

# Show how love and marriage has changed since jane austen's time essay sample

[Life](#), [Love](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

By close reference to some key scenes from *Pride and Prejudice* and the two short stories we have studied, show how ideas concerning love and marriage have changed since Jane Austen's time and how this is reflected.

In the period when Jane Austen lived society was structured, society was ruled by class and wealth, marriages were based on reasons other than love. Many married to gain status or financial security. Marriage almost became an economical transaction suiting the parents of those involved. As times have changed societies structures have lessened, class is no longer perceived in as much importance. As the roles of women have changed so have the roles of marriage, financial independence and later marrying trends mean that one has more time to consider love.

In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen looks at a very small section of society and how they deal with the concept of love. She looks specifically at the upper middle and upper classes, this is typical of many Austen novels. Through this novel Austen shows her dismay at the way in which society views love and marriage. We see this in the relationships of Jane and Bingley and Elizabeth and Darcy, she bases these model relationships on love. Through the use of other characters we see other views that society have on love and marriage.

In the instance of Mr and Mrs Bennet we can clearly see a union designed chiefly on materialistic measures. Between the two characters there is an underlying tension, which is caused by their inability to communicate effectively. He ridicules her while she hides behind her nerves, "...and have such tremblings, such flutterings, all over me, such spasms in my side, and pains in my head, and such beatings at heart, that I can get no rest at night

nor day.” He understands her perfectly and dislikes her for it, he can see how self absorbed, superficial and trivial she is and plays on this. He knows perfectly well that her main aim in life is to marry off her daughters, and when Bingley first arrives he refuses to visit him just to annoy her.

“ But my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr. Bingley when he comes into the neighbourhood.”

“ It is more than I engage for, I assure you.”

He deals with her the best way he can through, “...sarcastic humour, reserve and caprice...”

Although they are married it is not through love but necessity. In today’s society this would have almost certainly ended in divorce but as this was impossible in Austen’s time he had no choice but to remain with Mrs Bennet.

Another poor example of a relationship in Austen’s novel is that of Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins. Mr. Collins is a truly repulsive character in every sense of the word, his behaviour and manner turn the Bennet sisters away from this man. As cousin to the family and heir to the estate he would have the position of power within societies expectations, and whichever daughter he chose to marry would have been expected to accept. Mr Collins’ proposal to Elizabeth is very formal. He asks for parental permission, he lists all the reasons why he wants to marry her, yet they do not include love. From this we see that Mr Collins conforms to society, making a choice that would be conceded.

To his amazement Elizabeth declines and this he cannot believe, “ You are uniformly charming!” cried he, with an awkward gallantry; “ and I am persuaded that when sanctioned by the express authority of both your excellent parents, my proposal will not fail of being acceptable.” When things do go the way he had planned, he wastes no time in proposing to Charlotte Lucas. But their union too is not based on love, “ I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; considering Mr. Collins’ character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is fair...” This is a view shared by most of the community. One of the things that worries Charlotte Lucas is that no one better than Mr. Collins will advance and she will end up an old maid. This was a real for women living in this time, it wasn’t unusual for girls to be married in late teens and early twenties, if you still hadn’t married by your late twenties you were considered to be a spinster.

Jane Austen’s model characters are the complete opposite to this and show us that you need to learn to love someone. The novel is based on Elizabeth and Darcy’s developing feelings for one another. The title of the novel links to the characters, Darcy is proud, and has trouble admitting to his affections for Elizabeth. Elizabeth on the other hand is prejudice; she bases her own opinion of Darcy on the misinformation of others and her own quick judgement. We are surprised in the first time that Darcy proposes to Elizabeth because he admits to loving her; “ In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will no longer be suppressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”

This, as would be expected, angers Elizabeth, and when she chooses to refuse Darcy he is astonished. Anyone in Elizabeth's social position would be ecstatic at the suggestion of marrying someone like Darcy who is seen to have a much high social standing. But is also a rare occurrence within the novel as only two of the many relationships are based on love, this and Jane and Mr. Bingley. At this point Darcy and Elizabeth have only known each other for a few months, and don't really know each other that well. As the plot continues Darcy learns to separate Elizabeth from her family and Elizabeth discovers the real Darcy, not just the web of lies that Wickham had spun. In the second proposal scene the situation is very different, it is a very informal and almost unspoken agreement, just an understanding between the two characters. In this scene they discuss their feelings for one another and the changes that occurred for them to be able to reach this point. " I have been a selfish being all my life...Such I was from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth!"

