

## Irony

Jane Austen's novels are written with a thoroughly ironic point of view. Irony is the very soul of her writings. There is not a single paragraph of her writings in which irony is not found. Irony is a multidimensional term. There may be situational irony\_\_\_\_ the contrast between the expectation and fulfillment in a particular situation.

There may be verbal irony---- The contrast between the apparent meaning of a statement and its intended meaning.

There may be irony of character\_\_\_\_ The contrast between the appearance and the reality of a particular character.

Astonishingly, Jane Austen employed the above mentioned types of irony in 'Pride and Prejudice'. Let us have a glance at the play in order to explore it.

In 'Pride and Prejudice' there are abundant examples of an irony of situation. Mr. Darcy remarks about Elizabeth.

"She is not handsome enough to tempt me"

We may relish the situation later when we come across the fact that the woman who was not handsome enough to dance with was really good enough to marry. Darcy removes Bingley from Netherfield because he considers it unwise to have an alliance with the Bennet family, but himself ends up marrying the second Bennet sister. Collins proposes to Elizabeth when her heart is full of Wickham and Darcy proposes to her exactly at the moment when she hates him most.

The narrative of pride and prejudice has an ironic tone which shows verbal irony. The very tone of the opening sentence is ironic.

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife".

Another example of verbal irony is when Mr. Bennet after Lydia's marriage, feels that he should have a provision for his daughter so that:

"The satisfaction of prevailing over one of the most worthless men in Great Britain, to be her husband might have rested in its proper place".

Irony of character is the more prominent than any other type of irony. Elizabeth who prides herself on her **reception** is quite blinded by her own prejudice and fails badly in judging intricate character. Wickham appears charming and principled, but he proves an unprincipled rogue who brings much disaster to Bennet family. Darcy appears proud and ill-mannered, but ironically proves to be a true gentleman when he gets Wickham to marry Lydia by paying him. The Bennet sisters hate the Bennets for their vulgarity but are themselves vulgar in their behavior. Darcy is also critical of the ill-bred Bennet family but ironically his aunt Lady Catherine is actually vulgar and ill-bred.

Thus, it proves that Austen's fiction is steeped in irony all in language, situation and characterization. It is the sail of her novel which is a matter of highly interest and beauty in her writings.

### Jane Austen's limited range

Jane Austen was simple village girl who never got a chance to some across city life. Her subject matter is limited to the manners of the small section of the country-gentry. Jane Austen herself referred to her work as "Two inches of loory". In a letter to her niece Jane Austen wrote:

"Three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on"

A study of her novels shoes that:

Three or four families,  
A few stock characters,  
Similar settings.

Limited feminization, similar theme of love marriage and no politics, no religion, no nature --- all combine together and make her novels.

The very subject matter of Jane Austen's novels was to deal with three or four families in her novels. In 'Pride and Prejudice' it is mainly Bennet family, Lucas family, Bingley family and their friend Darcy that are dealt masterly. John Drink water rightly observes that family or neighbourhood, its ebb and flow, actions and reactions, and discussions on the niceties of behavior are present on the small canvas of Austen.

Jane Austen's characters are stock. John Drink water says that she did not invent characters but drew them from acquaintance. As in her acquaintance there was only the landed gentry, the upper classes, the lower clergy, the officer corps of military so she has duly given them place in her novels. It is because of lack of imagination that she excludes the lower classes, not only the industrial masses of the big cities but also agricultural laborers.

Jane Austen's settings are the ball rooms, dawning rooms, gardens and parks. Her characters are never shown in shops or feasting at restaurants.

A striking limitation of Jane Austen is the feminization of her novels. She was a woman and wrote on themes to the interest of woman. In her novels men do not appear except in the company of women. This is one of the reason for Darcy not appearing to be a wholly credible character. We never see Darcy except in the company of Elizabeth and since the novel is unfolded from the heroine's point of view, we look at Darcy through Elizabeth's eye.

Her favorite theme is that of love and marriage. In her novels girls are always looking for suitable men to be their husbands. Lady Catherine, Mrs. Bennet, Jane, Kitty, Lydia and charlotte are always shown discussing about marriage. The opening ironical sentence of 'Pride and Prejudice'. May be taken as the theme of her six novels:

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in

possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife”.

Jane Austen discusses neither politics nor religion. At the time, there was American war of independence, and especially there was French Revolution nearby which had cast an irresistible influence on the neighboring countries. But Jane Austen does not give a clue of that disorder and anarchy. Her heroine can never be seen praying or kneeling. Her characters do not have any spiritual insights. Lord David Cecil points out.

“Jane Austen studies men in relation with each other and not in relation to God, to politics or to abstract ideal”.

In her novels, there is no reference to nature itself. It is one of the great ironies of English literary history that at a time when the English romantic writers Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats and others were discovering external nature, Jane Austen manages to keep her characters indoors. A trip to lake district is cancelled in ‘Pride and Prejudice’ and Pemberley is brief.

