

Two Lovers in an Austenian Novel of Manners: The Impact of Social Status in *Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract— *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel that reflects the reality of life at all times. True love must come through all kind of obstacles such as reputation and class. In Austen's novel, the beauty, manner of speech, artistic and musical skills determine the women's values. Set in society during the Georgian era, where marrying for wealth and social status is more common than marrying for love and suitability, Elizabeth makes the definite choice to wait for love even though she knows it may never come. The social context of literature provides insight into the ways society has progressed and changed or even maintained its social values. *Pride and Prejudice* is still a timeless novel that examines relatable events within today's society. The power-dynamics between men and women and their effects on marriage and understanding one's place and purpose is clearly shown in Austenian literarily approach. Social class is an underlying factor, and the idea of marrying among higher or own class still continues, although it dwindles.

Keywords— Austenian, Love, Pride, Social Status, Women.

I. INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen's range of social opinions combined with her witty style makes her novel characters distinctive—in comparison with other protagonists. As A. J. P. Taylor, a famous English historian, mentioned: "Historians have long been in the habit of claiming" (3, 65). He disclosed among novelists, "history began with Walter Scott, the historical novelist and contemporary of Jane Austen;" but if we consider history as "a form of self-consciousness," in this case, history may begin with Jane Austen (*Ibid.*). The idea that girls at the Georgian era had no other choice except to find a husband nominee to get married was a grim outlook to the social order in England. Jane Austen was trying to ridicule the traditional thinking of marriage and the role it played out—alongside social status and reputation. Austen shows that marriage is a perfect ending because it is filled with values of society and personal satisfaction as her mother, Mrs Bennet gives out; "Mr Darcy! Who would have thought it! And is it really true? Oh! my sweetest Lizzy! how rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane's is nothing to it--nothing at all." (1, 419) *Pride and Prejudice* comprise different themes and motifs such as love, reputation, and class. Being one of the most cherished love stories in English literature, the novel technically checks all characteristics of a notable romance. The lovers start as almost enemies to each other that makes them elude one another. Initially, Elizabeth's pride and her misjudging perpetuated by Darcy's prejudice toward Elizabeth's social standing, technically blind him to know her personality.

Pride and Prejudice starting with one of the well-known initial lines in English Literature; "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of good fortune must be in want of a wife" (1, 3). This sentence is clearly affirming the central position of the novel on Bennets' family and their five daughters; the stunning Jane (22), the brilliant Elizabeth (20), the bookworm Mary (17), the childish Kitty (16) and the untamed Lydia (15). However, the novel particularly centres on the second elder girl of the family, Elizabeth. Mrs Bennet grew their daughters with her marriage obsession, and throughout the novel, their mother is aimed at showing them to rich men by ignoring their dreams without giving them a chance to make a decision. As Carr mentions, "[by] working to institutionalize the 'proper' discourses of women, to teach the emergent middle class how to be 'good' mothers and 'dutiful' daughters, nineteenth-century suggests books that "the relationship between mother and daughter was not seen as 'natural' or as the province of individuals, but as requiring considerable institutional support and guidance. The aim was not to create self-fulfilled individuals but to acquire facility in approved social functions." (6, 82) One of the sisters, Mary, is a girl who dedicated herself to books. She gives crucial information about pride and arrogance to the reader and says, pride "is a very common failing I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that it is prevalent indeed, that human nature is particularly prone to it, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary." (1, 21). Although blinded by her own pride and prejudice, it takes a long time for Lizzie to realize that she has already founded love.

