Pride And Prejudice (A Contemporary View) Essay, Research Paper

Pride and Prejudice: A Contemporary View

The hardest thing about this project, in my opinion, was in fact not the kind of research it took to arrive at the conclusions presented in this paper, but the process of grouping them together into something that might make any sense at all. I have come to learn that there are so many parallels between Pride and Prejudice and its modern counterpart, You’ve Got Mail, and to a lesser extent The Shop Around the Corner, that putting them together involves more than one might imagine. In any case, I found that You’ve Got Mail is more of a combination of The Shop Around the Corner and Pride and Prejudice than The Shop Around the Corner is related to Pride and Prejudice at all.

In reviewing Pride and Prejudice and You’ve Got Mail, I found that most major aspects of the film are similar to issues presented in Pride and Prejudice. However, the frequently rearranged presentation of these events when portrayed in You’ve Got Mail initially led me to see them as different. This had more to do with the concept of role reversal than anything else. Nevertheless, there were a few minor differences, each of which, along with the major and minor similarities between the novel and the film, I will thoroughly examine and discuss in this essay. Above all, I would have to say without a doubt that You’ve Got Mail is a successful adaptation to Pride and Prejudice, with the single most powerful connection between the two being the expression of a changing society.

As would be obvious to any viewer, reader, or analyst, this is done successfully through the characters of Kathleen Kelly and Joe Fox, who in different ways represent Miss Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Fitzwillam Darcy in Pride and Prejudice. When I say different I mean that Kathleen is not always Elizabeth and Joe is not necessarily Darcy. In fact, when compared to their corresponding social situations in Pride and Prejudice, Kathleen is Mr. Darcy, while Joe represents Elizabeth.

I say this because I realize that when we give our sympathy to Kathleen’s plight in You’ve Got Mail and to Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice, thereby connecting the two characters, we are not thinking of how readers of Pride and Prejudice when it was written felt when reading it. In their opinion, it had to have been Darcy who faced the dilemma, not Elizabeth. You see, in both the book and novel the traditional ways, whether they are of Victorian Era England or the Upper West Side, are being inevitably replaced by new social or economic standards. In Pride and Prejudice the noble class was sinking as the middle class rose, with the middle class seen much like a modern chain store in comparison to a classic book shop that had been in business for generations. It is in this way that Elizabeth’s family is shown as a virus in aristocratic England much as the FoxBooks franchise is to proud Upper West Siders.

Not only was the societal situation of Pride and Prejudice well represented in You’ve Got Mail, but also FoxBooks perfectly mirroring the “invasion” of a noble family by one with disgraceful connections played it out with the takeover of Kathleen’s shop. It was this and a difference of manners that initially kept the characters apart in both books but was conquered by a growth in their understanding of each other.

In any case, the characters of You’ve Got Mail help show the connection to the novel’s societal aspects mostly in that of Frank, Kathleen’s boyfriend. He represents the values in a character that were shown in one like Lady Catherine, in which he despises the idea that the new world and technology are taking over. “You think this machine’s your friend, but it’s not” are his initial words to Kathleen about her use of the computer. As a part of modern society, he hates it, and because of her situation, she is somehow expected to share those feelings. She does not, which is a large part of her connection to Darcy’s character, which is expected by all, including Elizabeth, to be proud and to never associate with those of a less noble blood than his own. Kathleen’s breakup with Frank broadcasts their internal differences, just as Darcy is written as different from most aristocrats in his ignoring class lines in recognizing morals.

Kathleen Kelly is always shown as the heroine in You’ve Got Mail because of her struggle to keep her small, pricey shop open in the shadow of the ‘terrible’ FoxBooks Store. In the same way, Darcy can be seen as courageous in his internal conflict of whether or not to break away from social standards placed upon him by his family. These same expectations are in some form placed on Kathleen, who runs her store in her mother’s shadow. She loves the store, but in some ways is shown as one of those in You’ve Got Mail who is the least affected by its closing. The people who most actively wish the shop to stay open are those who have grown up with it in their neighborhood. As Kathleen declares in a fit of passionate anger to Joe, “People may not remember me, either, but lots of people remember my mother.” In comparing Kathleen’s noble struggle to that of Darcy’s, I am not discrediting Elizabeth Bennet as the heroine of Pride and Prejudice, instead I am simply comparing two characters whose situations in life compare, regardless of anything else.

Although the economic situations in You’ve Got Mail closely reflect the social issues in Pride and Prejudice, there are still many more similarities between the book and the movie, and also between the video and the film it was originally based upon, The Shop Around the Corner. The one main similarity between all three was that of the love-hate relationship that defines Darcy and Elizabeth and is mirrored in Joe and Kathleen and Kralik and Klara in The Shop Around the Corner.

