

**THAIS ROBERTA FLORENTINO OLIVEIRA**

**THE ROLE OF THE WOMAN IN THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY IN THE  
NOVEL *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* BY JANE AUSTEN**

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I dedicate this study to my parents, Carlos Alberto Oliveira and Marlene Regina Florentino, and to my sister Juliana Honório, whom have supported me to accomplish many challenges in my life.

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to discuss the role of the woman in the family and society through the analysis of the novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) which was written during the Romanticism by Jane Austen. Based on a society that aims at financial interests and arranged marriages, the woman's main role is to long for a comfortable life by the side of a successful husband. However, some women are loyal to their feelings, go through the stages of the judgment and reach the peak of the discovery of true love.

**Keywords:** woman, family, society, Romanticism, marriage.

## RESUMO

O objetivo deste trabalho é discutir sobre o papel da mulher dentro da família e da sociedade através da análise do romance *Orgulho e Preconceito* (1813) de Jane Austen, escrito durante o Romantismo. Diante de uma sociedade que visa aos interesses financeiros e casamentos arranjados, a mulher tem como papel principal almejar uma vida confortável ao lado de um marido bem sucedido. No entanto, algumas mulheres agem com fidelidade aos sentimentos, passam pelas etapas do julgamento e chegam ao ápice da descoberta do verdadeiro amor.

**Palavras-chave:** mulher, família, sociedade, Romantismo, casamento.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study illustrates a new approach to the English Literature based on the premise that the woman depends on the family and society. It is necessary to discuss the role of the woman in the family and society in Jane Austen's literary composition *Pride and Prejudice*.

Firstly, Jane Austen's biography and sources of information regarding Romanticism that is encased in the novel are going to be discussed.

The next chapter will consist of a summary of the novel and its major characters.

Then, in the chapter *Why Pride and Prejudice?*, we can reflect on the reasons of the title of the novel by talking about some characters and their particular traits.

After that, the themes of the novel, such as marriage, property and intrigue are going to be pointed out.

Finally, the analysis of the novel concerning the role of the woman in the family and society is going to be talked about. Throughout the analysis, selected excerpts of the novel and of the themes are going to be presented.

Jane Austen was the first woman to be an important romantic writer, her workmanship traces a panel of the English agricultural society. Although she wrote when she was an adolescent, her books were published in her last years of life.

*[...] seus romances têm um frescor e humor [...] Como a primeira mulher que se tornou romancista importante, está acima dos movimentos clássico e romântico; em um certo sentido, preenche a lacuna entre os séculos XVIII e XIX, mas não pode ser enquadrada em nenhum grupo – ela é única (BURGESS, 2006, p. 209).*



The subjects of her novels are love, the fancy of beautiful and young girls in relation to marriage, strolls, visits, balls and tea, the choice of the adjusted husband and the good marriage.

We tried to show the subjects in her work *Pride and Prejudice* because we could see these themes, such as satire, gossip, judgment, falseness and intrigue involving all the characters, and all of these bad things happened in the novel because of the social life, for them, the society is more important than love and peace. The ladies had to marry a rich gentleman to have money and a good rank in the society, but we can see some exceptions. There were some women who fought against the false people to be happy with their lovers.

## 1 JANE AUSTEN'S LIFE



**Picture 1** - Jane Austen

**Source** - MUSSE, Ricardo. Jane Austen. A romancista pioneira. Cadernos entre livros: *Panorama da Literatura Inglesa*. Duetto, n. 1, p. 41, 2007. Edição Especial.

Jane Austen was born on 16 December, 1775, in the village of Steventon, Hampshire, in England. She was an English novelist. Her books are notable for their wit, social observation and insights into the lives of early 19th century women.

When Austen was a child, she wrote and performed plays and charades, and even as a little girl she was encouraged to write. The reading that she did of the books in her father's extensive library provided material for the short satirical sketches she wrote as a girl.

When she was 14 years old she wrote her first novel, *Love and Freindship* (1789) and then *A History of England* (1789). Some novels were re-worked and published later on, such as *Sense and Sensibility*, published in 1811, *Pride and Prejudice*, published in 1813, *Mansfield Park* published in 1814 and *Emma* which was published in 1816, *Persuasion* was written in 1815-1816, and was published in 1818, while Jane Austen was suffering from her disease. She started to write a novel called *The Watsons* in the winter of 1816 which was never completed because of her fatal illness. Jane Austen had a tubercular disease, she could not walk so far, so she used to drive out in a little donkey carriage. In May, 1817, she was really ill. And tragically, there was no cure and Jane Austen died in her sister's arms in the early hours of 18 July, 1817 when she was 41 years old. She is buried in Winchester Cathedral in Winchester. (About Jane Austen – her life & her novels, 2007).

None of the books published in her life-time had her name on them, they were described as being written "By a Lady".

