Sisterhood and Friendship in Pride and Prejudice: Need Happiness Be "Entirely a Matter of Chance"?

DEBORAH J. KNUTH
Department of English, Colgate University, Hamilton, New York 13346

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the first sentence of Pride and Prejudice has been analyzed and ironized more than any sentence Jane Austen ever wrote. One suspects that, like Elizabeth and Darcy, the author prides herself on "say[ing] something that will amaze the whole room, and be handed down to posterity with all the eclat of a proverb." and this sentence certainly meets that challenge. Despite the sacred status of these words, however, the many dissections of the famous formula "that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (3) always acknowledge the inaccuracy of the statement -- we always insist that it is, on the contrary, dowserless young women who are desperately in want of wealthy single men.

It is not always so with another famous and devastating line from the novel, the one in my title: "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance." Charlotte Lucas, one of those relatively impecunious old maids, expands upon her proverb: "If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar before-hand, it does not advance their felicity in the least" (23). It is curious that this ruthless assessment is not universally suspected by critics of Jane Austen to be as dubious as the novel's first sentence. In fact, critics are remarkably sympathetic to Charlotte Lucas's theory of marriage and her practical application of it when she "engag[es] Mr. Collins's addresses towards herself" (121). Ivor Morris has recently devoted an entire book to Mr. Collins, that personified case-in-point who renders Charlotte's theory so frightening in practice. In the course of his project, Morris asks whether Elizabeth Bennet's judgment of this self-important yet servile clergyman is completely to be trusted. Indeed, the many critics from the "didactic" school use the heroine's reaction to Charlotte's engagement to blast Elizabeth's high-spirited self-confidence in her own judgments. Kenneth Moler emphasizes the "theme" of art and nature in the novel as a context for Charlotte's disagreement with Elizabeth about marriage:

The Charlotte Lucas-Mr. Collins marriage is, of course, purely a marriage of the head: Charlotte enters into it with feelings of, at best, tolerance for her husband. At the other extreme is Lydia Bennet's marriage, which, although "heart" may be too kind a term to apply to it, is certainly [not] based ... on any rational considerations. (44)

The distinction here between "head" and "heart" -- between rational and presumably irrational or sentimental or "natural" considerations -- is a standard way of reading Austen's moral realm as if it were, say, Samuel Johnson's. In accepting that the contrast is best expressed thus, however, we have to dismiss the terms Elizabeth herself chooses to criticize Charlotte's actions when she discusses them with Jane:

To oblige you, I would try to believe almost anything, but no one else could be benefited by a belief [that Charlotte may feel something like regard and esteem for Collins]; for were I persuaded that Charlotte had any regard for him, I should only think worse of her understanding, than I now do of her heart. My dear Jane, Mr. Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man; you know he is, as well as I do; and you must feel, as well as I do, that the woman who marries him, cannot have a proper way of thinking .... You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger, security for happiness. (135-36)

Elizabeth's terms here may at first seem to indict Charlotte primarily for deficiencies in feeling ("her understanding versus "her heart"), but as the passage continues, the more abstract language of "reason" intrudes: "cannot have a proper way of thinking ... principle ... integrity ... selfishness." Is it, after all, possible to see "head" and "heart" as opposites in determining how to choose a life-partner? We can assume that Austen ironically criticizes Charlotte's "prudence" when she summarizes her motives in setting an early date for the marriage: "the lady felt no inclination to trifle with his happiness. The stupidity with which he was favoured by nature, must guard his courtship from any charm that could make a woman wish for its continuance; and Miss Lucas, who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment was gained" (122; emphasis mine). The addition of "pure" to "disinterested" would seem to seal the business.

