

**MANUFACTURING LOVE IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*
(TV mini- series 1995)**

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Abstract

In the well-known adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* by the celebrated British screenwriter Andrew Davies, one cannot help being enraptured by the much recycled dream of the “happily ever after” and the discourse of love that is unique to Austen. Romance here is for public consumption. The actor is a mere tool, a prop to manufacture the narrative of love on screen, which in turn is a practice in the “make-believe”. Love, as a construct, is signified through signifiers like country dances, the lingering gaze, and the deliciously Austenian vocabulary which includes paying “attentions” to the object of interest, showing “partiality”, the passionate declarations of the hero’s “regard”, the proposal for matrimony etcetera. The eye of the camera is all important. With costumes and real life locations, the actors and the drama series makers bring *Pride and Prejudice* out of the pages of a book and it stands as a living edifice on screen. Here is an attempt to deconstruct the language of romance manufactured using more than mere words on a page.

The opening credits of the drama series *Pride and Prejudice* are shown against a background of embroidery, lace work, bows and ribbons and the title appears against folds of shiny pink silk. These are the kind of images that women have come to be associated with: something they would (or should, if they are “womanly” enough) croon over as opposed to men (who would swear by *The Godfather*, action flicks, war movies...things befitting the “macho” stereotype). So, are the makers of the serial targeting a female audience with the dances, romances and clothes? This is the sort of discourse the serial itself seems to be constructing, as becomes apparent when Mrs. Bennet, who has just returned from a dance party, insists upon describing the lace on Mrs. Hurst’s gown and Mr. Bennet says ‘no lace, no lace Mrs. Bennet I beg you!’(Episode 1); and he wouldn’t suffer her descriptions of who danced with whom at the ball either. The discourse, no matter how old it is, holds sway today as well. It has been naturalized, but again, knowing that this is so enables one to see through it. One only has to bring to one’s attention the category of male choreographers and dancers or the non-effeminate fashion designers and tailors who further men’s association with fretting-over-clothes and lacework without any qualms. However, being aware of the artificiality of a discourse doesn’t help us to

get rid of it, society continues to nurture it. Moving ahead, perhaps what one would find more interesting is *Pride and Prejudice*'s discourse on love.

Not daring to undertake an endeavor as precarious as defining love (words, as a form of expression, have limits after all, which may not do justice to the entire concept), one may begin by asking the fundamental question: who falls in love?

If you are to be a part of an average love story (the larger discursive practice and not exceptions) you need to possess certain qualities. If you are simply beautiful (handsome in Jane-Austen-speak) like Jane Bennet and good looking like Charles Bingley there's love at first sight for you. In *Pride and Prejudice* code Bingley will show "partiality" towards Jane at social occasions like parties and balls where he must dance with her more often than he would do with others, and as Charlotte Lucas observes, he must "continue his attentions" towards Jane which would indicate to others present that he may have serious intentions towards her (which is another code for marriage). One must note that this is the pre I-Love-You age where strict drawing room manners and propriety must be observed and there is to be no holding of hands or any physical contact and you are to meet your lover formally *at* formal occasions (that is, you do not see each other in parks where you may dance around trees and hide behind flowery bushes: a popular representation of lover's tryst in old Bollywood films). You are to be so civil and well mannered that sometimes the other person (as happens in the case of Jane and Bingley) would be utterly confused as to whether you really like them, because the "serenity of your countenance" would betray no serious attraction. *That* would be the source of trials and tribulations in your love story. When you do get a chance to confess, your confession must be accompanied by a proposal of marriage. You'd say something like Darcy does, but not before you have walked up and down the room in agitation, sat down and stood up again:

In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed.

You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you...

Almost from the earliest moments of our acquaintance I have come to feel for you a passionate admiration and regard which, despite all my struggles, has overcome every rational objection; and I beg you, most fervently, to relieve my suffering and consent to be my wife. (Episode 3)

This is the crux of Elizabeth and Darcy's love story. There is *repressed ardent admiration* and *passionate regard*, there are "struggles" and "sufferings" (people suffer from love as if it is some sort of ailment). There is the overcoming of "every rational objection" ("love is blind" anyone?) like social status and money, or the lack thereof. In this case, love not only makes you suffer, it also makes you irrational. The suffering can be alleviated with the lover's "consent" to enter into matrimony, but God forbid if rationality should return!