Jane Austen loved to dance like the other girls and this activity was very common in her novels, for example in *Pride and Prejudice*:

She [Elizabeth] danced next with an officer, and had the refreshment of talking of Wickham, and of hearing that he was universally liked. When those dances were over, she returned to Charlotte Lucas and was in conversation with her, when she found herself suddenly addressed by Mr. Darcy who took her so much by surprise in his application for her hand, that, without thinking what she did, she accepted him (AUSTEN, 1994, p.73).

She had a shock when her parents announced that all the family would move to Bath. She did not want to move, she loved the countryside. Unfortunately they moved in 1801. The next five years were difficult ones for Jane Austen because life in that town was very busy and she disliked it. She had to be confined there, and it was very different from her village, Steventon. But it was not just this: her father died in 1805. After that, all the family had financial difficulties, then the Austen ladies moved to Southampton to share Jane's brother's home, who was called Frank and his wife Mary. Afterwards Austen fell in love with a young man who died and she was deeply upset. After the happenings she accepted a proposal of marriage from Harris Bigg-Wither who was one of her closest brother's friend, but she changed her mind the next morning, it was an upset episode.

Surrounded by her lively and affectionate family and wholly immersed in her writing and domestic chores, Jane Austen's life is often noted for its lack of events. She did, however, attract several suitors and even accepted a proposal of marriage from one admirer – only to change her mind the following morning (AUSTEN, Jane, 1994, p. 1).

Edward, who was Jane Austen's brother, offered his mother and sisters a permanent home on his Chawton estate. Therefore, the Austen ladies moved back to their beloved Hampshire countryside.

## 2 ROMANTICISM

According to Albert (1993), Romanticism has very little to do with things popularly thought of as "romantic", although love may occasionally be the subject of Romantic art. Rather, it is an international artistic, ironic and philosophical movement that redefined the fundamental ways in which people think about themselves and about their world. "...the situation in which the non-contradiction is defied is 'irony'" (ALBERT, 1993, p. 5).

It is one of the curiosities of literary history that the strongholds of the Romantic Movement were England and Germany, not the countries of the Romance languages themselves. Thus it is from the historians of English and German literature that we inherit the convenient set of terminal dates for the Romantic period, beginning in 1798 and ending in 1832, later for American literature than for European, and later in some of the arts, like music and painting, than in literature.

The early Romantic period thus coincides with what is often called *the age of revolutions*. A revolutionary energy was also at the core of Romanticism, which quite consciously set out to transform not only the theory and practice of poetry, and all art, but the very way we perceive the world. Some of its major precepts have survived into the twentieth century and still affect our contemporary period.

Other aspects of Romanticism were the emphasis on the activity of the imagination that was accompanied by greater emphasis on the importance of intuition, instincts, and feelings, and Romantics generally called for greater attention to the emotions as a necessary supplement to purely logical reason. When this

emphasis was applied to the creation of poetry, a very important shift of focus occurred. The definition of all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings marks a turning point in literary history.

[...] o romantismo procurou irromper durante toda a Época da Razão: o século XVIII teve uma série de rebeldes, individualistas, loucos, que [...] empenharam-se em uma literatura do instinto, da emoção, do entusiasmo e tentaram retornar ao antigo caminho dos elisabetanos e até mesmo aos poetas medievais (BURGESS, 2006, p. 196).

The Romantics asserted the importance of the individual, the unique, even the eccentric. “*O romantismo criou suas próprias regras e padrões e os rebeldes se tornaram o governo legítimo.*” (BURGESS, 2006, p. 196). Consequently they opposed the character typology of neoclassical drama. In another way, Romanticism created its own literary genres.

Interests in religion and in the powers of faith were prominent during the Romantic period, the Romantics generally rejected absolute systems, whether of philosophy or religion, in favor of the idea that each person must create the system by which to live.

Romanticism presented day-to-day life, showing the family and village society. As we can see in Asten’s novels at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

In this smaller, more peaceful world the significant issues were domestic rather than national, and a proposal of marriage was of greater importance than a peace treaty or a philosophical treatise (CCAA, [s. d.], p. 54).

### **3 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**

#### 3.1 The Novel and its major characters

In a small county called Hertfordshire there is a big and simple family, the Bennets. Mr. Bennet is married to Mrs. Bennet and they have five daughters, he is an ironic man, all he wants is a good future to his wife and daughters; Mrs. Bennet is an ambitious mother because all the time she looks for a husband to the Bennet daughters; Jane Bennet is the oldest daughter, Elizabeth Bennet is very close to her sister Jane; Mary is a shy girl who does not talk very much; Catherine (Kitty) and Lydia are the youngest daughters, and they are friendly, talkative and gossiping.

There are in the county new visitors. They are Charles Bingley, his sister Caroline Bingley and Louisa Bingley, and his best friend Fitzwilliam Darcy. The Bennets are very interested in meeting them, especially Mrs. Bennet, and the reasons are clear, the two men are rich and single. They moved to a big house with extensive grounds, in Netherfield. Mrs. Bennet told her husband that they have to go there to meet Mr. Bingley when he arrives in the neighborhood because of their five daughters. She wants their children have the opportunity to meet the man and make him interested in one of the girls.