Marxist critics note the appeal of a Mr. Collins to one in Charlotte's dependent situation. And we must note that, though Elizabeth leaves Hunsford regretting, "Poor Charlotte! -- it was melancholy to leave her to such society!" she reminds herself that Charlotte "had chosen it with her eyes open ... [and] did not seem to ask for compassion." Having chosen to regard her marriage as a purely material exchange, Charlotte has really forfeited compassion; if she is able to find "charms" in "[h]er home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns," it is hard for us to judge which deficiency is paramount -- that of the understanding or that of the heart (216). An economic and social understanding of Charlotte's motives cannot fully explain or excuse them: as Joseph Wiesenfarth has pointed out, "The plot clearly suggests the true value of money by subjugating it to personal dignity and love in the relationship of Darcy and Elizabeth, and its false value by dramatizing its first importance in the lives of Lady Catherine, Mrs. Bennet, and Mr. Collins.

1 The distinction here between “head” and “heart” – between rational and presumably irrational or sentimental or “natural” considerations – is a standard way of reading Austen’s moral realm as if it were, say, Samuel Johnson’s.
2 In accepting that the contrast is best expressed thus, however, we have to dismiss the terms Elizabeth herself chooses to criticize Charlotte’s actions when she discusses them with Jane:
3 To oblige you, I would try to believe almost anything, but no one else could be benefited by a belief [that Charlotte may feel something like regard and esteem for Collins]; for were I persuaded that Charlotte had any regard for him, I should only think worse of her understanding, than I now do of her heart. My dear Jane, Mr. Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man; you know he is, as well as I do; and you must feel, as well as I do, that the woman who marries him, cannot have a proper way of thinking .... You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger, security for happiness. (135-36)
4 Marxists note the appeal of a Mr. Collins to one in Charlotte’s dependent situation. And we must note that, though Elizabeth leaves Hunsford regretting, “Poor Charlotte! – it was melancholy to leave her to such society!” she reminds herself that Charlotte “had chosen it with her eyes open … [and] did not seem to ask for compassion.” Having chosen to regard her marriage as a purely material exchange, Charlotte has really forfeited compassion; if she is able to find “charms” in “[h]er home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns,” it is hard for us to judge which deficiency is paramount – that of the understanding or that of the heart (216).
5 An economic and social understanding of Charlotte’s motives cannot fully explain or excuse them: as Joseph Wiesenfarth has pointed out, “The plot clearly suggests the true value of money by subjugating it to personal dignity and love in the relationship of Darcy and Elizabeth, and its false value by dramatizing its first importance in the lives of Lady Catherine, Mrs. Bennet, and Mr. Collins.”

Department of English, Colgate University, Hamilton, New York 13346
Some exponents of what we might call feminist criticism may help us best to expose the flaws in Charlotte’s proverb-making approach to marriage. Susan Morgan points out the echo from the novel’s first sentence in Charlotte’s assessment of her situation: marriage “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” (122-23). Morgan analyzes Charlotte’s “abstraction, [which,] unlike her author’s, is without the saving consciousness of irony”: 8

These “satisfactory” reflections on having gained her point are untenable. Marriage is not “the only honourable provision” for Charlotte, much as it may be the provision she prefers. We can be sure that honor is not better satisfied by marrying Mr. Collins than by remaining an old maid…. For Charlotte, marriage also may be the “pleasantest preservative from want.” But living at home at Lucas Lodge she was not, in fact, in want …

Charlotte’s decision is immoral. (93-94)

Alison G. Sulloway is if anything more thorough in her condemnation of Charlotte’s statement: “Charlotte is blaspheming the sacrament of marriage.” And Brian C. Southam reminds us in this context that “marriage does have a moral relation to love.” 9 Even where a sensitive critic is inclined to assess Charlotte’s decision as “realistic,” “a lesser evil,” or otherwise “sympath[etic],” her choice still stands out as “the darkest note in the novel” (to Bernard Paris) and “grotesque” and “rather chilling” (to James Thompson). 10

