

Write an essay on Jane Austen's treatment of love, marriage and money in Pride and Prejudice. *Original*

There are a few important themes which are treated again and again in Jane Austen's novels, though in each case the novelist is able to impart something of freshness and novelty to the treatment. The business of getting people engaged and married is one of the decisive themes which the novelist deals with in her novels one after the other. Her talent is for the exclusive exploration of those aspects of human emotion and behaviour most closely associated with the social and economic framework that looms so large in most people's lives. Her life provided her with the opportunity of learning by heart the world of social pretension and ambition, of balls and visits and speculations about marrying and giving in marriage, of the hopes and fears of genteel people of moderate means — a world which, through her delicate and highly finished art, she turned into a microcosm of life in its social aspect.

(‘I write about Love and Money; what else is there to write?’ Jane Austen once remarked.) Lord David Cecil's sentence comment that ‘It was wrong to marry merely for money, but it was silly to marry without it’ may be taken as the view of Austen herself. Pride and Prejudice is a perfect example of a social comedy based on the interaction of love and money. The plot is concerned with the universal theme of marriage and love. Money stands in between. The very opening sentence — ‘It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife’ is clear enough to indicate what situation the story will unfold in course of its narrative. As a matter of fact, all the families (as presented in the novel) in the neighbourhood having daughters of marriageable age

enter into active competition with one another for the coveted prize of a rich son-in-law.

For Jane Austen life is a game of matrimony. She is busy in all her novels in finding out suitable husbands for her heroines. The real object of marriage, according to her, is not house-keeping, parish and poultry, but something higher. It is companionship, and intellectual and emotional association between husband and wife, and she would not approve of a marriage where such an association is wanting. [In Thomas Hardy and Somerset Maugham, love is treated as a consummating passion. Charles Dickens presents love as a domestic bliss. To Emily Bronte, love is fierce and stormy, and to D.H. Lawrence, it is instinctive and sex-oriented. But to Austen, love is neither a terrible thing nor a very deep passion. It is just a necessity of life at a certain age, may be preferably in youth.] But her characters generally do not fall in love at first sight. Besides this, Austen does not deal with illicit love. Love is always terminated in marriage with a background of steady income and financial stability.

Jane Austen could approve only a sensible husband to a sensible wife and foolish one to the foolish. Mrs. Bennet gets what she deserves, Mr. Collins chooses a companion unlike himself, while Jane and Elizabeth select persons agreeable and suitable to their respective temperament and personality. Jane and Bingley both are of good nature and so deserve to be each other's partners. Elizabeth becomes prejudiced against Darcy, partly because of his pride and partly because of the false impression of his character by Wickham. But as the story progresses, Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy and Darcy's pride against Elizabeth are removed, and eventually they are married. In their case again, Austen approves of the marriage of sensibly good persons of similar natures and temperaments.

The main theme of Pride and Prejudice is thus the search for husbands for girls of marriageable age. The novel is literally



overflooded with marriages. The arrival of Mr. Bingley and Darcy provides the suitable atmosphere of husband-hunting campaign. The concern of the novelist is with the matrimonial game of her characters. The love-affairs of Jane and Bingley, and Lydia-Wickham relationships display the youthful vigour of youths. The Collins-Charlotte episode also shows that life is simply a matrimonial game. Lydia-Wickham episodes also surround the problems of love and marriage. Austen always stresses affairs in a drawing room together with money concern, snobbery, status, lust, balls, seductions and love-jealousies. She describes the affairs of men and women arising out of sex, love and marriage. The Jane-Bingley love story and the clash of pride and prejudice between Darcy and Elizabeth accelerates the action of the story. For Charlotte, marriage is 'the pleasantest preservative from want'. Mr. Collins seeks just a wife, and to him it is immaterial whether that wife is Jane, Elizabeth or Charlotte. Lydia and Wickham get married because Lydia is infatuated with him and he needs some material relief. Thus those three couples get married for wrong reasons, and their marriages are utter failures.

It is only Jane and Elizabeth who marry where they ought to, and they are able to find happiness in their lives. Elizabeth marries last and marries most desirably. She and Darcy begin with prejudices and gradually move towards understanding. Elizabeth helps Darcy to shed his pride and really to be the gentleman that he thought that he was. Darcy in turn acts magnanimously to win her love. There gradually develop between them mutual affection and regards that form the basis of a sound marriage. (Elizabeth concludes justifiably: 'It is settled between us already that we are to be the happiest couple in the world?')