Park* centers on a girl, Fanny Price. Having spent ten years with her parents and seven other siblings in Portsmouth, Fanny, has to set off for her new home, Mansfield Park, situated in Northamptonshire, a hundred miles off Portsmouth. She is adopted by her wealthy uncle and aunt, Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, because of the poverty of her own family. From then on, she has to make acquaintance with her four new cousins, Tom, Edmund, Maria and Julia, and another aunt, Mrs. Norris. She is treated more like a servant than a daughter at Mansfield Park, except by Edmund, who always shows care about her and becomes her only true friend.

When the novel begins, Fanny and her cousins are young adults and ready to look for a partner in life. The arrival of Henry Crawford and his sister, Mary Crawford, in the neighbourhood brings a series of events to Mansfield Park. They are both attractive people with elegant manners. Both of the Bertram sisters are attracted to Henry and Fanny observes his flirtation with both of them. His lack of principle is the reason she later turns down his marriage proposal to her. Edmund is in love with Mary Crawford and hopes to marry her, until he realizes her unprincipled mind, just like her brother’s. At the end of the novel, Edmund finally understands the true value of Fanny, expresses his love to her and they are happily married.

Both of Fanny and Edmund have two alternatives in their marital choices: the Crawfords and each other. The Crawfords are seemingly good matches for both of them. They are desirable as spouse in many respects.

Firstly, the external factors that we have mentioned in the first two chapters are in place with the Crawfords. Money, as one of the most important outward factors in marital choices in the *Sense and Sensibility* chapter, is not a problem to the Crawfords. Henry Crawford has a good estate, and Mary Crawford has twenty thousand pounds. Secondly, class, which has been mainly dealt with in *Emma*, is also not an issue in relation to the Crawfords. They are both equal in class and social rank.
to Edmund and Fanny, so this will not be an obstacle in the process of marital choice.

Thirdly, equality of minds, as one of the internal factors we have deeply analyzed in *Pride and Prejudice*, is not a major concern here either. Both of the Crawfords are intelligent people. Mary shows her talent during horse-riding to Edmund; and her intelligence in drawing, “her merit in being gifted by nature with strength and courage” is “fully appreciated” by the Bertram sisters (65). Henry’s equal intelligence to his sister’s is shown during his play-acting. As Fanny has observed, Henry is “considerably the best actor of all”. He has “more confidence”, “more judgment” and “more talent and taste” than other gentlemen (153).

Apart from their intelligence, the Crawfords are also good-tempered people. Mary is “warm-hearted” and “unreserved” (40), she is welcomed by her aunt, the Bertrams, and even Fanny likes “to hear her talk” (60). Henry, just like Mary, is also thought the “most agreeable young man” (42). Furthermore, both the Crawfords are well-mannered. Their elegant society is very much appreciated at Mansfield Park. Henry has “air and countenance” (40). He is a “gentleman” with “a pleasing address” (42). And Mary also has “elegance and accomplishments” (40). “The manners of both are lively and pleasant” (40).

What make the Crawfords even more agreeable and seemingly perfect matches are the respect and affection they feel for Fanny and Edmund. Henry thinks Fanny “looked so lovely”, and he is “determined to marry” her (268). Mary also admires Edmund. At their second meeting in London after a long separation, she finds herself still “too much attached to him, to give him up” (387).

Lastly, just like for Elizabeth and Darcy, there is a certain complementarity as well between the Crawfords and the cousins. Both Fanny and Edmund are more reserved and serious, similar to Darcy, and like him, they could benefit from the lightness, liveliness and playfulness of their partners in life.

Given all of these advantages, there should be no doubt that they are
excellent marital choices for Fanny and Edmund. In spite of all this, they end up being rejected by the cousins. This is because their lack of principles. Fanny and Edmund can find no common moral ground with the Crawfords. They fail to see the importance of doing right. The mutual choice of Fanny and Edmund is a choice of morality and principle, and to Austen this is clearly a crucial inward factor when choosing a spouse.

