

Family Relationship in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice

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ABSTRACT

The novel represents the society in which a woman's status is of the greatest significance. The paper examines the proposal and the truth of love as her character often struggle to work out the best way to make a satisfied relationship. The novel depicts the women in her novel as the ones who make societal choice, as the men are the ones prejudiced by the women in society. Relationships are greatly predisposed by a character's social status and financial condition. The paper reveals the Darcy and Elizabeth relationship is believed impracticable by societal values due to their conflicting class ranks. It highlights the personal prejudices and pride, as seen in Elizabeth and Darcy, at first hinder factual perceptive and connection, but prevail over these personal faults allows for deeper relationships.

Keywords: prejudices, pride, relationship, personal, love, social, status and truth

INTRODUCTION

'Pride and Prejudice' is apt and suggestive, for the words 'Pride and Prejudice' indicate the dominant characteristics of the two principal characters of the book. The central figures of the story are Darcy and Elizabeth. The story describes the effect of pride upon the one and that of prejudice upon the other, and the way in which eventually the one conquers his pride and the other her prejudice. By the end of the story, both pride and prejudice give way to true affection and esteem. Critics are agreed that the title *Pride and Prejudice* was suggested by some sentences at the end of *Fanny Burney's Cecilia*. In *Cecilia* we get: "The whole of this misfortune has been the result of "Pride and Prejudice", and the last two words are repeated twice on the same page, each time in large type, so that they catch the eye. The book was published in 1876, and we know Jane had great admiration for Miss Burney's novels. It may have struck her that *Pride and Prejudice* was an improvement on her own more commonplace title, and there was nothing to prevent her from using it.

Pride and Prejudice was apparently written entirely for the pleasure of the writer without any thought of publication. But a year after it was completed, in November 1797, Jane's father wrote to the well-known publisher, Casell, to publish the book. The proposal was rejected by the publisher. *Pride and Prejudice* was not destined to be published until 1813, sixteen years later. During this time, it was extensively corrected and revised. "The opening line of the novel announces: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." (*Pride and Prejudice*, Ch 1)

Plot: The story of the novel is based on a century-old idea: a misunderstanding about character, good and bad, and a bad man good. Discoveries are about the real characters of the protagonists form the denouncement of the novel. There are marriages in the conventional manner, and all live happily ever afterwards. Jane married Bingley, Elizabeth married Darcy, and Lydia married Wickham. Even though Catherine was mostly with Elizabeth and Jane and the two sisters took great care of her education and shining so that she may not go the way of Lydia. Maria remained mostly with her father, as Mr. Bennet did not want to be left alone without the company of even one of his five daughters. The episode where Lydia and Wickham had a sobering effect even on the foolish and childish Mrs. Bennet. Thus there are no loose ends, and everything has been tied up in the usual 18th century manner.

Novel of Character and Not of Plot Then the plot of the novel is not original. It is of minor importance. The book lives and moves because of the character of Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine of the novel. To create an entirely charming heroine is a difficult task, but Jane Austen has succeeded where so many others have failed. In chapter 1, when Mr. Bingley arrives, she declares "I am thinking of his marrying one of them" (*Pride and Prejudice* 3). Elizabeth is charming and Jane Austen has succeeded, as Margaret Kennedy points out, in conveying, "The lovely April of her prim: it is an amazing feat for a girl of twenty-one to perform, but Jane Austen has performed it in the novel "Elizabeth has wit, sense, and a warm heart; but it is not these which capture the time of life which gives to all these attractions a spring freshness." Countless readers have fallen

in love with the charming heroine. The story is tame, even insipid, and is Elizabeth who makes it such a delightful story. "Austen's complex sketching of different marriages ultimately allows readers to question what forms of alliance are desirable especially when it comes to privileging economic, sexual, or companionate attraction" (Schmidt, Katrin 2004)

There is much in *Pride and Prejudice* which is in the tradition of the comedy of manners. There is the country Squire, there are people turning up at the wrong moments a wrong things there are fantastic sad ridiculous char like Mr. Collins and Lady De Bourgh, and the chic and stupid Mrs. Bennet. There is the comic proposal of Mr. Collins and the fantastic encounter between Lady De Bourgh. Tanner writes that Mrs. Bennet in particular, "has a very limited view of the requirements of that performance; lacking any introspective tendencies she is incapable of appreciating the feelings of others and is only aware of material objects" (Tanner, Tony 124)

Pride and Prejudice: Elizabeth. The novel has enough of drama, wit and humour. Character and action develop through short scenes in dialogue, and there are soliloquies which reveal character and motive "But there are subtleties in *Pride and Prejudice* which give a new twist to this comedy of manners." The attorney, Mr. Gardiner, is not a bore, but the best-bred man in the book. Mr. Darcy is several steps above the average country squire. He is the best-born of all the heroes of Jane Austen. Only, he is not good mannered enough. But even this deficiency is overcome by the end of the novel. He is set down, he is brought down by the end, but the consummate skill of the novelist lies in the fact that despite his faults, we like him and consider him to be worthy in every way of the charming heroine

