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# Sisterly Affection

## Relationships between sisters in *Pride and Prejudice*

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# Abstract

*Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen depicts the lives of five sisters at Longbourn where they live together with their father Mr. Bennet and their mother Mrs. Bennet, who tries ardently to get her daughters married. This essay will examine how the sisters' relationships are affected by women's conditions during the Regency era. During the 18th- and 19th-centuries women's position in society was heavily debated and changed dramatically. Sisterhood was a common subject in 19th-century literature and many novels explored how the competitive marriage market affected relationships between sisters. Like other texts from the period, *Pride and prejudice* presents the struggle for women who were forced to get married and be separated from their sisters. The novel highlights these issues through its portrayal of relationships between sisters both as individuals and as a community. This essay will examine how these issues are depicted in the novel and argues that through its representation of sisters the novel shows the importance of sisterhood. It will explore contrasting sisters, surrogate sisterhoods, and how the Bennet sisters are portrayed as a community.



Keywords: *Pride and Prejudice,* Jane Austen, sisters, women's lives, 19th-century England

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# Introduction

During the 19th-century many women were entirely dependent on their sisters for companionship and friendship since women were confined to the domestic sphere. But at the same time sisters were also potential rivals for accomplished men of a good fortune and esteemed families due to the fact that getting married was the only way for women to secure a good and comfortable life. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen depicts five sisters who are all different from one another in terms of disposition, character and with different attitudes to matrimony but who are placed under the same expectation to marry. This expectation is made graver and more severe due to the fact that the Bennet estate will pass to the nearest male relative upon Mr. Bennet's death. As a consequence of the absence of a son, Nina Auerbach argues that the Bennet sisters and other sororal groups are seen as mutilated since they consist of a community without men (7). Women risked the potential of being left destitute if they did not marry. Therefore, according to the rules of polite society in England, the only perceivable happy ending for the Bennet sisters is the separation of the siblings and a cutting of their sororal bond, as they would move from Longbourn to their husband's homes.

*Pride and Prejudice* ends in marriage between the hero and heroine, and as Juliette Wells writes: "we can hold Austen's novels responsible for reinforcing, through their comedic conclusions in marriage and the ensuing rearrangements of families, the idea that heterosexual partnerships ultimately take precedence over the bonds of sisterhood" (3). Jane Austen emphasises through the story lines of her novels, in which sisters affect each other's future, marital status and wellbeing, the importance of sisterhood but also that relationships between sisters were a complementary part of the heterosexual marriage market of the 19th-century (St. Peter 477). The novel shows how sisters often had no one but each other to depend on and furthermore how sisters could easily clash. This leads to the question, is the portrayal of sisterhood in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* shaped by the socio-economic conditions of women at the time in which it is set? This essay examines how the novel portrays relationships between sisters, sisters-in-law and to some extent other surrogate sisterhoods such as friendship between women. In doing so, it attempts to place the novel within the broader landscape of the 19th-century Romance novel, in which sisterhood was a common theme. This essay will argue that *Pride and Prejudice* offers a criticism of 19th-century ideology that confined women to the roles of daughter and wife by its portrayal of sisters.

The following chapter will consist of a historical background regarding women's lives and recurring images of sisterhood during the 19th-century. The main body of the essay

contains three sections. The first part is dedicated to the individual Bennet sisters and how they are contrasted in the novel. A section regarding surrogate sisterhoods will follow. Lastly, it will examine how the Bennet sisters are portrayed as a community.

## Historical Background

Middle-class men of the 19th-century were able to live an autonomous and independent life, which was a privilege that middle-class women did not share. Men were able to secure work positions and could rely on inheritance for income, which granted them power over women (Lowder Newton 27). The financial control men had over women lies beneath the surface in *Pride and Prejudice*, as Judith Lowder Newton notes: "for all its reference to money and money matters, *Pride and Prejudice* is devoted not to establishing but to denying the force of economics in human life. In reading the novel the real *force* of economics simply melts away" (29). The severity of the situation for the Bennet sisters is often minimised in the novel but is shown through the fact that the male characters' autonomy in terms of choice of partners and freedom regarding mobility is much larger than that of the female characters (Lowder Newton 30). Beneath the surface of the depictions of amusing balls and courtship lies a great fear and unease for the women of *Pride and Prejudice.*

Women had no choice but to marry in order to achieve social and financial security, which resulted in many difficulties for the women of the 19th-century. There was a shortage of accomplished men who were eligible for marriage due to casualties in wars and many women were therefore forced to work as governesses. Because the life expectancy was longer for women, there were a large number of spinsters in England. Many men emigrated to Australia and America to seek a better life, which additionally left a great number of unmarried women in Britain (Brandon 17-18). Consequently, trying to find a suitable husband was hard, and in order to do so girls were given dowries by their parents to make them attractive for marriage (Adkins 3). A person's social rank was mainly determined by their wealth, and people married others who were in the same social rank as them almost exclusively. People who married others who did not share the same social status as them were frowned upon (Adkins xxii). Arranged marriages were customary and marriage was furthermore a way of insuring that wealth and properties were kept within a family.

