In Search of a Man:
A Comparative Analysis of the Marriage Plot in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary*

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Introduction

It may seem rather original to reinvent a novel in the way that Helen Fielding has done with her novel *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, which is written in response to Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. However, she is far from the first author to do so. Actually, since *Pride and Prejudice* is the most popular of Austen’s novels, it has had a great number of sequels. One of these novels is the pseudonym Memoir’s *Gambles and Gambols*, which contains a large number of characters from all of Jane Austen novels (Sachs 374). Fielding’s novel is mainly a comment on *Pride and Prejudice*, taking place in a different time, with a new set of problems, related to the theme of finding a man in the eighteenth-century novel.

When Helen Fielding’s novel *Bridget Jones’s Diary* was published in 1996, it instantly became a success. The heroine, Bridget, a single thirty-something woman, in search of the perfect man, predictably runs into problems. Similarities with Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* are evident since Fielding has borrowed its plot and theme for her novel (Author Helen Fielding). As the novel shows, to find a man is as difficult for the twentieth-century woman as it was for the eighteenth-century woman. It was very important for a woman in the eighteenth-century to find a man, and she only had three prospects: “marriage, aging spinsterhood at home, or becoming a teacher or governess” (Bush 7). Today, when women have careers of their own, marriage and children come second, which is to be compared to the eighteenth century, when women had to get married, either for economic reasons, or, at least, to secure their future. Even though women are more liberated today, and spinsterhood is accepted, it is not seen as quite normal. Consequently, despite the fact that there are almost two centuries between the novels, there are a few similarities. The most striking one is the marriage plot from a woman’s point of view and the obstacles that she faces. Only when a woman has a man can she be truly accepted and, what is more, only when she has found the right one is she able to perfect herself. The fictive societies in the novels put pressure on the heroines, and so do their mothers. Another similarity between the novels is that both Austen and Fielding use irony as a narrative strategy in order to criticize the societies they live in, particularly with regard to its gendered values.

Both Elizabeth and Bridget have to struggle for their existence, just because they are women. The fictive societies they live in put great pressure on them to get married and to find a man, with the difference that Bridget is more free to choose for herself.

They are both stubborn and lively, but Elizabeth is smart and controlled, while Bridget is more of a stupid nature and without any self-control. In that sense Bridget is more like Lydia.
The aim of this essay is to make a comparative analysis of the characters of the two novels, especially the heroines and their mothers, but also of the two Darcys. The systems of norms regarding marriage influence the mothers and also, indirectly, their daughters. I am going to investigate to what extent Elizabeth and Bridget are influenced by their mothers and what role the communities play with regard to their choices. I am going to start with a background explaining women’s situation in the eighteenth-century.

Material


For information about the women’s situation in Jane Austen’s time, I turned to LeRoy A. Smith’s *Jane Austen and the Drama of Woman*, and Douglas Bush’s *Jane Austen*. These were also of use for my analysis of *Pride and Prejudice*.

For the analysis on the marriage plot I have used different sources with different approaches. In *Reader, I married him* Patricia Beer discusses why heroines and heroes fall in love, with the fact that they actually do marry. William Deresiewicz focuses on the community’s influence on the characters in his “Community and Cognition in Pride and Prejudice.”

For my analysis of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* I used “Authenticity, Convention, and *Bridget Jones’s Diary*”, by Kelly A Marsh, “Bridget Jones and Mark Darcy: Art Imitating Art ... Imitating Art” by Cecilia Salber, and “Authenticity, Convention, and *Bridget Jones’s Diary*”, by Alison Case.

For my analysis of the narration I have used Alison Case’s *Plotting Women*, as well as her article, which I mentioned above.

I have also consulted “Pride and Prejudice in *Pride and Prejudice*”, by Everett Zimmerman, and “Chance and the Hierarchy of Marriages in *Pride and Prejudice*”, by Joel Weinsheimer. For my introduction, I consulted “The Sequels to Jane Austen’s Novels”, by Marilyn Sachs.

The importance of Marriage in eighteenth-century England

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the alternatives for women were very limited. They could only hope to marry well, and to find a “proper” man to live a comfortable life with. Otherwise, as Douglas Bush explains, the prospects were aging spinsterhood at home, or
becoming a governess or teacher in a school (7). A woman who determined to stay single would attract social disapproval and pity, since she could not have children or cohabit with a man. The other option, life as a governess often meant a very ill paid drudgery, with neither hope to escape nor possibility to improve her situation.