II. SOCIAL STANDING IS IMPRESSING LOVE AFFAIRS

Pride and Prejudice indicated the distinct class categorization of British society during the Napoleonic Wars (1797–1815). Nearly all the member of the main characters in the novel are members of the landed gentry. Austen retells social and marital problems that were the most critical issues in her era. Bennet's daughters are searching for a proper nominee to get married and get social respect. Marital status is the only thing Mrs Bennet and her daughters care about. The Bennet family is not as needy and uncouth as seen by Darcy's family. Although Darcy is not proud and arrogant, his distant attitude and glances make him look as a bighead. Even though he earns ten thousand pounds monthly and owns half of the Derbyshire, he follows his emotions about Elizabeth without paying attention to possessions. Darcy is sceptical about

Elizabeth and thinks she aims to get married to him for his fortune and property. Reilly wrote, “[for] Austen, however, the ideal landowner embraces not the revolutionary ideals of equality and freedom, but the rural paternalism which assures the stability of the landed class.” (15, 23)

Hertfordshire symbolizes a movement from pride and prejudice to love for Darcy and Elizabeth. When Darcy states his love for Elizabeth, she refuses to accept, but later, when they understand each other, she replies, “You are too generous to trifle with me.” (1, 406) Moler underscores at the beginning of the novel, Darcy is the representer of “a bias toward ‘art,’” and “class pride,” and Elizabeth is the exponent of “‘nature’ and aggressive individualism,” (12, 12) He mentions that their “mental and temperamental propensities” are modified, and their marriage at the end of the story is “a union between a reasonable degree of ‘art’ and a desirable degree of ‘nature’”:

Darcy is a pompous Burney-Richardson aristocrat, with many of the most disagreeable attributes of his literary progenitors as well as a representative of ‘art’ and excessive class pride; Elizabeth is a determined anti-Evelina as well as a symbol for ‘nature’ and aggressive individualism. The marriage at the end of the story joins a properly humbled patrician hero and an anti-Evelina who has also undergone a partial reformation. (12, 506)

The idea of the novel lies in the marriages with different perspectives on marriage, in which Mr Collins and Charlotte Lucas show the positive variant of the marriage of convenience—reasonable marriage, without the interference of emotions. Charlotte Lucas states that “Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance.” (1, 25) In another part, she says, “I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home” (1, 140). Considering Charlotte’s mindset, it is clear that she did not fall in love with Mr Collins yet and her marriage is solely formed for beneficiary because she is happy with her life in her house. On the other hand, Wickham was unwilling to marry Lydia at first, but an interception of Mr Darcy who tells “take whatever you like, and get away” (1, 337), weigh in Wickham to keep aloof Lydia. Thereby, Wickham’s marriage and Charlotte’s marriage are not for prosperity and not for love. However, Lydia fell in love with Wickham because her choice was only conducted by feelings, not rationality. She did not care about abundance or her sisters’ opinions. Then, with Elizabeth’s request, she was saved by Mr Darcy. Without his generous act, and because of her elopement with Wickham, Lydia would be left with a ruined reputation. Newton explains “Darcy’s rescue of Lydia is another demonstration of the hero’s traditional powers, the powers belonging to money, class, and male privilege, but it is also to be construed as further demonstration that Elizabeth has altered Darcy, that he is not only more courtly to her but more courtly to her family, whom he is now not above serving.” (14, 40) Besides, Elizabeth’s mentality about marriage exemplifies a balance between emotions and rationality. Unlike Lydia, Wickham, and Charlotte, Elizabeth discerns the importance of wealth, reputation and romance equally. She does not act recklessly or too voraciously, and she does not have materialistic

tendencies. She refused not only Mr Collins’s marriage proposal, but also Mr Darcy’s, either. When Darcy tells Mr Bingley that Elizabeth is “tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt” (1, 12) him, despite Elizabeth approves that Darcy is “a man of very large property in Derbyshire,” (1, 86) she investigates for real love to get married. Love affairs can be different from person to person, but Elizabeth and Darcy represent a compassionate and mutual love story.

