

Pride and prejudice marriage

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



THE NOVEL IS CRITICAL OF THE SUPERFICIALITIES AND INJUSTICES OF AUSTENS SOCIETY, BUT NOT OF THE WAY THAT SOCIETY IS FUNDAMENTALLY ORGANISED. It is not the fundamental structure of the Regency Period that Jane Austen criticizes in "Pride and Prejudice" but rather its transgression into a shallow society, defined largely by marriage and status. Contextually women derived their all-important wealth (as women had no right to inheritance) and status from the frivolity of marriage, but this more often than not rendered women powerless and both parties were unable gain a sense of personal satisfaction. The satirization of Mr and Mrs Bennet's loveless marriage allows us to challenge the conventional fixation on wealth as opposed to the happiness and development of the woman. Through the portrayal of Lizzy and Darcy's union however, Austen in her novel of moral instruction presents us with an alternate view to marriage as a vessel for moral growth and development. It can be said that Austen, who never married herself asks not for social upheaval and revolution but instead embraces the importance of mutual respect within the union of man and woman. Marriage is presented as an institution that has the potential to assist in social improvement and for Austen; consists of mutual respect, individual growth and understanding but also backed with wealth. The highly satirical representation of Mr and Mrs Bennet's marriage exposes the consequences of what was then considered a conventional marriage, illustrating the reduction of human potential and interpersonal development. It is this uncomplimentary relationship and her self awareness that provides Elizabeth with the stamina to pursue a rewarding partnership with Darcy. Through the narration, Austen challenges the materialistic perception of

marriage within Regency England as a means to reflect social discourse that existed. Mr Bennet's regret in marrying a woman of " youth, beauty and an appearance of good humour" is shown in his loss of " respect, esteem and confidence". This bases Mr Bennet's cynical nature on the disappointment of his marriage. This suggests that marriage for vanity and materialistic aspiration is insufficient reason for a partnership and may leads to the inevitable dissatisfaction and restricts both individuals in their ability to mature. Within Mr and Mrs Bennet's matrimony, happiness is sacrificed as there lays a discrepancy between mutual respect and superiority. Mr Bennet's role as both a husband and father is overridden by a domineering and illogical Mrs Bennet who, unlike her husband holds no integrity or reflective capacity. This notion is emphasized through Mr Bennet's withdrawal from familial affairs to the realms of his library and is also channelled through his regret. This is evident through the lines " My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life. " Here Mr Bennet appears a broken man; reduced and defined by the actions of his wife which contextually was viewed as a reversal of gender roles. This in itself reflects the need of a male superior to maintain rationality within marriage, a fundamental structure of the Regency Period as wealth and status was primarily passed down the male line amongst the gentry. Austen encourages us to celebrate this but within moderation and thus views a happy marriage as one of respect and understanding. It can therefore be assumed that marriage in the Regency Era is a necessary tool for the continuum of moral thought and judgement for both the woman and the man. Austen employs *Pride and Prejudice* as a vehicle to advocate her

approval on marriage but only under circumstances of respect and understanding. Contextually this notion was forgotten given women's social and economic dependency on their male counterparts. Thus women only had the option of marriages where often neither party were a partnership. Through the defiant and outward voice of Elizabeth Bennet, Austen suggests that man and wife should balance each other. This disparity is portrayed vividly through Mr Collins' proposal to Elizabeth, to which she replied " I thank you again and again, but to accept is completely impossible. My feelings in every way forbid it. " In a culture whereby subservience to men was typified, Austen challenges this social convention through Elizabeth's refusal. Through Mr Collins' superficial and arrogant nature, Austen makes social commentary on the limiting nature of Regency England in its ability to stunt the individual's pathway to moral discovery, which therefore reduces human potential. A parody is created of Mr Collins as his ideals are so farfetched. His attempt to be the perfect gentleman with total lack of reflective capacity is reflected through the lines " that being, as I am, to inherit this estate after the death of your honoured father... ". This is also reflected in the role reversal between Mr Collins and Lizzy whereby the female becomes assertive and rational, highlighting society's perceptions of masculine dominance. Lizzy maintains the honour and dignity that Mr Collins doesn't possess in turn creating a parody of him in his pathetic attempt to model the perfect gentleman. Such rigidity between two people is starkly contrasted with Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship, which strengthens during the course of the novel. This is evident through Elizabeth's long-lasting revelation the love her and Darcy share, which can be seen through the

narration “ she began to comprehend that he was exactly that man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her”. This sense of finality emphasises Elizabeth’s personal satisfaction as Darcy has finally earned her respect and honour. This is a sign of both Darcy and Elizabeth’s development in their abandonment of old prejudices and misunderstandings. This union shows that through the institution of a proper and loving partnership of marriage, individuals are content and self aware they have more chance of worthy contributions to society In conclusion, Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* draws attention to societal flaws (such as the superficialities that have become marriage) that prevents the individual from gaining a sense of fulfilment. Although Jane Austen acknowledges wealth necessary in a relationship, she challenges its significance in deciding potential suitors, and in many cases compromising personal contentment. Through the caricatures of Mr and Mrs Bennet, an unhappy marriage is depicted as the characters fail to balance the needs of the other. The conventional method by which marriage is carried out is further satirized through Mr Collins and his overbearing importance over Charlotte Lucas. This heavily contrasts with the developing relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy, where they both abandon past judgements and grow from their ‘ first impressions’ in the pursuit of love and respect.