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Trabajo Fin de Grado

Unveiling narratives of the 19th and 21st
century society: A Comparison between *Pride*
and Prejudice and *Eligible*

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ABSTRACT

This Final Degree Project aims to conduct a comparative analysis between Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and its rewriting, *Eligible* (2016) by Curtis Sittenfeld. The main objective of this analysis is to examine these works, identifying their differences and similarities in issues such as the representation of gender identities and sexuality, as well as the influence of social classes. This dissertation intends to emphasize the way in which both the historical and geographical context have influenced the plot of these novels, thus marking a clear distinction between the two.

Key Words: *Eligible, Pride and Prejudice*, gender, marriage and social classes

RESUMEN

El presente Trabajo de Fin de Grado se propone realizar un análisis comparativo entre la obra de Jane Austen, *Orgullo y Prejuicio* (1813) y su rescritura, *Eligible* (2016) de Curtis Sittenfeld. El objetivo principal de este análisis es examinar dichas obras, identificando sus diferencias y similitudes en asuntos como la representación de las identidades de género y la sexualidad, así como la influencia de las clases sociales. Esta tesis pretende destacar la manera en la que tanto el contexto histórico como el geográfico han incidido en la trama de estas novelas, marcando así una clara distinción entre ambas.

Palabras claves: *Eligible, Orgullo y Prejuicio*, género, matrimonio y clases sociales

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1. INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen is considered a reference writer in the literary canon. Due to her undisputed fame, many other authors wanted to rewrite some of her works, and among them, *Pride and Prejudice* stands out. This was the case of Elizabeth Curtis Sittenfeld, who wanted to explore the minutiae of the work, giving importance to certain aspects that, until that moment, had not been examined in depth. The American writer is known for writing both short stories and novels. Among the latter, it is worth mentioning *Eligible* (2016), a contemporary rewriting of the previously mentioned novel by Jane Austen. Each author wanted to set her work around the social mores of her country, which had a significant influence on the style. Therefore, the main objective of this Final Degree Project is to conduct an analysis of *Eligible*, more precisely of how the author manages to adapt the story of *Pride and Prejudice* to the present day, as well as the different themes that predominate in the novel. In doing so, the changes with respect to the various social conventions of the 21st century will be taken into account. The issues to be dealt with will focus both on the representation of gender identity, sexuality and the different social classes and their importance. In addition, it is necessary to mention that these two topics are clearly affected by the treatment of marriage. Since the aspects exposed are reflected in the works of *Eligible* and *Pride and Prejudice*, it is practical to do another analysis, which, in this case, will be centered on comparing the differences and similarities between the interconnected stories created by both authors.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Many of the works that have been inspired by *Pride and Prejudice* have been considered adaptations or rewritings. The first term is understood as a process in which “one or more entities are reconfigured or adjusted through their engagement with or relationship to one or more other texts or objects” (Corrigan, 23). Whereas, “the authors of rewriting capitalize on the notion of intertextuality to produce their own creations based on previous works so that the creative space first created by another writer is expanded” (Gomez-Galisteo, 3). Having understood the differences between the two concepts, one may conclude that the novel analyzed in this dissertation can be considered a rewriting of the original work. One of the reasons why it is known that it is not an adaptation is that different changes had to be made in order to create this new novel. Some of those aspects would be the setting, Cincinnati, which is clearly related to the author’s place of origin and which disagrees with the original, as the story took place at the beginning of the 19th century in a rural area of England. Likewise, in the rewritings, “the language, the chronology, the intended message might change together with the title” (Dobson, 1), as occurs in *Eligible*. This work does not maintain a similar title to the original, since, in this case, it revolves around the name of the reality television program mentioned in the novel.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning the fact that *Eligible* can be read independently from *Pride and Prejudice*, because, despite making some allusions, such as the use of the same names of the main characters and the relationships between them, the plot develops differently. One of the reasons that supports this fact is that the novel of Sittenfeld offers a more contemporary take on the kind of conflicts, themes, or relationships portrayed in Austen’s novel. Moreover, unlike in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Eligible* shows the characters in their adulthood. The plot of this story continues to