At the first ball in the city, the Bennet's daughters meet the visitors, their father introduce them. Mr. Bingley and Jane start to flert, he invites her to dance with him. Elizabeth invites Mr. Darcy for a dance, but he refuses her proposal, later on she hears Mr. Darcy saying that she is not a companion for him, that in the country there will probably be other girls, who are more interesting than her.

By hearing Mr. Darcy's words, Elizabeth has no doubts that he is proud, with a hard heart, serious, cold and a strange man, while Mr. Bingley impresses everyone with his outgoing and good personality.

After the first ball, Jane and Elizabeth talk about Mr. Bingley, Jane tells her that he is an attractive man. They are talking about all the details when the Bennet family's neighbor, Sir William Lucas, visit them. His oldest daughter, Charlotte, who is Elizabeth's close friend, talked about Mr. Darcy's snub, she thinks that Mr. Darcy's family give him the right to be proud. In discussing Darcy's proud nature, Charlotte says,

His pride, said Miss Lucas, does not offend me so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, everything in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a right to be proud (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 17).

Charlotte's judgment of Darcy's pride represents a perspective on wealth and privilege, she expresses the views of society, especially in regard to money and marriage.

One morning, Jane receives a request from Caroline Bingley to come to Netherfield for dinner, her mother tell her to go there on horseback. During the way the rain comes, and Jane arrives wet and sick there.

The Bennets receive a note from Jane informing them that she is ill from getting soaked as she rode to Netherfield the previous day and will have to stay there until she feels better. Mrs. Bennet is not worried about Jane. She is very happy and satisfied because of this opportunity that her daughter is having to be there for more time and to be closer to Mr. Bingley. Bu Elizabeth really is worried about her sister, so she decides to go to Netherfield on foot to see how



Jane is feeling. There she takes care of her sister all the evenings. Elizabeth observes everybody in the house, she is energized by the group's discussion of character, especially the contrast between Bingley and Darcy. Bingley, they notice, is impetuous and impressionable, while Darcy is ruled by reason and reflection. Although Elizabeth frequently challenges Darcy's comments, he continues to find her more and more attractive and realizes that he "had never been, so bewitched by any woman as he was by her" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 13).

The day after Jane and Elizabeth return home, their father announces that a visitor will be arriving that afternoon, Mr. Collins, who is Mr. Bennet's cousin. Because Mr. Bennet's children are all female, the property will, by law, go to the next closest male relative: Mr. Collins. Mr. Bennet points out to his wife and daughters that Mr. Collins who, when he is dead, "may turn you all out of this house as soon as he pleases" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 50).

Because of the inheritance that he will receive from Mr. Bennet, Mr. Collins feels that he has an obligation to this family, so he decides to ask the oldest daughter to marry him. Unfortunately, Mrs. Bennet says Jane will be engaged soon, so she suggests Elizabeth and he agrees with her accepting Mrs. Bennet's idea.

Mr. Collins invite the girls for a walk in Meryton. There Elizabeth meets the officer George Wickham. At this moment Darcy and Bingley ride up to them, and both, Mr. Darcy and Wickham look at one another. Elizabeth sees on Darcy's face an angry expression, so she asks Wickham if they knew each other. He tells her that they had grown up together. Mr. Darcy's father had him as a son. According to Wickham, he was a favorite of Darcy's father and when Darcy's father died, Wickham was supposed to have received a position as a clergyman

at the rectory that the Darcy family oversees. However, Darcy gave the job to someone else. Wickham declares that both Darcy and his sister are proud and unpleasant people, and Elizabeth agrees with his opinion.

Jane heard the story, but she thinks that Elizabeth has to hear Mr. Darcy's version, but Elizabeth insists that Wickham told her the truth.

There is a second ball in the city, but this time it is a private ball, organized by Mr. Bingley, and all the Bennets go to the ball, of course. For a moment Mr. Darcy makes Elizabeth surprised, because Darcy asks her to dance with him that she agrees to it without thinking. They argue tensely and end their dance feeling angry and dissatisfied.

The morning after the ball in Netherfield, Mr. Collins asks Elizabeth to marry him but she refuses his proposal, because she does not love him. "I am perfectly serious in my refusal. You could not make me happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make you so" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 87).

Charlotte Lucas visits the Bennets and learns of Elizabeth's refusal of Mr. Collins. Charlotte begins spending more time with him, and within a few days, he asks her to marry him. Charlotte accepts, not for love but for security, and news of their engagement shocks Mrs. Bennet and Elizabeth. She cannot believe her friend will marry without love.