My purpose here is not so much to condemn Charlotte Lucas and her maxims as to use the contrasts between Charlotte and her friend Elizabeth to explore Austen’s treatment of the issue of “happiness” for relatively genteel women without adequate dowries. Most views of the question assume that men and marriage only are required for happiness. Nina Auerbach attributes to men a “mysterious power” that can even “draw women together,” despite their natural tendency to compete for male attention, as she argues in a chapter that discusses the Bennet sisters under the title “Waiting Together.” 11 She characterizes the Bennet sisters as “talk[ing] of nothing but Bingley and Darcy, speculating over their motives and characters with the relish of two collaborators working on a novel” (45). (Elsewhere, Auerbach refers to the sisters in their pre-marital state as being in “limbo” [39 and 48] and as “lead[ing] a purgatorial existence together” without men [47] – in hardly a state to “relish” any topic of conversation.) If the unmarried state is really characterized by such unrelied sniping among competitors and such exhaustive collaboration between sisters in the struggle for a man, then Charlotte Lucas’s strategy must earn the novelist’s approval and all ambiguity is at an end. But if we examine the novel’s rather extensive treatment of Charlotte’s marriage, we may find another way to interpret the relationships between Elizabeth and Jane and Elizabeth and Charlotte that clarifies how Jane Austen would have us read Charlotte’s choice of a husband.

Some weeks after the engagement, Elizabeth and Jane are discussing Bingley’s sudden departure and Charlotte’s marriage. Elizabeth observes,

“There are few people whom I really love, and still fewer of whom I think well. The more I see of the world, the more I am dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistency of all human characters, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of either merit or sense. I have met with two instances lately; one [Bingley’s defection] I will not mention; the other is Charlotte’s marriage. It is unaccountable! in every view it is unaccountable!”

“My dear Lizzy [Jane replies], do not give way to such feelings as these. They will ruin your happiness.” (135)

“Happiness” here has a much more general application than marital security. Elizabeth has been disappointed in her judgments of two people: Bingley, who was the all but declared lover of her sister and hence a soulmate of sorts, one who could estimate Jane’s value even as she does; and Charlotte, who “was Elizabeth’s intimate friend” to whom at one point she “told all her griefs” after a lengthy absence of “almost a week” (18 and 90). Disappointment in these two presumably like-minded people to herself has made Elizabeth cynical about the values of “all human characters” and the meaning of “the appearance of either merit or sense”; these sweeping indictments transcend the petty discussions of men and marriage that are often presumed, and not only by Auerbach, to make up the stuff of these sisterly conversations. If we focus on Elizabeth’s disappointment in Charlotte, we can see how the loss of a friend could in fact “ruin [a heroine’s] happiness.”

Charlotte Lucas has shared so many confidences and jokes with her friend that when we see them together at a dance, both without partners, the scenes feel habitual, as if these women have passed many partnerless evenings enjoying each other’s company.

“What does Mr. Darcy mean,” said [Elizabeth] to Charlotte, “by listening to my conversation with Colonel Forster?”

“That is a question which Mr. Darcy only can answer.”

“But if he does it any more I shall certainly let him know that I see what he is about. He has a very satirical eye, and if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of him.”

On his approaching them soon afterwards, though without seeming to have any intention of speaking, Miss Lucas defied her friend to mention such a subject to him, which immediately provoking Elizabeth to do it, she turned to him and said,

“Did not you think, Mr. Darcy, that I expressed myself uncommonly well just now, when I was teasing Colonel Forster to give us a ball at Meryton?” (24)
Almost its own reward. It is right after this exchange that Elizabeth refuses to be handed by Sir William Lucas to Mr. Darcy as a partner – a humorous foreshadowing of her response to his first proposal. She recalls, of course, overhearing his refusal to be introduced to her at the assembly (11-12). But the atmosphere of defiance of men in the conversation with Charlotte pervades the scene as well (26-27).

