

## ***Pride and Prejudice as a Dramatic Novel: An Estimate***

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### **Abstract**

Jane Austen is considered as one of the greatest pioneers of the feminist movement in English Literature. Jane Austen was a gifted and sensual author who in her time wrote consistently to amuse her relatives and audience. She had a gift of observing her environment and picture it vividly. Jane Austen's novels have been rightly called as domestic novels, as she never goes out of the parlour and chooses to work with or two families in a country village. Since *Pride and Prejudice* is a social comedy in which social relationship, even love and marriage relations, find a mercenary motivation, still in it she deals with the domestic life and aspirations of the Bennets, and to some extent with those of the Lucases. *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel which is divided into acts just like as a drama or play. This novel is a dramatic one, which envelopes the whole plot of this novel with many love-ridden themes. This paper is going to highlight the dramatic elements present in the novel, as well as their importance within the novel, and the relationships of characters in the novel with each other and their importance with respect to time.

**Keywords-** *Society, Comedy, Realism, Family, Domesticity, Marriage*

### **Introduction**

The genius of Jane Austen is essentially dramatic. Her novels read like comedies and can be staged well if produced before an audience in a theatre. She is a good builder of plots. She might have sacrificed fact to form in *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility* and form of fact in *Mansfield Park*, but she has maintained the balance between fact and form in *Pride and Prejudice*. *Pride and Prejudice* has not only the humour of Shakespearean comedy, but also its technique. In this novel she does not twist the reality to fit a logical scheme, nor does she allow life to tumble pellmell. While constructing the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* she had maintained all the dramatic qualities of holding

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the attention of her readers. The story is not only very well developed but is also full of suspense. Jane Austen had written novels like *Congreve* and *Moliere*, and follows the tradition of comedy of manners. There is interlinking of various episodes in her novels. There is unity of action and concentration in her novels, more particularly in *Pride and Prejudice*. The side issues and episodes produce a unified impression and are closely related to the main thread of the story. She confines her moves to a limited area and describes the events in the life of few families. Like comedy of manners, her novels also show reversal of attitudes of the hero and heroines towards each other, e.g. in *Pride and Prejudice* we have the reversals of Darcy and Elizabeth. Elizabeth first meets Darcy at a village ball. She at once becomes prejudiced against him on account of his haughty behaviour in general and a remark of his regarding her in particular that she was not handsome enough to tempt him to dance with her. She displays very great skill in handling events to the deepening of Elizabeth's prejudice, and to the awakening of Darcy's love, in spite of his pride. When the love in *Pride and Prejudice* has reached the proper degree of intensity, she brings Elizabeth and Darcy together at Hunsford Parsonage. There is an arrogant and insulting proposal of marriage and an indignant refusal. From this scene on to the end of her story, Jane Austen is at her best. By easy gradations through a process of disillusioning, Elizabeth's prejudice vanishes, and with its gradual vanishing goes on the almost pitiable humiliation of Darcy. The marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy is not merely a possible solution of the plot, it is as inevitable as the conclusion of properly constructed geometrical demonstration. For a parallel to workmanship of this higher order one can look only to Shakespeare, to such a comedy as *Much Ado about Nothing*.

Walter Allen says, "Both character and action are presented through short sentences and scenes in dialogue". The scenes come rapidly and the character and action are developed and the dialogues reveal the character. The clash between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth has dramatic significance. Jane Austen has used the soliloquies like Shakespeare in her novels. The soliloquy of Elizabeth on receipt of Darcy's letter is a good instance of self-analysis. Needless to mention that the genius of Jane Austen is essentially dramatic. Her novels read like comedies and can be staged well if produced before an audience in a theatre. Baker states, "She knew her Shakespeare well, as is obvious to the critical reader". Her genius was essentially dramatic. She is nearer akin to Congreve and Moliere than to Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth, who could depict characters and contrive plots and scenes to show off idiosyncrasies, but only carried a few brilliant raids into the territory of the comedy of manners. She was dramatic in a deeper and truer sense. Character and action are

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inseparable in the work of the true dramatist, whether it be staged in a novel or designed for the platform of a theatre. She was a dramatist nevertheless sometimes in the actual manner of the stage. Her pointed dialogue, the ironical situation in which the characters would have conducted themselves so much more wisely, and the scenes in which the character would have only been aware of what is patent to the reader, and the scenes in which pretences and delusions are stripped away, the table turned on humbug and folly, and the rights of common sense re-established, are theatrical as well as dramatic. But take merely not the dramatic episodes but the wholes. In every novel, wills are set in motion, something important results, ignominy. When the goal is reached, they see themselves as they are, not only this, they are changed by what they have gone through; they have been brought up against realities. Something fundamental has happened within them. Maraine Dashwood and Elizabeth Bennet in the first, Emma Woodhouse and Anne Eliot in the last of her novels are not the same at the ends as at the beginning. That is what Drama always does, whether tragic or comic. Jane Austen chose to write what is essentially comedy; she quailed at tragedy. Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. "I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can," she wrote in an oft-quoted passage in *Mansfield Park*.