Mr. Bingley leaves for a temporary visit to London, but Jane receives a letter from Caroline Bingley stating that the whole party has left for London and will not return all winter. Caroline tells Jane that they are spending a great deal of time with Georgiana Darcy and that she would like Miss Darcy to marry her brother. Jane is disappointed by the news, but believes that Caroline's letter is

written in friendship and helpful feelings. Elizabeth is on the side of her sister, she thinks that Mr. Bingley's sister is planning to apart the lovers. Caroline send another letter to Jane telling her that they will never come back to Netherfield. Because of this letter Jane feels depressed, Elizabeth is very angry, she blames all those people for everything bad that is happening to her sister.

Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, who are the Bennet girl's uncle and aunt, see Jane's sad face and invites her to go to London with them. She accepts immediately, because she will probably feels better staying far away from the county for some time.

Mr. Collins and Charlotte Lucas marry and move to Hunsford. After the new life, Mrs. Collins invite Elizabeth to visit them and she accepts, on the way she stopped in London to visit her aunt and uncle, the Gardiners. Before she leaves London the Gardiners called her for a trip to northern England and she agrees.

When she arrives at the Collins' house that she will stay, Charlotte and Mr. Collins greet her enthusiastically and give them a tour of the house and garden.

About a week after Mr. Darcy and Colonel Fitzwilliam arrive at Rosings, the residents of the house are again invited to dinner. Lady Catherine, who is Mr. Darcy's aunt, focuses much of her attention on Darcy, while Colonel Fitzwilliam asks Elizabeth to play the piano for him. Darcy soon joins them at the piano and it is not long before Elizabeth and Darcy become engaged in a spirited conversation about Darcy's reserved behavior among strangers. Elizabeth criticizes him for not trying harder, while Darcy states that he simply isn't able to easily talk with people he doesn't know well.

The next morning, Darcy visits the parsonage and is surprised to find Elizabeth alone. Their conversation is too formal and embarrassing, but soon Elizabeth asks him if Mr. Bingley plans to return to Netherfield. After a few minutes of silence, Darcy shocks Elizabeth with a declaration of love for her and a proposal of marriage. Initially flattered by his regard, Elizabeth's feelings turn to shocking as Darcy lists all of the reasons why he has resisted his feelings for her. Elizabeth in turn surprises Darcy by refusing his proposal, stating, "I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 151).

She condemns him for separating Jane and Bingley, for treating Wickham poorly, and for his arrogance and selfishness. He accepts these accusations without apology, even with contempt. However, he is sad when she accuses him of not behaving like a gentleman and when Elizabeth finishes her denunciation of him, Darcy angrily departs. Elizabeth cries for half an hour afterward and goes to her room when everyone returns home.

The next morning, Darcy goes to Mrs. Collins' home to give Elizabeth a letter, Then he leaves her and she reads the letter.

Be not alarmed, madam, on receiving this letter [...] I write without any intention of paining you, or humbling myself [...] but I demand it of your justice [...] The first-mentioned was, that, regardless of the sentiments of either, I had detached Mr. Bingley from your sister, - and the other [...] the prospects of Wickham [...] My objection to the marriage were not merely those which I last night acknowledged to have required the utmost force of passion to put aside, in my own case; the want of connection could not be so great an evil to my friend as to me [...] I do suppose that it would ultimately have prevented the marriage had it not been seconded by the assurance which I hesitated not in giving, of yours sister's indifference [...] If I have wounded your sister's feelings, it was unknowingly done; and though the motives which governed me way to you very naturally appear insufficient, I have not yet learnt to condemn them. Which respect Mr. Wickham [...] was to the last so steady [...] to promote his advancement in the best manner that his profession might allow [...] There was also a legacy of one thousand pounds [...] He had some intention [...] of studying

the law, and I must be aware that the interest of one thousand pound would be very insufficient support therein. I [...] was perfectly accede to his proposal. I knew that Mr. Wickham ought not to be a clergyman [...] and accepted in return three thousand pounds[...] but his studying the law was a mere pretence [...] About a year ago [...] he so far recommended himself to Georgiana [...] Mr. Wickham's chief object was unquestionably my sister's fortune, which is thirty thousand pounds [...] This, madam, is a faithful narrative of every event in which we have been concerned together [...] I shall endeavour to find some opportunity of putting this letter in your hands in the course of the morning. I will only add, God bless you (AUSTEN, p. 152-158, 1994).

In the letter Mr. Darcy confessed all his involvement with Wickham and with Mr. Bingley and Jane's apart. After reading it, Elizabeth does not want to believe him. Then she thinks better and sees that all he told her in the letter is completely true, so she says, "I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 162).

Elizabeth soon receives two letters from Jane that shatter any hopes she has about her relationship with Darcy. In the letters, Jane tells her that Lydia has run away with Wickham from Brighton and that they probably have not gotten married. In shock because of the news, Elizabeth rushes to get her uncle, but is met there by Darcy. Troubled by Elizabeth's excitement, Darcy sends for her uncle and stays with her to try to calm her down.