Again, at the dance at Netherfield, Elizabeth stations herself next to Charlotte to describe the onerous attentions of Mr. Collins, to leave her only when inextricably engaged to dance with that “awkward and solemn” gentleman. “The moment of her release from him was extasy [sic].” Elizabeth “returned to Charlotte Lucas, and was in conversation with her, when she found herself suddenly addressed by Mr. Darcy, who took her so much by surprise in his application for her hand, that, without knowing what she did, she accepted him … [immediately beginning] to fret over her own want of presence of mind” in doing so (90). The accidental nature of this acceptance belies what we know to be Darcy’s misreading of Elizabeth’s feelings towards him. (Likewise, Elizabeth’s indifference contradicts Auerbach’s image of the heroine “waiting” eagerly for male deliverance from a female purgatory.) Charlotte consoles Elizabeth that despite her reluctance to dance with Darcy, “I dare say you will find him very agreeable” (90). Elizabeth’s joking response, “Heaven forbid! – That would be the greatest misfortune of all – To find a man agreeable whom one is determined to hate! – Do not wish me such an evil,” is of a piece with the satirical mode she and Charlotte seem to have adopted on such occasions in the past.

But despite her participation in this independent female banter, Charlotte is calculating her future quite differently from her friend. Her whispered warning to Elizabeth before the dance “not to be a simpleton” in expressing to Darcy her preference for the insignificant Wickham is evidence of this distinction between the friends, and suggests that her early pronouncement about happiness in marriage (23) may have been sincere, despite Elizabeth’s rejoinder, “You make me laugh, Charlotte; but it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself.” Elizabeth has assumed Charlotte’s remarks to be in keeping with their mutual tone in discussing men and marriage, but under the apparent friendship – or sisterhood – of detached observation, Charlotte has been cloaking the vulgar assumptions she may have about Elizabeth’s views of marriage, but her friend.

She had once or twice suggested to Elizabeth the possibility of [Darcy’s] being partial to her, but Elizabeth always laughed at the idea; and Mrs. Collins did not think it right to press the subject, from the danger of raising expectations which might only end in disappointment; for in her opinion it admitted not of a doubt, that all her friend’s dislike would vanish, if she could suppose him to be in her power. (181)

The chapter concludes, alluding to Charlotte’s “kind schemes for Elizabeth!; these “schemes” consist of Mrs. Collins determining which future husband for her friend would have “considerable patronage in the church.”

When Charlotte comes to Longbourn to give Elizabeth advance notice of her engagement, whatever mistaken assumptions she may have about Elizabeth’s views of marriage, she knows full well that her friend will be shocked. “Engaged to Mr. Collins! my dear Charlotte, – impossible!” The violence of these words causes a reaction:

The steady countenance which Miss Lucas had commanded in telling her story, gave way to a momentary confusion here on receiving so direct a reproach; though, as it was no more than she expected, she soon regained her composure. (124-25; emphasis added)

Elizabeth’s response, we are told, comes with all the force of “her astonishment,” since “that Charlotte could encourage [Mr. Collins] seemed almost as far from possibility as that she could encourage him herself” (124). Elizabeth reflects that

She had always felt that Charlotte’s opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she would not have supposed it possible that when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage. Charlotte the wife of Mr. Collins was a most humiliating picture! – And to the pang of a friend disgracing herself and sunk in her esteem, was added the distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen. (125)

The loss of Charlotte Lucas’s friendship is a serious blow to Elizabeth. Where before they had shared confidence – or at any rate a verbal show of apparent agreement – now “there was a restraint which kept them mutually silent on the subject [of the engagement]; and Elizabeth felt persuaded that no real confidence could ever subsist between them again” (127-28).

Notes of regret for the loss of this friendship resound throughout the novel but when the time comes for her visit to Hunsford, “[a]bsence had increased [Elizabeth’s] desire of seeing Charlotte again” (151), and on leaving she seems to have found it a real “pleasure [to be] with Charlotte,” even on the ridiculous footing of Mr. Collins’s houseguest (215). The saving outcome of this sentimental (yet comical) contretemps is that Elizabeth’s “disappointment in Charlotte made her turn with fonder regard to her sister, of whose rectitude and delicacy she was sure her opinion could never be shaken, and for whose happiness she grew daily more anxious…” (128).

