



## Fangirling Jane Austen Style

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All About Love Stories: By Ele! - The Fangirl Verdict

### Introduction

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

And so begins one of the most famous stories ever told – Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen, first published in 1813 and adapted into countless TV shows and films ever since – even one that includes zombies. And my go-to when I need a pick me up. It is, for me, a comfort blanket – and I’ve discovered, so too is kdrama.



*Romance is blossom trees: Soo Yea-ji and Kim Soo-hyun, It's Okay Not to Be Okay*

Now, a confession: I’m a romance addict. When I say romance, I mean the swoony, will-they-won’t-they, and they really should as they’re perfect for one another, sort. Ah, the Jane Austen type with a fleeting glance over the fan, a

scant touch of hands, a longing, lingering utterance of their name. The sort I can squeeEEEE over (and I do *a lot* of squeeing). Just as I adore Jane Austen stories, I too find a cosy kind of comfort in kdrama, in the restrained but powerful story of love.



*Swoon: Song Joong-ki, Vincenzo*

There are the familiar tropes to make me swoon: a beginning set in a beguiling world far removed from my own; a misunderstanding that sets the One True Pairing (OTP) on opposing sides; a throwing together through unusual events; a falling out; a truck (or horse and carriage) of doom; an interfering grandmother or aunt; and then a final happy – gloriously sweet and chaste and heartfelt – ending!

These tropes are what my brain craves. Does yours too? Well, with Jane Austen in mind, I figured what better way to delve into some of the best kdramas of the romantic sort than via the aid of *Pride and Prejudice*. Who's with me? Let's go!

## Setting



*Yongin Daejanggeum Park, filming location for many Korean dramas, such as Empress Ki*

Kicking off things, as all good stories should, is a beautiful setting. Like Mr Darcy's grander than grand home of Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice*, kdrama makes good use of its filming locations to take our breath away. From its recreated historical buildings (*Empress Ki*), to its modern architecture (*The Greatest Love* – the lead male's cool house is in fact a museum), to its sweeping landscapes (*Mr Sunshine*), to its blossom trees (any drama filmed in spring) and snow (any drama filmed in winter), yep, kdrama has its gorgeous settings down.



*Pretty Korea: Mr Sunshine*

## Costume



*Beautiful clothing: Soo Yea-ji, It's Okay Not to be Okay (designer Minju Kim)*

Shopping for ribbons, doffing top hands, who doesn't love a well-dressed OTP? Whether it's modern and stylish (*Crash Landing on You*) or fairy tale theatrical (*It's Okay Not to be Okay*) or period sageuk (*Queen for Seven Days*) the outfits are invariably eye-catching.

## Original Soundtracks



*Kim Ha-eun as Seol-hwa playing the Haegeum, Chuno*

While Elizabeth's piano playing would not be "at all amiss, if she practiced more", and Mary's playing "delighted us long enough", perhaps Lady Catherine de Burgh sums up my thoughts on music best when she says: "There are few

people in England, I suppose, who have more true enjoyment of music than myself, or a better natural taste. If I had ever learnt, I should have been a great proficient.”

Quite. The proficiency of original soundtracks in kdrama is very high indeed, with many a romantic, dramatic, and heart-breaking moment enhanced by an invariably extremely catchy tune. From the chirpy ‘Paradise’ by Tmax (*Boys Over Flowers*) to the powerful ‘Orbit’ by Hwasa (*The King, Eternal Monarch*), to the punchy Auditory Hallucination by Jang Jae-in featuring NaShow (*Kill Me, Heal Me*).

For me though, it’s the sublime lament of ‘Lovers’ played on the traditional Korean instrument, the haegeum, and the whole of the original *Chuno* soundtrack that best demonstrates how music can lift an exceptional drama into an epic one. You might like to play ‘Lovers’ while you read on...

[드라마 추노OST \(K-Drama 'Chuno' OST\) 비익련리\(Lovers\) Performed by KOREAN POPS](#)

[ORCHESTRA\(코리안팝스오케스트라\) - YouTube](#)