revolve around the Bennet family. In the present day, Jane and Elizabeth (Liz) live together in New York, Liz as a writer at a famous magazine and Jane as a yoga teacher. Due to an unfortunate health problem of their father, they must return to their hometown, Cincinnati. It is then that they discover the decadent family situation, not only because of the fact that three younger sisters (Mary, Kitty, and Lydia) are still living in the family home without providing any help, but also because of the financial problems. Meanwhile, the mother has only one thing on her mind: to arrange the marriage of her daughters. All this seems to be boosted by the TV show she watches, *Eligible*, which revolves around the search for love of its participants. Among the contestants is Chip Bingley, who is unable to find a partner, so he decides to move to Cincinnati. These are the reasons that encourage Mrs. Bennet to see in him the potential to become Jane's future husband.

As mentioned above, *Pride and Prejudice* plays an essential role in the English literary canon. Therefore, when Sittenfeld published her rewrite based on that work, many authors wanted to carry out an analysis of both novels. A clear example is the article by Gomez-Galisteo ("An Eligible Bachelor: Austen, Love, and Marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Eligible* by Curtis Sittenfeld"), which focuses on examining how Sittenfeld presents her characters in comparison with Austen's, as well as commenting on the changes in the representation of marriage. "After Austen: Reinventions, Rewriting, Revisitings" is another valuable analysis comparing these two novels. Its author, Lisa Hopkins, provides a contrast in terms of the representation of unmarried woman, in this case, focusing on the character of Mary, one of the younger sisters of the Bennet family. Both analyses address concrete issues, which I am interested in exploring in my dissertation, along with others that mark the difference between *Pride and Prejudice* and

Eligible. These include the analysis of gender identity and sexuality as well as the influence of social class on issues such as status or marriage.

One of the main reasons for comparing such themes in the works is the significant cultural difference between 19th-century England and 21st-century America, as reflected in the issue of marriage. Therefore, in my examination of the novel, the characteristics of both historical periods and how they have affected the thinking of society regarding the treatment of these will be explored. Likewise, it is necessary to analyze how the different gender identities have been and are represented in society, since this transformation will be reflected in the characters of both works. On the one hand, the female characters, as would be the case of Elizabeth (Liz) and on the other hand, the male ones, where the LGTBQ+ collective is included through the integration of a transgender character in the narrative, Hamilton (Ham). Moreover, it is necessary to highlight the theme of sexuality as a general concept. *Eligible* naturally shows the different ways of enjoying it, either as a couple or through one's own pleasure. A clear example is Mary, one of the younger sisters, who prefers to enjoy her sexuality without the need to engage as it ends up happening with Fitzwilliam Darcy and Lydia. Arguably, the rewrite and the original novel share some of their main themes, as both focus on questions such as sexuality, while addressing the social stereotypes created about it and ultimately exposing the way people think about sexuality.

3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND *ELIGIBLE*

The initial part of this thesis will focus on the comparative analysis between the novels of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Eligible*. This section has been divided into two parts. In the first instance, a thorough exploration of the similarities and differences in the representation of gender identities in both novels will be carried out, focusing especially on the characters of Elizabeth, Wickham and Ham. This will be followed by a discussion of sexuality and the way in which it has been reflected in both works, as well as a commentary on the new types of sexuality present in the rewrite, which establish a clear distinction from the original work. In addition, given the influence that social classes have had in the course of history, it is relevant to analyze their role in both works. Considering the magnitude of this topic, a subdivision has been made for a better understanding. The subsections will explain the themes of social status and marriage and how they are reflected in the novels.

3.1) REPRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Pride and Prejudice presents the representation of gender as one of the most predominant themes in the novel. Therefore, it is essential to conduct an analysis along with a comparison of how such issue is reflected in the work *Eligible*. Likewise, it is necessary to explore the way in which both works deal with the subject of sexuality, which, together with the previously mentioned one are intrinsically connected to the historical and social context in which the plot of both works unfolds.

