

The Rise of an Equal Marriage in *Pride and Prejudice*

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... Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year.¹

Due to the movies like a series of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Jane Austen might extend her modern readership, and women who have watched these movies might yearn for a man like Mr. Darcy.

The novels of Jane Austen end happily with the marriages of several couples including protagonists. In this paper, I would like to concentrate on the marriage of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and point out the aspects and meaning of their marriage.

Had Elizabeth's opinion been all drawn from her own family, she could not have formed a very pleasing picture of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort. Her father captivated by youth and beauty ... had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and confidence, had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown. To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement. This is not the sort of happiness which a man would in general wish to owe to his wife... .²

The above quotation illustrates that Elizabeth disagrees with the relationship between her parents. Then, what is her ideal conjugal relationship?

I . Conservative aspect in Elizabeth's Marriage

By marrying Darcy, Elizabeth becomes a mistress of the large estate, Pemberley, and

is going to preserve Pemberley with Darcy to the next generation. Being a mistress of Pemberley, Elizabeth “secures upward social mobility, as well as financial advantage, for herself and her family”.³ Additionally, Vivien Jones comments that “Elizabeth and Darcy’s ‘family party’ at Pemberley represents the nation: as in Burke’s focus on the ‘little platoon’, the intimate, domestic group is both the image and the source of national order and responsibility”.⁴ This can be said to be the conservative point in her new life. However, it seems that the marriage of Elizabeth is a kind of too-good-to-be-true Cinderella story. Nevertheless, Elizabeth gives us a sort of pleasing impression of her marriage and the readers would think that she deserves to be the wife of a handsome man with “ten thousand a year”. This is due to the Austen’s calculation and the technique of contrast. Austen puts negative subjects around Elizabeth: an elopement which links to destruction (Lydia Bennet and George Wickham), a disgusting rector (Mr. Collins), a friend who marries without a love (Charlotte Lucas), a sister who does not doubt anybody and flippant parents (Jane Bennet). Using these rejecting items adroitly, Austen softens the image of Elizabeth’s marriage to moderate and neutralise.

II . Radical aspect in Elizabeth’s Marriage

By materialising a couple like Elizabeth and Darcy, Austen might give us an example of a radical marriage by implication even compared with her contemporaries. In *The Natural Daughter* (1799), Mary Robinson tries to write about women’s financial and mental independence from men. Robinson starts her carrier as an actress and also leaves some literary works. Martha Morley, a heroine of *The Natural Daughter*, marries Mr. Morley “possessing a clear estate of four thousand pounds per annum, with a comfortable and spacious family mansion, was considered as a man of unblemished reputation”.⁵ But she adopts a found infant secretly while Mr. Morley was away on business. Finding an unknown child with his wife, he suspects that the child is her natural daughter. Since she does not give up this child, Martha is “now driven from her husband’s home, without the means of future subsistence.”⁶ At first, she does not lament for her situation at all.

Mrs. Morley’s virtue had one invulnerable safeguard—Pride: not the little vanity of birth or fortune; the variegated bubble, Fame, blown from the trumpet of frothy adulation; it was the pride of a feeling mind, the dignity of self-approbation. She did not, like Julia, sigh or weep with ostentatious sensibility. Her feelings were

not the effects of habit; they were the energies of nature.⁷

However, she feels that she is “of all human beings the most unhappy”⁸ when she sets out to London with little Francis. In order to raise Francis, Martha seeks work as an actress and an author. Thus this story includes the female independence from her husband, but Martha loses her comfortable home and fortune.

Charlotte Brontë is thought to be a successor of Austen. In *Jane Eyre* (1847), Brontë expands the marriage of a governess, Jane Eyre, and a landlord, Edward Rochester. In addition to her social rank, Jane feels inferior to Rochester as she does not have a fortune. Abruptly she inherits her uncle's fortune and becomes an independent woman. On the other hand, Rochester is released from his mad wife since she dies by fire. Under these circumstances, Kawamoto mentions that Jane and Rochester become equal and they marry.⁹ Jane states her equality to Rochester saying:

... I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result.¹⁰

It seems that Jane and Rochester overcome the obstacles such as the difference in the social class, a fortune and his mad ex-wife, and they ostensibly look happy though he becomes blind and handicapped as a sequela of a fire. This means he needs Jane's care all his life although Jane explains “perhaps it was that circumstance [Rochester's disablement] that drew us so very near”.¹¹ Brontë seems to describe an equal marriage in this novel, but she struggles to do this, and as a result, she makes Rochester physically ruined and blinded. Thus we can say that Brontë narrowly succeeded in portraying an equal marriage. Kawamoto further says that Charlotte Brontë seemingly denies¹² the world of Jane Austen, but actually what Brontë does is what Austen has not done, and Brontë finds a solution to the same problem (how they handle marriage of the main characters, that is, how to make love and money coexist) but with a different point of

view. In this perspective, Brontë inherits Austen's reverse tradition,¹³ but I cannot share the same opinion with her. Hard line feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft censure men to get equal rights based on the idea that women are oppressed by another sex, yet the degree they attack men is so intense that men are ruined after the assault. Rochester's blindness is a good example of this case. In this respect, Austen is far more radical than Brontë as both Elizabeth and Darcy are healthy, and they lose nothing or secure everything when they marry.