Overcome by what she has learned, Elizabeth begins to cry and tells Darcy what has happened. He expresses concern and worries that his own silence regarding Wickham is, in part, responsible for the present situation. Thinking he is only in the way, Darcy leaves. Elizabeth realizes that she loves him, but fears that the family scandal will ruin her chances of his wanting her for a wife. She knows Wickham's mercenary nature too well to believe that he would marry someone like Lydia who has no money. The whole town gossips about

Wickham's disreputable nature and speculates on Lydia's future. A letter arrives from Mr. Collins condemning Lydia's behavior and advising the Bennets that he has no connection with her in order to save the rest of the family's reputation.

Relief comes at last with a letter from Mr. Gardiner informing the family that Lydia and Wickham have been found. Although they are not married, they have been convinced to do so, provided that Wickham's debts are paid and Lydia receives an amount of money. Mr. Bennet agrees to the conditions.

Contemplating her sister's marriage, Elizabeth reflects that her wishes for a future with Darcy are completely hopeless now. Even if he would marry into a family as embarrassing as the Bennets, he would never willingly marry into a family of which Wickham is a part. This thought makes her feel sad, when she realizes at last how perfectly matched she and Darcy would have been.

Elizabeth and Darcy go for a walk and she says thanks without thinking for his involvement in Lydia and Wickham's marriage. In turn, Darcy declares that he still loves Elizabeth and wants to marry her. When Elizabeth responds that her feelings have greatly changed and that she also loves him. The couple discusses the story of their relationship. Darcy tells Elizabeth that her refusal of his first proposal caused him to examine his pride and prejudices and to subsequently alter his behavior. They also talk about Bingley and Jane. Darcy is happy about their engagement, and he admits to encourage Bingley to propose.

Darcy and Elizabeth's engagement is so unexpected that the Bennet family has difficulty believing it at first. After the marriages of Elizabeth and Darcy and Jane and Bingley, life progresses happily.

The Bingleys move close to Pemberley after about a year, and Elizabeth and Jane are frequently visited by their sister Kitty, who improves considerably under their influence. Back at Longbourn, Mrs. Bennet continues to be silly, Mr. Bennet misses Elizabeth and enjoys visiting her, and Mary appreciates having no pretty sisters at home to compete with her. As for the rest of their families, Wickham and Lydia continue to waste money, Lady Catherine is cold to Elizabeth, and Miss Darcy and Elizabeth become very close. Darcy and Elizabeth's happiness is increased by visits from the Gardiners' visits.

## 4 WHY “PRIDE AND PREJUDICE”?

The masterpiece *Pride and Pejudice* is special not only because it deals with the misjudgments that the first impressions may cause, but how it can change by the time people get to know each other better.

[...] ela [Austen] tenta tão-somente mostrar um pequeno segmento da sociedade inglesa de sua época – o anestesiado pequeno mundo das famílias rurais com um razoável padrão de conforto. (BURGESS, 2006, p. 209).

*Pride and Prejudice* deals with a prejudiced society, whose financial situation was much more important than the personal desire, mainly the female one.

Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy meet each other through the main activities in the society, such as, great parties, visits, strolls and picnics. The couple has an argument and finishes it by changing the disagreements by using the erudite and fine vocabulary. For instance: “Heaven forbit! – That would bethe greatest misfortune of all! To find a man agreeable whom one is determined to hate! – Do not wish me such an evil.” (Austen, 1994, p.73)

Elizabeth’s mother pledges herself with the new friendship by trying to arrange good marriage for the five daughters and to give her daughters dignity and honor, as she said: “A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!” (AUSTEN, 1994, p.5). But Elizabeth hates her mother’s idea: marriage just to be successful in the society. She wants to fall in love. She doesn’t want to talk about marriage as a means to economic security.



Elizabeth hates Darcy's snobbish actions, and he hates Elizabeth's pride in her judgment of people. But they can realize that this hatred is only a disguise. In this personal war between each other there is a very strong hidden feeling.

Elizabeth is prejudiced against Darcy, and everything appears as the first impression, that soon it is absorbed day by day until the moment that love is discovered.

Elizabeth at first is prejudiced against Darcy; she believes that Darcy's opposition to the love affair between his friend Bingley and Elizabeth's sister Jane is based solely on aristocratic pride – Darcy, she believes, does not want to see his friend marry someone beneath his social rank. Elizabeth later learns that she had been mistaken about Darcy's character: overscrupulous he may be in his concern to protect his impulsive friend from the scheming mothers of marriageable daughters but snobbish and haughty he is not. She learns, in effect, the depth of her own pride in her judgment of people. Darcy, too, learns the folly of his prejudice based on class. When the two finally become engaged, they both learned the wisdom of tolerance and humility. Instinct, then – whether in the form of pride or of prejudice – must be tempered and even conquered by judgment. (CCAA, [s.d.], p. 57-58)

## 5 THEMES OF THE NOVEL

According to Silva (2005), *Pride and Prejudice* represents the summit of Jane Austen's first works and is a widely read novel. It is written in gentle satire. The main object of Austen's satire in the novel is the mercenary and the ignorance of the people, a common criticism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. One of the characters in the novel which best carries these qualities is Mrs. Bennet, a foolish woman who talks too much and is obsessed with getting her daughters married.