Society was very hierarchal with patriarchal principles, where leadership and authority were primarily associated with men. Men could determine what part women should or should not play, and women were always subsumed under the male. The only viable option for a woman was to get married, and as she did, everything she owned belonged to her husband. Women’s primary role was to give birth to children and take care of her family, while men were providing for their family’s well-being. The woman herself did not make the choice of a husband, but it was a decision made by her parents. However, England was going through a time of change during the late eighteenth-century, and the choice of a husband was more often based on women’s free will, rather than merely a paternal decision, as Douglas Bush explains: “although on the higher social levels parents were still active operators in the marriage market, daughters had gained far more freedom of choice than had been open to the persecuted Clarissa Harlowe” (5). Thus the marriage market was more open for women to choose, but of course society was still patriarchal and, in addition, class structures limited their choices.

Men with a good fortune must not marry beneath them but find a wife of assured position, preferably with wealth as well. From this point of view it is quite remarkable that Darcy chose Elizabeth, who is below him in both rank and wealth. The fact that her sister has eloped does not make her reputation better, because one sister’s mistake affects or harms the reputation of the whole family. In the eighteenth century, from marriage “a woman might expect ‘freedom from parental authority, social status, and enough pin money . . . to make life tolerably pleasurable’. . . At the worst, marriage became a form of legalised prostitution” (Smith 14). Thus, although women had gained a little freedom, they were still subordinate to men because the man in a family was the one controlling the finances, but also because of women’s lack of legal status. Of course there were those who were happy in marriage, but not everyone was as lucky in marriage as Elizabeth and Darcy appear to be, since, once married, the woman belonged to her husband. She had to obey her husband, and the man had the right to force his wife into sex and childbirth, and in those days childbearing was not as safe as it is today. The only thing that could make a woman accept her status must be that the patriarchal society’s values were so deeply rooted that she did not know of anything else. I will now
analyse those values as they are reflected in the fictive communities of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Bridget Jones’s Diary*.

**The Communities**

The opening of *Pride and Prejudice*, one of the most famous first sentences in English literature, reflects the norms of the community: “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife” (5). There is a need to get the daughters in the Bennet family married, and most importantly, to a man in possession of a good fortune. The community, its activities, expectations and conventions put pressure on Mrs. Bennet, who is the driving force when it comes to her daughters’ marriages. She wants the best for her daughters, but the reason to have them married off with wealthy gentlemen is to make herself and her family rise in social status. A good reputation means so much, and if it is harmed, then the future prospects for the family will be very dark. However, what this opening really shows is the fixed opinions of the community they live in. It is this “universal truth” that drives Mrs. Bennet to the actions of finding a good man for one of her daughters.

The fictive community is of central importance since it gives a perspective on people’s thoughts and how Elizabeth changes, or, more accurately, how she softens in her opinions by going from one community to another. While she is at Longbourn she is safe, and can talk to her friends about anything, discussing events and strengthening her opinions. After the Meryton assembly, the Miss Bennets and Miss Lucases meet to discuss and analyse the evening, as they always do after a ball (17-8). Going through the evening, they get each other’s thoughts and opinions on different matters. Generally, hearing others helps Elizabeth rethink events and change her mind about anything, but in the case of the Meryton assembly the discussion does the opposite to Elizabeth. Hearing her friends and family discuss how dreadful Mr Darcy is makes her opinion of him even stronger. Her resentment of him is really of the same nature as that of her mother. Elizabeth feels that her pride has been harmed by the pride of Mr Darcy. Even when she gets closer to Darcy as a person she cannot let go of her prejudice, because almost everyone of her acquaintance despises him. Elizabeth’s contempt might be due partly to her difficulty in understanding him.

Mr Darcy’s pride, however, is mere insecurity. But when Wickham tells his story about Mr Darcy, Elizabeth’s resentment towards him increases. It is because she has already found Mr Darcy proud that she easily accepts Wickham’s story, and that without any real evidence of the truth of it. However, even though Elizabeth has a clear dislike for Darcy, she cannot help being a little interested in him. This is evident as she is always confronting him.
and forcing him into communication, with topics that she thinks might upset him. As the case when Elizabeth claims that Darcy does not have any defects, which he does not agree with at all (47-8). However, her reason for this is that she wants to know his real character, and it eventually brings them a little closer to each other.

Whenever Elizabeth spends time in her own community there is always someone to gossip about, and someone to feel sorry for. In this sense, Elizabeth is a “...typical member of her community. She assents to and helps propagate collective judgements; she takes her opinions for universal truths...” (Deresiewicz 508). She thus risks being trapped in her own thoughts and her prejudice, just as those around her, unless she tries to gain an insight into the true nature of things. As Everett Zimmerman declares, prejudice is the opposite of pride: ”the self is completely involved with others, everything is interpreted as it affects the self.” Prejudice is a real weakness, which destroys a person’s judgment completely. Zimmerman further explains, “both qualities, pride and prejudice, reserve in a severe limitation of human vision and are essentially selfish...” (Zimmerman 66). Thus, in order to develop, Mr Darcy must free himself of his pride, and Elizabeth must free herself of her prejudice. It is only when the two of them have been freed from the community’s demands that they are able to be truly happy.