From these examples of relationship only in one novel, many have different views on love and marriage. Although pre-nineteenth century society had a greater hold on the day to day lives of many people, our heroine shows that these can be broken. Elizabeth goes against the rules of society because she seeks more from life, she wanted happiness and marriage but based on love not materialistic means. Through the course of the last century the role of women has changed greatly, we would like to think that we are more independent, ambitious and have more freedom from society's dominion.

Tea in the Wendy House is a modern story as is He said... We would expect the female characters to have more autonomy in deciding their futures.

Lynn has known Graham for an extensive amount of time, their relationship developed from childhood friends into lovers. When Lynn discovers that she's pregnant she runs away, she's scared of Graham's reaction and the reaction of her parents. Graham and her family support her, he wants to marry her, because he does love her. She on the other hand is indefinite about the marriage. She had ambitions, "Is that all? A lovely mum? I used to have ambitions." Because of her situation she feels compelled to agree, after all she has the love and assistance of Graham and her family, Lynn cannot challenge that. She yearns for what she cannot have and expects more from her life; like Elizabeth she is going against the verisimilitude of society. Society would anticipate her pleasure at the prospect of having a comfortable lifestyle, being cared for not having to worry about finance or affections.

From this we can see that really the public still has certain views on people and they effect us, in the way we behave, think and regard others. Bev in He Said is also subject to public scrutiny; she is the outcast, left to fend for herself, after being used by Errol. The community in which she lives judges her and repudiates her, relinquished by the father of the child, her own father and even the insensitive doctor who suggests an abortion. "An abortion. If you are to have the pregnancy terminated, we will have to move fast." Bev is forced to deal with her problems by herself, but because of her strong character, "This is my child! Nothing to do with you. Nothing at all!"

we believe that she will be able to cope. In *He Said* we meet a character similar to that of Wickham, Errol is an irresponsible philanderer who in Austen's time would have been made accountable for his actions like Wickham was. Due to the changes in society Errol is not held responsible, but we do get a feeling of Bev being blamed, from her father and the doctor. All three main female characters are stereotyped and they all go against society's regulations. They don't want to conform and Bev and Elizabeth don't, they fight for their own sake, but Lynn doesn't she accepts the situation and as a result we are unsure of her lasting happiness.

The main characters also have different relationships. Darcy and Elizabeth had to go through many changes before they could be content together. Bev also realises the world is harsh, through Merle's support she is able to overcome others like the doctor or Errol and become independent and confident. Errol and Bev didn't have a long-term relationship like Lynn and Graham or Elizabeth and Darcy. Bev's relationship with Errol ended quickly with him walking out on her, Darcy would never do this to Elizabeth because he loves and respects her, they have a fairy tale marriage were they will live happily ever after. The relationship between Lynn and Graham is not quite as stable, Lynn feels trapped and although she is going along with the arrangement for now, we cannot help but feel uneasy over the future.

There is an immense difference in the lifestyle of the various characters. *Pride and Prejudice* is locked into the closed world of the middle to upper classes. In a society that is constrained by class homes are very significant, people judge by the size of an estate, yearly income and even the carriages

that they own. There were a completely different set of social manners and etiquette, we see this when Elizabeth goes to visit Pemberley. To us this would appear very strange, arriving at someone's house to have a look at the way it is decorated or gardening. In *Tea in the Wendy House* the house is also very important, it links to Lynn and Graham's youth and the flashbacks remind us of the unrealistic views love and marriage that they had. Although financial security counts for less than in *Pride and Prejudice* Lynn's mother says, "Graham's very good to you, and he's got a job, and of course there's the house. You really have struck gold there." Bev faces completely different circumstances than Elizabeth and Lynn. She has to work in a burger bar for her own upkeep, she lives in a filthy bedsit in a very closed world. She wouldn't be able to afford to redecorate the way Lynn and Graham do or go visiting people all across the country in the way the Bennet sisters do.

Through these stories the authors are trying to put across their own points of view, Austen is ridiculing the upper and middle classes for their frivolous and trite reasons for marriage. Geras is challenging stereotypes through Lynn's character, working against the need to accept or compromise our own choices. Burford addresses the prejudices that reign in our society, she also teaches us independence through the character of Bev.

My own view is that although society has lessened its grip on our lives, we still follow the expectations and conform to what is anticipated. We still judge others based on fortune, gender or race. Human nature compels us to stay part of a group, we feel the need to belong and don't want to be unconventional.