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LOVE AND MARRIAGE IN THE NOVEL OF JANE AUSTEN

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ABSTRACT



There are a few important themes which are treated again and again in the novels of Jane Austen, 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 important themes which the novelist takes up for the treatment in novel after novel. Jane Austen, sharing the opinion commonly held by her contemporaries and satisfied with the conditions that prevailed, was of the view that a young women should marry for love certainly, but in satisfactory conditions. Austen gives object lesson to show how careful a young woman should be in marrying well, by describing the misconditions.

Key Words: Love, Marriage, Pride, Prejudice, Mannerism

Introduction

Jane Austen has been a rational woman exceptional in intellect, unique in wit and has found herself in circumstances which were merge and at times irrational. She is endowed with fastidiousness on the one hand and enjoyment on the other hand. She has employed her experience creatively in the service of comedy. She has always kept close to the commonest incidents and characters as a reader might have met him the ordinary walks of life. She is endowed with such a potential to portray them wit liveliness, originality and verisimilitude.

Sir Walter Scot says of Austen as a personality with “ talent for describing the involvements, feelings and characters of the ordinary life; her exquisite touch which renders ordinary common place things and characters interesting, from the truth of description and sentiment. The theme of Education, the mistakes caused by self-deception being encouraged by wrong standards and ideals, the attempt to live in accordance with a principle that cannot be applied to the world of ordinary or personal relationship, lies behind much of the novels of Jane Austen.

Writers on Jane Austen

The novels of Austen in the words of W.L.Cross “ they were not written to over turn the English constitution or to bring about a general reformation of the society, but to mark the manners of the time, is clear”. But there is ample evidence in the novels of Austen to show that they don’t merely mark the manners of the time. They have elevated from the level of social history to the level of broad allegories in which the virtues and defects of men are set forth and commented upon in narrative form. They also exemplify the ironic point of view in which incidents, characters and situations imply something beyond that they embody. Hence they are considered as symbolic rather than allegorical.

Thomas Hardy and Somerset Maugham treated love as a consummating passion. Charles Dickens on the other hand presents love s a domestic bliss. But in Miss Austen’s novels love is neither a terrible thing nor a very deep passion. It is just a necessity of life at a certain age, say youth. Passions are unknown to Miss Jane Austen and persons don not fall in love at first sight in her novels. Besides these Miss Austen does not deal

with illicit love in her pictures. Love is always terminated in marriage in her descriptions. Even the eloped Lydia and Wickham are excused because they got themselves married.

The Theme of Love and Marriage

The love of Darcy and Elizabeth starts not with a smooth running river but like a hatred one. The novel makes it clear that Darcy's pride leads to prejudice and Elizabeth's prejudice stems from a pride in her own perception. Elizabeth does not give Darcy a chance or rather she does to give a chance to know how she really feel about him. The famous first encounter is disastrous: it occurs at the assembly where Darcy says Bingley of Elizabeth, who is sitting down: "she is tolerable but not handsome enough to tempt me: and I am in no humor at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men." As a natural result Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feeling towards him.

Jane Austen could approve only a sensible husband to a sensible wife and foolish one to 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 temperament and personality. Jane and Bingley both are of good nature and so deserve to be each other partners. Elizabeth and Darcy form another pair of lovers whose nature is more or less similar.

These two characters are remarkably intelligent and both are given to critically examining men and manners. Elizabeth becomes unduly prejudiced against Darcy, because of his pride and partly because of the false presentation of his character by Wickham. But as the story progresses Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy and Darcy's pride Elizabeth are removed and eventually they are married. In this case again Jane Austen approves of the marriage of good personality and temperaments.

In the words of Jane Austen heart must be controlled by head, feelings must be subordinated to reason. She is angry with a character who is led away by the feelings. However Austen does not despise that Elizabeth is fascinated by the sweet manners and charming personality of Wickham. But

on the sound advice of her Aunt Mrs. Gardiner, she controls her feelings. Lydia has neither sense nor character to put check on her feelings. She elopes with Wickham at the first opportunity and brings disgrace to herself and on her family.

But at the Netherfield where Elizabeth has gone to nurse the ailing Jane, Elizabeth makes her extraordinary and attractive personality being felt by others in the house. With the insult of the ball fresh in her mind she does not like him. However Darcy realizes the good at Elizabeth's heart. He says "in vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you." She is under the delusion of Darcy's ill-treatment of Wickham and for ruining the happiness of her most beloved sister.

This is not the end but only a beginning were the heroine of Austen is going to come out of her delusions, feelings for fancy and her fascination for Wickham. The next day she is handed Darcy's justly famous letter which gave new a light not only on the Jane bingley matter but also on the supposed unfairness to Wickham's claims. she grew absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced and absurd.

"how despicably have I acted! She cried, 'I who have prided myself on my discernment! I who have valued myself on my abilities! Who has often disdained the glib and generous candor of my sister: and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable distrust. Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretched"

The marriage of Mr. Collins is suitable because Mr. Collins is a fool, his wife Charlotte is gifted with good sense. But she is too practical in her outlook and takes pleasure herself in marrying a fool so that she could dominate him. So Jane Austen sympathizes with Charlotte:

"Poor Charlotte! – It was not melancholy to tolerate her to such a society. But she had chosen it with her eyes open; and though evidently regretting that her visitors were to go, she did not seem to ask for compassion".

The real object of marriage according to Jane Austen is not home and housekeeping, parish and poultry but something higher. It is companionship,

intellectual and emotional association between husband and wife and Austen would not approve of a marriage were such an association is wanting. Austen shows the play of the life's little ironies without sacrificing the sense of probability.

None of the heroines marry entirely for the sake of love. In fact the mercenary view of marriage is proclaimed by many of her characters and practiced by even more of them. Charlotte Lucas the friend of Elizabeth Bennet accepts the egregious Collins purely from practical considerations and is able to have the security and comfort of a home of her own which a reader may feel must have mattered more to women in Jane Austen's days when independent careers for women were not common.

Conclusion

The only way a woman could live in comfort and security was by marrying a man who could provide a home for her. Self reliant and self recognition are the two virtues which Austen always extols in her novels. Here in this novel the virtue of self reliant is taught by the heady and reckless conduct of Lydia Bennet.

Jane Austen is concerned with the achievement of a perfect marriage as essential for happiness, for it is the chief of human relations. It is necessary for happiness as well as for the development of personality. By the end of Jane Austen's novels, there is always the achievement of self-control and self respect and principal means of such an achievement is a league of perfect sympathy with another who is one's counterpart.

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