A obra de Austen é composta por comédias satíricas da vida social e doméstica de uma limitada esfera da sociedade inglesa. Suas tramas constituem uma variação do tema padrão dos romances femininos do século XVIII: a entrada em uma sociedade cujo ápice para a mulher é o casamento. Cada uma das heroínas de Austen segue o mesmo padrão para conseguir um marido, geralmente um homem mais velho que se coloca tanto como um pai e um guia quanto como um amante. Apesar de trabalhar com tramas previsíveis, limitadas e de foco estreito, Austen era capaz de usar um estilo refinado e meticuloso para explorar um tema universal: o lugar do ser humano dentro da família e da sociedade (SILVA, 2005, p. 213).

According to the information on the site Cliffs Notes – *The fastest way to learn* (2007), Lydia Bennet, the youngest of the Bennet daughter who is devoted to a life of dancing, fashion, gossip and flirting; and Mr. Williams Collins, the silly person who is completely stupify by Lady Catherine in every aspect of his life that he has forgotten his own morals and duty. The tone of the novel is light, satirical, and vivid. Scenes such as Mr. Collins proposal to Elizabeth, and Lady Catherine visits to Lizzy at Longbourn, provides comic relief to the reader while at the same time revealing certain characteristics of the characters. For example, Lydia's lack of common sense and responsibility is revealed when she takes pride in being the first Bennet girl to be married. Lydia does not take into consideration the circumstance of her marriage, the personality of her husband, or the prospects of their marriage for the future. Elizabeth

Bennet's ability to laugh off her misfortune and to continue to be optimistic, considering her situation, also contributes to the tone of the novel.

Austen's powers of subtle discrimination perceptiveness is revealed in *Pride and Prejudice* in which she is able to convey such a complex message using a simple style.

The themes of the novel which are marriage, property and intrigue are going to be discussed below. They "lie at the heart of *Pride and Prejudice*" (AUSTEN, 1994, p.2).

## 5.1 MARRIAGE

The main subject in the novel "is stated in the first sentence of the novel is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 5).

In this statement, Jane Austen has cleverly done three things: she has declared that the main theme of the novel will be courtship and marriage, she has established the humorous tone of the novel by taking a simple subject to elaborate and to speak intelligently of, and she has prepared the reader for a chase in the novel of either a husband in search of a wife, or a woman in pursuit of a husband.

For Silva (2005), the first line also defines Austen's book as a piece of literature that connects itself to the 18<sup>th</sup> century period. *Pride and Prejudice* places great emphasis on man in his social environment rather than in his individual conditions. The use of satire and wit, a common form of the 18<sup>th</sup> century literature, also contributes to label the book of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, because Jane Austen

had allowed personal feelings of the characters to be expressed in her work, she can also be classified as Romantic. In the figure of Elizabeth, Jane Austen shows passion attempting to find a valid mode of existence in society. Passion and reasons also come together in the novel to show that they are complementary of marriage.

There are seven different marriages presented in the novel. Excluding the Gardiners and the Lucas, the remaining five marriages contrasts to each other to reveal Austen's opinions and thoughts on the subject of marriage.

Darcy and Elizabeth's marriage reveals the characteristics which constitutes a successful marriage. One of these characteristics is that the feeling cannot be brought on by appearances, and must gradually develop between the two people as they get to know one another. In the beginning, Elizabeth and Darcy were distant from each other because of their prejudice. The series of events which they both experienced gave them the opportunity to understand one another and the time to reconcile their feelings for each other. Thus, their mutual understanding is the foundation of their relationship and will lead them to a peaceful and lasting marriage. This relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy reveals the importance of getting to know one's partner before marrying. Jane Bennet and Bingley's marriage is also an example of successful marriage. Jane Austen, through Elizabeth, expresses her opinion of this marriage in the novel:

[...]really believed all his [Bingley] expectations of felicity, to be rationally founded, because they had for basis the excellent understanding, and super-excellent disposition of Jane, and a general similarity of feeling and taste between her and himself (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 267).

However, unlike Darcy and Elizabeth, there is a weakness in their relationship. The weakness is that both Jane and Bingley are too good-hearted to ever act strongly against external forces that may attempt to separate them:

You [Jane and Bingley] are each of you so complying, that nothing will ever be resolved on; so easy, that every servant will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always exceed your income (Austen, 1994, p. 268).

Obviously, Lydia and Wickham's marriage is not a good example of marriage. Their marriage was based on first impressions, good looks. Once these qualities can no longer be seen by each other, the once strong relationship will slowly fade away. As in the novel, Lydia and Wickham's marriage gradually disintegrates; Lydia becomes a regular visitor at her two elder sister's homes when "her husband was gone to enjoy himself in London or Bath" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 298). Through their relationship, Jane Austen shows that hasty marriage based on superficial qualities quickly cools and leads to unhappiness, according to the information on site *Cliffs Notes – The fastest way to learn* (2007).