The novel has its faults and quite glaring ones too. We have already noted the lack of originality of the plot. There are faults in characterization as well. Darcy is real and convincing, but we do not know quite enough about him. His extreme insolence in the beginning does not quite match with his latter behaviour. It goes too far and so strikes us as unconvincing. There is some want of skill in the minor characters as well. Many, the provincial blue-stocking, is carelessly done, she is not even funny. Kitty is insignificant; she does not come to life in the pages of the novel. Mr. Collins and Lady De Bourgh are certainly very amusing, but they seem to have strayed from another book. They are not quite worthy to be a supporting cast for Elizabeth. In her scenes with them, even Elizabeth becomes a little less real, and her speeches grow a little stilted. They are not three dimensional figures.

But despite such faults, and perhaps many others, *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the most popular of the novels of Jane Austen. It is one of the masterpieces of fiction in the English language. It is a great, 'classic', a work for all times and all countries. Nobody, who has ever read the novel with pleasure once, has ever liked it less on successive readings. This is so because of its charming heroine, its easy, graceful style, its high entertainment value, and its scintillating dialogues. "Pride and Prejudice is also about that thing that all great novels consider the search for self. And it is the first great novel that teaches us this search is as surely undertaken in the drawing room making small talk as in the pursuit of a great white whale or the public punishment of adultery" (Quindlen, Anna 6)

Pride and Prejudice is a social comedy. It is social because it is a study in the social life of two or three middle-class families in a provincial town. Jane Austen has studied the action and reactions of the people within these narrow limits. It is a comedy because Jane Austen has exposed the foibles, the follies, and the absurdities inherent in the life and character of these people. She observes their life and interprets it in terms of comedy. Their social relationships are largely determined by monetary considerations. Hence the remark of David Daiches that in *Pride and Prejudice* the novelist, "has exposed the economic basis of social relationships with an ironic smile"

The novel deals with the social life of the Bennets, Lucases and the Bingleys. They are all leisured middle class people who have not to bother about earning their livelihood. The Bennets may be said to belong to the lower middle-class with only two thousand a year, and the Bingleys to the upper middle class with a much higher income. Their life is a round of visiting, playing cards, singing, going to dinners, and inviting people to dinner. Mrs. Bennet's behaviour reflects the society in which she lives, as she knows that her daughters will not succeed if they do not get married. "The business of her life was to get her daughters married: its solace was visiting and news." (*Pride and Prejudice*. 7)

The Bingleys, financially much better off, organize parties and dinners, where there are balls and a lot of idle gossip. The Bennet sisters read books and go out shopping for their diversion. Mr. Bennet finds solace in his library. (They go out on four or five visits out of the Longbourn neighborhood. Thus Janet goes to London with the Gardiners, Elizabeth to Mr. and Mrs. Collins at Hunsford, and later she got to Derbyshire with the Gardiners. Their petty rivalries, doubts and suspicions which beset this narrow and confined life have been skillfully exposed by the novelist. Nor has she failed to provide us with glimpses of the life of aristocracy. Lady De Bourgh is an aristocrat, proud, to and insolent. She lives an artificial life of pomp and show, and likes to display her wealth and splendor. She has nothing to do and finds diversion in taking rides in her carriage, listening to the piano, or inviting people to dinner. The life of the country clergy has also been

glanced at through Mr. Collins. They have nothing much to do and depend for their living on the patronage of the great whom they flatter in season and out of season. Similarly, through the flirtation of Lydia and Catherine with the military officers, we can form an idea of their social life. It seems to be a corrupt lot which finds its diversion in having love-affairs with the girls in the towns where their regiment is stationed. Mr. Wickham is a typical specimen of the class, dishonest and profligate. Limitations of the Picture "In *Pride and Prejudice*, the failure of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet as parents is blamed for Lydia's lack of moral judgment. Darcy has been taught to be principled and scrupulously honourable but he is also proud and overbearing" (Pinion, F B , 15)

Such is the social life depicted in the novel. It will be noticed that the life of the lower classes, and of those who earn their living by the sweat of their brow, has been rigidly excluded. As has been well-said, no footman ever crosses the stage of Jane Austen. We may get an occasional glimpse of the house keeper, but it is only from a distance. Similarly, city life is beyond the range of the novelist. Even though Jane Bennet goes to London and stays with the Gardiners for a pretty long time nothing is told to us of Metropolitan life.

And the basis of this social life is money. It turns monetary considerations. This is why it has been said that, Jane Austen's text is money." Andrew H. Wright and Persal Smith both find *Pride and Prejudice*, "didactic and mercenary" Leonard Woolf points out that in *Pride and Prejudice*, the social standards are almost entirely those of money and snobbery remarkable to what an extent the plot and characters are dominated by questions of money."