*Pride and Prejudice* is a dramatic novel both in spirit and form. It deals with only one complexity of life, that is, love. The area of action is limited. The characters help in the development of the plot, and are endowed with certain qualities which determine the action. The novel is a comedy of manners as well as of errors. Both Darcy and Elizabeth misunderstand each other: their pride and prejudice are removed, and the novel ends like a comedy on a happy note. The skill of Jane Austen becomes more dramatic when she gradually removes the clash of Pride and Prejudice from the hearts of Darcy and Elizabeth respectively and brings them close to each other. To match her making delicate stroke after stroke is a most delightful and engrossing pastime. What she has set out to do, she has done it with consummate ease. The ease of the plot does prove that it is carefully constructed like that of a drama. It has an introduction, complication, climax resolution and catastrophe. Also Mr. Collins is introduced like a comic figure; the scene is confined to a narrow area, to a low middle-class society; parents' concern for the marriage of their children and the love-affairs or marriage prospects of these children. The main plots and subplot is interlinked. Wickham as villain gives a touch of melodrama to the novel. The comic proposals of Mr. Collins give dramatic relief. The episodes and action are fused to effect unity. Moreover, the novel is a drama in five acts with exposition and denouement. It has an introduction, complication, climax, resolution and catastrophe. Baker has

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pointed out that both the theme and the plot-structure of *Pride and Prejudice* are remarkably dramatic. He divides the narrative into following five acts of a high comedy:

1. In Act I we are introduced to Longbourn people, and are acquainted with their leading traits, foibles and prejudices. Elizabeth and Darcy meet; but Darcy's pride leads Elizabeth to form a prejudice against him. Still, dislike is not total indifference, for Darcy "feels the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention". The sub-plot also begins to outline itself in the mutual attraction of Bingley and Elizabeth. But, both the affairs come to an end with the departure of the two girls from Netherfield and Bingley's silence.
2. The second Act is largely taken up with absurd antics of Mr. Collins, who, having been refused by Elizabeth, marries Charlotte Lucas. Elizabeth is fascinated by the handsome scapegrace Wickham. Darcy continues to be fascinated by her, but is repelled by the follies of her mother and younger sisters. A master stroke of irony begins to develop in this act, for Collins and Wickham are both to be instrumental in bringing about complete reconciliation of Elizabeth and Darcy.
3. In Act III, the turning point of the story lies mostly. Elizabeth goes to Hunsford on a visit to the Collinses, and meets there Darcy and his friend Colonel Fitzwilliam. Darcy makes to her a proposal of marriage, which she rejects stigmatizing the pride and the alleged wrong done to Wickham. Elizabeth receives from Darcy a long letter of explanation which gives her food for thought. An idea flashes across her mind that in spite of his of all his charming manners Wickham, perhaps, is not a good man, and that his accusation of Darcy is false and malicious. She now begins to see the other side of the case put by Wickham. She has a talk with Colonel Fitzwilliam about Darcy and his eyes are opened.
4. In Act IV, Elizabeth goes on a tour with her uncle and aunt, the Gardiners, and visits Pemberley. While they are being shown round the famous mansion, she is surprised by the sudden arrival of Darcy. Darcy is exquisitely civil to her and her relations. Elizabeth's resistance to Darcy begins to melt away. But fresh difficulties crop up; news arrives from Longbourn that Lydia has eloped with Wickham. Will Darcy, the haughty man, condescend to marry the daughter of a family which has been disgraced by Lydia's elopement. There seems to be no hope for Elizabeth.
5. In Act V, Mr. Gardiner makes a search for the runaways, and finds them hiding in London. Wickham is persuaded to marry Lydia. They marry and come to Longbourn for a few days. A casual remark of Lydia leads Elizabeth to discover that it was Darcy, and not Mr. Gardiner who prevailed on Wickham to marry Lydia. Darcy pretends to have done it, for he held himself responsible for the mischief done by Wickham. Jane and Bingley are engaged, but Elizabeth does not hope that Darcy's

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former feelings for her will ever revive. She has already refused to marry him. But a chance occurs which enables Darcy to know Elizabeth's true feelings for him. Lady Catherine, who is anxious to bring about a match between Darcy and her daughter, goes to Longbourn to extract a promise from Elizabeth that she will not marry Darcy. Elizabeth, however gives no such promise. When Darcy comes to know of this visit and its result he realises the true nature of Elizabeth's true feelings for him. Finally the lovers meet, "and it does not take long for two such intelligent and sensitive persons to make sure that pride and prejudice are at length beaten."

## Conclusion

Thus, we see that the structure of the form of *Pride and Prejudice* is dramatic. But the spirit of the novel is also dramatic by which *Pride and Prejudice* may be said to be a dramatic novel. As we know that a dramatic novel demands a strictly developed plot, so is the case with *Pride and Prejudice*, as its plot is completely, naturally and carefully developed. Besides this a dramatic novel should deal with only one complex of life; it should confine itself to one action of society, and *Pride and Prejudice* deals with only one complexity of life that is, love. Also the action in *Pride and Prejudice* is limited to the hero's pride and heroine's prejudice, which eventually gave rise to the comedy of errors. In this novel also the characters are not merely a part of the machinery of the plot, nor is the plot merely a rough framework over which the characters are hung. The characters are endowed with certain qualities and these determine the action, and the turn progressively changes the characters. The pride of Darcy and the prejudice of Elizabeth are ultimately removed and they are happily united. Thus, they dissolve the solution.

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