Although little is told of how Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet got together, it can be inferred by their conversations that their relationship was similar to that of Lydia and Wickham - Mr. Bennet had married a woman he found sexually attractive without realizing she was an unintelligent woman. Mrs. Bennet's favoritism towards Lydia and her comments on how she was once as energetic as Lydia reveals this similarity: Mr. Bennet's comment on Wickham being his favorite son-in-law reinforces this similarity. The effect of the relationships was that Mr. Bennet would isolate himself from his family; he found refuge in his library or in his wife. Mr. Bennet's self-realization at the end of the novel in which he discovers that his lack of attention towards his family had led his family to develop the way they are, was too late to save his family. He is

Jane Austen's example of a weak father. According to the information on the site *Cliffs Notes – The fastest way to learn* (2007), in these two latter relationships, Austen shows that it is necessary to use good judgment to select a spouse, otherwise the two people will lose respect for each other.

The last example of a marriage shows a different nature from the ones mentioned above. Mr. Collins and Charlotte's marriage is based on economic security rather than on love or appearance.

[...] the heroine's friend Charlotte marries the foolish but respectable Mr. Collins out of "convenience", in order to avoid the life of an old maid and to secure for herself a safe future (C.C.A.A. [ s.d.], p. 57).

For Silva (2005), it was a common practice during Austen's time for women to marry a husband to save herself from spinsterhood or to gain economic security. However, Jane Austen viewed this as a type of prostitution and disapproved of it. In the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen dramatizes this kind of woman inequality and shows that women who submit themselves to this type of marriage will have to suffer in tormenting silence as Charlotte does:

When Mr. Collins said anything of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed, which certainly was not unseldom, she [Elizabeth] would involuntarily turned her eye on Charlotte. Once or twice she could discern a faint blush; but in general Charlotte wisely did not hear (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 123).

These five marriages contributes to the theme that a happy and strong marriage takes time to build and must be based on mutual feeling, understanding, and respect. Hasty marriages acting on impulse, and based on superficial qualities will not survive and will lead to inevitable unhappiness.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen has denounced the elements of marriage and society that she found unpleasant. These are the conclusions of her

observation of the people in her world. However in her writing, Austen has also reflected her own enjoyment in life among these people with and without their faults.

Just as a young girl today might dream of someday marrying a movie star or a millionaire, so young middle-class girls of the period dreamed of marrying a handsome rich young aristocrat. They nursed their fantasies on sentimental novels which were enormously popular at that time, and gossip. (...) marriage is less a result of the storm of passion than a means to economic security or a joining of characters who are moral and intellectual equals (C.C.A.A. [ s.d.], p.56-57).

## 5.2 PROPERTY

Money plays an important role in the novel *Pride and Prejudice*. The Bennet women will have a bleak financial future after Mr. Bennet dies.

An example of it is when Mrs. Bennet refers to Mr. Bingley, saying the he wins "*four or five thousand a year*" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 5).

Mr. Collins mentioned his financial security "*one thousand pounds in the 4 per cents*" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 86) to persuade Elizabeth to marry him.

Another example of property is Wickham, he inherited 1,000 pounds from Darcy's father. After dissolving his claim to the clergyman position, Wickham received more than 3,000 pounds from Darcy, but he spend the all the money on playing cards, later on he was again asking Darcy for money, which Darcy refused to give him. Wickham then attempts to get married to Miss Darcy without parental agreement, just because she would inherited 30,000 pounds. He discovered that if he married Georgiana Darcy he would not receive any money, so he lived her alone, making her depressed. After that, Wickham runs off with Lydia, whose portion equals Elizabeth's - 40 pounds a year, 1,000 pounds overall. He tells Darcy that he has no

intention of marrying Lydia, so Mr. Darcy persuades Wickham to marry Lydia, he paid Wickham.

## 5.2 INTRIGUE

When Elizabeth goes to Netherfield to see how Jane is feeling, Caroline Bingley criticizes her by making an intrigue and saying,

Why she [Elizabeth] must be scampering about the country, because her sister had a cold? Her hair so untidy, so blousy! (AUSTEN, 1994, p.30)

Another example of intrigue that we can show is when Elizabeth meets Wickham, because he told many lies about Mr. Darcy, so he says that,

Mr. Darcy often acknowledged himself to be under the greatest obligations to my father's active superintendence, and when, immediately before my father's death, Mr. Darcy gave him a voluntary promise of providing for me, and I am convinced that he felt it to be as much a debt of gratitude to him, as of affection to myself [...] for almost all his actions may be traced to pride; - and pride has often been his best friend (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 66).

The themes mentioned above are presented in the novel and they show a vision of human relationships in the family and society in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.