Women were meant to strive for marriage but married life for women was challenging. After a woman's wedding day, she moved from being under the authority of her father to living under the control of her husband. A husband's wife was legally his possession since

women lacked legal existence. Married women could not own property nor have their own income unless this was stated in a marriage settlement. A settlement could entitle her to pass on her dowry to her children or to obtain it if her husband died (Adkins 5). Terminating an unhappy marriage was difficult and women could not divorce their husbands even if they were abusive since there was no divorce law until 1857 (Adkins 16). If a couple annulled their marriage, the woman would lose custody of her children as children officially belonged to their fathers. Men could furthermore legally sell their wives to other men to end unhappy marriages (Adkins 17). Married women spent their time caring for her children. Women were meant to produce many children and childbirth often came with many injuries or death (Adkins 23).

Marrying for the sake of love was becoming a recurring theme in many novels from the late 18th-century and throughout the 19th-century (Adkins 3). But marrying someone with a great income meant having a comfortable future and the conflict between marrying someone for love or for security is a common theme in Jane Austen's novels. During the Renaissance, marrying for the sake of love became an important part of people's lives for the first time in English culture. Compatibility and companionship were considered important foundations for a marriage. A union between a man and a woman was considered to lead to self-fulfilment for them both but despite this, women did not have a choice regarding whom they married (Boone 48).

Few girls were given a formal education during the 18th-century, and not until the rise of the bourgeoisie and the marriage market was made more competitive did education become a customary part in the upbringing of middle class girls (Jones 98-99). During the late 18th-century, a debate was held regarding women's role in society in relation to marriage and education. The conservative side of the debate wanted an education for women that suited their role in the domestic sphere. Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay Graham were the front figures of proto-feminist values. Mary Wollstonecraft recognised that the requirement to be married was a confining and limiting demand placed on women. In her text *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1792)* she discusses that by making marriage the only aim for a woman's existence her education, mind and soul is neglected for the sake of men. She writes: "[i]n youth a woman endeavours to please the other sex, in order, generally speaking, to get married, and this endeavour calls forth all her powers" (Jones 54). She argues that women should not be forced to marry from a young age and be able to cultivate their own minds and needs. Mary Wollstonecraft supports women's education

further in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). However, as the reputation of both Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay Graham fell in the public eye, the debate regarding women's rights and education was halted during the beginning of the 19th-century (Mukherjee 11).

Women were taught to be submissive, meek, and idle in order to become a good companion to her future husband. The ideals for women were taught through conduct books and the Scottish clergyman James Fordyce was a popular author of conduct manuals who wrote *Sermons to Young Women* (1766). The purpose of the conduct books was to teach women how to obtain a man's desire in order to secure a husband. Vivien Jones concludes that the conduct books hide the economic interest and idea of public control that tied women to marriage and motherhood. She writes that "[t]heir ultimate object is still social stability based on the subjection of women within marriage but the language of affective individualism masks actual power relations by offering women the promise of romantic attachment and personal choice" (15). During the beginning of the 19th-century individualism was an important conception, but women were still hindered from living an autonomous and self-governing life (Mukherjee 4). Instead, the conduct books promoted an ideal for women to be obedient, docile, and quiet wives. The conduct books induced a sharp contrast between fallen and angelic women (Jones 57).

Women were legally and financially subjugated to men during the 19th-century. But women's position in society changed during the period, which prompted a focus on relationships between women in English literature. This made relationships between sisters central in 19th-century novels and women's socio-economic conditions were explored in the texts. The novels tend to focus more on heroines rather than heroes and women's personal and emotional development. The setting of the novels tends to be in the private sphere, which pushes women to the centre of the texts (Brown vii). Families increased in size as the general health of the public improved. Siblings consequently spent a lot of time together and usually formed strong bonds. However, rivalry between sisters is often a recurring theme in 19th-century literature. The right of primogeniture, laws regarding entailed estates and men's entitlement to property, coerced women to be married. This made them rivals for eligible men. The situation for families where the children only consisted of daughters was often more severe (May 339).

