

Incarnations of the Main Characters in Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice"

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Abstract: The paper identifies one major defect in each main character of the younger generation and discusses the incarnation of each character in Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice". Through the identification and discussion, the relationship between the incarnations of the main characters and their different destinies is revealed to readers.

1. Introduction

Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" is a Victorian-era romance and comedy which mainly deals with themes of manners, morality, education and most of all love and marriage. It is generally believed that the male protagonist Mr. Darcy is the incarnation of "pride", while the female protagonist Elizabeth is the incarnation of "prejudice". [1] Darcy and Elizabeth can be described with adjectives as "proud" and "stubborn" respectively. Actually, the predominant defects in the other three pairs of main characters of the young generation can also be described with adjectives. To be specific, Bingley and Jane can be described as "indecisive" and "reserved"; Collins and Charlotte, "realistic" and "rational"; Wickham and Lydia, "hypocritical" and "materialistic". The present paper will try to explore the above incarnations of the four pairs of main characters in love that lead to their different actions, setbacks or failures on their way to their respective marriages or after their marriages.

2. Body

2.1 Darcy and Elizabeth: "Proud" and "Stubborn"

Darcy, born into the bourgeoisie upper class family, is quite well off. Darcy is a handsome and imposing man with refined manners. He is in nature a kind-hearted gentleman, which can be shown in his attitudes towards his seniors and servants around him. Darcy's pride originates from his identity as a wealthy noble man. He looks down upon the uneducated people from the lower class as he says, ".....but dancing is also fashionable in other kinds of societies in the world, even uneducated people can dance." [2] At the ball, he comments on Elizabeth's looks in this way. "She is not pretty enough for me to dance with her." [2] Darcy's pride leaves a very unfavorable first impression on Elizabeth and everyone else in the ball. Even Mrs Bennet assumes Darcy to be a most disagreeable person.

Darcy's pride is most vividly shown when he tries to conceal his feelings towards Elizabeth

despite his deep affection for her. Darcy falls in love with Elizabeth, beginning to pay more attention to this “ordinary-looking” girl, but he would always keep his love a secret. For example, Darcy would lower his head and bury himself in reading books in Elizabeth’s company, pretending to totally ignore Elizabeth. As his love for Elizabeth surges, Darcy’s outer pride fades away and is gradually replaced by his true inner kindness and tolerance. So when Elizabeth’s youngest sister Lydia elopes with the evil Wickham, instead of standing by or even making fun of Elizabeth’s family scandal, Darcy alone solves the problem by paying off Wickham’s debts and letting Wickham marry Lydia by giving them a large sum of money. Darcy’s pride does set up a lot of obstacles on their way of being united, but Darcy finally makes it by giving up his pride and sacrificing for Elizabeth out of love.

Elizabeth is a most lovely, smart, outgoing, brave, resolute, and upright lady. Though not as pretty as her elder sister Jane, Elizabeth is also a beauty. Despite all the merits in her character, Elizabeth has her own defects in character. That is, she is likely to make arbitrary decisions, and has developed prejudices against Darcy for Darcy’s pride and her own abruptness. Elizabeth is indeed stubborn. When Jane gets ill and stays at Bingley’s, Elizabeth insists visiting her by walking to the destination. Elizabeth walks with “impatient activity” and ends up with “weary ankles” and “dirty stockings”. Elizabeth shows her stubbornness as she makes the resolution at the very beginning. Elizabeth is a person of high self-esteem. She would rather choose to be single than to be married to a wealthy person who shows no respect for her. Being ignorant of all the truth concerning Darcy’s intervention in Jane and Bingley’s love and Wickham’s invented story, Elizabeth bluntly turns down Darcy’s proposal the first time. Elizabeth’s stubbornness has turned Darcy in her eyes into something like a stereotype. For Darcy, Elizabeth’s stubbornness in character is what really attracts him and is also what hinders him from winning Elizabeth’s heart the first time. Only after the exposure all of the facts concerning Darcy’s morality to Elizabeth does the latter change her attitude towards Darcy.

2.2 Bingley and Jane: “Indecisive” and “Reserved”

Bingley and Jane have an immediate attraction to each other. Both decent in appearance and mild in temperament, they are indeed a perfect match. As Bingley’s best friend, Darcy sincerely advises him to leave Jane for the reason that Jane appears to be holding an indifferent attitude. Actually, Jane is just a very reserved person and has a thin skin, not good at expressing her affection for Bingley. Bingley finally follows Darcy’s advice and leaves Jane, which shows that Bingley lacks independent thinking and is in nature a very indecisive or irresolute person. He is unable to make his own judgement and decisions and cannot act out of his own will.