3.1.1) GENDER IDENTITIES

Over the centuries, the representation of women in literature has been changing in a noticeable way, as the characteristics associated with them varied according to the social conventions of the time. This change can be appreciated in how characters in the novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Eligible*, are portrayed. Jane Austen intended to convey in her work the empowerment of women, which was not very consistent with the historical period, since at that time women were not being taken into account much in terms of making decisions. Camelia Boarcas argues that despite the fact that the female characters the author portrayed in her work had “restricted lives, her novels are not about restriction, not even about expression, but about the relationship between the two, about how women find ways to develop and assert their womanhood despite the restrictions placed on them”. *Eligible* continues with this same interest, however, from a more current point of view, therefore it could be argued that the intention in both works is to question the gender expectations of their time, with the changes that these imply.

In addition, as previously explained, Sittenfeld’s novel is a rewrite, so the characters are not faithful to the original story, yet the two novels share characteristics in common. An example of this is that the narrative in both works focuses on the character of Elizabeth (Liz). While Sittenfeld presents almost exclusively the character’s point of view, Jane Austen makes use of the third person to expose both Elizabeth’s experiences and other characters’ features. Moreover, both novels portray her as a strong, independent and open-minded woman. This somehow breaks with the stereotypes of the era presented in *Pride and Prejudice* and maintains a more updated image of how women are portrayed in the 21st century. The behavior of this character in *Eligible* fits quite well with the personality she possesses in the original novel, as in both works, she represents the

struggle against gender discrimination and prejudice. An obvious manifestation of this fact is that Elizabeth is not afraid to confront any male character, as is the case with Darcy on numerous occasions. In the present day, the ability to express oneself freely is a distinctive feature of society, however, in the 19th century society this was not the case, as women tended to be subservient to male opinion.

An obvious distinction between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Eligible* is the integration of a new type of gender identity in the rewriting. As will be discussed throughout this thesis, Sittenfeld's work is notable for introducing certain concepts into her narrative that allow the reader to situate the story in today's society. One of them is the inclusion of the collective LGBTQ+ in the novel, which can be clearly exemplified through the character of Hamilton (Ham), who is presented as a transgender man. This fact could be understood as a direct contraposition to what Wickham, the character in *Pride and Prejudice*, from which Sittenfeld would have been inspired to create Ham, represents. Wickham is part of the army and therefore certain stereotypes are attributed to him, such as the arrogance. He is also a character with very ambitious aspirations. At first, his attention is focused on Elizabeth. Knowing that she does not have the same interest, he decides to try with Lydia, one of the younger sisters of the Bennet family. This character's interest is exclusively economic, lying about the feelings he has for the young woman. However, Ham, from *Eligible*, represents the opposite. In this case, it is he who has money, so he does not focus on the economic but on the sentimental. He is presented as a humble character who, despite being initially rejected by Lydia's family, shows great interest and effort to be accepted. Therefore, it could be considered that the representation of Ham in the rewriting is more human than what occurs in the original play. Similarly, it should be mentioned that Sittenfeld gives more weight to this character

in her novel than Jane Austen does in *Pride and Prejudice*. One of the main reasons could be because he projects more positive and appropriate values in the narration of the rewritten story.

Consequently, it is arguable that *Eligible* innovates and differs from *Pride and Prejudice*, among other reasons, because of the integration of a character who is part of the LGTBIQ+ collective and who has no place in the original work. Sittenfeld has managed to capture in her novel through the characters the different opinions that today's society may have about this matter, allowing the reader to feel identified with some of them. One evidence of this could be the lack of knowledge on the part of some family members about this issue, as reflected in page 355: "As had occurred to Liz, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Bennet had been familiar with the term *transgender* before the previous evening, and having it jointly defined by Lydia and Ham". Through the inclusion of Ham's character, Sittenfeld is able to emphasize the difference between 19th and 21st century society. However, it is necessary to comment that each novel innovates in its own manner, since both integrate remarkable themes according to the social conventions of the historical period in which the story takes place.