When Elizabeth is away from Longbourne to visit Charlotte, she changes a little. Not being able to confide in her sister as she has always done, or having her mother around all the time, makes her form her own opinions and make her own judgement. When she stands more or less alone in a community she does not belong to, she has a lot of time to think for herself. She is surprised that she meets Mr Darcy so many times when she is out walking on the grounds, but she does not think that he has a motive to do so. Nor does she realize that the reason for him to stare at her so much might be because he likes her, not just to judge her. Mr Darcy, in his turn, realizes that the opinions that Elizabeth has are not her own but are shaped by her community. Her community has blinded her, and it is not till she knows the true nature of things that she can really begin to change herself. It is the proposal of Mr Darcy that starts a change in Elizabeth. His explanation of his feelings and how much against his nature it is to fall in love with her makes Elizabeth really angry and, of course, she rejects him.

In response to her accusations of his involvement in separating Jane and Mr Bingley, and that he is responsible for the misfortune of Mr Wickham, Mr Darcy only gives brief answers and leaves in anger. It is not until the next day, upon the reception of a letter from Mr Darcy, that Elizabeth gets to know the truth behind the turn of events she has been accusing him of. Concerning Mr Wickham she cannot believe Darcy’s version to be true, and she tries
to think of it as a lie. However, since she has received it as a letter she can go back to it as many times as she likes and read through the details. Having done so she realises that she has been unfair to Mr Darcy and gets really ashamed of herself, ashamed that she has been blinded by prejudice:

'How despicably have I acted! she cried; 'I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister and gratified my vanity, in useless or [blameable] distrust. How humiliating is this discovery! yet, how just a humiliation! Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself.' (162).

Fortunately she realises her prejudice, and how wrong she has been in judging people without access to all information. It is, again, of great significance that she is in a different community than her own when she is reading the letter. If she had been at home she would probably have discussed its contents with Jane and her family and she would not be able to make her own judgements. Since that is not the case, she has to learn the truth about herself the hard way. From this moment Elizabeth is more careful in discussing her opinions with people, and does not judge people too harshly without knowing them first. But it is not only Elizabeth that undergoes a change; Mr Darcy must also let go of his pride, and the rooted opinions that he has from his community. They both come to realise that “correct judgement depends upon a knowledge of both oneself and the other...” (Smith 102). They get to know their true selves and do not listen too much to the voices of their communities any more. They are free to make their own decisions and are listening to their hearts.

In fact, every important meeting Elizabeth has with Mr Darcy takes place outside of her community. The most important one, though, is her visit to Pemberley. Seeing the place and hearing what the housekeeper has to say about Mr Darcy, Elizabeth now sees him in a different light. She regrets rejecting Mr Darcy, thinking that she might have been the mistress of Pemberley at this time. Then seeing him at his own place, she sees him in a totally different light and really starts to question herself, and if he still wants her. With no prejudice left she, for the first time, sees who Mr Darcy really is, and really likes what she sees. It was the pride in Elizabeth that could not let go of her prejudice against him, but now when all prejudice is gone, she cannot only see who Darcy is, but also show her true self to him. At this point both
of them have liberated themselves from their communities’ opinions and demands. It is thus evident how the fictive community in *Pride and Prejudice* is a negative force, an impediment to the union of the hero and heroine. I will now turn to *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and make a corresponding analysis of the community that she lives in.

In twentieth century society, a woman has to live up to an ideal as a thin, cool, perfect woman, more known as the Hollywood ideal. It is this that Bridget wants for herself, to be perfect, and to find a man. Kelly A. Marsh maintains that “Bridget’s diary reveals the external pressure she feels to be better than she is, pressure that exists without reference to her own qualities and qualifications- improvement for its own sake.” (57) Bridget’s mother, Mrs. Jones, is one such source of pressure, since she is desperately trying to get her daughter married- just as Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. Her main target is Mark Darcy, the son of their old friends, and “one of those top-notch barristers. Masses of money. Divorced” (9). Mrs. Jones’s goal is for them to meet at the New Year’s Day Turkey Curry Buffet, where she and aunt Una can keep an eye on them. Her mother in this way tells Bridget that she is not pleased with her lifestyle and wants to bring a change into it. The society’s opinion on single life is reflected through Mrs. Jones, who thinks of it as a failure to not have her daughter married. Mrs Jones only wants what is best for Bridget, but sometimes she does not look to see what it is that Bridget wants. In Bridget’s first meeting with Mark Darcy, she is prejudiced to him, and he is acting coldly and proudly towards her. Because of their parents’ involvement, and because of the prejudices that Bridget and Mark have created even before they meet, the meeting is not successful. Society’s pressure makes Bridget feel that she has to change herself in order to be accepted. Society’s pressure on Bridget shows through her parents, her friends and media. After all, these things are what a society is built on and how values are maintained.