It is worthy to note the differences between male and female characters in this novel. There is a massive gap between men and women in the mentioned society, where the only opportunity for a woman to make a good life is to find a rich husband. Otherwise, women are under the risk of becoming homeless. Schneider says, “[for] many women in the world of Austen’s novels, marriage was synonymous with economic survival” (16, 6). Men are representing the ruling class society. Mr Darcy and Mr Bingley are wealthy, but at first, Mr Darcy behaves like a snob, thinking that nobody is equal to him at the party scene. His behaviour reflects the general idea in that society that women are not equal to men. Austen agrees with Charlotte Lucas’s opinion that marriage “was the only honourable provision for well-educated women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness must be their pleasantest preservative from want” (138). Thus and so, Jane Austen criticizes the social order, considering the Bennet family who is allowed to live in their house at that rate Mr Bennet is alive. Mrs Bennet is reluctant in accepting such an offer and pushes her second daughter, Elizabeth Bennet, to marry Mr Collins, the heir of Bennet’s mansion. Even though Elizabeth does not love Mr Collins, she is constantly criticized by her mother for making no account of Mr Bennet. In this respect, Mrs Bennet can be described as a very contradictory character, who on the one hand does not want to lose the mansion, but, cares her daughters’ happiness. She is the most significant evidence of the moral and social crisis reflected in this novel when her relationship with Darcy makes pressure on Elizabeth.

III. LOVE IS ABOVE SOCIAL BARRIERS

Pride and Prejudice is not as cliché as an underlying love story, but it is “a novel about second chances” (17, 91). Throughout the story, there is a chain of incidents following Elizabeth and his family, and Elizabeth caused most of the action moving. Without her and her encouragement on love, Jane would not go after Mr Bingley, Elizabeth’s friend Charlotte Lucas wouldn’t marry Elizabeth’s cousin Mr Collins, truth about Mr Wickham’s unruly ways would not be exposed to his father, and she would not be able to convince her father to approve her union with Mr Darcy. Elizabeth is the character that observes and pushes the action. Christie describes, “Elizabeth’s respectful and grateful feelings on the one hand, and Darcy’s romantic passion on the other remain categorically distinct, leaving an ironic gulf between the circumstantial details of the novel and its fairy-tale structure.” (8, 331) Besides, Darcy sacrificed his pride to convince Elizabeth to forgive him. Love is the virtue of pride and spreads its positive aura to others. For Mr Bingley, a person can be prideful of being bona fide. Unlike Mr. Bingley,

Mr. Darcy was a man looking down to the people who later became a person with a lack of social graces, described as, “he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud” (1, 10). At that time, the blood and the family’s status was the cause of reputability. When Darcy felt his love for Elizabeth, he gave up his pride and the sense of humiliation. He found that Jane is distant and shy toward Charles, so, he interpreted the situation by being opinionated and made Bingley break up with Jane. Thereby, Elizabeth was violently angry at Darcy and refused his proposal, as she said, “I could easily forgive his pride if he had not mortified mine.” (1, 21) Being humiliated has no excuse for her, but love overcomes all of the struggles, as Elizabeth is emphasizing, “I have spent four days in the same house with him, and I think him very disagreeable.” (1, 87)

Elizabeth Bennet “had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous.” (1, 12) She is a charming, attractive and intelligent woman who is aware that marriage plays an important role to get a statue in England. Austen demonstrates her strong personality when she refuses Mr Darcy’s proposal initially—unlike the other women in the society who are ready to marry the first wealthy man who offers: “She was convinced that she could have been happy with him; when it was no longer likely they should meet.” (1, 344) Elizabeth is a smart lady with moral strength who draws a portrait of a woman of rationality and emotion. Elizabeth had to cope with a pathetic mother and two younger greedy siblings, and never loses her logic, but stands as a strong woman with sharp intelligence. Elizabeth is a faithful follower of her heart. She convinces her sister Jane to show the fact that Bingley really loves her, but because of their class difference, Miss Bingley does not approve it: “In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man’s affection, and though her intentions did not vary for an instant, she was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive; till, roused to resentment by his subsequent language, she lost all compassion in anger.” (1, 211)