Let us start with Fanny’s choices. Fanny, as mentioned, is the adopted child at Mansfield Park. This makes her situation unequal to her four cousins. “Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different” (12). She is used to being neglected by everyone, except Edmund, who is her only friend in the family. Although being the youngest and almost invisible among the five children, Fanny is the one with principles all the time. When Tom, the older son of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, suggests a play-acting in the house during his father’s absence, only Fanny and Edmund are against the idea. They think the play, *Lovers’ Vows*, is very inappropriate for young ladies to act. As Roger Sales puts it: “They are shocked … by the inclusion of an unmarried mother in Agatha and a young woman who makes a bold declaration of love in Amelia” (122). However, Edmund finally gives in and participates in the play. It provides the young people an opportunity of making love in public. Henry Crawford flirts with Maria Bertram, regardless of the fact that she has been engaged to a dull, but very rich man, Mr. Rushworth. What is worse, he flirts with Julia at the same time. Edmund, through this play, is also able to express his love to the beautiful Miss Mary Crawford. Only Fanny can see the faults of it: “the situation of one, and the language of the other, so unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty …” (128). The play-acting is stopped by Sir Thomas return.

Henry’s flirtation with Maria during the rehearsal and Maria at the same time does not escape Fanny’s eyes, nor does his skill for acting. As she thinks to herself: “She did not like him as a man, but she must admit him to be the best actor” (153). Unfortunately, Fanny’s indifference to Henry arouses his interest in her. As he says to his sister:
I do not understand her … I never was so long in company with a girl in my life – trying to entertain her – and succeed so ill! Never met with a girl who looked so grave on me! I must try to get the better of this. Her looks say, ‘I will not like you, I am determined not to like you,’ and I say, she shall. (213)

He decides to make Fanny in love with him, out of his own “idleness and folly” at first, with no seriousness (213). But later on, he realizes Fanny’s value as a perfect wife, finds himself in love with her, and decides to marry her.

Beyond Henry’s expectation, Fanny does not accept his proposal of marriage. She is grateful for what Henry does for her brother, William Price, for helping him get the promotion in the navy. But to use this as a reason to expect a marriage from her, is considered as “nonsense, as mere trifling and gallantry” by Fanny (278). She knows what Henry is like, she has observed what he dose to both of her cousins. As she writes in her letter to Mary Crawford: “I have seen too much of Mr. Crawford not to understand his manners” (283). Fanny has witnessed Henry’s charm to the Bertram sisters, and his flirtatious behaviours with both of them at the same time. His casual treatment of two young ladies, who are from respectable family with good education, is something Fanny cannot agree with. Considering her own poor condition compared with her two cousins, she feels herself insulted by Henry’s proposal. She cannot accept a man who has no respect for women, who plays with women’s hearts without shame.

Nevertheless, Henry does not want to give up so soon. Fanny is quite determined to refuse him, explains to him that “their dispositions were so totally dissimilar, as to make mutual affection incompatible; and that they were unfitted for each other by nature, education, and habit” (302). Henry takes all this as a challenge, since “He had been apt to gain hearts too easily. His situation was new and animating” (302). Fanny, being always a gentle and modest girl, becomes angry and thinks Henry’s perseverance “so selfish and ungenerous” (303).
Henry’s proposal even arouses Lady Bertram and Edmund’s concerns. They both persuade Fanny to accept such a good match ever happens to her. But Fanny still adheres to her own principles. As she explains to Edmund:

We are so totally unlike … we are so very, very different in all our inclinations and ways, that I consider it as quite impossible we should ever be tolerably happy together, even if I could like him. There never were two people more dissimilar. We should be miserable. (323)

Fanny understands that she and Henry have nothing in common. She foresees the unhappiness of their future, and decides not to accept a marriage where only misery is concerned. And the more important is, as she explained to Miss Crawford: “I cannot think well of a man who sports with any woman’s feelings” (336). Fanny thinks Henry’s behaviours do not meet the basic principles of being a gentleman, and as a woman with principles and moral sense, she cannot accept a husband like him.