You would thank goodness that someone invented "I Love You" and "Will you marry me?" but again, while these one-liners serve the purpose, they leave little scope for originality. One does wonder where these ideas come from. Does cinema/literature promote them, because of which they are imitated by people, or is it the other way around? It is an instance of naturalization of certain discursive practices to an extent that the factors that generate them can no longer be observed. These days, in Hollywood, a confession of love isn't necessarily complemented with a proposal for marriage. There is the dilemma the "modern man" faces, being reluctant to sacrifice his freedom at the altar of matrimony. In *Pride and Prejudice* world, this would not be the honourable way of handling a relationship. Here one does not form casual relationships with people for it will be frowned upon by society. In contrast, one is especially reminded of the American sitcom *Friends* where the rules of "courtship" are entirely different

(there is a lot of promiscuity) and a person may go through multiple relationships before settling down with someone. Unlike *Pride and Prejudice*, in *Friends* a pair of lovers would not be represented in a way where they are required to decorously stay out of each other's personal space. As, both the TV shows were aired around the same time (though *Friends* lasted for several seasons) the completely contrasting representation of how lovers behave helps to highlight the fact that the language of love is in fact a social construct.

Coming back to the question (who falls in love?), as far as love stories are concerned, if you are not strikingly beautiful, then you must at least be witty and sensible like Elizabeth Bennet. In time you would grow "handsome" in your admirer's eyes, when you acquire one that is. But your future admirer would effectively take you down to pieces before he can see you as a complete being, as is apparent from the conversation between Caroline Bingley and Darcy during the party at Lucas Lodge:

- I believe I can guess your thoughts at this moment.
- I should imagine not.
- You are thinking how insupportable it would be to spend many evenings in such tedious company.
- No, indeed, my mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow.
- And may one dare ask whose the eyes that inspired these reflections?
- Miss Elizabeth Bennet. (Episode 1)

Miss Bingley does have a tendency of getting herself stabbed in the heart but the thing to note is how a woman's being is reduced to a pair of fine eyes in a pretty face. First the woman would be analyzed: her figure, her manner of walking, tone of voice, her address and expressions, her air, her mind (that must be improved by extensive reading), her accomplishments (an accomplished woman in Jane Austen code being someone capable of playing music, singing, painting, embroidering, and speaking a couple of foreign languages) will all be duly noted. It's only when a man is completely in love, like Bingley, that he would declare her to be the most beautiful creature he ever beheld and finally see her as a complete being. Darcy too, promotes Elizabeth from tolerable-but-not-handsome-enough-to-tempt-me to the-most-handsome-woman-of-my-acquaintance when he is head over heels in love with her. She is no longer just "a pair of fine eyes".

The next category is the neither-handsome-nor-witty people. If you are plain and unlikely to be pretty, you need to be unpretentious, artless and sincere like Bronte's Jane Eyre and you would get your own love story. On the other hand if you are Quasimodo the Hunchback, no one will love you despite your good heart and your end would be tragic.

Also, love is not made for you if you are odious like Mr. Collins or conceited like Caroline Bingley even though she likes Darcy very much and makes it all too plain, by trying very hard to win his favour. Her heart must be broken because she does not have the right qualifications that a typical Romance requires. One may feel sorry for her and hope that she finds someone who shares her haughtiness so that their like-mindedness may create a love story for them. Similarly, Austen's Mary Crawford loses Edmund Bertram's regard for her, in spite of her superior beauty, as she was not found to be sufficiently virtuous by the standards of her time. Edmund learns to love the "soft light eyes" of the plain but mentally superior Fanny Price as "Timid, anxious, doubting as she was, it was still impossible that such tenderness as hers should not, at times, hold the strongest hope of success" (*Mansfield Park* 399).

In *Pride and Prejudice* world, people's body language is very restricted already, and if you are very reserved like Darcy, or worse, if you are Colin Firth trying to portray Darcy, there is very little you can do with your facial expressions. You must appear to be in control of your emotions at all times. (He doesn't look it but when he starts performing he does become Darcy). So for Colin Firth his eyes speak the language of love. This means that the action involves a lot of staring at Elizabeth at all possible occasions. There is one such scene in episode four where Darcy gazes at Elizabeth while she interacts with his sister. Darcy's "long look" could not be too long (and therefore creepy), or too short lest it should fail to carry the right message. But the timing of the look will not depend on the actor but on the camera focusing on the actor's face or the editor of the video clip who handles the post production stage of the serial. This is not a live performance on stage after all and we get to see what the camera wants us to see. This reminds one of what Walter Benjamin says in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" about the actor's loss of aura because the camera does not respect his performance as an integral whole:

Experts have long recognized that in the film "the greatest effects are almost always obtained by 'acting' as little as possible...." In 1932 Rudolf Arnheim saw "the latest trend . . . in treating the actor as a stage prop chosen for its characteristics and . . . inserted at the proper place... Let us assume that an actor is supposed to be startled by a knock at the door. If his reaction is not satisfactory, the director can resort to an expedient: when the actor happens to be at the studio again he has a shot fired behind him without his being forewarned of it. The frightened reaction can be shot now and be cut into the screen version. Nothing more strikingly shows that art has left the realm of the "beautiful semblance" which, so far, had been taken to be the only sphere where art could thrive. (13-14)