3.1.2) SEXUALITY

The principles and chronology of each period are reflected in both works in themes such as sexuality, which is presented both directly and indirectly, as well as its relationship to social expectations. The female characters in *Pride and Prejudice* attempt to break certain stereotypes, for example, by having Elizabeth take control in her relationship with Darcy. However, such a novel still maintains a traditional point of view. Austen's characters remain true to the idea of not having sexual encounters unless it is with the person they

love, while Sittenfeld conveys through her characters today's vision of sexuality. She maintains the concept of a passionate love, as in the relationships of Jane and Chip or Lydia and Ham. However, she also detaches the characters from the idea of love in certain aspects, focusing on the mere enjoyment provided by sexual relations. This is reflected in the first sexual encounters between Liz and Darcy.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that the authors construct the sexual tension between the characters through not only the narrative but also the language used in the interactions between them, although each one approaches the subject in a different way. Nevertheless, the two works seem to share a common thread. The initial relationship between Darcy and Elizabeth is described in both novels as hostile. Simultaneously, they seem to highlight the apparent dislike they feel for each other, creating tension between the characters. This hatred is reflected on page 74 of *Pride and Prejudice*, when the characters reproach each other for their faults, Elizabeth states: "And *your* defect is a propensity to hate everybody", to which Darcy states: "And yours, "he replies, with a smile, "wilfully to misunderstand them." A similar situation exists in *Eligible* when Darcy points out to Liz that the glass of wine was his, it is then that she asks him "are you worried about my B-minus Cincinnati germs?", challenging him once, it was then that "He looked at her, took a sip, and said, without smiling "I have confidence in my immune system" (81).

One may argue that such hatred is conducive to sexual tension between characters. Hence, the complex and detailed descriptions that both provide in their novels may be intended to convey the idea of sexual tension in a more emotionally effective manner. Jane Austen approaches the subject in a more classical form, so the references to the issue

are not as explicit as they are in *Eligible*. The author of *Pride and Prejudice* describes the encounters between the characters by focusing on small details, such as a crossing of glances. An example of this is found on page 308 on her novel: “their eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of each were overspread with the deepest blush.” In *Eligible*, Sittenfeld makes use of more explicit language, which allows for a more direct understanding of the bond that unites the characters, whether emotional and sexual or simply sexual. The latter is evident on page 238 where Liz takes the initiative by asking Darcy: “want to go to your place and have sex?”

In addition, it should be noted that the author of *Eligible* has managed to make use of techniques that help the reader to place the context in a more modern era, creating the contrast with that of the original work. This is illustrated by the integration of slang in her novel. In this way, she has shown that the writer has to adapt to new social convention and the change they entail. One evidence of this is on page 132 of the work, where can be found the abbreviation “ST”, used in a conversation between Liz and her friend Charlotte. It is the novel itself that provides a detailed explanation about the meaning for a better understanding. The narrator writes that it is “an abbreviation the two friends had been using since their high school days, stood for sexual tension” (132). Therefore, it could be argued that in the rewriting sex is no longer appreciated as a taboo subject and, for that very reason, it has been trivialized to the point of using acronyms to refer to it.

At the end of the novel Sittenfeld exposes a more modern perspective on sexuality through Mary, one of the younger sisters of the Bennet family. In both novels, this character is detached from the main plot. Her tastes and interests are unknown. This is

probably because in neither work is Mary shown to be interested in meeting any man. In *Eligible* her firm ideal about sexuality is shown which revolved around the idea that “any woman capable of satisfying her own desires—which, though not all of them knew it, was any woman anywhere— would never need to disgrace herself in the pursuit of a man” (486). Thus, it could be said that the rewriting gives visibility to the different ways in which women today can make use of and enjoy their sexuality. To this end, it has included some innovations, such as the use of sexual devices. One of the clearest examples is found on page 486: “The nine-inch dildo Lydia had boasted of sounded garish, but after experimenting over the years, Mary had settled upon a sleek and ergonomic vibrator with five modes of stimulation, powered by an almost silent motor”. This quote not only reflects the evolution of society over the years by establishing a sharp distinction between eras, but it is also able to reflect the type of content that is natural to find in a novel written nowadays compared to one written 203 years ago.

3.2) INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CLASSES

One of the most conditioning factors in society is social classes, which influence the perception of each person, reflecting the socioeconomic and educational level of each one. In spite of numerous attempts to alleviate the inequalities generated by these social classes, they continue to form part of the hierarchical division established by society. This classification determines the social status of each individual, which is seen as a determining factor with respect to the marital union. All this is reflected in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Eligible*.

As the storyline of the novels unfolds, one can observe how women are depicted as complex human beings, mainly by portraying their emotions. However, they are also

constrained in society by their social and economic status. The Bennet family, specifically the sisters, are a clear example of this. The reason for this is that despite having their own aspirations and desires, their chances of achieving these goals are hindered by the limitations imposed by both their gender and their social class.