## OTP Misunderstandings

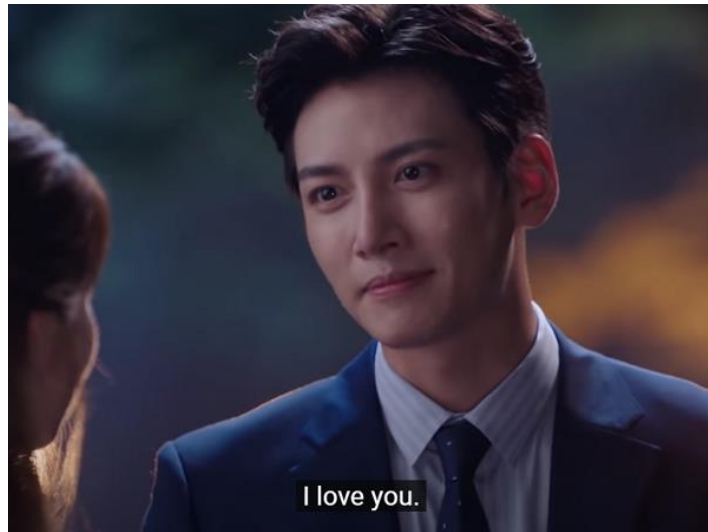


*Playing with gender: Yoon Eun-hye and Gong Yoo, Coffee Prince*

No romantic kdrama would be complete without a misunderstanding or ten. Just as Elizabeth Bennett mistakes Mr Darcy's pride as "a propensity to hate everybody" and he her prejudice as "wilfully to misunderstand", from bad first impressions the ensuing drama never fails to deliver.

Probably the most well-worn of them all is the female lead dressed as a boy. From *Sungkyonkwan Scandal*, to *Love in the Moonlight*, to *Shine or Go Crazy*, to *The King's Affection*, it is a truth universally acknowledged that kdrama's leading females must first appear as men and confuse everyone. Kudos to *The Tale of Nokdu* for reversing the role. Far and away for me the greatest of them all, and the most wonderfully handled, is *Coffee Prince*.

## Always a Happy Ending



*Happily ever after: Ji Chang-wook and Nam Ji-hyun, Suspicious Partner*

Perhaps the thing I like best in romantic kdrama – as in all of Jane Austen’s books – is that they end *happily*. Jane Austen had her reasons (her own unhappy romantic ending) just as Korea has its (a painful country division) that perhaps explains why the successful coming together of our OTPs gives comfort to all who’ve suffered heartbreak. Even when the ending veers into realism (*Suspicious Partner*) or tragedy (*Mr Sunshine*) it still leaves the heart with hope.

## The Cast



*Great characters played by great actors: Jang Hyuk, Chuno*

Where would any story be without flawed, brilliant characters? And where would kdrama be without its stellar actors? *Chuno* just wouldn't be as compelling without (deafening squeeEEEEEE) Jang Hyuk playing Lee Daegil. *It's Okay, That's Love* without Jo In-sung's heartfelt portrayal of Jang Jae-yeo wouldn't make the fantastic OTP half so glorious.



*Heartfelt OTP: Jo In-sung and Gong Hyo-jin, It's Okay, That's Love*

### **Pride and Prejudice Kdrama-style**

With all this in mind, I thought it might be fun to cast *Pride and Prejudice* with the very best and, to me, most fitting kdrama stars. Feel free to suggest your own!



Female Lead: Elizabeth Bennett

Park Min-young as Chae Young-shin, *Healer* (2015)



*Elizabeth Bennett: Park Min-young, Healer*

“You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it.”

To make our Elizabeth Bennett, I’d like to combine aspects of many characters Park Min-young has played (*Sungkyonkwan Scandal, Her Private Life, Queen for Seven Days*) with the single-minded, slightly off-beat but extremely likable, Chae Young-shin in *Healer*. Always bright, charming, astute and playful. She also scores bonus points for having, as Mr Darcy affirms, “very fine eyes”.

Male Lead: Mr Darcy

Hyun Bin as Captain Ri Jeong-hyuk, *Crash Landing on You* (2020)



*Mr Darcy: Hyun Bin, Crash Landing on You*

“She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*.”

Stiff, buttoned-up, outwardly awkward but in fact loyal, upstanding, warm-hearted, who better than Captain Ri in *Crash Landing on You* to be the eponymous Mr Darcy? Oh yes, and very good looking to boot – bonus!

## Second Female Lead: Jane Bennett

Gong Hyo-jin as Gu Ae-jung, *The Greatest Love* (2011)



*Jane Bennett: Gong Hyo-jin, The Greatest Love*

“‘Tis too much!’ she added, ‘by far too much. I do not deserve it. Oh! Why is not everybody as happy?’”

Kdramas never have just one romance going on at once (think of how much we cared about Seo Dan and Gu Seung-jun in *Crash Landing on You*). Austen gave her secondary leads an easier time of it than some, though forbearance is the word that sums up both the Bennett’s eldest daughter and also any role Gong Hyo-jin plays, most especially evident in *The Greatest Love* but also in *Thank You* too. Never has one woman forgiven so much wrong. Elizabeth Bennett tells her sister: “you are too good”, and goodness, that was never truer than for Gu Ae-jung.

## Second Male Lead: Mr Bingley

Lee Seung-gi as Cha Dae-woong, *My Girlfriend is a Gumiho* (2010)



*Mr Bingley: Lee Seung-gi, My Girlfirend is a Gumiho*

“He was lively and unreserved, danced every dance, was angry the ball closed so early, and talked of giving one himself.”