True: Elizabeth’s anxiety here is for Jane’s “happiness” with Bingley. But when we examine the feelings these sisters have for each other, I argue that we can come closer to understanding how Jane Austen implies the importance of a more universal idea of feminine happiness than mere marital security. One touchstone for true happiness in Jane Austen’s world – one Charlotte fails to remain in contact with – is close friendship with other women. Elizabeth substitutes for Charlotte her Aunt Gardiner and her sister; Charlotte can look forward only to the daily intrusions of the sterile Miss De
Bourgh and her companion in their phaeton and evenings at Rosings shared with Lady Catherine “when she could get nobody else” (67, 158, 172). As for the companionship of Mr. Collins, the only substitute for her former daily intercourse with her family and friend, the humorous treatment of Charlotte’s successful strategies for avoiding her husband makes them too memorable to need recording here. Suffice it to say that Charlotte has most peculiarly designated her own “happiness,” in a way that reverberates both comically and sentimentally throughout the novel. The eldest Bennet sisters, on the other hand, enjoy as heroines not only the most advantageous marriages in the novel, but also the most valuable relationships with female relations and friends.

The confidences shared by Jane and Elizabeth in the novel begin with discussion of Mr. Bingley the day after they meet him at the assembly: “When Jane and Elizabeth were alone, the former, who had been cautious in her praise of Mr. Bingley before, expressed to her sister how very much she admired him” (14). We find many of these private conferences between the sisters: in the shrubbery (86) or in their own room (116). They seek privacy to correspond with each other (177, 188). Similarly, Elizabeth’s confidential encounters with Mrs. Gardiner occur “on the first favourable opportunity of speaking to her alone” (144) or when “Elizabeth … contrived to sit by her aunt” (152).

This intimacy between the sisters (or the aunt and niece) has as much to do with silence as with communication. When Jane fails to hear from Miss Bingley after the Netherfield party has departed for London, “whatever she felt[,] she was desirous of concealing, and between herself and Elizabeth, therefore, the subject was never alluded to” (129). When a letter does come, bringing bad news, “A day or two passed before Jane had courage to speak of her feelings to Elizabeth” (134). On the return from Hunsford, the vacuous Maria Lucas exclaims, “‘How much I shall have to tell!’ but Elizabeth privately add[s], ‘And how much I shall have to conceal!’” (217). As with Jane’s disappointment over the defection of Bingley, Elizabeth is at first reluctant to communicate her rejection of Mr. Darcy’s proposals because of the “state of indecision in which she remained, as to the extent of what she should communicate” (218; emphasis added).

Here begins the protracted suspense of undisclosed plot between the sisters that is not relieved until the very end of the novel, a suspense secondary only to the conclusion of the Romantic plots, as Elizabeth bears the burden of her knowledge almost in isolation, except for what Mrs. Gardiner manages to guess (264, 281). Though Elizabeth does find an opportunity to acquaint Jane with a censored version of Mr. Darcy’s proposal and with the truth about George Wickham, much suspense remains:

The tumult of Elizabeth’s mind was allayed by this conversation. She had got rid of two of the secrets which had weighed on her for a fortnight, and was certain of a willing listener in Jane, whenever she might wish to talk again of either. But there was still something lurking behind, of which prudence forbad the disclosure. She dared not ... explain to her sister how sincerely she had been valued by [Darcy’s] friend. Here was knowledge in which no one could partake. (227)

The phrase “got rid of two of the secrets” echoes the other deliberately vulgar uses of the verb “to get” in the novel: the “business of [Mrs. Bennet’s] life was to get her daughters married” (5); Elizabeth criticizes Charlotte’s advice about marriage, “if I were determined to get a rich husband, I dare say I should adopt it” (22); Elizabeth similarly rejects Lydia’s formula for marital success: “I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands” (317); “Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs. Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters” (385). The weight of unshared confidence on the mind of the heroine is thus verbally linked to that greatest millstone of all in this novel, the burden represented by an unmarried woman.

