
Pride And Prejudice: Social Issues In A Novel

Pride and Prejudice, a novel about how marriage and wealth can determine your worth in society, comments and ridicules values and attitudes, including classism, wealth and reputation, all of which were crucial aspects of a happy and prosperous life in the 18th century. Mr Bingley, Mr Darcy and the Bennet family which consist of Mr and Mrs Bennet and their 5 daughters, discover the difficulties that class, wealth and reputation posed. Jane Austen allows the contemporary reader to explore values and attitudes that challenge well-respected values in our society today, such as fairness and equality. The novel stands as a reminder that even though our society has changed, these values and attitudes still maintain relevance today, as wealth, class and reputation still exist in our society and form social division, envy and prejudice.

'Money can't buy you happiness,' is a phrase that was highly disregarded in the 18th century, because money indeed bought peoples' happiness. Well, that was what most people believed. A happy future, wealth and the value of money was something that the characters in the novel knew very well. The very first and iconic sentence of the novel sets up one of the story's main idea of the need for wealth in order to live that happy life. 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.' Through these words, Austen addresses the view of her time that money equals marriage, and this idea was 'universally acknowledged', known to all and considered a norm. These days, to a certain extent, this view still stands as we pursue those designer brands and that house in Shelley.

Characters such as Mr Darcy, Mr Bingley and Mrs Bennet were presented as people in different situations when it came to the idea of money improving your happiness in life. 'Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien, and the report which was circulated within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand (pounds) a year.' Mr Darcy, who highly valued wealth and status, was seen as an extremely suitable man to marry. The only aspect of his personality turning people away was his pride. Compared to Mr Darcy, Mr Bingley is a character who recognised his wealth, but didn't allow his wealth to blind him from seeing in a positive way what was around him. Mrs Bennet, on the other hand, showed the view of what the majority of people would've thought of money in terms of providing a comfortable life and rich men were a prize to be won. 'A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!' Today in the 21st century, attitudes towards money, although still extremely important, have greatly changed from the way society viewed wealth as presented in Pride and Prejudice. Wealth no longer separates people to this extent; it doesn't determine your worth or respectability, at least not as obviously as back in Austen's time. Pride and Prejudice constantly remind us that these values and attitudes displayed in the novel were relevant to her time, but we still believe money and happiness are linked.

Social class and hierarchy separated society during the 18th century. It was a system that was solely based on the amount of money that you had. Austen shows different views towards the social hierarchy system through her characters, some who were overly invested in it, such as Lady Catherine de Bourgh or Mr Collins, and some who managed to recognise their wealth without being pretentious, characters like the Gardiners and Mr Bingley. Mr Collins, a 'conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man' was a character devoted to the idea of class.

He grabbed at any chance to be recognised as a man of significance to Lady Catherine and tried to make any connections that would make him seem more respected. Lady Catherine stands strong for the idea of class as she repeatedly tries to convince Mr Darcy that Elizabeth isn't the woman to marry. 'You have no regard, then, for the honour and credit of my nephew! Unfeeling, selfish girl! Do you not consider that a connection with you must disgrace him in the eyes of everybody?' The Gardiners, however, are described as humble and caring, the only people in the novel described to have any common sense. Mr Gardiner is Mrs Bennet's brother, a total opposite compared to her as he, 'was a sensible, gentlemanlike man, greatly superior to his sister, as well by nature as education.' Mrs Gardiner was just as well-respected as she, 'was an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman, and a great favourite with all her Longbourn nieces.' The Gardiners earned a modest income and didn't boast about it, almost similar to the value of class in our society today. Today using social class to determine one's self-worth is frowned upon, but is still a value to be learnt by many in our society.

In the 21st century, money makes the economy go 'round and is important to our everyday lives, however, it doesn't divide us into class and it doesn't measure our worth. Wealth in this century doesn't necessarily make us feel happier all the time, it continues to carry envy and prejudice among our societies. Although our views on wealth have much changed from Austen's time, ideas such as money bringing along superiority and power still exist and are relevant in our society. Donald Trump, the President of the United States, is a clear example of the way the view of money has developed. Donald Trump became the first billionaire president of the United States in 2017. Since he came into power, many people have criticised him for his choices, actions and narcissistic ways, but the last two years have shown that he ignores others views and only cares for the reputation. 'I have a lot of money - much more money than all of them put together, and all of their phony contributions put together - but you have to understand, I want to be me.' Compared to Donald Trump, however, is Andrew Forrest. A self-made billionaire, he donates billions to charities and helps others in need. With a net worth of 7.4 billion USD, he is a 'businessman with great social conscience.' Andrew Forrest shows that money is not all there is to a good reputation as he puts his money into good use. These attitudes showed from just 2 wealthy people of our society in conjunction with those described in *Pride and Prejudice*, show our need for change and just how much we are improving. Today, reputation isn't tied to wealth or social status as it is in the novel, but it is something that is earned through recognition for hard work and is known not purely because of money.

Pride and Prejudice stands as a reminder to our society today that reminds us of just how much our view of class, wealth and reputation has changed. Although these values and attitudes are outmoded, they are still present in our lives and as contemporary readers allow us to reflect and change our ways in fairness and equality.