Bridget’s friends form a great part of her life; they are the ones she turns to when she has problems with either men or with her self-esteem. They form a kind of urban family, discussing their opinions of men, of single life and of being a disappointment to their parents. Bridget’s friend Tom, who is gay, has a theory that there is a natural bonding between homosexuals and single women in their thirties, since both are “being accustomed to disappointing their parents and being treated as freaks by society” (27). This reflects the fact that even though single life is more accepted in our days, life as a single woman is not really “normal”, at least not when one has come to an age over thirty. Thus people are mocking Bridget for being single, saying things like: “how’s your love-life?” (40), asking whether or not she has got any Valentine cards, only to go on to say, “I knew you didn’t get any” (50).
seems as though the only way to be accepted is to have a man, and preferably a couple of children, just to let people know that you are a person. Her bad self-esteem is the reason for the mistakes she makes; she does not believe that she can be loved for who she is, because her self-esteem is built up by a society telling people how to behave and how to look.

Bridget makes attempts to conform, thinking that she would be better accepted if she was thinner, but once she has lost some weight everybody thinks that she looks “tired” and that she “looked better before” (106-7). Bridget tries too hard to fit in to her society and to be accepted, although she is in fact already loved as she is.

As *Bridget Jones’s Diary* shows, although the situation for women has certainly changed since Jane Austen’s time, women will still have to struggle in order to get anywhere in life, and to keep that place. The demands on women from the communities are much the same. Marriage and getting children is one demand that has lasted through the centuries. The role of mothers has not changed very much either, as the two novels show.

**The Mothers**

The mothers of Elizabeth and Bridget are very demanding and nervous women, whose greatest wish is to have their daughters well married. In reading *Pride and Prejudice* it becomes clear that the marriage plot permeates the whole novel. This plot is also an important part of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, but treated in a different way, because it focuses more on Bridget’s problems and lifestyle. The reasons for marriage differ as well, a natural consequence of the novels being almost two centuries apart.

Mrs Bennet’s daughters, all of them pretty girls, should not present a problem. However, at the beginning of the novel, when Mrs Bennet tells her husband that Mr Bingley has come into the neighbourhood, he is teasing his wife in not going to see the gentleman. He also claims that he will write him [Mr Bingley] a letter, putting a good word for Elizabeth, because she has “something more of quickness than her sisters” (6), whereupon Mrs Bennet responds, “I desire you will do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good humoured as Lydia. But you are always giving her the preference” (6). It is quite clear that Elizabeth is not her mother’s favourite among her daughters, and she takes a great part in the plans of getting her married to Mr Collins: “Elizabeth was the least dear to her of all her children; and though the man and the match were quite good enough for her, the worth of each was eclipsed by Mr. Bingley and Netherfield” (84). Mrs. Bennet starts to plan ahead, and expects Elizabeth to say yes to Mr Collins, even though she, Elizabeth, is unaware of the plans. The rejection is a sad moment
for Mrs Bennet, because now the entail will not move on in the family, and then there might not be a second proposal for Elizabeth. Elizabeth is here not willing to risk her life being trapped in a loveless marriage, because she has already seen it in the marriage of her parents.

Mrs. Bennet changes her opinions the same way as the wind blows, that is to say, if a person is considered charming one day, she may be nice and good humoured. If the next day she finds out some terrible news, she might never want to see that person again, and can change back again as quickly. She is a bit false since she can be nice to her friends in person, but talk behind their backs at home with her family, which only makes her look stupid. Unfortunately she has passed on her stupidity to her youngest daughter, Lydia, who at a moment without adult attendance elopes with Mr Wickham, a most inappropriate choice of man. Mrs Bennet’s nervousness disappears as soon as Lydia and Mr Wickham are married, and she is very happy that her favourite child was the first one to marry. To be able to say that one of her daughters is married is probably her greatest joy in life. When later on her two eldest daughters also get married, and well married, she could never be happier. Even if she was stupid and ignorant, she only did what she thought necessary to get her daughters married; because that was the only way she could be really happy. Thus Mrs Bennet gets her way in the end.