Though Jane has her good looks, good manners, and high self-esteem, she is not very confident about herself and not quite powerful within. Like Bingley, Jane cares much about other people’s impressions and opinions. That is why she tries to conceal her true inner feelings. Jane is devoted to Bingley. When Bingley leaves, she assumes that Bingley has never loved her. She goes to London in search of her beloved, but in vain. Being afraid of making her family worry and being laughed at by people in the neighborhood, Jane conceals his love and pain as well after their departure. So Jane’s reserved character also contributes to their splitting-up for some time. With the help from Darcy and Elizabeth, Bingley and Jane are finally reunited. The indecisiveness in Bingley and reservedness in Jane are the true obstacles on their way to marriage. Were it not for external factors, they would stand a chance to miss the chance to get married.

2.3 Collins and Charlotte: “Realistic” and “Rational”

Being a Christian, Collins is very devoted to his “boss” Mrs Catherine who has offered him the very position as a clergyman. Despite his religious belief, Collins is in reality a very realistic person. To maintain his social status, Collins is loyal and obedient to Mrs Catherine and tries every means to please her. So to accomplish the task of locating a “right” lady and getting married assigned by Mrs Catherine, Collins would like to sacrifice self-esteem and love for a quick marriage. As the inheritor of Bennet family’s property and with the position as a clergyman he has gained, Collins gets aware of his qualifications as a competitive candidate to marry one of the five daughters of the Bennet family. For Collins and the greedy Mrs Bennet, such matching is quite realistic. When Collins fails in his attempt to win the heart of the pretties of the five---Jane, he immediately turns to the lovely and smart Elizabeth; when he fails the second time, he, only two days later, gets along with Elizabeth’s best friend---Charlotte. By so frequently changing his prey, Collins has become kind of a hunter. The final choice of Charlotte as his lifelong partner by Collins is not out of love but out of practical purposes.

Although Charlotte’s father is given the title of a knight, the family is not quite well-off. Charlotte is as intelligent as Elizabeth, but compared with Elizabeth, she is an ordinary-looking 27-year-old woman on the shelf. Charlotte herself claims that she is not in pursuit of romance. Indeed, Charlotte is most rational. She knows in the depth of her heart that she does not love Collins, but still agrees to marry him somewhat against her will. What Charlotte needs is the material comforts, social status and stability brought about by marriage, and to marry Collins means a decent, guaranteed life whereby her daily and social activities can be sustained.

2.4 Wickham and Lydia: “Hypocritical” and “Materialistic”

Wickham and Lydia are the anti-heroes in the novel. Wickham is a liar who gets Elizabeth’s trust by making up stories about Darcy. Being a hypocrite that appears charming and eloquent, Wickham quickly captures Elizabeth’s heart and deceives her into believing his invented stories about Darcy. Worse still, Wickham tries to tempt Darcy’s sister in a bid to get the property. And he finally elopes with Elizabeth’s younger sister Lydia, which has seriously ruined the Bennet family’s reputation. Therefore, Wickham can be considered a real bad man and hypocrite whose inner thoughts and outer looks and deeds do not show consistency.

Spoiled by her mother, Lydia is a materialistic young lady. Though young, Lydia is seeking pleasure all day long. She likes flirting with handsome officials in the army. Lydia matures early and tends to make hasty decisions. A young and naive lady full of passion and energy, Lydia grab every opportunity to enjoy the material comforts, totally ignorant of her own fame and the fame of her family as an unmarried lady. Lydia’s materialistic attitudes results from the absence of family education and results in her shortsightedness. By eloping with Wickham without realizing Wickham’s evilness and taking into consideration her family fame, Lydia seems to live in the present all the time. That is, Lydia is not capable of regretting for what she has done and planning for future. Also, she is more materially concerned than spiritually and socially concerned.

3. Conclusion

The paper picks up one main defect in character of each main character of the younger generation and discusses the incarnations of the main characters in Jane Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice”. The four pairs of lovers Darcy and Elizabeth, Bingley and Jane, Collins and Charlotte, and Wickham and Lydia are the respective incarnations of “proud” and “stubborn”, “indecisive” and

“reserved”, “realistic” and “rational” and “hypocritical” and “materialistic”. The first two pairs of defects in character delay their marriage; the third pair of defects in character has accelerated their marriage, but such marriage is not based on love but on mutual needs, so their marriage is nominal. Based on the last pair of defects in character, the marriage of Wickham and Lydia is doomed to split up in the end despite their getting married to each other with the help of external forces. Though the analysis, readers can get insights into the relationship between the main characters’ defects in character and their destinies. To some extent, character does determine destiny. Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice” highlights the view that “a happy marriage is supposed to be based on mutual love, not on other factors such as money or social status”. [3]

References

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