## 5 THE ROLE OF THE WOMAN IN THE NOVEL

The importance of marriage in the lives of Elizabeth Bennet and her sisters may be difficult for modern readers to understand. We can see that marriage is the most important thing for woman at that time on the first page in the novel. For example, for Bennet ladies' mother, Mrs. Bennet, the most important thing in the world is to marry their daughters, especially if the man is rich, "A single man of a large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for aour girls" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 5). Young women today have a variety of options open to them regarding their future - they can marry, of course, but they can also go to college, follow any career path that may interest them, and live on their own, independent of relatives. Young women of Austen's age did not have these advantages. Although the daughters of the middle and upper class could be sent to school, their education there consisted more of becoming "accomplished" than it did of expanding their academic knowledge. Additionally, women in early nineteenth-century Britain were not allowed in higher education, so private tutors, governesses, and private schools were the extent of structured education open to them. Naturally, a young woman like Elizabeth Bennet with a lively mind would have been able to acquire her education independently through reading. Elizabeth indicates as much to Lady Catherine, describing education for her and her sisters as being unstructured but accessible,

[...] such of us as wished to learn, never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle certainly might. (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 130).

By talking about a woman's accomplishments, Darcy also comments that a really commendable woman will improve "her mind by extensive reading" (AUSTEN, 1813, p. 33).

A woman's formal education was limited because her job opportunities were limited - and vice versa. Society could not conceive of a woman entering a profession such as medicine or the law and therefore did not offer her the chance to do so. "In fact, middle and upper-class women had few avenues open to them for a secure future" (Cliffs Notes – The fastest way to learn, 2007). If unmarried, they would remain dependent upon their relatives, living with or receiving a small income from their fathers, brothers, or other relations who could afford to support them. In Elizabeth's case, she is dependent upon her father while he is living and she is unmarried, but because of the entail and the fact that she has no brothers, her situation could become quite desperate when he dies. She and her mother and sisters would be forced to rely upon the charity of their relatives, such as Mr. and Mrs. Phillips, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, and even Mr. Collins. Such a position would be extremely unpleasant and humiliating.

According to the information on the site *Cliffs Notes – The fastest way to learn* (2007), other options available to a gently young woman who needs to support herself would be to take a position as a governess or a lady's companion. Both jobs allowed a woman to earn a living without sacrificing her social position. However, the working conditions of these jobs were often distasteful and degrading. Any other form of employment a woman could take was considered unacceptable and would most likely harm her social standing.

Five daughters brought up at home without a governess! I never heard of such a thing. Your mother must have been quite a slave to your education [...] Without a governess, you must have been neglected (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 129).

An unmarried woman's social standing would also be harmed by her living alone, outside of the sphere of her family's influence. If a single woman who had never been married was not living with her family, she should at least be living with a suitable chaperone. Therefore, when the Bennet daughters travel in *Pride and Prejudice*, they always stay in the company of a relative or a respectable married woman. Jane visits the Gardiners, Elizabeth stays with the now-married Charlotte, Elizabeth later travels with the Gardiners, and Lydia goes to Brighton as the guest of Mrs. Forster. When Lydia runs away with Wickham, however, her reputation and social standing are ruined by the fact that she lived with him alone without getting married. Only marriage can save her from being rejected by her social sphere, and only marriage can save her family's reputation as well, unless they disowned her. Consequently, Darcy's efforts to find Wickham and Lydia and to buy Wickham's marriage to Lydia quite literally saves not only Lydia's reputation, but the whole Bennet family as well.

Upon my word, said Mrs. Gardiner, I begin to be of your uncle's opinion. It is really too great a violation of dependency, honour and interest, for him to be guilty of it. I cannot think so very ill of Wickham. Can you yourself, Lizzy, so wholly give him up, as to believe him capable of it? (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 215).

Another example of the woman's role is that Elizabeth is a heroine, because she wants more than a wealthy husband, who could give her economic security, she does not worry about saving her family. She does not care about financial security, she wants much more than that, all that she wants is to understand her feelings, she waits for the true love.

The happiness which this reply produced was such as he had probably never felt before, and he expressed himself on the occasion as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do. Had Elizabeth been able to encounter his eyes, she might have been how well the expression of heartfelt delight defuse over his face became him; but though she could listen, and he told her of feelings which, in providing of what importance she was to him, made his affection every moment more valuable (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 282).

## CONCLUSION

When the role of the woman in the family and society was analyzed in the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, we could conclude, that the author makes use of such resource not only as a mechanism to call the reader's attention for a determined aspect of the work, but mainly to criticize the English society in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The novel shows not only inappropriate behaviors and values, or unprincipled people of this society but also different views on marriage. For the society, marriage is not a result of passion. It is more a result of economic security or a moral and social choice of a companion for wife. Thus, young middle class women of the period wanted to marry a handsome rich aristocrat.

Then we could also notice that the role of the woman is not only to enjoy special privileges of a high social status. The woman's feelings play an important role for the society. When Elizabeth and Darcy finally get engaged, they have both learned the wisdom of humility and tolerance. Therefore, the role of the woman is not only to be by the side of a wealthy man's side; her feeling, such as love also plays an important role.

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