In Pride and Prejudice, Darcy and Elizabeth are at first and throughout most of the book kept apart by their conflicting social ranks, just as Joe and Kathleen are kept apart by their business competition. The characters of Kralik and Klara actually help explain the two other relationships because just as they are kept apart by competition in the workplace, they keep in touch through letters without knowing who the other one is. They hate each other, as do Joe and Kathleen, in person, but both couples evidently have a relationship where despite their feelings that the other is a bad person, they find each others good points online or by post. This is shown in The Shop Around the Corner in a quote from Klara, who says to Kralik, “Why, I could show you letters that would open your eyes. No, I guess you probably wouldn’t understand what’s in them. They’re written by a type of man so far superior to you it isn’t even funny.” The same basic statement is made by Kathleen to Joe in You’ve Got Mail, where she remarks, “The man who is coming here tonight is completely unlike you. There is not a cruel or ungenerous bone in his body.” This, the fact that Klara reveals that there were times Kralik could have “swept her off her feet”, and the obvious notion that Joe and Kathleen could get along had they not been “FoxBooks and The Shop Around the Corner” gives some insight into the more complex characters of Elizabeth and Darcy, who were apparently right for each other all along, but had been kept apart on unfortunate technicalities.

Although each couple may have been right for each other, they may have been kept apart by more than just business or class lines. They hurt each other’s pride, which was something that could only be caused by bad manners and repaired by good ones. This idea culminates in the scene in Pride and Prejudice where Darcy proposes to Elizabeth for the first time, and in both movies in the caf scenes where the couple was supposedly to meet for the first time as mail correspondents. In all three, the characters erupt at the others’ attack on their pride and become so angry, all reconciliation may seem impossible.

“From the very beginning, from the first moment, I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed upon to marry.”

These words of Elizabeth Bennet affected Darcy in the same way that those of Kathleen and Klara affected Joe and Kralik, respectively. That is to say, it hurt his pride. A lot. In any event, this experience served to make Darcy grow, with respect to manner and his management of pride. The same effect was had on Joe and Kralik, and they forgave Kathleen and Klara in the meantime. This further advanced their relationships eventually leading to all three couples ending up in love with each other despite all odds against them.

Manners were an important part of Pride and Prejudice and were reflected in You’ve Got Mail through communication. Good manners were shown by email while bad ones were apparent in Joe and Kathleen’s verbally abusive relationship, their avoidance of each other, and in their misperceptions of the other. In my opinion, the Gardiners, who brought Darcy and Elizabeth together in the book, had a lot to do with the concept of email and manners in You’ve Got Mail. Their true selves were made clear online, and once Joe learned the truth, he began to see past what had been going on between them and fell in love with Kathleen. She, of course, still had the misperception of him that had been dictated by their economic/social relationship, and even this died away after Joe showed her some of the good manners she had been exposed to throughout their internet relationship. This exact situation was displayed in The Shop Around the Corner, and with a few surface differences, is what happened between Elizabeth and Darcy in Pride and Prejudice after the proposal scene. In all situations, manners were dictated by prejudices laid down by society and in turn altered personal perception, where good manners were untainted by society and bad ones were prejudiced. Therefore, good manners lead to friendly relationships and bad ones lead to conflict.

At first, I did not see the same humor in You’ve Got Mail that had been used in Pride and Prejudice, primarily because I was looking for Jane Austen’s personal “regulated hatred” instead of that of modern culture. It is undisputable that the same satire used in Pride and Prejudice is shown in the character of Patricia Eden, Joe’s girlfriend. She represents materialism in her blind yet self-proclaimed insensitivity. When Frank, Kathleen’s boyfriend, asks Joe Fox at a party “how he sleeps at night,” Patricia jumps in and responds, “I use a great over the counter drug- Ultra Dorm .you wake up without the slightest hangover!” Another time, right before Joe decides to break up with her, four people are stuck in an elevator. Each person talks about what they plan to do if they get out alive. The first two are sincere and have to do with family and relationships. When it is her turn to speak, Patricia says, “If I ever get out of here, I’m having my eyes lasered.” Another character that is humorous and at the same time represents a commentary on society is Gillian, Joe’s father’s fianc e. She goes to get her eggs harvested in one scene, buys tacky items only because they are expensive, makes passes at Joe, and finally runs off with her daughter’s nanny. She and Patricia seem to represent people who in today’s world are trendy and have no character whatsoever, as opposed to those in Pride and Prejudice who represent those who are stupid, marry for money, and follow ridiculous customs. They are essentially the same because each shows what seems to be morally wrong with the people in the time period in which each was written.

The one factor I did not see in You’ve Got Mail that reflected a major idea in Pride and Prejudice was feminism. It was apparently groundbreaking at that time for Elizabeth to reject two out of three potentially successful offers of marriage, and I just didn’t see any such signs of independence besides Kathleen owning her own store, which I did not see as the same.

In any case, You’ve Got Mail more than anything was a successful contemporary adaptation to Pride and Prejudice, especially in representing the social and economic situations in a variety of ways. You’ve Got Mail and The Shop Around the Corner were also successful in showing the dynamics of the relationship between Darcy and Elizabeth though that of Joe and Kathleen and Klara and Kralik with respect to manners, morals, and romance.

Works Cited :

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