Men were encouraged to get married but could choose not to whereas if women

remained unmarried they were considered to have failed in their destiny to be a mother of the nation. The status of unmarried women lowered during the 18th- and 19th-century as the production of goods was moved from the home as a result of the Industrial Revolution. But a single woman who was an extended part of a household that produced its own commodities and goods was regarded as a valuable and useful part of the family (Boone 367). The family as a unit became emblematic for society and the English nation during the period, which tied women further to the domestic sphere (Boone 279). Domesticity and nationality were concepts that were woven together during the 19th-century (Chase and Levenson 3). Nationalism was increased due to the wars and a domestic ideal was beginning to be promoted by the rising middle-class (Chase and Levenson 6). The patriarchal domesticity of the household was a method that the rest of society was ruled by, which was not necessarily based on blood relations. This system placed the father as the head of the household while the mother was in charge of domestic duties (Chase and Levenson 4). The concept of family made sisters a common figure in 19th-century texts and in the English home "[t]he vulnerable core and inner sanctum of that hard and inviolable edifice is the sister's chamber" (May 327). Leila S. May argues further that the sister functions as the angel in the house as she is still chaste:

> The family is organised around the sister's innocence as a defence system and its protection justifies the family, just as much as the rest of society - including its bellicose commercial, imperial and colonial practices - is justified by virtue of its function as a protector of the family. (327)

The sister was therefore placed under surveillance in order to protect her chastity. Conduct books argued for the control of women's sexuality, and female sexuality was generally viewed with suspicion. Virtue and propriety were ideals that women were meant to uphold. If a woman acted in a way that was considered impure, she could face both legal actions and be ostracised by society. Any sexual relations had outside the sanctity of marriage were considered unnatural. Many 19th-century texts that depict relationships between sisters involve a sister rescuing her sister from becoming a fallen woman (Brown 45). Michael Cohen describes the effect of a sister rescuing her sister: "[b]y being in every way like her sister, the respectable woman effects a rescue of her fallen sister because she cancels all the moral opprobrium that goes along with being fallen" (86). He interprets the rescuing of one's sister as an entirely unselfish act that makes the bond between the sisters deeper. However,

the potential of being viewed as an impious and immoral woman by being the sister of a fallen woman could be an incentive for feuds between sisters and made them controlling and critical of each other's behaviour in 19th-century literature (Brown 45).

The views and symbols of sisterhood changed greatly between the late 18th-century and the Victorian era as a consequence of the changing conditions for women. One of the arguments used against education for women was the idea that communities of women were viewed as threatening and induced the potential of girls behaving with impropriety (Auerbach 14). Despite Mary Wollstonecraft's promotion for women's education she shared the view that women should not form collectives as women then run the risk of becoming too intimate:

> women from necessity, because their minds are not cultivated, have recourse very often to what I familiarity term bodily wit; and their intimacies are of the same kind. In short, with respect to both mind and body, they are too intimate… On this account also, I object to many females being shut up together in nurseries, schools, or convents. I cannot recollect without indignation the jokes and hoiden tricks, which knots of young women indulge themselves in, when in my youth accident threw me, an awkward rustic, in their way. They were almost on par with the double meaning which shake the convivial table when the glass has circulated freely. (Auerbach 14-15)

The opinion that women should not form communities as they enable the possibility of women becoming too close was produced due to the controlling of women's sexuality. The potential of lesbian relationships made society of 18th- and 19th-century England view communities of women with unease. Collectives of sisters were formed as consequence of the confinement of women in the domestic sphere and they were therefore not viewed with the same apprehension (St. Peter 477). Sisterhoods that did not function as an integral part of the system of patriarchal domesticity that the English nation was built upon were seen as threatening.

Relationships between sisters were idolised during the Victorian era. Novels often depict sisters who devote themselves entirely to their sister. These texts often portray a woman who courageously sacrifices herself for her sister. However, during the Victorian era the moral outlook became narrower than during the Regency period. Many of the Victorian novels that depict sisters that share a strong bond often place feminine qualities on a pedestal and uphold harmful ideals for women. Sarah Stickney Ellis, a Victorian author of conduct books, defines sororal bonds:

> [Unlike men], women *do* know what their sex is formed to suffer; and for this very reason, there is sometimes a bond existing between sisters, the most endearing, the most pure and disinterested of any description of affection which this world affords…[This bond] arises chiefly out of their mutual knowledge of each other's capacity of receiving pain. (Auerbach 17-18)

Sarah Stickney Ellis describes sisterhood as the purest relationship one could have and this view was prevalent in Victorian literature that romanticised relationships between sisters. She describes a bond that is formed of mutual understanding. The sister relationship is uniquely equal in a world of hierarchal family dynamics, which is portrayed in novels of the 18th- and 19th-centuries (Cohen 15). Readers are often encouraged to choose between rivalling sisters in fiction during the period but the texts attempt to oppose the necessity of choice. The texts urge the reader to deconstruct the dichotomy between fallen and virtuous women. The novels that depict either strong and loving sororal relationships or rivalling and clashing sisters share a common desire to let each sister develop to her full potential (Brown 9).