Affable, but also easily steered in the wrong direction, Mr Bingley is immediately drawn to “the prettiest girl in the room”, Jane Bennett – just as Cha De-woong is drawn to Gu Miho (Shin Min-a). I mean, who wouldn’t be? Sure, she’s a supernatural nine-tailed fox but if Mr Bingley can forgive Jane Bennett’s brash mother, Cha De-woong can get used to a few moonlit tails.

## The “villains”

No kdrama would be as angst-inducing without its share of antagonistic forces. Often internal, such as personal tragedies (*Hometown Cha Cha Cha*) or mental health issues (*It's Okay, That's Love* and *Kill Me, Heal Me*) kdrama can also throw in a stubbornly snobbish grandmother or a prickly ex-girlfriend just to make our leads' romance even bumpier...

## Mr George Wickham

Jang Hyuk as Kwon Oh-joon, *Robber* (2007)



*Mr George Wickham: Jang Hyuk, Robber*

“He is, beyond all comparison, the most agreeable man I ever saw.”

Merciless and single-minded, Mr Wickham manipulates Elizabeth with as much ease as fellow ‘seduce-them-for-their-money-then-dump-them’ Oh-joon in the oftentimes difficult to watch, *Robber*. No stranger to manipulative, ruthless characters (see also *Money Flower* and *My Country: New Age*). Jang Hyuk knows just how to play a less than scrupulous character while simultaneously gaining our sympathy – or in my case, enduring (squeeeeeeeing) devotion.

Lady Catherine de Burgh

Kim Young-ok as The Grandmother, *Coffee Prince* (2006)



*Lady Catherine de Burgh: Kim Young-ok, Coffee Prince*

“I take no leave of you, Miss Bennett. I send no compliments to your mother. You deserve no such attention. I am most seriously displeased.”

As forthright as only a secure, wealthy woman-of-a-certain-age can be, The Grandmother in *Coffee Prince* is as acerbically friendly to our heroine as Mr Darcy’s aunt, Lady Catherine de Burgh, is to Elizabeth Bennet – until, of course, she gets wind that romance is afoot and then all claws are out. I can almost hear Kim Young-ok spitting: “Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?”

## Miss Bingley

Baek Jin-hee as Tanshiri, *Empress Ki* (2014)



*Miss Bingley: Baek Jin-hee, Empress Ki*

“‘I beg your pardon,’ replied Miss Bingley, turning away with a sneer. ‘Excuse my interference. – It was kindly meant.’”

Snobbish and acidic, Mr Bingley’s sister is quite the opposite to his affability. Just as Empress Consort, Tanashiri, in *Empress Ki* is dogged in her determination to poison anyone looking likely to steal her throne. OK, Baek Jin-hee’s character takes things a tad further than Miss Bingley’s proprietorial interference, but you get my drift.

**Comedic characters:** If there’s one thing I personally find ‘difficult’ about kdramas, it’s the comedic characters. Often extremely loud and over-the-top, they are – now I think of it – not so very different to the comic relief characters in *Pride and Prejudice*...

Lydia Bennett

Ji Sung as Ahn Yo-na, *Kill Me, Heal Me* (2015)



*Lydia Bennett: Ji Sung, Kill Me, Heal Me*

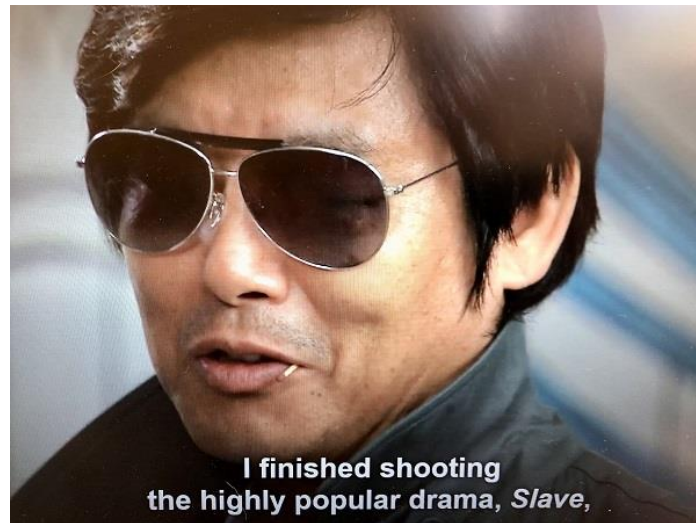
“‘And we meant to treat you all,’ added Lydia; ‘but you must lend us the money, for we have just spent ours at the shop.’”