In a similar way, one can see that everything that Mrs. Jones has an opinion of reflects on Bridget. In addition, she is a very demanding kind of person, and when she realise that she has spent “thirty-five years without a break running his [Mr. Jones’] home and bringing up his children”, (53) she makes a fresh start, leaves her husband, finds herself a Portuguese lover, and gets a job in television. In the autumn of her life she is now doing things that she wants to do, and does not care if she hurts someone’s feelings. She admits to Bridget that “having children isn’t all it’s built up to be. I mean, no offence, I don’t mean this personally but given my chance again I’m not sure I’d have...[any children]” (196). Even if she does not wish Bridget to never have been born, this is what it sounds like. Evidently, as Mrs Bennet, Mrs Jones never thinks about what she says and does not care if anyone thinks that she is stupid. She has found the key to happiness and enjoys her life, even though it only lasts for a while. Fortunately, she comes to her senses, and realizes that she had a much better life before and finds herself safe back at home, being her old self, bossing everybody around. Basically, she is as selfish as Mrs Bennet.

Realizing what she has missed in her life, Mrs Jones also wants Bridget to take a chance and change. However, her demands make Bridget feel as if she is not good enough, and therefore she tries to change herself, instead of being able to accept herself as she is. Mrs
Jones only wants what is, in her own eyes, best for Bridget, and if that includes having Mark Darcy in the family, so much better. She is always bursting into Bridget’s apartment with new clothes and food, really trying to get her daughter on the right track, but never realizing that Bridget might be annoyed with her.

However, she is very generous, when it suits her, but as soon she does not get what she wants she is complaining, saying, “My nerves are shot to ribbons”, (120) in an echo of her forerunner, Mrs Bennet. Mrs Jones, trying to make Bridget feel guilty, says: “Remember, I gave you the gift of life. Where would you be without me? Nowhere. Nothing. A dead egg. A piece of space, darling” (135). This usually works. She wants her friends and family to support her, as she has always been supporting them. The one she expects most support from is Bridget, because, in her opinion, Bridget owes her that. She wants to help Bridget find a man and thinks that Bridget should let her. She tries to run Bridget’s life and does not accept that Bridget is a grown woman who can make her own decisions. However, no matter how much she tries to make Bridget change she will not succeed. The pressure Mrs Jones put on Bridget is not solely her own; she is reflecting the pressure of a whole society.

The mothers affect Elizabeth and Bridget more than they think, both in a positive and a negative way, Elizabeth’s mother in the way of wanting her daughters to marry, more than wishing to have Mr Darcy in the family. Even though she thinks ill of Mr Darcy in the beginning, she changes her opinion when she hears about of his engagement to Elizabeth: “Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters. With what delighted pride she afterwards visited Mrs Bingley, and talked of Mrs Darcy, may be guessed” (297). Her wish has finally come true, and therefore her happiness could not be greater.

Bridget’s mother, on the other hand, can never stop talking about Mark Darcy; she is almost obsessed with having Bridget and him together. She is always reminding Bridget about Mark, if he is going to be at a party they are invited to, as when she calls to tell Bridget that she has been invited by Mark Darcy’s mother to their ruby wedding: “She thought it might be nice to have one or two young ‘uns there to keep Mark company” (207). She cannot stop her obsession, even though she has, without success, tried to fix Bridget up with Mark before. However, in the end she does succeed, but it is not until she is safely back home with her husband that Bridget realizes her feelings for Mark, and can be happy herself.

Both Mrs Bennet and Mrs Jones mirror the community’s demands on women, in their pressure on their daughters. But what they do not understand is that one cannot change a person to be exactly the way one wants, one can only learn to accept them as they are and try
to give some advice on the way. After all, they are nothing but nervous, demanding mothers with little understanding, but they are, nevertheless, Elizabeth’s and Bridget’s mothers.

**The Heroines**

Despite the fact that our beloved heroines, Elizabeth Bennet and Bridget Jones, live two centuries apart, they share the same problems, namely the trouble of finding a decent man. They are both very lively and stubborn, and like to share their opinions of things. But this is where their similarities end. Elizabeth likes reading and walking, things that Bridget never seems to have the time to do, unless the reading is some magazine or self- help book. Those books, and men related problems, are discussed at the get- togethers with her friends, which always turns into a disaster, through drinking too much wine. Elizabeth’s character is more down to earth, but she likes to discuss balls and gossip with her family and friends. They may not always agree with each other, but they at least accept the opinions of others.