3.2.1) STATUS

Societies have evolved according to the social conventions of each historical stage. However, all of them seem to have something in common, the need to play a role in order to fulfill the expectations imposed by society itself is still evident. According to Irvine, “England in 1813 was a quite rigidly hierarchical society, and *Pride and Prejudice* is in part a novel about the possibility and implications of mobility between status groups in such a society” (10). Jane Austen portrayed in her novel on numerous occasions the ostentatious social gatherings that took place not only as a form of entertainment, but also to demonstrate the purchasing power of each family. The latter was essential in terms of finding a partner for the young people who were presented in society and therefore the forms of courtship were governed according to the social class to which they belonged. Despite being something characteristic of the past, these formalities can still be seen in today's society as Sittenfeld has reflected in her work.

In *Eligible*, the traditional value is maintained through the character of the Bennets' mother, who organizes, along with other women, the events that bring together the high society of Cincinnati. This fact allows establishing a clear connection with the original novel, providing a point of view more in line with 21st century society and allowing current readers to identify with the work. Moreover, the novel also breaks with the traditional form of courtship by integrating a reality show, which perfectly adapts the

way society understands relationships today. The question of status is limited, social classes remain in the background, giving importance to the search for love, instead of the acquisitive level.

As it was previously explained both novels address, albeit in different ways, the various social classes. This distinction is mainly due to the historical context, as well as the geographical location. “Jane Austen is a novelist who comes from England, all of her works are the result of her observations of the social conditions that were happening in England at that time” (Dewi, 17), whereas Sittenfeld presents in her novel the different social classes in accordance with the established American society of the 21st century. In *Pride and Prejudice* there is a clear distinction between the middle and upper classes. Jane Austen reflects in her work “that Darcy family belongs to the upper class. It can be seen from their estate, snobbish life style” (Hariyanti, 8). An example of this is the way in which the character’s house is described: “the rooms were lofty and handsome, and their furniture suitable to the fortune of its proprietor” (Austen, 30). In addition, another aspect that allows an understanding of Darcy’s social position is his income. This fact is presented at the beginning of the novel, when the author introduces the character to the readers by including “the report, which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year” (Austen, 13). *Eligible* apparently maintains the idea that one has about Darcy’s character from the original work. Sittenfeld describes him as an arrogant doctor. It is not only the fortune he possesses that places him in high social class, but also the job he occupies, since having private health care in the United States means that doctors’ salaries are high.

On the other hand, the Bennet family could be considered middle class because of the characteristics that the author of *Pride and Prejudice* attributes to them in her work. One of the most relevant indicators is the income of each family: “Mr. Bennet’s property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year” (Austen, 36). Sittenfeld has reflected in her work a similar status for the family, in which “Mr. Bennet had done little while supporting his family with a large but dwindling inheritance” (Sittenfeld, 9). Despite the differences between the novels, they share a common nexus, economic problems. In the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, the issue is dominated by low income, which is reflected in their low social status and the need for the mother to marry off her daughters. *Eligible* has reflected the same economic problems, giving them a more present-day approach. As previously mentioned, Mr. Bennet has serious health problems and since he has no health insurance, he is forced to remortgage his house in order to cover the high costs of medical bills, thus causing a decadent financial situation for the family. All this is due to the fact that, as explained above, healthcare in the United States is private, with the consequence that not everyone can afford such expenses. Once again, the distinction between social classes is emphasized.

As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, the authors correspond to different historical periods; therefore, the interests of the characters will be influenced by the social conventions of the time to which they belong. According to the values of the time in which *Pride and Prejudice* was written, “for women, working to support themselves was incompatible with genteel social position: they could inherit money or marry it” (Hume, 293); for this reason, the novel reflects the idea of marital union as a way to improve one’s social class. The woman in this case would equalize her status to that of her husband. This fact is reflected in the union between Charlotte and Williams, as both