## Contrasting Sisters

During the period of Jane Austen's life women gained more independence and their choices in terms of occupation and means of gaining a livelihood were widened. Therefore, in many 18th- and 19th-century texts the reader is encouraged to choose between two sisters, as Sarah Annes Brown writes: "[t]here could be no easier way of presenting the difficult choices women had to make than through the use of contrasting sisters one of whom chooses marriage the other a brilliant career" (3). The Bennet sisters are not presented with a choice between marriage and a career but they have to make a choice between choosing marriage to a man for the sake of comfort or compatibility. Sisters are given the same upbringing and share the same social status. Therefore, women's lack of opportunity and choice is shown and manifested through the portrayal of relationships between sisters. As a consequence of women's lack of possibilities the only happy ending available for the Bennet sisters is being married to a man of a good fortune. Despite their differences in personality traits and desires, they are all meant to strive for the same ending. By showing that the obligation to be married is placed on all five sisters it cannot be confused with individual desire but a demand settled on all women.

If one of the Bennet sisters marries, her marital status will have a deep effect on the marriage prospects of her other sisters. By contrasting Elizabeth with the other Bennet sisters as well as other women in the novel the text shows that Elizabeth makes the right choice in rejecting Mr. Collins and later accepting Mr. Darcy's proposal. Elizabeth possesses a strong will and because of her wittiness she is often seen as harsh. She is contrasted and, more importantly, balanced by Jane who upholds the societal standards placed on women and does not stray from the path that is set out for her. This contrast is common in 19th-century fiction, as Sarah Annes Brown notes: "[a] number of texts present us with one girl who is passionate, creative, uncontrolled and (generally) dark who is contrasted with her more restrained, conventional and fairer sister" (6). Elizabeth often praises Jane's angelic and kind personality. But Elizabeth also dislikes that Jane is too kind for her own good since she lets the opinion of Caroline Bingley and Louisa Hurst influence her. After the first ball that they attend, where Mr. Bingley, Caroline Bingley and Louisa Hurst and Mr. Darcy make their first appearance, Elizabeth and Jane discuss Jane's feelings toward Mr. Bingley. Elizabeth proclaims: "[o]h! You are great deal too apt you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in any body. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes" (Austen 9). Unlike her sister, Elizabeth makes snap judgments about other characters quickly.

Jane's conventionality is furthermore presented as her potential weakness, as she almost fails to secure a husband. Charlotte warns Elizabeth that Jane's passivity might be damaging for her marriage prospects, she says: "it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him; and it will then be but poor consolation to believe the world equally in the dark" (Austen 13). Charlotte's fear is realised and Mr. Darcy reads Jane's passivity as indifference. This pushes him to drive Mr. Bingley and Jane apart. Mr. Darcy explains his decision in a letter to Elizabeth after she has rejected his first proposal. He writes that Mrs. Bennet and the three younger sisters of the Bennet family suggested that Jane and Mr. Bingley's matrimony would be an advantageous match. A match that would increase the prospects to secure esteemed and wealthy husbands for her other sisters. However, he writes that Jane's indifference is the ultimate reason to drive them apart: "this remonstrance might have staggered or delayed his determination, I do not suppose that it would have prevented the marriage, had it not been seconded by the assurance which I hesitated not in giving, of your sister's indifference" (Austen 135). Mr. Darcy convinces Mr. Bingley that Jane does not hold any regard for him.

Jane acts according to the rules of conduct for women during the 19th-century. By

showing that Jane almost loses her opportunity of securing a husband, by behaving the way she is ought to behave, the novel offers a critique of the passive role that women were meant to uphold (Dabundo 43). But ultimately, Jane's conduct and passivity is meant to show that Elizabeth's willingness to act on her emotions in order to secure happiness for herself and her sisters is a good trait. She later agrees with Mr. Darcy in his judgment of Jane and "[s]he felt that Jane's feelings, though fervent, were little displayed, and that there was a constant complacency in her air and manner, not often united with great sensibility" (141). Elizabeth, who in many ways does not abide to the rules of conduct for women, is thus not viewed as acting out of turn but seen as sensible for doing so by being contrasted with Jane. However, Elizabeth needs to learn a lesson from Jane too. While Elizabeth's self-assuredness is rewarded in contrast with Jane, she has to learn that she needs to be patient and more broadminded. This is humiliating to her, as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar write:

> The invitation into conscious acceptance of powerlessness is always mortifying, for it invokes the fall from authority into the acceptance of one's status as a mere character, as well as the humiliating acknowledgment on the part of the witty sister that she must become her self-denying, quiet double. (161-162)

Elizabeth must learn from Jane to quiet her opinion and judgement. Elizabeth believes that she has acted particularly unsympathetic toward Mr. Darcy, as she learns why he dislikes Mr. Wickham and why he separated Mr. Bingley and Jane. She is therefore ashamed due to her previous judgment of Mr. Darcy, and thinks: "[h]ow despicably have I acted!'…'I, who have prided myself on my discernment! - I, who valued myself on my abilities! Who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust" (Austen 141). Elizabeth feels disheartened and discouraged as she admits to being wrong. The distrust she formerly had against Mr. Darcy was due to his treatment of herself and mostly toward Jane, but she is now ashamed to ever have felt any doubt about his character.