So, the language of love is actually being created by the editor using the actor as a tool. There is a great industry, equipped with technology and a whole lot of money, involved in creating the phony aura of the hero. The portrayal of love is for sale, and so is Darcy (which becomes apparent if one pays attention to the fact that the drama series involves the kind of voyeurism the book cannot portray). For example you have Darcy in a bathtub (those portable metal ones) with a servant pouring a pitcher of water over his head. One could say that from a feminist angle, this is quite a progressive move. The norm is the objectified heroine in a bubble bath and not the objectified hero. You see him in his bathrobes with hair all wet looking out of the window at Elizabeth who is playing with a dog in the garden below, and he's wearing a gentle expression (instead of the proud one reserved for the drawing rooms) with admiration written all over his face. Elizabeth does not see it. Nor does she see the wounded and pained expression in his eyes when he walks back to his room after his marriage proposal is rejected by her. It is meant to be seen by the audiences that end up sympathizing for the poor Darcy. While the script will take care of Elizabeth falling for him, the director must take care of making the audiences sympathize with Darcy and maybe fall in love with him -a little. He's never referred to by his first name 'Fitzwilliam' even by his cousin (Colonel Fitzwilliam); he's always 'Darcy', a word that has acquired romantic associations like 'Prince Charming' and that is supported by other mini discourses such as "women love Mr. Darcy" and "Darcy fever". We are so used to it now that the question of the phony aura of the actor takes a backseat.

How is a lover supposed to behave when he is rejected by his beloved? You would spot Darcy trying to get over the rejection by fencing furiously (“I shall conquer it, I shall” he says before making an exit in episode 4). He would even dunk himself in a lake near his house to get rid of his disappointment, which is a lot of action for a typical Jane Austen adaptation and possible only outside the drawing room-like settings. The females can indulge in no such feats however; they must keep their composure and take care of their embroidery or maintain their gardens, and occasionally, as in case of Elizabeth, see visions of their loved one’s face in the mirror while brushing their hair or against landscapes while riding in a carriage.

One must spare a few moments on the wonderful Mr. Collins whose analytical application of the discourse of love on his own life serves as a demonstration (in a nutshell) for those trying to decode the same. Here’s “Falling in Love”, courtesy Mr. Collins (Episode 2):

Step one: Find a person to fall in love with.

The best thing in this situation would be to fall in love with the eldest of the daughters from the family whose property would be entailed to you after the death of the head of the family (in other words, Cousin Jane). She would accept you, of course, you are going to inherit her father’s fortune.

Step two: Paying “attentions”.

Smile at Cousin Jane pointedly while dining with the family so that she can see it plainly that she is “favoured”. For her benefit refer to your fortunate position in life owing to your noble patroness Lady Catherine de Bourgh. (“I have been treated with such affability, such condescension, as I would never have dared to hope for. I have been invited twice to dine at Rosings Park.”)

Step three: Talk to her mother hinting at your intentions.

-I must confess myself quite overwhelmed with the charms of your daughters.

-Oh, you’re very kind, sir. They are sweet girls, though I say it myself.

-Perhaps... especially the eldest Miss Bennet?

-Ah, yes, Jane is admired wherever she goes. But I think I should tell you, Mr. Collins, I think it very likely she will be very soon engaged.

- Ah.

- As for my younger daughters, now if any of them... in their case I know of no prior attachment at all.

Oh no! What an unexpected development! All your work has been undone! Well, at least the mother turned out to be quite sensible. So nice of her to point you in the right direction.

Step four: Find a new person to be the subject of your affections.

The camera follows Mr. Collins’s line of vision to settle on Lydia and Kitty playing in the garden (uh! too rowdy); next you have Mary with her book (too studious...you’ll have to spend the rest of your life explaining this or that). The focus is now on Elizabeth who is speaking to Jane quite animatedly and is looking nice standing in the garden with the sun in her hair. (Bingo!)

Step five: Repeat step two.

Step six: The Proposal.

Tell her (Oh! she doesn’t want to be alone in your company? How modest of her). Tell her, that she’d already know the object of your disclosure since you have made it quite clear by paying her attentions for an appropriate period of time. However, you must enumerate your reasons for marrying her: setting an example to your parish, your personal happiness and the wish of Lady Catherine de Bourgh (“ ‘Mr. Collins’, she said, ‘you must marry. Choose properly’, she said.

‘Choose a gentlewoman for my sake; and for your own, let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up too high. Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her!’). Also, you are doing her a favour as you are going to inherit her father’s property anyway. Thus you have talked about the “violence” of your affections, in the “most animated language”.