The short end of the stick, Elizabeth always judges people without knowing them well. As she gets closer to Mr Darcy, she learns not to judge people without knowing them well. Elizabeth’s quick judgment of Mr Darcy causes pain for her family. If she had been less prejudiced against him, she and all the people around her could have prevented many mishaps and emotional turbulence. Like every human being, Elizabeth also has faults. Elizabeth’s weakness is that, even though she is a reasonable observer, she could not help herself when accredits William’s words. Facing her true self, she is eager to be changed, despite she falls into William’s trap and thereby, becomes ashamed of her attitude. On the other hand, even in the darkest day, she is ready to get a lesson and bloom again up from where she is. Because of her prejudice towards Mr Darcy, she does not like his personality and refuses to know him or to have closer communication with him. For a long time, she even does not accept the feelings toward Mr Darcy. She sympathetically tells Jane that; “[it] has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began.” (1, 414)

The love story of Elizabeth and Darcy is strong proof that love can overcome all the obstacles. Throughout the novel, they need to overlap many difficulties beginning with Elizabeth’s pride and misunderstanding of Darcy. Other characters in the play such as William, Lady Catherine, and Mr Bingley cause some barriers in their story through their social class differences in which Austen shows the reader that love is so powerful and it can overcome all of the barriers and difficulties. The love story of Elizabeth and Darcy proves that if two people are meant to be together, they will do. When Mr Darcy confesses his love for Elizabeth, she says, “In vain have I struggled, it will not do. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you” (1, 211). The author highlights the importance of overcoming our prejudgment towards a person; reminding us that first impressions might be wrong. When the first time Mr Darcy and Elizabeth encounter at the ball, Charles Bingley tells Darcy that he should dance with her, but Darcy says that “She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me” (1, 12). Eventually, Elizabeth and Darcy overcome the obstacles, and they find true selves. Zelicovici has observed that the novel falls into two halves; the chain of errors and misunderstandings that drive Elizabeth and Darcy apart and later, Elizabeth’s reversal. In Austen’s novels always mistakes resulted in wrong reasoning. She wrote, *Pride and Prejudice* has two phases: “first a period of ‘re-cognition’ and then a painful ordeal” (19, 107).

Up to the end, Elizabeth and Darcy cannot break the barriers to reach each other. Even if they do, it happens interstitially. They think that barriers can protect emotional destruction without considering that they can also make your heart frozen, you cannot show your feelings and get the warmth of the feelings you are faced. Elizabeth says, “My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject for ever.” (1, 406) Darcy indeed opens her heart to Elizabeth; he overtakes his barriers and opens his heart. Darcy and Elizabeth put their barriers precedent to their love; but at the end, they realize that the barriers are faded out. Except Elizabeth and her sister, other daughters of the Bennet family make unhappy marriages. Austen displays that important choices like marriage should not only dependant on love but reputation and wealth; because, even if you follow your feelings—like Lydia—you may be deceived. A proper example is Lydia Bennet who is a marriage-enthusiast, so she left home to marry the wealthy officer of her dreams. Running away with Wickham without an official marriage proposal or her father’s consent, Lydia brought about public shame to the Bennets by flirting and recklessly decided to run away with Mr Wickham whose character revealed as a manipulative antagonist.

Gender inequality made women feel debilitated. Mrs Bennet is a typical mother in the seventeenth century who hopes her daughters find well-situated husbands; so, they can experience a pleasant life. Foster Stovel says, “Just as Lady Catherine is a parody of Darcy, so Mrs. Bennet is a caricature of Elizabeth, and, just as Lady Catherine absorbs all Darcy’s conceit, freeing him to be courteous, so Mrs. Bennet absorbs all Elizabeth’s folly, freeing her to be rational, so that the couple can live happily ever after.” (5, 201) The society

expected a woman to make babies and stay home passively. As it was back then, the legacy would go to the oldest male of the family or the next akin. It means when maid or women's fathers or husbands died, they were being left alone without any assets. As a woman of five daughters had nothing to bequeath, Mrs Bennet was trying to marry off her daughters with nice but rich males that makes her an ungracious person; the very opposite, a caring, and thoughtful mother. However, Mrs Bennet tells that it is "very likely" that Mr Bingley "may fall in love" with one of her daughters. (1, 4) Mrs Bennet is interested in, not only financial situations of her grooms but the feelings of the partners too.