Mary Bennet is the middle child of the Bennet sisters and she is an erudite and moral character, but she is seen as conceited by her sisters. She is described as being an ordinary and pedantic girl: "Mary, who having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient to display" (Austen 16). Mary's displays of her accomplishments are often a source of great embarrassment for her family members and she is seen as peculiar for her passionate nature. She is contrasted

with her two younger sisters, and as Lydia describes their previous travels to Hertfordshire and the parties they had attended, she says to Mary that she wishes she could have joined them and Mary responds: "[f]ar be it for me, my dear sister, to depreciate such pleasures. They would doubtless be congenial with the generality of female minds. But I confess they would have no charms for *me*. I should infinitely prefer a book" (Austen 150). Mary's abhorrence to the enjoyment of female pleasures means she is viewed as a stern and antisocial character. While Lydia and Kitty are considered shallow for their enjoyment of balls and courtship, Mary is seen as strange for disliking them. Mary links Lydia and Kitty's interests with the one-sidedness of women's minds but she is not allowed to discard these interests either.

During the late 18th-century women's education was discussed avidly. This prompted a negative image around intellectual women who were well educated. The term bluestocking was at first assigned to both men and women to describe relationships based on intellectual exchange, but by the seventeen-seventies only women were called by the term and by then it had been given a negative air (Myers 9). The term was meant to ridicule learned women who broke the taboo against being an educated woman and taking part in intellectual circles (Myers 10). The bluestockings formed communities of their own and were well known by the early 19th-century as the term was adopted into German, Dutch, Danish, French and Swedish. They endured mockery and contempt but they proved that women were capable of learning and qualified to receive the same education as men (Myers 12).

The bluestocking figure appeared in many novels that depicted groups of sisters and Mary embodies the type in *Pride and Prejudice*. Although Elizabeth enjoys reading, her intellect is never viewed with the same ridicule that is attached to Mary's image. The effect of contrasting the bluestocking Mary with the well read Elizabeth is that Elizabeth will not be seen as pretentious and conceited in comparison. The contrast between Mary and Elizabeth is sharp in the novel, as Laura Dabundo writes:

> Thus what Mary, truly a great reader—which probably means an indefatigable bookworm—represents may be the opposite extreme from Caroline Bingley, who is clearly not a reader at all, with the middle ground achieved by Jane and Elizabeth, who are educated to converse sensibly, to recognize folly and evil, but not to become exempla of pedantry and concomitant pedestrianism. (44)

This portrait of Mary pushes the reader to view Elizabeth's relationship to reading and learning favourably. Elizabeth's behaviour would otherwise be seen as inappropriate and unsuitable for a woman, Meenakshi Mukherjee concludes that "[t]he behaviour of Elizabeth runs counter to most norms laid down by the conduct books. She is independent, unaffected and intelligent; her unabashed walk through the muddy countryside to see her sick sister violates the code of female propriety" (8). Elizabeth does not abide by the rules of conduct for women because she reads books for her own sake, unlike Caroline Bingley who reads to obtain Mr. Darcy's attention. However, the text is careful to demonstrate that Elizabeth is not a bluestocking woman like Mary. During Elizabeth's visit to Netherfield to take care of the ill Jane, she joins the party in the drawing-room downstairs while Jane is asleep. She declines to enter a card game with them and begins to reads instead. Louisa's husband is surprised that she prefers reading to playing and Caroline says, "Miss Eliza Bennet … despises cards. She is a great reader and has no pleasure in any thing else" (Austen 24). Elizabeth responds "I deserve neither such praise nor such censure … I am *not* a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things" (Austen 25). Elizabeth disputes the fact that she is an avid reader and discards the image that is attached to a woman who attempts to be educated above anything else.

Despite the negative portrait of Mary, she is the only sister in the novel who acts according to Victorian standards of sisterhood. When Lydia has eloped with Mr. Wickham, Mary emphasises the importance of sisterly affection and reasons that they should not focus on the negative consequences that Lydia's actions will have on the image of all the Bennet sisters. She states: "[t]his is a most unfortunate affair; and it will probably be much talked of. But we must stem the tide of malice, and pour into the wounded bosoms of each other, the balm of sisterly consolation" (193). The self-sacrificing sister who values the wellbeing of her sister above her own reputation was a common figure in many Victorian novels. Despite Mary's unselfishness, Elizabeth responds in a dismissive manner (Brown 75).