novels describe him as a wealthy man. Therefore, it could be argued that “*reality* in this story is present in the person of Charlotte Lucas, who knows exactly what she is getting in Mr. Collins but is nonetheless deeply relieved to be able to marry him” (Hume, 294). Hence, from what has been previously discussed, “from the vantage point of the early nineteenth century she was probably an object of empathy for some women” (Hume, 294). However, “sympathy for Charlotte is in short supply among twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers” (Hume, 294), since, in 21st century society, social position is not usually a determining factor in bringing about a marital union. *Eligible* diverges from the original play in terms of the relationship that unites Charlotte and Williams. While it is true that the two characters end up getting married, the reasons behind it are not similar to those presented in *Pride and Prejudice*. In the rewriting Charlotte is aware that marrying Williams could improve her quality of life thanks to the wealth he possesses, however, the main cause that motivates such a link is related to the feeling they have for each other, which is not reflected in the original work.

Both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Eligible* present economic motives as the cause of rejection by some characters. An example of this is Fitzwilliam Darcy’s initial opinion of the Bennet family given their declining financial situation. In addition, it is necessary to emphasize the idea that in both novels the character of Darcy is presented as a man who possesses a great fortune, which attracts the attention of many women. Therefore, it could be said that this fact poses a problem for marriage, since economic motives prevail over sentimental ones. Although in both works this character ends up getting engaged to Elizabeth, *Eligible* diverges from *Pride and Prejudice* showing, in turn, to be a more innovative novel than the original, by introducing the term of “prenup” (Sittenfeld, 470), which referred to the prenuptial agreement, in it. This could be due to the fact that the

author wants to emphasize the fact that Elizabeth's interest in Darcy is a love interest and not a financial one. With this, she makes it clear that the purpose of the union between the two is not to ascend in social class, as one might expect from her character, since this nexus could solve the declining economic situation that the Bennet family is going through.

It could be claimed that this idea is in contraposition to what has been presented in the original work, which highlights the economic factor as one of the main conditions for marriage. As explained above, Lydia ultimately marries Wickham, thus achieving what they both desire. She longed for marriage and his interests were financially focused. However, the Bennet family did not have a large fortune or a high status, which is the reason why the union between the two was difficult to be carried out. So that this fact would not trigger any scandalous event, such as the separation of the couple after the engagement and the possible defamations that could affect the family, Darcy decided to financially compensate Wickham so that the union could be formalized. Although not exactly the same, this idea could be related to the concept of the dowry which "is distinctive because it is a large transfer made to a daughter at the time of marriage" (Botticini and Siow, 1385). This concept is decisive in situating the original work in the 19th century England, thus marking a clear contrast with *Eligible*. As a result, one might argue that both works focus their attention on different ideas reflecting the social conventions of each era and geographic locations.

On the other hand, one could comment that Sittenfeld projects through the character of Mary, one of the daughters of the Bennet family, the idea of an independent woman, which does not resemble what is presented in the original work. Readers can

understand the freedom this character feels through the words and descriptions offered by the author of *Eligible* in her work. In it, the young woman is able to enjoy her solitude without having to deal with social conventions that, despite the evolution from the 19th to 21st century society, still tend to associate women with marriage. The point of view offered by the novel can be understood as a break with the stereotypes that predominate in the original work. Likewise, the fact that Mary has to hide from her own family could be interpreted as a flight from being judged for her decision not to maintain a sentimental relationship, which was different from the path her sisters had taken. This fact could have a clear relationship with the idea that was held in the 19th century where women had to marry in order to maintain a high status and not be judged by the rest of society.

3.2.2) MARRIAGE

The plot of *Pride and Prejudice* illustrates the concerns of the time, such as moral values. It could be said that the author reflects in her work a portrait of the English society of the time. One of the factors that could be key to the characterization are relationships, which are motivated by economic ambitions and love. However, Sittenfeld presents marriage through a more modern perspective adapting to the social conventions of the 21st century. A clear example of this could be Jane Bennet, who manages to reconcile motherhood with marriage in a different way than the conventional one. As previously mentioned, Jane longs to start a family, however, she is clear that, if she cannot achieve it in the traditional way, she will do her best to start it on her own. It is then that the author introduces the idea of the single-parent family, a concept well-known and accepted by 21st-century society. However, during the 19th century it was difficult to conceive of the idea of a single woman raising a child, as most women who became pregnant “had

extremely limited choices and, for many, the only possible route was to give up their child to the Foundling hospital” (Moorhead).