Thus, we may conclude that she truly referred to her work as ‘Two inches of worry’ there is no question that within these limitations her art is perfect. She handled characters and events, dialogues and Plot with a masterly hand.

## Theme

Marriage was an important social concern in Jane Austen's time and she was fully aware of the disadvantages of remaining single. The opening ironical sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* could be taken as the theme of her six novels:

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife".

The domestic novel *Pride and Prejudice* duly deals with the theme of 'Love and Marriage'. It explores Austen's views on good and bad marriages, and the best type of marriage that is based on love and understanding.

- i. A bad type of marriage is that of Collins and Charlotte. Lydia and Wickham and Mrs. Bennet.
- ii. A good type of marriage is that of Bingley and Jane.
- iii. The best type of marriage is that of Darcy and Elizabeth.

The marriage of Collins and Charlotte is based on economics. For Mr. Collins marriage is something so trivial that he quickly shifts from Jane to Elizabeth and then from Elizabeth to Charlotte. On the other hand Charlotte marries Collins for an only comfortable home Charlotte Lucas, when she is giving Elizabeth reasons for accepting Mr. Collins, says:

"I'm not romantic you know I never was. I ask only a comfortable home".

The runaway marriage of Lydia and Wickham is disgusting. It is based on superficial qualities as sex, appearance, good looks and lost. Both of them are slaves to desire and their affections are bound to come to an end soon.

Another unpleasant marriage is that of Mrs. Bennet. The novel opens and we find them married for twenty three years. Their marriage is based on arranged principle. Mrs. Bennet was a woman of mean understanding and little information. She was a woman whose:

"Weak understanding and illiberal mind had brought very early in their marriage put on and to all affections for her".

An example of the good kind of marriage is that of Jane and Bingley. It is based on love, simplicity and innocence. It lacks understanding but their simplicity turns to be a virtue. When Darcy asks Bingley not to have much interest in Jane for she does not return his affections, Bingley is duly convinced. When Darcy lets him propose Jane, he duly complies with. Thus, it is their simplicity and love that makes their alliance a successful alliance.

We may conclude with conviction that, the marriage of Darcy and Elizabeth show Austen's concept of the best marriage. It is based on love, sincerely and understanding. Both of them are individuals, they love each other but their love is not love at first sight. In order to understand each other, they had

undergone a change. One had to give up his pride, and other had to culminate her prejudice. It is the best type of marriage.

- i. Marriage is Jane Austen's time --- and theme of her novels.
- ii. Pride and Prejudice --- theme good-bad and best type of marriage.
- iii. Bad marriage --- Collins, Charlotte, Mr & Mrs. Lydia – Wickham and Bennet.
- iv. Good Bingley, Jane.
- v. Best, Elizabeth – Darcy.

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### Structure flaw

Pride and Prejudice has been praised for its simple and convincing plot, but critics have been quick enough to point out certain crudities and improbabilities which signify a little structural flaw in Pride and Prejudice the following point may be discussed in detail:

- i. A strange volte-face in Darcy's character.
- ii. Mary and Catherine are not quite necessary characters.
- iii. Wickham's Charms are not much exhibited.
- iv. Elizabeth's visit to Chalotte appears improbable.
- v. Elizabeth's meeting with Darcy at Hanford is a stronge accident.

Darcy is a proud young man and his pride is well shown at Netherfield. He was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased. He was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening while his "manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity".

The above mentioned is the impression which we have about Darcy, but volte-face is strange when Elizabeth is at Pemberley, and maid servant.

Mrs. Reynold tells Elizabeth that Darcy was: "Always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted boy in the world," "The best land-lord and the best master".

Secondly, Mary and Catherine are not quite necessary characters in the novel. They do nothing important in the development of the plot. They are given no more importance in the novel than they deserve while all the other three sisters are thoroughly discussed. If Jane Austen had employed only three sisters in the novel, it might had been better than five.

We hear quite a lot about Wickham's Charms that even heroine starts having interest in him. The extent is that a girl could not resist his charms and elopes with him. But it can be observed with naked eye that Jane Austen has not been successful in exhibiting his charms.

The main structural flaw in the novel come to forefront when both Bingley and Darcy shift to London, there is a breakase in the main plot, even sub-plots of that of Bingley-Jane and Collins-Charlotte is broken. Then Elizabeth visit to London and stay with Charlotte and meeting with Darcy is firstly absurd, and secondly left to chance. We may remember that Charlotte was the wife of the man who had pompously proposed to her and was bluntly rejected. How could she think to visit the home of a man who is disgustingly rejected by her: but Jane Pusten announces. When Chalotte welcomes Elizabeth: "Mrs. Collins welcomed her friend with the liveliest pleasure and Elizabeth was more and more satisfied with coming".

Then, Darcy's meeting with Elizabeth is also a mere chance – a weakness of the plot. Darcy does not come to see Elizabeth but his aunt Lady Catherine. If he had not found her accidentally, he would not have thought of meeting her again.