An anonymous little scene illustrates this tension between courtship and friendship that enhances the novel’s dénouement: Bingley and Darcy, who have just returned from Netherfield, are visiting amid a large party at Longbourn. Elizabeth has been watching Darcy with great anxiety through two days of visits “in no cheerful humour.” Certain now that Bingley and Jane’s engagement will soon be formed, she is still doubtful of Darcy’s intentions, and his shy silence gives her little encouragement. For once, the female interlude between dinner and coffee hangs heavy:

Anxious and uneasy, the period which passed in the drawing-room, before the gentlemen came, was wearisome and dull to a degree that almost made her uncivil. She looked forward to their entrance, as the point on which all her chance of pleasure for the evening must depend.

“If he does not come to me, then,” said she, “I shall give him up for ever.”

The gentlemen came; and she thought he looked as if he would have answered her hopes; but, alas! the ladies had crowded round the table, where Miss Bennet was making tea, and Elizabeth pouring out the coffee, in so close a confederacy, that there was not a single vacancy near her, which would admit a chair. And on the gentlemen’s approaching, one of the girls moved closer to her than ever, and said, in a whisper,

“The men shan’t come and part us, I am determined. We want none of them; do we?”

Darcy had walked away to another part of the room. She followed him with her eyes, envied every one to whom he spoke, had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee; and then was enraged against herself for being so silly! (341)

For once, Elizabeth is in the same position as Miss Bingley, for whom a woman companion can never be a “first object” (54), once the gentlemen, and Darcy in particular, enter a room. Having been accustomed to female solidarity with Charlotte on the sidelines of the courtship competition, Elizabeth has now painfully learned a more typical response. These last eight chapters of the novel celebrate the process whereby the sisterhood/friendship subplot and the courtship plots can be resolved and dovetailed into a satisfying union, avoiding the competition between the two implied in the defiant language of this “one of the girls” who tries to assert confederacy with Elizabeth (17).

The relief from the suspense of Elizabeth’s and Jane’s unshared secrets begins after Lydia’s marriage has taken place. But until Jane is assured of Bingley’s affection, her reticence about her own feelings postpones communication
The significance of Elizabeth's relationships with Jane and with her Aunt Gardiner can perhaps best be appreciated when we remember how other women in this novel interact. Jane's early trust in the affection of Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst increases the pain when Bingley apparently abandons her on their advice. One subplot of the novel concerns the eventual vindication of Elizabeth's reading of these two women's false professions of friendship for Jane, and Jane's admission of her own error in what Elizabeth calls "the most unforgiving speech" Jane ever uttered (350; see also 15). From the first, these sisters have seemed ill qualified to befriend the Bennets. The utmost of their "considerable" powers of conversation is to "describe an entertainment with accuracy, relate an anecdote with humour, and laugh at their acquaintance with spirit" (54). Miss Bingley's warm professions of regard for Miss Darcy are no more genuine than her professed friendship for Jane; both have self-serving motives (269-70). At the end of the novel, realizing that it is "advisable to retain the right of visiting at Pemberley," Miss Bingley becomes "fonder than ever of Georgiana, ... and p[ay]s off every arrear of civility to Elizabeth," with a wonderfully economic consciousness of the laws of etiquette (387).

Jane and Elizabeth's relationship is also set in relief by the other Bennet sisters. Despite Elizabeth's spirited defense of her family's approach to educating their daughters when challenged by Lady Catherine (165), the potentially destructive effect of Lydia's influence on Kitty is posed as a serious problem, a perfect contrast to the mutual nurturance between the eldest girls (165, 283, 213, 231). Among the subplots concluded in the novel's dénouement is the threat to Kitty of Lydia's pernicious influence. We find that Kitty will divide her time between the Darcys and the Bingleys: "In society so superior to what she had generally known, her improvement was great" (385). The other sister to benefit from the Darcys' marriage is Georgiana (whose past susceptibility to Wickham's blandishments somewhat mitigates Lydia's error) who will receive from Elizabeth "knowledge which had never before fallen in her way" (388). Like her brother, we can assume, she will learn to temper shyness and gravity with a measure of irreverent wit.