IV. PRIDE AND PREJUDICE ARE IMPRESSING LOVE

Pride and Prejudice show how the notion of pride and prejudice is a barrier to happiness and love. Proud prevents the love, and it is the most significant handicap to love. Pride is one of the seven deadly sins, but love is the highest of the seven heavenly virtues by St. Paul, the Apostle. The novel is on how a gentleman swallowed her pride for love, and how a woman's first judgement of love affected a family. Kelly described, "true to the culture of her class, the Anglican gentry, Jane Austen shows that observation and judgement are not ends in themselves, but they are for conduct, for the leading of one's life in a civil community. One wants a cultivated mind because one wants to behave properly, not just with propriety, but appropriately." (11, 158) Without Elizabeth's belief in love, the novel would be over with tasteless and loveless marriage of Elizabeth and Mr Collins, and the rest of the sisters' situations would be unknown. Austen shows love is not a concern of materialism or beauty; when, for instance, Jane fails to find a husband, even though she is the most beautiful girl in the town.

Such a love story exists in novels, stories or dreams which leads them by the decisiveness of prejudice. Almost every aspect of our lives are directed by the decisiveness of our prejudice, and we make social contacts accordingly. Although Darcy and Elizabeth were both in the same mindset, their prejudice caused them to bear a grudge against each other without fully knowing the other. Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy's pride leads her to realize her proud. Bonaparte discusses that Austen is differentiating between "a reason and a cause," in one hand and between "a psychological motive and a philosophic ground" (2, 154) on the other hand. She wrote the reason that "Elizabeth had had for her disinclination toward Darcy" is because of "the mortification of her pride." (*Ibid.*) The central conflict of *Pride and Prejudice* is Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship because they seem different characters, but as the story goes on, Elizabeth—against her will—falls in love with Darcy. Darcy's pride changes as he states his love for Elizabeth and gets rejected. Notwithstanding, Elizabeth's attitude and her compassion changed Darcy and his Proudful character to be a more tolerant person. Darcy told Elizabeth;

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I cannot be so easily reconciled to myself. The recollection of what I then said, of my conduct, my manners, my expressions during the whole of it, is now and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me. Your reproof, so well applied, I shall never forget: 'had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner.' Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me;—though it was some time, I confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice. (1, 408)

Darcy is described as a proud person whose manners "gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud" (1, 10). Proud people are unadmitted by society, and thereby, Darcy is disliked. With the sense of 'pride' of wealthiness, recognition and nobility, Darcy gives Elizabeth the cold shoulder; and because of the 'prejudice,' Elizabeth's family is worried about being an ordinary peasant. Both proud, but they are investigating love. Despite her prejudice about Darcy, Elizabeth did not forget him. Hirsch mentions, "Elizabeth's 'pride' has driven her to be defensively 'prejudiced.' Although she once took satisfaction from her pride, it is now seen to be a response to threats to her self-esteem, a defense against feelings of inferiority, vulnerability and shame. Elizabeth understands her prejudice to be a product of her vulnerable pride, and beneath that pride—ready to return with a vengeance—is the feeling of shame." (10, 63-64)