Step... WHAT? SHE HAS REJECTED YOUR OFFER? Of course you “understand that it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man they secretly mean to accept when he first applies for their favour”, and therefore you can still hope to lead her to the altar before long... she is only increasing your love by suspense, “in the usual manner of elegant females...” She persists in rejecting your proposal? Fine! There’s the nice Miss Lucas who has invited you to stay at her house instead. *She* seems to be sending the right signals. You propose to her and she accepts! Bravo! You have found the love of your life!

Ironically, the world view Mr. Collins holds is not far from the truth of his times. It is a reflection of the circumstances that exist in the society he lives in. We may laugh at him but his analysis of Elizabeth Bennet’s situation is quite accurate. She has little money and no inheritance set aside for her. All that the Bennet sisters can do is to marry well to secure their future. From this angle one can understand why Mrs. Bennet is so worried about her daughter’s marriage and so focused on “securing” a son in law. (If she finds out how two of her daughters almost lost their suitors thanks to her, she would definitely have another attack of her famous nerves.) Social security is an important theme in *Pride and Prejudice*. Charlotte Lucas is quite concerned about it, as is apparent from her advice to Elizabeth, about Jane and Bingley

- I see that Mr. Bingley continues his attentions to Jane, Lizzy.
- I'm very happy for her, Charlotte.
- She does seem very well pleased with him.
- I think if he continues so, she's in a fair way to be very much in love with him.
- And Mr. Bingley? Do you think he is in love?
- Well it is clear that he likes her very much.
- Then she should leave him in no doubt of her heart. She should show more affection even than she feels, not less, if she is to secure him.
- Secure him? Charlotte.
- Yes, she should secure him as soon as may be.
- Before she is sure of his character? Before she is even certain of her own regard for him?
- But of course! Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance, you know. There will always be vexation and grief. And it is better to know in advance as little as possible of the defects of your marriage partner, is it not, now? (Episode 1)

Charlotte acts on her own advice and *secures* Mr. Collins, who is the best person she can hope to marry, given her situation. Between love and matrimony, falls the shadow of money. Girls must marry prudently lest they should lose their social footing. Such awareness makes Jane Austen’s treatment of love ironic: “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife” (3). In the drama series, Elizabeth is made to utter similar lines in the first episode. The characters themselves are aware of the irony of their situation, like Elizabeth and Jane:

-If I could love a man who would love me enough to take me for fifty pounds a

year, I should be very well pleased.

-Yes.

-But such a man could hardly be sensible and I could never love a man who was out of his wits.

-Oh, Lizzy. A marriage where either partner cannot love or respect the other, that cannot be agreeable, to either party.

- As we have daily proof. But beggars, you know, cannot be choosers.

-We're not very poor, Lizzy.

- With father's estate entailed away from the female line, we have little but our charms to recommend us. One of us at least will have to marry very well. And since you are quite five times as pretty as the rest of us, and have the sweetest disposition, I fear the task will fall on you to raise our fortunes.

-But, Lizzy, I would wish... I should so much like... to marry for love.

-And so you shall, I'm sure. Only take care you fall in love with a man of good fortune. (Episode 1)

Towards the end, in episode 6, when Jane asks Elizabeth about since when has she been in love with Mr. Darcy, she jokingly replies: "Well it's been coming on so gradually, I hardly know. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley." Jane and Elizabeth have been lucky that the people they fell in love with happen to be sound, not only in character, but financially as well.

Speaking of the happily ever after, when rich men have been *secured* by deserving girls and all is reconciled between lovers, they can now say things like "dearest, loveliest Elizabeth!" (She had been 'Miss Elizabeth' and 'Miss Bennet' throughout the series). There's still no holding of hands or forgetting one's manners but one will have a twinkle in one's eye, if one is Darcy and a loving smile on one's face if one is Elizabeth. The serial ends with a kiss that Austen would never have allowed in her book and marriage is the happy conclusion of the narrative with the bride and the groom driving happily away in a carriage. You are not supposed to wonder if they got along well after marriage; the story loses interest when love is secured.

What the serial makes easy to observe is that these people are not really in love with each other, as they are in the novel. They are pretending to be in love and acting according to their idea of how people in love should behave (not in the present but in Jane Austen's time). From this angle, one can see a discourse manufactured for public consumption that has already given the audiences a point of view about love stories, and that now appears to confirm and satisfy it.

All said and done, it's hard not to fall for the constructed ideas about love... one finds them beautiful and they keep one happy. Therefore, it is only fitting to conclude, and happily so, with one such mini-discourse that propounds the idea of love in a nutshell:

Have you ever been in love?

You could touch the moonlight,

When your heart's shooting stars,

You're holding heaven in your arms,

Have you ever been so in love?

(Celine Dion)

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