Elizabeth is the second child in a family of five girls, and is considered the second prettiest of the sisters. Her disposition we learn about at the Meryton assembly, to be very “lively and playful”, “delight[ing] in anything ridiculous” (12). She is also a very caring sister, especially with Jane to whom she can relate anything that is on her mind. She likes being involved in discussions, but only when she thinks she can contribute with something valuable. Overhearing Darcy’s opinion of her at the Meryton assembly, and seeing the way he acts, make her think of him as proud. From that moment, whenever she and Darcy are in the same room, they are either totally quiet or get into discussions, which always lead to one or two misunderstandings. When Elizabeth is at Netherfield, she gets into a discussion with Mr Darcy and he gives an explanation of pride. She ironically remarks that he does not have any defects. However, Darcy declares that he has faults enough and explains:

``My good opinion once lost is lost for ever."

``That is a failing indeed!'' - cried Elizabeth. ``Implacable resentment is a shade in a character. But you have chosen your fault well. I really cannot laugh at it; you are safe from me."

``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 every body."

``And yours,'' he replied with a smile, ``is wilfully to misunderstand them."

(47-8)
Elizabeth’s mind has already been made up; she is determined about Mr. Darcy’s character and is at this point too blind to accept anything else. Elizabeth tries to figure out Mr. Darcy’s character, but because of her prejudice against him, she cannot make a fair judgment. Despite the fact that Elizabeth somehow knows that he is right, she cannot bear that thought and therefore she cannot stay at Netherfield any longer. She is running away from her problems, but not for long. She is going to meet Darcy several times, and have many discussions. But for the time being this is what is best for both parties, because Darcy’s attraction to Elizabeth is becoming a little too strong.

Elizabeth is a person who values love in marriage very highly, in order to feel true happiness. But in her friend Charlotte’s view, “Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance....and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life” (20). Her demands on marriage are not so high; in order to be happy she only wants to be comfortably settled. The point in what she is saying is that the chance of getting a happy marriage is not so great, because there are also other motives for marriage. When a woman gets a proposal she should consider accepting it, because if she does not, she might not be so lucky as to get a second proposal. It is rather unusual for a woman like Elizabeth to get three proposals as she does, two of them by the same man: Mr. Darcy. However, as explained above it is not until they have reached an equal understanding of each other and of themselves that they can be engaged.

In explaining to Elizabeth what it was that he fell for Mr. Darcy simply explains: “For the liveliness of your mind” (292). But it is for her beauty, not for her mind, that he at first notices her. Maybe this is not so hard to understand since a character’s face is the first thing seen. As Patricia Beer maintains, “Although Jane Austen is realistic enough to show men assessing women according to their beauty she consistently makes her male characters in speech put more value on their minds” (47). Thus Mr. Darcy is impressed by Elizabeth’s liveliness, and her quickness in finding herself so easily in a conversation. She is not as stupid or ignorant as most of her family - he sees that she is special.

Bridget Jones is also, as suggested above, a character with a lively mind and is, in Cecilia Salber’s words, “surprisingly reminiscent of, and at times as endearing as, Austen’s Elizabeth Bennet...” (1) (connecting to the fact there are parallels between the plots and the heroines of the two novels). But the resemblance between the characters does not only involve Elizabeth; Bridget draws on Lydia as well. Lydia and Bridget are both immature and desperate to get married, with a lack of self-control as well, Bridget in relation to food and smoking, and Lydia in relation to red-coats.
Bridget is a very disorderly character with bad self-esteem and weak self-control. She sets as goals to stop smoking, to lose weight, and to get to work on time, all of which she fails. She is not in control of her life, and the way she reveals her mistakes is hilarious. However, even when she is making a total fool of herself, she is loved. There are forces that are encouraging Bridget to change, one of them being her mother, the other one the myth of self-perfection, “the idea that the self can be completely remade, [which] saturates Bridget’s consciousness” (Marsh 59). To remake oneself is not possible, at least not when you are Bridget Jones and want to change so much about yourself. It probably would have been better to focus on one thing, like smoking. If a person really was able to change so much, then she would not be the same person any more, and this would only lead to repression of feelings. Her bad self-esteem makes her think of herself as ugly and fat, but who, except herself, knows how fat she really is. On the first day of work in the New Year, Bridget writes:

“9 a.m. Ugh. Cannot face thought of going to work. Only thing which makes it tolerable is thought of seeing Daniel again, but even that is inadvisable since am fat, have spot on chin, and desire only to cushion eating chocolate and watching Xmas specials” (17).