The plot of novels that depict a rescue of a fallen sister usually consist of a man rescuing one sister and he gets married to the other sister as a romantic reward. However, during the 19th-century novels often depict a woman saving her sister. The effect of a sister recuing her sister from being seen as sexually impure is the assertion that there is no difference between the respectable heroine and her sisters who have been seduced (Cohen 96). In *Pride and Prejudice,* Mr. Darcy rescues Lydia from being a fallen woman. She elopes with Mr. Wickham and he agrees to marry her after Mr. Darcy has paid him a sum to do so. If

Mr. Wickham had refused to marry Lydia, the marriage prospects of all the Bennet sisters would be compromised. The situation is severe, and Mr. Collins writes in a letter to Mr. Bennet that "[t]he death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison with this" (Austen 198). He further writes that the Bennet family should cut all connection and ties to Lydia but even then all the sisters and their acquaintances will be affected negatively. Mr. Darcy rescues Georgiana and Lydia's reputation from being destroyed by the same man and therefore Elizabeth sees him in a different light.

Both Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth value their sisters. When Elizabeth visits Pemberley for the first time, Mrs. Reynolds who works for Mr. Darcy talks about his good qualities as a brother, she says that "[w]hatever can give his sister any pleasure, is sure to be done in a moment. There is nothing he would not do for her" (Austen 167). During her stay at Pemberley Elizabeth's infatuation for Mr. Darcy is increased. One thing that Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy have in common is their strong tie to their siblings. In contrast with Elizabeth, Lydia has proven that she values her own interest in favour of her sisters. Elizabeth warns Mr. Bennet of letting Lydia go to Brighton prior to her leaving because she fears that it would affect her reputation. Once she has eloped Mr. Bennet says to Elizabeth: "Lizzy, I bear you no ill-will for being justified in your advice to me last May, which, considering the event, shews some greatness of mind" (Austen 200). Elizabeth is therefore viewed as sensible in comparison with Lydia.

After Lydia has married Mr. Wickham, she visits the rest of the Bennet family at Longbourn. Elizabeth and Jane are anxious for her wellbeing prior to her arrival and assume that she must be mortified. But when they arrive she behaves in a conceited manner toward her sisters, and they are surprised at her insolent behaviour: "Elizabeth was disgusted, and even Miss Bennet was shocked. Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild noisy and fearless" (211). Lydia is unwilling to change for the better unlike Jane and Elizabeth. Lydia presumes that her sisters must envy her for being married at such a young age and suggests that her marriage will ensure that her sisters will get married. Elizabeth replies: "I thank you for my share of the favour … but I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands" (Austen 212). Lydia and Mr. Wickham's wedding occurs out of necessity in order to save Lydia's reputation. Even though Elizabeth is angry at Lydia, she strongly dislikes that she has to marry Mr. Wickham. She knows that he has previously attempted to make Georgiana Darcy elope with him in order to obtain her inheritance. Once Jane and Elizabeth hear the news of their marriage for the first time Elizabeth says:

> And they are really to be married! … How strange this is! And for *this* we are meant to be thankful. That they should marry, small as their chance of happiness, and wretched as his character, we are forced to rejoice! Oh Lydia! (Austen 203)

Elizabeth questions the fact that they should be happy that Lydia has no choice but to marry such a despicable man. She criticises the fact that women had to marry men for social and financial security. Through the portrait of the Bennet sisters' different attitudes to marriage an opposition toward the submission of women through marriage is represented. Despite whether the Bennet sisters want to get married or not, they cannot choose not to marry, and therefore a criticism of women's dependency of men is offered.

## Surrogate Sisterhoods

A common trait in 19th-century fiction is when non-family members are given an extended role in the family. Women who were an extended part of the home, benefitted the household, and maintained the family structure were seen as surrogate sisters. Relationships were formed in order to increase the family's social and economic status, as Leila S. May writes:

> By domesticating desire, it clears a space for intimacy and self-exposure in a world whose class structure and social organization promotes dissimulation and discourages intimate personal contact; it realigns social obligations and familial commitments; it fosters the illusion of naturalness, disguising highly synthetic formats of interaction; it permits social permeability; it thickens 'blood' while at the same time adulterating, devaluing and watering down real family relations. (346)

There were practical reasons behind the formation of surrogate sisterhoods especially between sisters-in-law. Women who did not marry often had to live with their brothers and formed bonds with their wives. During the early 19th-century houses were small and siblings spent more time together than in the later parts of the century (May 349). Sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law were considered to be brothers and sisters. This means that women who did not share any consanguinity could become sisters.