The basis of social relations in *Pride and Prejudice*, economic and Jane Austen has exposed it with an ironic smile. The characters in the novel are guided in their relationships by monetary considerations. Mrs. Bennet's one ambition in life is to see her daughters well married to eligible young men, and their eligibility is to be judged only by one standard, the economic. She has no objection even if any of her daughters marries a military officer, how-so-ever corrupt he may be, provided that he has five or six thousand a year. She considers Bingley an excellent match for Jane, not for any other consideration, but solely because he has a large fortune, "A single man of large fortune: four or five thousand a year! What a fine thing for our girls?" The words have a tinge of irony; it is as if the novelist is laughing in her sleeves at this mercenary motivation of Mrs. Bennet. Indeed, Mrs. Bennet's obsession with money makes her an absurd, ridiculous character. We cannot help laughing at her when she considers the absurd Mr. Collins a suitable match for sensible and cultured Elizabeth, merely because he can provide her with a comfortable home. His own recommendation is that he is a man of sufficient means. We are much amused at her great anxiety that she and her daughters would be rendered poor, in the event of Mr. Bennet's death. The folly of this mercenary attitude is brought out by the novelist through the remark of Mr. Bennet that she may die earlier than he, and so the contingency may never arise.

The acceptance of Mr. Collins on the part of Charlotte Lucas is another instance of economic considerations governing even marriage-relationships. The attitude of the Lucases towards love and marriage is entirely materialistic. Any man will do so long as he can provide a suitable, comfortable home. It is for this reason that Charlotte accepts the fool of Hunsford and her parents approve of her choice. However, the absurdity of Mr. Collins and the kind of life Charlotte leads at Hunsford has been fully exposed through a stay of Elizabeth at the Parsonage. "When Elizabeth rejects Darcy's first proposal, the argument of marrying for love is introduced. Elizabeth accepts Darcy's proposal only when she is certain she loves him and her feelings are reciprocated" (Gao, Haiyan ,388)

We feel that Elizabeth was right in rejecting the pompous and absurd Mr. Collins, and the mercenary nature of Charlotte is thrown into sharp relief by contrast with the sensible attitude of Elizabeth. However, Elizabeth herself is not entirely free from this materialistic bias at the sight of the beautiful Pemberley Park a sudden impulse to possess it pays her, and she regrets her rejection of Darcy's proposal ironically enough, she accepts Mr. Darcy only after her visit to Pemberley Hall. Was her motivation mercenary? At least, Sir Walter B thought so. However, in answering the question we must take into consideration that her prejudice against Darcy has already melted, and his nobility had been revealed by his role in the Lydia-Wickham affair.

Mr. Wickham himself is a character with whom money is in everything. He must get money by hook or by crook. He tried to elope with Miss Darcy not because he loved her, but because she had a large fortune. He flirted with Miss King for this very reason. He agreed to marry Lydia only when he had extorted a large amount of money from Darcy. Wickham-Lydia episode is a criticism of military-life of the day. It is also a criticism of parents like Mr. Bennet who neglect their children. Had he taken more care of his daughters, and exercised greater control over their movement, Lydia would not have acted in such a disgraceful manner. Wickham has been shown as thoroughly depraved and wicked, ready to sacrifice, honour, virtue, friendship, everything, for the sake of money. He has great personal charms, but he exploits them to get money. Jane Austen has succeeded in making him thoroughly despicable.

The arrogant and ill-mannered Lady De Bourgh has also become a victim of the ironic smile of the writer. She has a large fortune, and her sole diversion in life is to display her splendour. It is for this reason that she invites people to dinner. Those who flatter her, like Collins, and tolerate her insolent behaviour, are liked by her. This contemptible, stupid lady does not like that Elizabeth should marry Darcy, because Elizabeth is poor and he comes of a moneyed, aristocratic family. However, her attempts at preventing their marriage only make her ridiculous. The readers are much amused at her discomfiture. Ironically enough her efforts serve to hasten the union of Darcy and Elizabeth which she had tried to prevent.

CONCLUSION

Pride and Prejudice is a social comedy in which are social relationships, even love and marriage relations find a mercenary motivation. The novelist has observed the absurdities of character and social life, and interpreted them in a humorous manner. She has exposed the absurdity of excessive materialism with an Ironical smile. However, it must be pointed out that her picture of social life is a limited one. It is limited to the life of the leisured middle and upper middle classes in a provincial town. No doubt, by and large, money motivates the actions of the chief personages; but Jane Bennet is an exception. She is a saintly character who is really in love, and who is not at all influenced by monetary considerations. The Jane-Bingley story introduces an element of pathos in this admirable social comedy of Jane Austen. Pride and Prejudice is a criticism of life expressed in terms of comedy.

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