Fanny’s refusal to Henry surprises her uncle, Sir Thomas in a great deal. He cannot understand how Fanny would turn down a man so agreeable, concerning his “situation in life, fortune, and character” and even his kindness to her brother (291). Fanny is not able to tell her uncle the real reason of her refusal, because she does not want to disgrace him with his own daughters. Disappointed by Fanny’s ‘ingratitude’, Sir Thomas decides to send Fanny back to her own home in Portsmouth, expecting that “both social and geographical distance will eventually lend enchantment to her view of Henry” (Sales 112).

Henry follows Fanny to Portsmouth to show his sincerity, he is seen as “decidedly improved” (377). With his perseverant effort, he gradually wins Fanny’s secret inclination to him. Unfortunately, his own vanity leads him to resume the flirtation with Maria Bertram, who has been married and known as Mrs. Rushworth. Their elopement makes Fanny realize that no matter how much Henry might have changed, he is still a man with no principle. And Fanny is freed from being bothered by him, for good.

Another more important reason for Fanny to refuse Henry’s consistent
proposal, is because of her cousin, Edmund. Fanny has admired, respected and been secretly in love with him for a rather long time. Edmund has been Fanny’s only trustworthy friend and companion since her arrival in Mansfield Park. Her affection to his has been long established:

She regarded her cousin as an example of everything good and great, as possessing worth, which no one but herself could ever appreciate, and as entitled to such gratitude from her, as no feelings could be strong enough to pay. Her sentiments towards him were compounded of all that was respectful, grateful, confiding, and tender. (36)

The more time they spend together, the more Fanny becomes dependent on Edmund. She is grateful for Edmund’s attention, kindness and help to her. Whenever she is being wronged by other family members, or in any troubles, Edmund is always there to show support. As D.W. Harding states: “Her gratitude for the protective affection of an older brother changes in time to the longing to possess this knight errant as a husband” (194-5).

Fanny has such firm believes in Edmund, that when he declares that he is about to join the play, she is very much disappointed. She thinks he “had descended from that moral elevation which he had maintained before” (146). They are used to stand in the same line. They both think the acting of Lover’s Vows as a disgrace to themselves as well as to the family. Fanny is jealous of Edmund’s sacrifice for Mary Crawford. He gives in his principle to get close to her. Fanny has a moral concern about Edmund’s affection to Mary, because from her daily observation, she thinks Mary does not deserve him. The moral principles Fanny and Edmund have shared is what Fanny values the most, and also what is missing in Henry Crawford’s characters. As Mary Lascelles puts it: “Fanny has the shrewder perception of what is consistent with the moral principles they share, and the greater steadiness in obeying their promptings” (68). Therefore, between the two alternatives, Henry and Edmund, Fanny’s heart has long and invariably settled for the later. Edmund’s “strong good sense and uprightness of mind” defeat Henry’s vain and flirtatious nature (21).
As for Edmund, there is also an alternative choice for him, Mary Crawford and his cousin, Fanny Price. Edmund has a strong affection to the beautiful, elegant and smart Mary Crawford. In the meantime, Mary is also happy to be around Edmund. Since matrimony has always been her object, Edmund seems to her a good match.

But as soon as they get acquainted, Edmund finds different opinions Mary shares with his. Edmund is distressed to find out that Mary has no regard for his future profession as a clergyman. According to her, “A clergyman is nothing” (86). She thinks “A clergyman has nothing to do but to be slovenly and selfish” (103). Later on a ball, her “manner of speaking of the profession” to which Edmund will soon belong has “absolutely pained him” (257). Edmund, however is attracted by Mary, cannot bear to listen to her mockery of his profession, and starts to argue with her. “… the conflict between Edmund and Mary Crawford about his taking order (and taking his clerical duties seriously) is a major statement of their difference of moral outlook” (Harding 107). Being aware of Mary’s opinion on his profession, her “decided preference of a London life”, and their different expectations for fortune between ‘being rich’ and ‘only not being poor’, he is still willing to see her as his future wife (236). As he tells Fanny in a letter about his feeling when he meets Mary in London again after a long separation: “It is the influence of the fashionable world altogether that I am jealous of. It is the habits of wealth that I fear” (391). Until then, Edmund has not been able to see the real Mary.