Jane Austen shared this porous view of sisterhood as sororal ties are formed beyond bloodlines in her novels. She portrays family relations that are shaped by kinship, money, and law but affection between sisters is not determined by essence (May 350). In *Pride and*

*Prejudice* Charlotte Lucas and Elizabeth share in many ways a more intimate bond than Jane and Elizabeth have in the beginning of the novel. The relationship between Georgiana Darcy and Elizabeth become a sororal relationship upon Elizabeth's marriage to Mr. Darcy and the development of their relationship changes the outcome of the novel. But the forming of sibling ties between two people who do not share any blood relation often function as an obstacle for the characters in *Pride and Prejudice*. The Bingley sisters' disapproval of Jane as a match for their brother nearly drives them apart. Lady Catherine de Bourgh is appalled at the thought of Lydia becoming Mr. Darcy's sister after her notorious elopement with Mr. Wickham as she asks: "is *such* a girl to be my nephew's sister? Is *her* husband, the son of his late father's steward, to be his brother? Heaven and earth!" (Austen 240). Characters who do not encourage sibling ties in the novel are often seen as arrogant and superior people. Additionally, surrogate sisterhoods are promoted in the novel more often than not.

Caroline Bingley and Mrs. Hurst are rivalling and scheming sisters. They cannot look past differences in social status and are therefore viewed as conceited. Elizabeth starts to like Caroline and Louisa when they show some affection for Jane. But they still do not think that Jane is good enough to be married to Mr. Bingley. Mrs. Hurst says to Mr. Bingley, Mr. Darcy and Caroline that "I have an excessive regard for Jane Bennet, she is really a sweet girl, and I wish with all my heart she were well settled. But with such a father and mother, and such low connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it" (Austen 24). The fact that the Bennet sisters have an uncle in trade lowers their prospects in the eyes of polite society. Caroline and Louisa will not accept Jane, which Elizabeth realises. Caroline writes in a letter to Jane that they are leaving Netherfield and she suggests that Georgiana Darcy would make a good match for Mr. Bingley. Jane is convinced it is Charles' decision to leave whereas Elizabeth knows that Caroline is the one at fault. Mr. Bingley leaves and does not come back to Netherfield for the whole winter and Elizabeth begins to fear that his sisters will manage to keep him away. The portrait of Caroline and Mrs. Hurst show how the structure and politics of family relations in English society during the 19$^{th}$-century deeply affected sororal ties.

Charlotte is in many ways a surrogate sister to Elizabeth. Charlotte fears living a life of spinsterhood and therefore accepts Mr. Collin's proposal. The expectation for women to be married tied the idea of having a happy and complete life with matrimony. A woman could not be considered to be self-fulfilled if she remained unmarried. Through the portrait of Charlotte women's obligation to marry is shown, and Charlotte's approach to marriage is described in the novel:

> Without thinking highly either of men or 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. (Austen 85)

Despite being aware of Charlotte's attitude to marriage, Elizabeth is astonished when Charlotte tells her about their engagement and she is convinced that it will be impossible for Charlotte to be happy with the insensible Mr. Collins. The marriage between Mr. Collins and Charlotte incites a fear in Elizabeth since the two women will now be separated and therefore cannot be as intimate as they were before: "Elizabeth felt persuaded that no real confidence should ever subsist between them. Her disappointment in Charlotte made her turn with regard to her sister" (Austen 89). The parting between Charlotte and Elizabeth is difficult for Elizabeth and she fears the future separation between her and her sisters.

## A Community of Sisters

The life that the Bennet sisters lead at Longbourn is described in small detail. The plot consists mainly of events that affect the marriage prospects for the Bennet sisters. The scenes when Jane and Elizabeth are alone together depict them discussing either Mr. Bingley, Mr. Darcy or other men. Women were forced to get married in order to become self-fulfilled and therefore while living at Longbourn the Bennet sisters' lives are considered to be incomplete. The community that the Bennet sisters share must therefore be dissolved in order for the Bennet sisters to reach their quest, which is to marry. The Bennet sisters lead a life of waiting and anticipating the day a man will complete and give value to their existence. Elizabeth describes the time that they spend awaiting to be completed:

> Anxious and uneasy, the period which passed in the drawing-room, before the gentlemen came, was wearisome and full to a degree, that almost made her uncivil. She looked forward to the entrance, as the point on which all her chance of pleasure for the evening must depend. (Austen 228)

Elizabeth's happiness is dependent on the entrance of the gentlemen. The personal achievements and development for women in Romance novels are tied to their ability to

secure a husband. It amplifies the view that the Bennet sisters are lacking something even when they have each other. Nina Auerbach argues that as a group of sisters the Bennet sisters are seen as deficient since they consist of a community without men, she writes that "[w]omen by themselves appear to be incomplete, as if a limb were missing. They do not come into their proper place and function without the male" (7). Male communities on the other hand are official and institutionalised, and the men that take part in them are involved in a collective and universal practice. Instead, communities of women share an isolated and remote existence (Auerbach 32). The affinity and kinship of the Bennet sisters is therefore pushed to the margins of the novel.