Darcy describes Elizabeth as a "tolerable" person, but "not handsome enough" (1, 12) to tempt him. This is a reason why she did not like Darcy; even if she did not completely forget him. Because of her uncertain feelings against Darcy, when she learned Darcy's unkind actions against Wickham, she felt close to Wickham. Besides, Darcy caused to separate Jane and Mr Bingley. Colonel Fitzwilliam said Darcy "congratulated himself" because he "saved a friend from the inconveniences of a most imprudent marriage," (1, 207) and Elizabeth learned who was responsible for their separation. Later, Darcy declares his love to Elizabeth by telling, "In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you." (1, 211) Making a mistake by dissembling Jane and Mr Bingley, Darcy takes steps to undo what he did wrong. He clarifies himself to Bingley, and by this means, Bingley marries to Jane. Even other characters changed in some ways; Mr Bennet sent his daughter Lydia far away apart from her family. Although everyone's idea about Wickham was positive, Darcy suddenly changed common belief about himself. "That is very true," replied Elizabeth, "and I could easily forgive his pride if he had not mortified mine." (1, 21) Elizabeth here says she can ignore her pride because she was always a girl, who cared about her feelings and the realities of life. What was important to her was a true love that makes her grew absolutely ashamed of herself and says,

How despicably have I acted!" she cried—"I, who have prided myself on my discernment!—I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust.—How humiliating is this discovery!—Yet, how just a humiliation!—Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly.—Pleased with the preference of one [Wickham], and offended by the neglect of the other [Darcy], on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself. (1, 230)

Neumann explains that Austen's prose is characterized by its incorporation of "double-voiced" verbs that "conflate narration with reported discourse [...] to confuse—intentionally—a character's subjective speech with the narrator's objective account of that character's thoughts or feelings" (13, 365). Butler, in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, suggests that Jane Austen meant to "ridicule the whole notion of love at first sight by offering hate at first sight" (18, 28): "It is clear that to her love at first sight and hate, at first sight, are essentially the same. Both are emotional responses, built on insufficient or wrong evidence, and fostered by pride or complacency toward the unreliable subjective consciousness." (5, 213) She says, "Jane Austen has to allow time[...] for Elizabeth to change her emotional antipathy to Darcy into a predisposition to love him." (*Ibid.*, 209) Brownstein notes that Austen's authoritative voice allows her to play with irony and meaning: "Austen can comment with varying degrees of explicitness on the limits of rhetorical and human authority. Through self-reflexive irony, she can keep her distance from the discourse of authority, the patriarchal mode of imposing oneself through language" (4, 68). Cervel analyzes *Pride and Prejudice* in the realm of Cognitive Linguistics, saying, "the conceptualization of people as containers is tremendously visual since it is something which pervades our perception of reality. Moreover, this helps us to understand that the Subject and the Self are two parts which integrate a whole: the human being, and the reason why relationships such as the one established between Jane and Bingley on the one hand and between Elizabeth and Darcy on the other are likely to exist." (7, 251)

V. CONCLUSION

This novel is not a rebellion against the social order in its era; instead, it is a clear depiction of the gender inequality of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the whole story is told from the female point of view with a happy ending. Jane Austen tells us that even in an unequal, unfair, and society full of discriminative, you can still find your happiness and love. In fact, the characters—and Elizabeth above all—had many obstacles on their way to get happiness. Those obstacles were not related to the patriarchal society, but instead, all of the obstacles were Elizabeth's own blindness which was shown by her prejudice about Mr Darcy. At first, Elizabeth was obsessive about Mr Darcy's inflated ego, and she could not

penetrate deep into his soul, later, she found out the first impression may often be false which predetermined Elizabeth's attitude toward Mr Darcy. Wrong first impression, along with prejudice became serious obstacles for Elizabeth, leaving behind the other obstacles—such as low social class, weak female position in society, and the lack of money—on her way to happiness. However, Elizabeth demonstrated that nothing could stop a person to reach his goal. Austen tells us that when you are making your choices, do not manipulate yourself about other's appearance and assets and give reign to prejudice; thereby, happiness will not be postponed.

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