III . The Meaning of Elizabeth's Marriage

As we have seen, Elizabeth's marriage includes both conservative and radical elements. The second quotation from this paper indicates that the relationship of her parents lacks "[r]espect, esteem, and confidence"¹⁴ which Elizabeth thinks indispensable to marriage. In this point, the case of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet is the very example of how not to behave for her. Using an unbalanced couple like Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Austen by contrast might attempt to draw an equal relationship between a man and a woman. An equal relationship here means not to vindicate the women's right against the men, but women come to have an equal voice with men. William Deresiewicz comments about this relationship saying that "the multiplexity of relationships in Austenian communities creates the conditions for friendship between women and men",¹⁵ and continues by saying "[m]any other fictional heroines and heroes, before Austen and after, do not have such freedom".¹⁶

Then how does Austen make Elizabeth test to reach this equal point? First, Austen makes Elizabeth reject Darcy at the ball where the polite institution exists. This gives a very strong impression to the readers; in other words, her action can be interpreted as a deviation. Second, through associating with Darcy frequently, she removes misunderstanding and prejudice against Darcy; that is, she comes back to her original position, the middle way. Third, putting an unsuitable and suitable conjugal couple very near her, Austen makes Elizabeth reaffirm what an ideal marriage should be. Finally, as activists as Elizabeth and Darcy are, Austen indicates that they will practice establishing an equal relationship. Deresiewicz sums up this process stating:

[C]ognition and courtship (in other words, reason and love)—turn out to be central to her maturation. It is in her dealings with eligible men that Elizabeth is tripped up by and finally fights herself free from the cognitive constraints of her commu-

nity, and it is through her love for one of those men that she belongs to establish a new and better community.¹⁷

Thus we can see Austen's radical side and her sense of equality in the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy. In 1799, in addition to *The Natural Daughter*, Robinson pseudonymously published *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799). It seems that Austen's message echoes Robinson's statement in the work. She has kept company with William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. It is said that their influence reflects this work. However, in *A Letter to the Women of England*, unlike Wollstonecraft who claims vindication of women's rights, Robinson claims sexual equality. In the light of this fact, they are both feminists but their claims aim at different goals. While Wollstonecraft gives "a powerful critique of the division of duties and privileges between the sexes", Robinson is "firmly on the side of the 'feminist' thinkers or 'modern' philosophers of the 1790's, as one of the strong defenders of her sex".¹⁸

Let us consider the following quotations from *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*.

Let WOMAN once assert her proper sphere, unshackled by prejudice, and unsophisticated with vanity; and pride ... will establish her claims to the participation of power, both mentally and corporeally.

... . I shall remind my enlightened country-women that they are not the mere appendages of domestic life, but the partners, the equal associates of man: and, where they excel in intellectual powers... . I argue this, and my assertions are incontrovertible. (emphasis added)¹⁹

In what is woman inferior to man? In some instances, but not always, in corporeal strength: in activity of mind, she is his equal. (emphasis added)²⁰

As above quotations show, what Robinson claims in this work, and what Austen asserts in Elizabeth's marriage make an analogy. Both women just do not criticise men, but they demand the equal position of both sexes. There is no record in Austen's letters that she has read Robinson's *A Letter to the Women of England*, but here we can notice Austen is inspired by Robinson's allegation. Consequently, Austen stipulates Elizabeth's

position as the middle way and makes her marry Darcy, who will lead Elizabeth to an equal marriage. Allan Bloom explains:

Elizabeth would never marry a man whom she considered her inferior, while she hates a man who considers himself her superior. Equality of the partners would seem to be the answer, and it is. But the establishment of equality between two strong-willed individuals is not such an easy thing and probably requires each to think the other is superior. (emphasis added)²¹

As Mr. Bennet says by “unequal marriage”,²² Elizabeth will be unhappy. This implies that only by “equal marriage”, she will be happy and “her acceptance of Darcy means that this will be a marriage of equality”.²³ Sarah Emsley observes the quality of their equality as follows:

Elizabeth and Darcy offer the example of an equality qualified by concessions of superiority. This superiority is not social snobbery but spiritual humility. The equality between them is above all acknowledgement by each that the other is superior. This kind of equality in marriage can never be simply contractual, and because it is intractably mysterious.²⁴