Edmund’s affection for Mary does not come to an end until he learns her unprincipled comments on Maria Bertram and her brother, Henry Crawford’s adultery. On hearing that Henry has run away with Maria, a married woman, Mary is not horrified by immoral and irresponsible conduct, but understates it only as ‘folly’. Edmund is stunned that Mary reprobates the ‘detection’, rather than ‘offence’ of the whole affair. Furthermore, Mary’s blame on Fanny’s refusal of proposal from Henry is something Edmund cannot
agree with. As Edmund tells Fanny, the charm of Mary is totally broken after he hears Mary’s absurd condemnation on her:

Had she accepted him as she ought … Henry would have been too happy and too busy to want any other object. He would have taken no pains to be on terms with Mrs. Rushworth again. It would have all ended in a regular standing flirtation … (423)

Not only Mary thinks Henry is not morally wrong, but she blames Fanny for not accept him. She thinks Fanny’s refusal results in Henry and Mrs. Rushworth’s adultery. She even thinks there will be no problem for Henry, has he married Fanny, to flirt with another married woman. All these show clearly that Mary is a woman of no principle and moral values at all. And Edmund has finally seen her faults as “faults of principle … of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind” (423).

Through the whole event, Edmund realizes that it has been “the creature” of his “own imagination”, not Mary, that he “had been too apt to dwell on for many months past” (425). Edmund confesses that he has idealized Mary in the way he wishes her to be. When he finds the truth that she is a woman with only vanity but no principles, he chooses to leave her and her world of vanities.

Anyhow, “The climax created by Edmund’s rejection of Mary Crawford is not at the same time the triumph of Fanny’s love for him” (Harding 206). As Lionel Trilling states: “Mary Crawford is the antithesis of Fanny Price” and that Mary “is not to be admired” since her mind compounds “with the world, the flesh, and the devil” (128). And as one of Edmund’s marital alternatives, and the one who deserves admiration, Fanny, as a choice for a perfect wife, her value is still to be discovered by Edmund.

Edmund has played a decisive role in forming Fanny’s merits when they were still young. He “recommended the books … encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment …” (22). When Fanny secretly admires him, he also
praises her for having “good sense, and a sweet temper” and “a grateful heart” (26). When Sir Thomas is angry at their play-acting at Mansfield Park during his absence, Edmund defends no one but Fanny, as he says: “We have all been more or less to blame … excepting Fanny. Fanny is the only one who has judged rightly throughout, who has been consistent” (174). Although Edmund is with Fanny to protest against the acting scheme, he gives in to it eventually, in the expectation of expressing his own love to Mary Crawford through the play. He thinks himself blamable, as the others are. That makes him see Fanny’s consistency, her unchanged principle. He used to correct Fanny’s judgment, later he begins to rely on her judgment. Whenever he has difficulties, he asks for Fanny’s opinion. Even when he decides to join in the play, he tries to get Fanny’s support.

Barely has Edmund done regretting Mary Crawford, it strikes him that how he never see Fanny would be a perfect wife. As he ponders by himself: “whether it might not be a possible, a hopeful undertaking to persuade her that her warm and sisterly regard for him would be foundation enough for wedded love” (436). Fanny is totally the opposite of Mary, but does not grow less pretty than Mary does. Edmund, for the first time, see Fanny no longer his loving little cousin, but a grown-up woman with a beautiful mind. Her mind has been long guided and formed by him. Her consistent principle is what he regards most and relies on. As Warren Roberts once puts it:

Fanny Price can be regarded as the Christian heroine, sickly and delicate of constitution but internally strong and sound of moral judgement. She was a necessary instrument in the ‘salvation’ of Edmund. Weak as she was physically, she was resolute in her convictions (201).

Unlike Mary’s corrupted mind, Fanny’s strong and upright one is what Edmund can benefit from. From then on, he begins to expect a marriage with Fanny.