Both novels portray their “contemporary” societies through their characters. One of them is Mrs. Bennet, who is characterized as representing a somewhat traditionalist attitude, as her greatest ambition is to marry off her daughters. Among her concerns is the age of Jane and Elizabeth, as she is afraid that they are too old for anyone to be interested in them. This was a key factor in the 19th-century society, and one of the most important incentives for arranging marriages was purchasing power. Both works reflect this theme, albeit in a different way. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the author indirectly alludes to the problem of succession. In the 19th century society “by law and by custom, a woman was granted very little control over money, even money that we would today consider her own. A woman of the upper classes could expect to be granted a ‘fortune’ from her family upon marriage or the death of her father” (“Chicago Public Library”). This is why, in the absence of a male son, the Bennet family estate would go to the closest relative, which in this case is a cousin, Mr. Collins. For this reason, the mother has such a predilection for matching one of her older daughters with him, so that, in this way, the family property would continue in the family legacy. Although this same attempted of marital union is reflected in the novel of *Eligible*, the rewriting diverges from the original in terms of the idea of succession. Sittenfeld approaches the themes of marriage from a different point of view, avoiding presenting it as something necessary to continue the family legacy. In this case the attempted union between Liz and Mr. Collins is aimed at trying to solve the Bennet family’s financial problems. Additionally, she does not make evident in her novel the need to have a male descendant in order to secure those assets, as opposed to the idea presented by Jane Austen.

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (Austen, 1). Although *Pride and Prejudice* initiates its story with this sentence, neither the novel nor the rewriting is related to the moral values that the sentence seems to imply. As Alhasan and Omar argue, “the familiar ending that Austen disapproved is that a good reward for a poor woman is to marry a wealthy man. To the contrary, her unfamiliar reward is to marry her soul mate. In addition, Austen with the happy-ever-after ending, she confirms a universal theme of marriage as the ultimate goal for a woman” (137). It is this same type of ending in *Eligible*; however, as mentioned numerous times in this thesis, the way of approaching such a concept is different. On the one hand, Sittenfeld exposes a media wedding broadcast on the air and starring the elder Bennet sister and her new husband, Chip Bingley. This fact alludes to certain programs that are broadcasted today and whose content would be inconceivable for 19th century society. On the other hand, the wedding between Lydia and Ham should be highlighted. Both novels narrate the escape of Lydia and her partner. However, neither the circumstances nor the characters that accompany her are the same. Ham is a transgender person. The first impression of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet is one of complete rejection, but as the story progresses, readers can appreciate the change of mentality of the characters, who, at the end of the story, end up reconciling with Ham, implying that they respect his decision to change gender. Therefore, through the union of this couple *Eligible* gives visibility to the LGTBIQ+ collective, thus marking a great difference with the original work.

4. CONCLUSION

Throughout the pages of this dissertation, we have been able to see the way in which Jane Austen represents in her work the traditional values of her time, such as the vision of marriage, the differences between social classes or the representation of gender based on stereotypes. However, it is the author herself who questioned these values in her novel, as has been reflected in the analysis of this dissertation. Something similar occurs with Sittenfeld, who maintains some traditional traits, as shown through the character of the mother of the Bennet family, while integrating current issues in the 21st century society, though the inclusion of a character who is part of the LGTBIQ+ collective, Ham. As is evident, the historical period in which the novels were written is different. Jane Austen portrays the mores of the 19th century English society, while Curtis Sittenfeld reflects the social conventions of the 21st century America. Despite the apparent differences, both novels share certain similarities. *Pride and Prejudice* illustrates a social change in terms of the representation of women's status at the time. Although the work includes female characters that follow the established canons of the time to which the story refers, the writer introduces innovations through the character of Elizabeth, who is described as a strong and independent woman. Therefore, it could be argued that this similar idea is the one that the author of *Eligible* has tried to perpetuate in her work, centering the narration of the story on that character. Social classes are a crucial factor in both novels, as they affect both the view of marriage and that of status. Through a critical analysis of the two subjects, notable differences have become evident, for example, *Pride and Prejudice* exposes the remarkable importance of social class advancement, while *Eligible* does not evidence this fact. All this could be the result of the 203-years gap between the two novels.

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