

The Importance of Marriage in Jane Austen's Novels

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Abstract

The following article reveals the significance of marriage in Jane Austen's novels. The writer's style is analyzed through the image of the heroes of the work, and the important role of marriage in society is revealed with the examples from the novel. The work focuses on the analysis of social life and gender issues, the role and relationship of women and men in society, family and marriage relations, as well as the different and similar views of men and women in relation to them.

Keywords: Marriage, Social Status, Romantic Love, Financial Situation.

Introduction

Marriage was a socially and economically significant ritual in 19th-century in England. It was expected to provide social standing, security in one's finances, and a feeling of respectability by society. In order to maintain fortune or social standing, inheritance, and form strategic relationships, marriages were frequently planned. But as the century went on, romantic love grew in significance, and by the later Victorian era, companionate marriages had taken control. The theological and legal structures that surrounded marriage also contributed to the emphasis on marriage's significance at that time.

Jane Austen emphasizes marriage as a social evaluation and a major issue in her works. In particular, Austen delves into the expectations and limitations placed on women in early 19th-century society when it came to marriage.

1. **Social Status and Wealth:** Getting married is frequently portrayed as a means of enhancing one's financial and social standing. Elizabeth Bennet and other characters in "Pride and Prejudice" must negotiate social conventions and expectations in order to find a compatible partner who shares their ideals.
2. **Class and Social Mores:** Austen's books emphasize the tight social mores of the era as well as the difficulties individuals have when attempting to marry outside of their social class. In "Sense and Sensibility," cultural conventions and expectations around marriage are examined, and the Dashwood sisters' quest for happiness is influenced by these ideas.
3. **Individual Agency and Love:** Austen highlights the value of sincere love and individual agency in marriage, despite social pressure. Emma Woodhouse from "Emma" and other characters gain insight into the intricacies of love and the importance of marrying for the right reasons rather than just those of social convention.

4. Satirical Critique: Using humor and sarcasm, Austen criticizes the importance society places on marriage for social or economic gain alone. Her books frequently highlight the problems with the current marriage market, as characters occasionally put money and prestige over compatibility.

Essentially, Austen's depiction of marriage offers a complex examination of personal wants and the search for true love in the face of social expectations, as well as a reflection of the difficulties and conventions of her period.

Considering the social issues and expectations of her era, Mrs. Bennett in Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" is mostly focused on making sure her daughters marry well. Her viewpoint is distinguished by:

1. Economic Concerns: Mrs. Bennett gives careful thought to how marriage would affect one's finances. She believes that by making sure her daughters marry wealthy men who can support them, she can secure their futures.

2. Urgency and Anxiety: It's common to see Mrs. Bennett as tense and unduly keen to marry off her daughters. Her conviction that women are under pressure from society to find a suitable partner early in life is what motivates this rush.

3. Social Position: Social status is another important factor for Lady Bennett. She wants her daughters to marry someone who will improve their social position, so that they can move up in the social ladder.

4. Lack of Delicacy: Lady Bennett's matchmaking methods lack finesse and sophistication. Her lack of tact and openness sometimes lead to humorous situations.

All in all, Lady Bennett's view of marriage is influenced by the practical aspects of her social background. Her character serves as a satire of the social expectations of marriage in 18th-century England, which Jane Austen tries to criticize in "The Sense of Sense and Sensibility."

Main part

Jane Austen emphasizes the advantage of marriage in her novel "Emma". *"We should not like her so well as we do, sir, if we could suppose it; but she knows how much the marriage is to Miss Taylor's advantage; she knows how very acceptable it must be, at Miss Taylor's time of life, to be settled in a home of her own, and how important to her to be secure of a comfortable provision, and therefore cannot allow herself to feel so much pain as pleasure. Every friend of Miss Taylor must be glad to have her so happily married."*¹

In the abovementioned passage one can clarify that Mr. Knightley feels marriage to be safe for Miss Taylor and even more the author uses oxymoron in the extract describing the young lady's position as "therefore cannot allow herself to feel so much pain as pleasure." Here we should note that being married could guarantee happiness by Mr. Knightley's expression about Miss Taylor.

In the following passage one can conclude that marriage was not only a secure and status in social life but also successful one could bring happiness via attention and good sense of a man to a woman: *"It was, indeed, a highly prized letter Mrs. Weston had, of course, formed a very favorable idea of the young man; and such a pleasing attention was an irresistible proof of his great good sense, and a most welcome addition to every source and every expression of congratulation which her marriage had already secured. She felt herself a most fortunate woman; and she had lived long enough to know how fortunate she might well be thought, where*

¹ Jane Austen. Emma. Wikisource, 1816

*the only regret was for a partial separation from friends whose friendship for her had never cooled, and who could ill bear to part with her”.*²

In “Pride and prejudice” the author emphasizes the importance of marriage even more than ever. Her most favorable book starts with the following statement which gives the reader full understanding that a person should live in a couple to succeed in social life of Austen’s period: *“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife”.*³

However, the following extract proves that one should feel happy in marriage which could be a good chance which probably not all couples might possess:

*“Well,” said Charlotte, “I wish Jane success with all my heart; and if she were married to him to-morrow, I should think she had as good a chance of happiness as if she were to be studying his character for a twelvemonth. Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance.”*⁴

Conclusion

In the following a reader can understand that marriage should be a person’s aim in life no matter if it is successful or not: *“Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object: it was the only honourable provision for well educated young women of small fortune, and, however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want”.*⁵

In conclusion, the staff member of Jane Austen’s house museum Anne notes a single man with good property travelled to towns in search for wives. In return the families with daughters to be married presented their daughter in balls and the chosen girl was promised to have good social life.

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² Jane Austen. Emma. Wikisource. 1816

³ Jane Austen. Pride and Prejudice. Barnes and Nobel Classics. New York.

⁴ Jane Austen. Pride and Prejudice. Barnes and Nobel Classics. New York.

⁵ Jane Austen. Pride and Prejudice. Barnes and Nobel Classics. New York.