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### The Importance of Numbers in *Pride & Prejudice*

*Pride and Prejudice* is known as a great love story and yet the theme of money plays a central role to the plot. In the time period in which this story was written, wealth and status defined your position. Because of the entail, the Bennet women will have a bleak financial future once Mr. Bennet dies. When you recognize this dilemma, Mrs. Bennet's pursuit of husbands for her daughters takes on a sense of urgency that overrides her foolish behavior. Money takes precedent in love and marriage and the female characters in this story understand that.

From the beginning of the novel in Volume I Chapter I, we see Mrs. Bennet wastes no time in trying to convince her husband that Mr. Bingley would be a perfect match for one of their daughters. Declaring to her husband that Mr. Bingley is indeed:

*"...single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!."*<sup>1</sup>

Jane Austen is very focused on numbers and describes money amounts down to percentages. When using percentages Jane Austen is referring to the fact that some landed gentry's earnings came from investing their money and the rate of four or five percent is the usual rate of interest given during that time.

According to Linda Slothouber's article, *Bingley's Four or Five Thousand, and*

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<sup>1</sup> Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. New York: 4th Norton Critical Edition, 2016, pp. 3. Print.

*Other Fortunes from the North*, Bingley and his siblings are rich. “The sisters have inherited 20,000 pounds each and Charles’s legacy from his father amount to... 100,000 pounds...he holds investments in stocks or government funds, yielding the 4,000 pounds to 5,000 pounds a year...”<sup>2</sup>

Many have taken the time to calculate the value of the pound in Austen’s day and it is believed that one pound is equal to \$80 dollars in today’s money. Using this calculation we see that Mr. Bennet’s yearly 2,000 pounds is \$160,000 dollars. Mr. Darcy’s 10,000 pounds equates to \$800,000 dollars, quite a difference.

“This comparison of Austen's pound with the modern dollar not only clarifies characters' annual incomes, but also exposes the magnitude of certain financial transactions, such as Darcy's dealings with Wickham. First, Wickham inherited 1,000 pounds, or 80,000 dollars from Darcy's father. After dissolving his claim to the clergyman position, Wickham received 3,000 more pounds (240,000 dollars) from Darcy. Within three years, he was again asking Darcy for money, which Darcy refused to give him. Wickham then attempts to elope with Miss Darcy, whose inheritance totals 30,000 pounds (2.4 million dollars). Wickham then runs off with Lydia, whose portion equals Elizabeth's — 40 pounds a year, 1,000 pounds overall. He tells Darcy that he has no intention of marrying Lydia and still plans to marry an heiress. To persuade Wickham to marry Lydia, Darcy must then pay Wickham's debts, totaling 1,000 pounds, or 80,000 dollars in addition to buying his commission at about 450 pounds or 36,000 dollars. Mr. Bennet also conjectures that "Wickham's a fool if he takes her for less than

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<sup>2</sup> Slouthouber, Linda. “Bingley’s Four or Five Thousand, and Other Fortunes from the North.” *Jane Austen Society of North America*. Vol. 35. 2016: pp. 50.

ten thousand pounds," meaning that Darcy probably also paid Wickham an additional \$800,000 dollars. Elizabeth's overwhelming gratitude toward Darcy and the debt of her family to him become much clearer in light of these figures in U.S. dollars.<sup>3</sup>

As we see from the emphasis on money throughout *Pride and Prejudice* numbers are very important. Jane Austen made sure her readers have a clear view of exactly how much money each character had or didn't have and looking at the numbers, when they are converted to today's dollar, we get a clear picture of why numbers are so important.

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<sup>3</sup> Kalil, Marie. *CliffsNotes on Pride and Prejudice*. 29 Sep 2019.