Loud, extrovert, thoughtless, a fangirl (of soldiers in uniform) the youngest Bennett sister, Lydia, is every bit a modern selfish teenage girl. Who could be more fitting to be her than the loudest of Cha Do-hyun’s multiple personalities in *Kill Me, Heal Me*, Yo-na, idolising over Oppa and squealing as only Lydia Bennett can – oh, OK, and me too.



Mr Collins

Sung Dong-il as Ban Do-hong, *My Girlfriend is a Gumiho* (2011)



*Mr Collins: Sung Dong-il, My Girlfriend is a Gumiho*

“I am happy on every occasion to offer those little delicate compliments which are always acceptable to ladies.”

If Mr Collins were any more ridiculous, obsequious, vain, he’d be comedic – oh, wait, he is funny in his pomposity, and I give credit to Sung Dong-il for making the often cringeworthy film-director-in-shades in *My Girlfriend is a Gumiho* hilarious too. For likeable cringe, see also: Cha Seung-won as Dokko-jin in *The Greatest Love*.

**The Ensemble:** What would *Pride and Prejudice* be without all the Bennett sisters? The balls would be a lot quieter, that’s for sure, just as a kdrama without its ensemble cast would lose some of its greatest charm. Kdramas excel at creating ‘villages’ of family (think of the Gonjin residents in *Hometown Cha Cha Cha*, the ahjumamas in *Crash Landing on You*, the crazy shop owners in *Vincenzo*).

Miss Charlotte Lucas

Shin Se-kyung as Dam, *Tree with Deep Roots* (2011)



*Miss Lucas: Shin Se-kung, Tree with Deep Roots*

“I am not romantic you know.”

Left on the shelf aged twenty-seven (properly ancient), Miss Lucas makes the seemingly mad decision to marry the charmless Mr Collins and secure her future. Sensible – if not romantic – Dam too chooses to follow her photographic head and help King Sejong create Hangul in *Tree with Deep Roots* rather than run off into the sunset with Ddol-bok (played by, squeeeee, Jang Hyuk) – and, yes, I’m left as askance by the decision as Elizabeth Bennett was of Miss Lucas’.

Mary Bennett

Kang Han-na as Yang Hye-sun, *My Roommate is a Gumiho* (2021)



Mary Bennett: Kang Ha-na, *My Roommate is a Gumiho*

“Far be it from me, my dear sister, to depreciate such pleasures. They would doubtless be congenial with the generality of female minds. But I confess they would have no charms for *me*. I should infinitely prefer a book.”

Speaking her mind when entirely unwanted is Mary’s fatal flaw but also her genius – just as it is for Yang Hye-sun, the 700-year-old gumiho-turned-human, in *My Roommate is a Gumiho*. I am a fan of the literal and both Mary and Yang Hye-sun only ever speak what they literally mean.

Kitty Bennett

Shin Min-a as Kang Joo-eun, *Oh My Venus* (2015)



*Kitty Bennett: Shin Min-a, Oh My Venus*

“‘And you are never to stir out of doors, till you can prove, that you have spent ten minutes of every day in a rational manner.’ Kitty, who took these threats in a serious light, began to cry.”

Despite being older than Lydia, Kitty “will follow wherever Lydia leads” – so that would be hurrying after her to throw handkerchiefs at soldiers or, as in Joo-eun’s case in *Oh My Venus*, chasing So Ji-sub to help her get fit. Kitty’s enthusiasm is as infectious as Shin Min-a in everything she does. See also *Arang and the Magistrate*, *My Girlfriend is a Gumiho*, *Hometown Cha Cha Cha*. It’s the dimples!

## Mr and Mrs Bennett

Im Ye-jin as Na Gong-joo and Ahn Suk-hwan as Geum Il-bong, *Boys Over Flowers* (2009)



*Mr and Mrs Bennett: Im Ye-jin and Ahn Suk-hwan, Boys Over Flowers*

“An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. – Your mother will never see you again if you do *not* marry Mr Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*.”

Kdrama excels in bickering couples who seem on the brink of divorce, just like the Bennetts who are as ill-matched as a gat with a rah-rah skirt. But like Mr and Mrs Bennett, underlying the squabbles is love. So even as Jan-di’s mother pushes to marry her daughter off to a wealthy man in *Boys Over Flowers*, they pull together when facing hardship.

## Closing words



*Lee Na-young, Romance is a Bonus Book*

As our OTP rides happily away in their palanquin with blossom falling, with the cast of supporters cheering them on, I should perhaps leave you all with a final quote from *Pride and Prejudice*, spoken by Mr Darcy in answer to Elizabeth's question of when he fell in love with her:

"I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look, or the words, which laid the foundation. It is too long ago. I was in the middle before I knew I *had* begun."

And so it is with kdrama; I was watching *Romance is a Bonus Book* – my *fiftieth* kdrama – before I knew I had begun. Reader, I give you fair warning.