

Plot of Pride & Prejudice original

The novels of Jane Austen are chiefly celebrated as exemplary specimens of disciplined workmanship, rather than novels conveying any everlasting philosophical message. Austen always tells her story with a strong sense of coherence and structural integrity, although the basic pattern that centres around the theme of marriage is the same and having not much of shock, wonder or mystery in it.

The plot of P&P also basically turns upon the fluctuating love-hate relationship between Elizabeth & Darcy exploring the development of love with its culmination in marriage. But Austen shows a remarkably acute dramatic sense in working out the different stages of the growth of pride & prejudice of Elizabeth and Darcy and their final self-realization that cures them of their shortcomings to bring their story along with all the parallel episodes to the point of resolution.

P&P is famous for a neat and very well organised dramatic structure. The plot is characteristically complex and multi-dimensional, with the story of Elizabeth & Darcy at its centre and a number of underplots running alongside the main strand and getting integrated to comprise a rounded whole that highlights Austen's social views of love, money and marriage. The main plot concerns the handsome, proud aristocrat Fitzwilliam Darcy and the intelligent & self-respecting Bennet girl Elizabeth. At the Meryton Ball Darcy

chances to meet Elizabeth and immediately mortifies her by making an offensive remark. Darcy's behaviour is prompted by his offensive social pride that turns Elizabeth strongly prejudiced towards him while there is also an element of lofty self-assessment on the part of Elizabeth underlying her prejudice towards Darcy. Elizabeth's prejudice is further aggravated by Wickham's clever disclosure of Darcy's unfair treatment of him. Elizabeth who claims to be an 'intricate student of character' accepts the villainous Wickham at the face-value, failing to have an insight into the reality behind the appearance.

Darcy however gets attracted by the liveliness of Elizabeth Bennet and his feelings towards her grow steadily warmer so much so that he proposes to Elizabeth while she is on a visit to the Hunsford Parsonage. But Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth reveals his pride and Elizabeth rejects the proposal, the rejection being the first dramatic climax of the main plot.

During her visit to Pemberley Elizabeth discovers the real worth of Darcy as the owner of a huge family estate and the young aristocrat being admired & respected by all. The prospect of a handsome marriage, of becoming 'the mistress of Pemberley', must have allured Elizabeth, bringing about a definite change in her outlook towards Darcy. Further, Darcy's letter of explanation to Elizabeth opens her eyes to the lack of any grain of truth in her prejudice against Darcy. She chances to find how

unscrupulous Wickham had been and how rightly he was served by Darcy. This is how the main plot evolves from situation to situation showing a distinct rise and fall before Elizabeth & Darcy finally approach a point of mutually understanding reconciliation. ^{a) not careful and honest about his deed.}

The main plot gets further enhanced with Lydia's elopement with Wickham and Darcy's positive role in tracking down the couple and bringing them together to the altar of marriage. Darcy illustrates his concern for Elizabeth & her family, thus revealing his hum-an face long hidden behind his ^{b)}deceitful idiosyncrasy. Darcy also ^{b)}changes his role in the Jane-Bingley affair so that the long held up love at the first sight can reach to its desired culmination. Elizabeth finally proves the strength of her character by triumphing over the formidable opposition of Lady Catherine for which she is highly appreciated by Darcy. This central plot of a gradual discovery of love leading to marriage through an uneven course of strong pride and detestable prejudice underscores Jane Austen's purpose behind her book.

There are several other underplots all of which are inseparably connected with the main story and each of these subsidiary strands testifies to the superiority & maturity of the central motif of love & marriage. The love at first sight between Bingley & Jane is an example of the typical romantic love based on

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quiet adoration but seriously deficient in evolving itself into a growing and maturing relationship. Darcy's intervention prevented the fruition of this love for he believed that the Bingley-Jane match would be an incompatible one. It is Darcy's counter-intervention that furthers the love to marriage. Darcy does so in order to impress Elizabeth. Elizabeth is truly impressed & that catalyses the maturity of love between Elizabeth & Darcy.

In the Jane-Bingley episode Jane was Elizabeth's sister and Bingley was Darcy's friend. In the Charlotte-Collins sub-plot, Charlotte Lucas happens to be Elizabeth's best friend and the foolish clergyman Collins marries Charlotte only after his proposals to marry Jane & Elizabeth fall through. At a deeper level the Charlotte-Collins sub-plot relates to the Elizabeth-Darcy love story. Charlotte marries Collins with no expectation of love but only for social recognition & security. The marriage shocks Elizabeth but later she finds her friend Charlotte not much unhappy in her married life. Even if this is a marriage of convenience prior to her visit to Pemberley, Elizabeth chances upon the truth that the question of social & economic security cannot & should not be altogether ruled out in marriage.

The episode of Lydia's infatuation & elopement with Wickham is yet another parallel development very closely interwoven with the main plot. The flirtatious Lydia is a sister of the self-respecting Elizabeth Bennet, she

like Jane being a foil to Elizabeth. The villainous Wickham is able to exercise some influence on Elizabeth only because of his proximity to Elizabeth due to his relationship with Lydia. The infatuation & ^{the} subsequent elopement generate a crisis which seems to be a blessing in disguise for Elizabeth. Darcy gets an opportunity to prove his sympathy & concern for Elizabeth thus removing the long acc-umulated prejudice in her mind.

P&P possesses a complex and multi-layered plot but everywhere Austen shows her sense of construction, connecting each & every under plot very closely with the main strand of the narrative. Like all the other novels of Austen, P&P also deals with an apparently simple basic plot line — one or more young eligible bachelors coming in contact with young marriageable girls there-
-by initiating a highly complicated and dramatic course of events. Austen does not aim at writing a great or cosmic novel with any transcendental philosophical message, but there is little doubt that she can with her characteristic deftness organize copious narrative materials into a harmonious and well-designed structure.