All of Fanny’s goodness is agreeable to Edmund, and he is also glad to find that he has been the dearest one to her ever since they were little. He is
very much satisfied with a match as such, because there are “no doubts of her deserving, no fears from opposition of taste”; there is also “no need of drawing new hopes of happiness from dissimilarity of temper. Her mind, disposition, opinions, and habits wanted no half concealment”; and he has always acknowledged Fanny’s “mental superiority” (437).

The solid foundation of their mutual affection, admiration, respect, and most important, their principled minds, secures all of their pleasures and comforts together. Edmund makes the right decision from the two alternatives. Fanny is his moral model and true love.
Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to show how important both the outward and inward factors are in decision-making process in relation to marriage in the four novels *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*. The argument was that all Austen’s novels revolve around the balance of all external and internal factors. Individual novels seem to focus more or less on specific factors.

Chapter one deals with money factor in the novel *Sense and Sensibility*. Marianne Dashwood is a symbol with unworldly character that shows no care about money. Unfortunately, her first love John Willoughby chooses a mercenary marriage over true love, and Marianne learns more prudence and realism. It is Elinor, who keeps a good balance between heart and head, which Austen highly praises in the novel. And her happy marriage with Edward Ferrars proves to be a right and wise choice.

Chapter two, *Emma*, concerns the rank issue. Emma Woodhouse makes many mistakes in her match-making interference with Harriet Smith because of her class consciousness and superiority. Her wrong-doings are corrected by Mr. Knightley’s good judgment. On the whole, the novel discourages rejection of class boundaries, but we also see that people from different social class are also able to build a happy marriage, as long as there is equality of minds between them. Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill prove this point.

Chapter three and four turn to the inward factors. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the main focus, as shown in Jane and Frank’s case, is the equality of minds. The two good marriages between Elizabeth and Darcy, and her sister Jane and Bingley, are good examples. The other two female characters, Charlotte and Lydia fail in their choices. The former chooses a mercenary marriage, which only an outward factor, money, is concerned; and the latter a marriage built mainly on sexual attraction, which is only an inward factor, yet a wrong one. Thus, neither of them considers equality of minds
with her husband, and they both end up in bad marriages.

The last *Mansfield Park* chapter explains the importance of principle in marital choices. The Crawfords have everything but principle. They are intelligent, good-tempered, elegant and both show respect and affection to the cousins, but they do not have good moral judgments and the courage to act accordingly. Therefore, they do not deserve happy endings. In contrast, Fanny Price, who always keeps consistent principles, wins Edmund’s heart and respect, and ends with a happy life ever after.

As a realistic novelist, all of these four Austen’s novels deal with realistic issues: money, rank, social status etc. With the in-depth reading and analysis, we realize that there are some romantic thoughts and imaginations in her realistic works. Austen understands the importance of fortune, there is financial security in either good or bad marriages in her novels. This is the social circumstances and trend at her time. But in all her good marriages, the characters value some other factors more. Austen’s ideal marriage consists of true affection, mutual admiration and respect, equality of minds and high moral and principles between a couple, which is not an easy thing to do back to pre-Victorian period. Those bad or less satisfactory marriages explain her disappointment in people who are too realistic and materialistic, or too unrealistic and too unworldly. It is also maybe the reason why she remains single through her entire life. Her expectation in marriage is higher than the social standards, which makes her at the same time a romantic novelist.

To sum up, marriage must reflect the social and economical reality of the society. Only when there is a firm base can individual desires be considerable. Money and rank are outward factors which cannot be totally neglected in marital choices. But equality of intelligence, minds and moral principles are more important to determine a happy marriage. These four are Austen’s deeply serious novels, in spite of all the satire, humour, wit and romance portrayed in them.

It is worth noting that these particular conditions belong to Austen’s time, but the theme of choice of spouse is universal. Every individual must find one balance between the demands of society, and his or her own desires, emotions and hopes. Hence readers are able to both learn from and enjoy Jane Austen’s novels.
Anyhow, realistic or romantic, those factors mentioned in Austen’s novel are also relevant to people’s marital choices in modern society. Many of her good points are still referred to nowadays. This, together with her light humor and witty words, are the reason why there are so many ‘Janeites’ in the world, and why she still occupies a high place in English and world literature.
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