Elizabeth's triumphant marital success, then, in distinction to Charlotte's fate, places her amid a circle of (largely) female friends and relations in a careful disposition that unites friendship with appropriate marriage as joint prerequisites for happiness. Within a year of their marriages, "Jane and Elizabeth, in addition to every other source of happiness, were [settled] within thirty miles of each other," a distance, for families of their means, early in the novel established as "easy" (385, 178). Of course, this union of friendship with marriage gives Jane Austen opportunity to use her knowledge of the relationship she knows best – the one she shared with Cassandra – greatly to enhance the treatment of courtship in **Pride and Prejudice**.

NOTES


2 Ivor Morris, *Mr. Collins Considered: Approaches to Jane Austen* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 7. Morris is more concerned to use Collins as a touchstone for certain issues and values in Austen's fiction than to analyze his function as a character, but he continues to use Elizabeth's reaction to Collins as an occasion for judging the heroine. See pp. 8, 50, 87, 106-07, 122, and passim.


4 The most thorough statement of this approach is found in Samuel Kliger, "Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in the Eighteenth-Century Mode," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 16 (1947), pp. 357-70.

5 Lillian Robinson, for example, concedes that Charlotte's choice may well have been "the only way she could have alive – whether or not provision existed for her to subsist in tolerable material comfort as a spinster" (*Why Marry Mr. Collins?*, in *Sex, Class, and Culture* [Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978], pp. 179-99; p. 197).

6 Robinson's analysis clarifies the fact that, if anything, *Elizabeth's* situation is more desperate than Charlotte's, since Sir William Lucas's "estate," however small and recently accumulated, is not entailed away from any of his offspring, male or female (Robinson, pp. 188-89).


12 He fears that he may “elevate her with a hope of influencing his felicity” when she is staying at Netherfield (p. 60); later on at Hunsford he assumes she is “‘wishing, expecting [his] addresses’” (p. 369).

13 See, for example, p. 146.

14 Bernard Paris points out that Elizabeth’s “reaction to Charlotte’s behavior is especially intense [because] [a]part from her father, Charlotte is the person in her world who is closest to her in temperament and intelligence.” He discusses the friendship on pp. 119-20.

15 Cynthia Caywood points out that Charlotte Lucas “quietly imitates Mr. Bennet’s response to a miserable marriage … she retires like Mr. Bennet into a private sanctuary, his a library, hers a workroom, when the marriage becomes impossible to manage” (p. 34).

16 Elizabeth gives Jane “leave to like him. You have liked many a stupider person,” demonstrating that in her relationship with her sister she adopts some of the same tone that characterizes her friendship with Charlotte (p. 14).

17 Claudia L. Johnson has discussed this passage to make a somewhat contradictory point: “Austen does not extensively consider female friendship as an important alternative or even a supplement to the marital relationship …. Indeed we do want [the men] to part [the women], and the success of this passage depends on our agreeing that it is folly to suppose that female bonding can or should displace men in the minds of sensible women” (*Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988], p. 91).

18 The author points out that the danger of Lydia’s proposed Brighton trip is only enhanced by her new-found friendship with Mrs. Forster: “‘(by the bye, Mrs. Forster and me are such friends!)’” (p. 221, emphasis Austen’s; see also p. 230).

19 Elizabeth and Darcy will remain close friends with the Gardiners, the last-mentioned characters in the book, of course, and gradually achieve both rapprochement with Lady Catherine and friendship with Mr. Bennet as well. See pp. 388, 385.

20 On the relationship of Jane and Cassandra as compensation for marriage, see Janet Todd, *Women’s Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 399-402. Even Nina Auerbach concedes that the claustrophobic concentration of “manless women” at Chawton from 1809 to 1817 “must be given credit for some of the … generative power” that produced Austen’s fiction” (*Communities of Women*, p. 49).
Charlotte Lucas knows this and says "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance". This implies that the marriage could be a happy or unhappy time depending on how well the characters know each other beforehand. Austen created many single female characters in Pride and Prejudice and she put each of them in a bad light, which is ironic as she never married herself. Austen says in Pride and Prejudice that a woman who never marries could only look forward to living with relatives and therefore being dependant on them, as women didn't have their own careers; the only path o...Â Therefore, they both need to overcome their defects to understand each other and make their relationship work.