The fatness has been made up in her mind, her weight going up and down, depending on how good she has been with her diet and exercise. Her bad self-esteem comes out after conversations with characters like Rebecca. However, even though she has a wish to be someone she is not, she realises that she could never be that character and is quite happy as she is: “Wish to be like Tina Brown, though not, obviously, quite so hardworking” (96). Since Bridget is not willing to put in an extra effort at work, she will never be able to develop there. She is always late for work and does not take her job seriously. In fact Bridget seems to be quite satisfied with herself, realising that she has a good job where she does not have to put in so much of an effort. She makes a check on what she is doing in the mornings to find out why she is always late to work, and realizes that “three hours and thirty-five minutes between waking and leaving house is too long” (93). Bridget determines that in the future she must get straight out of bed in the mornings, and keep her clothes in order so that she easily can find them in the morning. She seems as though she simply does not care about what people think of her, when it comes to her being late and having a mess in her home. She is still dependent on her mother in that sense, thinking that she will fix it for her.

The friends she has are always there for her, when she needs them, and she is there for them when they need support. She is a support to her father when her mother has left him; she supports Magda when her husband has been unfaithful to her, but, most important of all,
she leads the search for Tom when he has vanished. She is really a supportive friend, and with this she shows that she can take responsibility.

The way Bridget writes the diary is of great importance. She records what she wants to change and how she has done in the different areas; and if she is not pleased she writes a little excuse: “9st 3 (but post-Christmas) alcohol units 14 (but effectively covers 2 days as 4 hours of party was on New Year's Day), cigarettes 22, calories 5424” (7). She does not keep a diary in order to remake herself, but rather as a justification. This is her way of saying that she likes who she is. Laughing away the seriousness of what her intentions in keeping a diary was from the beginning, the reader realizes that Bridget is probably never going to be able to change. Like Elizabeth, Bridget likes to laugh away the seriousness of a situation.

Bridget cannot make herself to be in full control, and we see that the characters around her do not have so much more control over their lives. Because of the fact that every character is an individual, another character cannot know what the other one thinks. We cannot control everything in our lives, and we know for a fact that Bridget’s father cannot control his wife when she decides to leave him, and that her friend Jude cannot control her boyfriend from leaving her. Elizabeth also wants to have control, but like Bridget she cannot control what the other characters do. Elizabeth cannot control her younger sisters, and she cannot control the decisions her parents make. She is only in control of her own destiny, but when she realizes her feelings for Darcy she cannot control how he will feel about her, because every character is an individual. Thus Elizabeth and Bridget have one more characteristic in common: the wish- unfulfilled- of being in control.

The Two Darcys

Both of the two Darcy’s are considered proud at the beginning, and do not act very nicely. But they change and start to stand up to and defend the heroines, in an attempt to get attention. I must say that Mr Darcy has a more difficult time than Mark to get away with his pride, perhaps because it is more deeply rooted in him, pride being more accepted at that time than it is today. As Miss Lucas say:

“His pride,” said Miss Lucas, “does not offend me so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, everything in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may express it, he has a right to be proud” (18).

So, we see that it is more accepted by the community in Pride and Prejudice, but that does not mean that everyone likes characters that are proud. As we know, Elizabeth does not
approve of it at all; however, she gladly talks of his pride among her friends. She does not feel sad because Mr Darcy has rejected her; he is not a person to like anyway.

Bridget, on the other hand, feels that, even though she was not interested in Mark, she did not want to be rejected by him. It makes her feel like a failure, that she is repulsive to all men.

Their pride, however, is mere insecurity. The pride they both have, makes some people dislike them, but they are also able to change, a change that will make their heroines fall in love with them. In addition, they are both helping their heroines with problems concerning a member of their family. When finally the trouble Mrs Jones has put herself in is over, Bridget asks Mark: “Why did you bother doing all this? Bridget, he said. Isn’t that rather obvious?” (306). He has actually fallen in love with her, despite all her faults and mistakes. It is thus when Mr Darcy and Mark have let go of their pride that they can allow themselves to love.

Although it is a different society we live in today, one must consider the possibility that things we see much of today might have gone unnoticed in the eighteenth century. To some extent, the differences between these two characters can be seen to reflect the differences of the ages. Mr Darcy’s fortune, for example, was inherited from his father, while Mark Darcy has worked for his wealth as a successful barrister. They are both feeling demands from their societies to get married to someone that has a good rank in society, so they do not need to feel embarrassed for their choice of wife. No wonder that Mr Darcy expresses, in his first proposal to Elizabeth, how degrading it would be for him to marry her. It was simply how it was in the eighteenth-century community. It is the case with him, as with Elizabeth, that he cannot be together with her until he has freed himself from the community’s opinions.

With Mark and Bridget things work differently. They live in a society where it is accepted to marry someone that not have the same rank as yourself. However, Bridget is the kind of person that always makes a fool of herself, and as Mark is a successful barrister, he needs a woman who is a good representation for him. But once he gets to know her, he sees a person he likes, and realizes that she is a person with a good heart.

We see the differences in ages in more ways. The fact that Mark Darcy has been married one time before is of great significance, since it was not as usual in the society that Mr Darcy lived in. They are shaped by the rules of their society.

