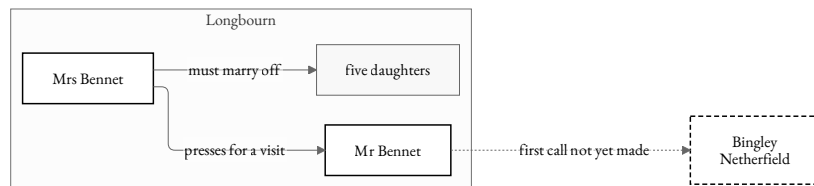


In Regency England, women of the gentry could not hold property, enter professions, or support themselves independently. Marriage was not a social nicety but an economic mechanism. It was the only reliable route by which a daughter could secure her financial future. A family with daughters and no male heir had one primary problem to solve.

Chapter 1 opens with the system in its initial configuration: five Bennet daughters, an estate that cannot pass to any of them, and a new single man of large fortune who has just taken the neighbouring property. The chapter is a single dialogue — twenty-three years of marriage compressed into a few exchanges — and the dynamic between Mr and Mrs Bennet tells you as much about how this system operates as the narrator’s closing summary does.



Solid border: active participant. Grey fill: present but not individually foregrounded. Dashed border: not yet integrated into the social network.

Chapter 1

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

That famous constant, asserted at the top of the file, is globally declared and locally scoped. A public attribute on a single class — with no integration tests. “Universally acknowledged” means, as the second paragraph clarifies, “by the surrounding families.” What the man himself wants is beside the point. He has money; they have daughters; the classification follows automatically.

“My dear Mr Bennet,” said his lady to him one day, “have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?”

Mr Bennet replied that he had not.

“But it is,” returned she; “for Mrs Long has just been here, and she told me all about it.”

Mr Bennet made no answer.

“Do not you want to know who has taken it?” cried his wife impatiently.

“*You* want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.”

This was invitation enough.