The invisibility of the community that the Bennet sisters share is shown in the contrasting descriptions of Longbourn and Pemberley. Pemberley has a large park that stretches wide and contains a variety of surroundings. Elizabeth and her uncle Mr. Gardiner and Mrs. Gardiner drive for a long time by carriage through the grounds and Elizabeth admires the gardens and its streams and banks deeply. When they arrive at Pemberley House, she is astonished by the sight and impressed even further when they enter the building that is filled with beautiful objects in every corner. Unlike Longbourn House, Pemberley is described as a real home. Mr. Collin's future ownership of Longbourn makes the Bennet sisters' life at Longbourn a vacancy and a temporary stay, as Nina Auerbach writes: "Mrs. Bennet is a constant shrill reminder of the entail's overweening power over the family unit, and Jane Austen present Longbourn House in part as Mrs. Bennet perceives it - as an inherently lost and already half-vanished mirage" (42). Longbourn House is only a blueprint of a home as long as the Bennet sisters remain unmarried.

Sarah Annes Brown argues that a pair of sisters often have a different function in 19th - century texts than a group of sisters, she writes: "[w]hereas representation of paired sisters frequently invite us to choose between them, generally directing us pretty clearly in the 'right' direction … groups almost always require us to spread our sympathy more widely" (72). However, by viewing the sisters individually with Elizabeth as the protagonist her quest will be favoured above the other sisters. *Pride and Prejudice* does therefore not belong to the category of 19th-century texts that idolise relationships between sisters and Leila. S.May concludes that "[i]n Austen's social and familial world, sororal love must defer to married love, in part because, as Austen well knows, marriage - even a bad one - is imperative to the survival of many women" (345). Furthermore, all the Bennet sisters do not share the happy ending of *Pride and Prejudice*. The younger sisters' social status is increased through Jane's

marriage to Mr. Bingley and Elizabeth's marriage to Mr. Darcy. But Jane and Elizabeth's improvements are not dependent on positive development of Mary, Kitty and Lydia (May 345). Jane and Elizabeth manage to live close to each other at the end of the novel but the community of the Bennet sisters is still disjointed by their marriages. Meaning that relationships between women are set aside due to women being forced to marry a man in order to secure a comfortable future. The sororal communities of the 19th-century were created to be dissolved as they functioned as a complement to the creation of heterosexual partnerships. However, a desire in the text to the keep the community of the Bennet sisters intact is displayed. When the Bennet sisters are waiting for the entrance of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley one of the girls whispers something to Elizabeth: "[t]he men shan't come and part us, I am determined. We want none of them; do we?" (Austen 229). Due to the anonymity of the girl who expresses this wish that the sisters should not be separated through marriage the comment is appointed to the Bennet sisters as a collective. The Bennet sisters share a mutual desire to maintain their sororal tie.

# Conclusion

The Bennet sisters' approach to marriage is vastly different in the novel. By contrasting the five sisters, Elizabeth's quest is favoured above the other sisters. The opposing images of the Bennet sisters show the prescriptive outlook of feminine ideals during the 19th-century. The Bennet sisters do not abide to the rules of conduct for women in many ways, Mary through her will to be educated above else, Kitty and Lydia through their liveliness and Elizabeth through her independence. They are punished in the novel for acting in ways that were considered improper for a woman. Elizabeth's relationship to the ideals is favoured in the novel but she has to learn to be more like her conventional sister Jane in order to secure a husband. As a female protagonist of a Romance novel her pursuit is to be married to a man which will lead to the separation of the sisters. Women's lack of means to provide for themselves during the 19th-century is shown through the portrait of the contrasting Bennet sisters.

Like many 19th-century texts *Pride and Prejudice* involve a sister being rescued from being a fallen woman. As a consequence, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth are seen as good siblings, which push them toward their resolution and ultimately their matrimony. Lydia has no choice but to marry Mr. Wickham and she is portrayed as nonsensical for her actions. But the text sympathises with her through Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth's disapproval of Mr. Wickham. However, *Pride and Prejudice* does not belong to 19th-century Victorian texts that idolised sisterly affection nor does the texts belong to the genre of 18th-century novels that depict a pair of sisters that consist of one fallen and one virtuous woman. Rather Jane Austen uses traces of these two genres in *Pride and Prejudice* where siblings who willingly search for ways to improve themselves are rewarded and their ties to their siblings are made deeper.

The rivalry and feuds between sisters and surrogate sisters is caused by the submission of women and their confinement in the domestic sphere. The text opposes rivalry between

women through the portrait of Caroline Bingley who schemes and mocks other women, and is as a consequence seen as a conceited and arrogant woman. The positive portrait of surrogate sisterhoods in the novel shows that relationships between women had value. The relationships between Elizabeth and Charlotte as well as her relationship to Georgiana show that sisterhood is important for Elizabeth's happiness. However, through the novels ending in marriages the community that the Bennet sisters share is disrupted and their lives are seen as incomplete while they remain unmarried. But ultimately, through the portrait of the Bennet sisters a desire is displayed to increase the opportunity for women to live the life they want to lead, be able to explore their interests and form relationships between women without obstruction.

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