The two Darcys are slaves under their communities, which makes them proud and unable to open up. They get to know of their weakness by their heroines, and that is when the
process of change starts. With the change they see things from a different perspective, and start to accept people as they are. They also make the heroines aware of their weaknesses, and it is when both couples has come to an equal understanding that they see who they truly are. The differences between the two heroes are a matter of changes two centuries have brought to society, and it is the societies that shape the characters.

**Narration**

Both Austen and Fielding use irony as a narrative strategy, particularly as a way to criticize their societies. Even though Elizabeth is the central consciousness, she is sometimes mistaken as the narrative voice. Also her own thoughts dominate a large part of the novel. Elizabeth seems to gain control of her narrative when she finds her true self, while Bridget does not seem to be in much control over it. At times she seems to be in control, while at other times she does not.

Elizabeth, for example, truly believes Mr Wickham’s story about Mr Darcy and is therefore blinded by her prejudice when she is having a discussion with her sister about these two gentlemen. Mr Wickham gladly tells Elizabeth that Mr Darcy is the one who is responsible for his misfortunes and that it gives him pain seeing him. Of course she believes him, but Jane has a hard time accepting that Mr Bingley would actually be friends with such a man and says:”It is difficult indeed - it is distressing. One does not know what to think.” Whereupon Elizabeth blurts out: “I beg your pardon; one knows exactly what to think” (70). In this section Elizabeth is not in control of the narrative; the opinions of their community are reflected through her. At this point her opinion could be the opinion of all the people in Meryton. As told earlier, Elizabeth agrees with, and helps to propagate, collective judgements. In other words, her opinion is not her own, but a reflection of her community’s opinions. It is not until she has found out what her own opinions are, and who she really is, that she gets control over “her narrative.”

In *Bridget Jones’s Diary* the female character narrator allows the readers to feel superior to her. Bridget appears to lack control over her own life as well as lacking “control over her narrative and its ironies” (Marsh 55). It seems as if she is unaware of her own abilities and one cannot but feel sorry for her, for instance when all her efforts to make food for her birthday-party totally fail. Alison Case argues that feminine narration “is characterized by the restriction of the female narrator to the role of narrative *witness*...” (1999: 4). Case further explains that “diary and epistolary narration are in fact the most typical forms for feminine narration” (2001: 177). The fact that Bridget keeps a diary, and the way that she
does it, shows that she is willing to change and want to take control over her life. However, her keeping a diary is less about her improvement than a justification of herself. Bridget does fail in all of her New Year’s resolutions, except one: “form functional relationship with responsible adult” (3), but this she cannot be the only one to control, because there are other characters involved. Although she is not the perfect person, she actually has no serious intentions to change. After all, one likes her as she is, with all her faults. This is also the case with Elizabeth. Even though she is not flawless, she is liked as she is.

In order to be in control of their narratives, both Elizabeth and Bridget must learn to get to know themselves. To do that they have to let go of their prejudice and free themselves from the opinions of their community, which are parts of the same process for both heroines.

**Conclusion**

In this essay I have examined the two popular novels, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, to see what it is that affects the heroines and their road to marriage. I have shown how the fictive communities affect the heroines into a state of prejudice, and that the only way out of this is for the heroines to free themselves, and become aware of who they are. We see how Elizabeth lets go of her prejudice and the values of her community, to be able to express her own opinions. For Bridget, the change is not as clear, as she remains much the same, but she learns to like herself, and with that also to love Mark.

When examining how much impact the mothers have on their daughters we see that the communities’ opinions are reflected through the mothers. Their opinions are then influencing their daughters. They are very demanding, and they influence their daughters in both positive and negative ways, whether they are satisfied or not. I have examined Elizabeth’s and Bridget’s lives and personalities, considering their opinions on love and marriage, and how they are affected by their communities and mothers. I think that the communities and the mothers have a great impact on the outcome of the heroines. The mothers affect their choices, but the heroines are still able to form their own opinions, and do not go into a serious relationship without being in love. They go through a big change, in which they get to know more about themselves in the progress. The two Darcys go through a change as well, where they have to struggle against their own mind, and against their societies’ rules. It is when the heroes and heroines have come to a full understanding about each other and themselves that they are in control of their narrative, and can finally be together.
In the section on the narration, I show that as long as Elizabeth is prejudiced, and does not have her own opinions, she will not be able to be in control of the narrative either. The same goes for Bridget, who clearly lacks control of her narrative most of the time, and the reader is more likely to laugh at her than with her. With their changes, the heroines also gain control of the narrative, Elizabeth more than Bridget, and can finally allow themselves to open their feelings, and be happy.
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