In addition to Emsley’s claim, this equation can be included the concept of “friendship”.²⁵ Austen tried to insist that “[f]riendship steps in as the essential middle term, mediating between marriage and community both as a social form and as a type of feeling, permitting the flow of energy between all three, a single elemental energy that infuses all human bonding”.²⁶ The couple with “friendship” deconstructs the relationship which needs “care” (the case of Rochester and Jane Eyre) as “care” needs both the strong and the weak. This does not connect with the equal relationship. Georgiana Darcy observes her sister-in-law and her brother and thinks:

Georgiana had the highest opinion in the world of Elizabeth; though at first she often listened with an astonishment bordering on alarm, at her lively, sportive, manner of talking to her brother. By Elizabeth’s instructions she began to comprehend that a woman may take liberties with her husband... (emphasis added)²⁷

Thus Elizabeth succeeds in establishing a friendly and firm relationship with not only her husband but also his younger sister by her “the liveliness of mind”.²⁸

Notes

- 1 Austen, Jane. *The Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen: Pride and Prejudice*. Ed. R.W. Chapman. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988. p.10.
- 2 *Ibid.* p.236.
- 3 Jones, Vivien. Introduction. *Pride and Prejudice*. By Jane Austen. London: Penguin, 1996. p. xxi.
- 4 *Ibid.* p.xxii.
- 5 Robinson, Mary. *A Letter to the Women of England and The Natural Daughter*. Ed. Sharon M. Setzer. Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003. p.117.
- 6 *Ibid.* p.140.
- 7 *Ibid.* p.140.
- 8 *Ibid.* p.141.
- 9 Kawamoto, Shizuko. "Charlotte Brontë as Jane Austen's Daughter." *Journal of Tsuda Colledge*. 15 (1983): 1-20. p.6.
- 10 Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Ed. Michael Mason. London: Penguin, 1996. p.500.
- 11 *Ibid.* p.500.
- 12 Brontë, Charlotte.. "Charlotte Brontë on Jane Austen." Ed. B.C. Southam. *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage Volume 1, 1811-1870*. London: Routledge, 1995. p.126.

In her letter to G.H. Lewis, Charlotte comments negatively about Austen saying:

Why do you like Miss Austen so very much? I am puzzled on that point. What induced you to say that you would have rather written *Pride and Prejudice* or *Tom Jones*, than any of the Waverly Novels?

I had not seen *Pride and Prejudice* till I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And what did I find? An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses. These observations will probably irritate you, but I shall run the risk.

... . Miss Austen is only shrewd and observant.

(12 January 1848) (Southam vol.1, 126)

- 13 Kawamoto, Shizuko. "Charlotte Brontë as Jane Austen's Daughter." *Journal of Tsuda Colledge*. 15 (1983): 1-20. p.18.
- 14 *Pride and Prejudice*. p.236.
- 15 Deresiewicz, William. "Community and Cognition in *Pride and Prejudice*." *ELH* 64 (1997): 503-35. p.518.
- 16 *Ibid.* p.518.
- 17 *Ibid.* pp.520-1.
- 18 Ty, Eleanor. "Mary Robinson." Ed. Steven Serafin. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. 158 *Nineteenth-Century British Literary Biographers*. Detroit: Gale Research, 1994. 297-305. p.304.
- 19 Robinson, Mary. *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*. 1799. Poole: Woodstock, 1998. pp.2-3.
- 20 *Ibid.* p.17.
- 21 Bloom, Allan. *Love and Friendship*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993. p.200.
- 22 *Pride and Prejudice*. p.376.
- 23 Emsley, Sarah. "Radical Marriage." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 11 (1999): 477-98. pp.495-6.
- 24 *Ibid.* p.496.
- 25 Deresiewicz, William. "Community and Cognition in *Pride and Prejudice*." *ELH* 64 (1997): 503-35. p.531.
- 26 *Ibid.* p.531.
- 27 *Pride and Prejudice*. pp.387-8.
- 28 *Ibid.* p.380.

『高慢と偏見』における平等な結婚の誕生

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本稿では、ジェイン・オースティン（1775–1817）の『高慢と偏見』（1813）のヒロイン、エリザベス・ベネットとヒーロー、フィッツウィリアム・ダーシーの結婚について焦点をあて、その結婚のもつ二面性について、メアリー・ロビンソン（1758–1800）の『私生児』（1799）やシャーロット・ブロンテ（1816–55）の『ジェーン・エア』（1847）のヒロインの結婚と比較しながら述べるとともに、その結婚のもつ意義について、メアリー・ロビンソンの『イングランドの女性たちへの手紙・精神的不服従に対する不当な措置について』（1799）と照らし合わせながら考える。

エリザベスの作品中の存在は、保守的要素や異端児的要素を兼ね備えつつも、どちらにも属さない中立的で独特なものとして描かれている。そして、ダーシーと平等な発言権を持つ新しい形のカップルとなることにオースティンは成功させていることがわかる。