

Crossings

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Insights on the Upcoming Production of *Pride and Prejudice*, the Musical

by Tess McKinley, Director

“Ha-ha! Ouch.”

My advice to my three children as they approached adulthood was, “Don’t marry the person you can live with; marry the person you can’t live without.” Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* provides us with the humorous but sometimes tragic consequences of making wrong choices.

Pride and Prejudice was chosen as America’s fourth best-loved novel by The Great American Read poll. I’ve conducted a little personal polling of why this story is so popular. Most respond that they wanted to see the prejudice against the maligned and misunderstood character of Mr. Darcy unraveled. They wanted justice for the stereotyped Elizabeth.

Austen’s characters are living in false realities shaped by “fake news.” Mr. Darcy cannot allow himself to see beyond the limited scope of his elite breeding, and Elizabeth Bennet believes lies because they support her natural inclinations and stereotypes.

In their grasping attempts at happiness, the other characters ignore principles of virtue, practice deceit, manipulate the truth, and resort to defamation and name-calling. They choose financial security, physical beauty, titles and positions, and rational argument over love.

Their preconceptions result in misunderstandings and broken hearts.

Prejudice and stereotyping are hot-button issues, and Austen wisely reveals that change does not come from forcing others to be or do what you want them to be or do, but from changing ourselves, as Darcy and Elizabeth finally do in recognizing each other as equals.

Like Austen’s characters, we too readily cast aspersions on others without recognizing the faults in ourselves. Our first impressions or opinions are sometimes wrong. Persisting in misguided assumptions and resisting the possibility of change or transformation within ourselves, we cease to grow as emotionally healthy adults. If we insist that others change to think as we do, we become isolated, unhappy, bitter, and defensive, as do some of Austen’s most unfortunate characters.

After the truth is finally revealed, the principal characters have a paradigm shift. The veil is lifted and the lies are relinquished. Mr. Darcy sings, “You gave me the chance to be redeemed.” The power of the truth reshapes and rewrites their lives.

Jane Austen’s wisdom is as poignant for us today as it was 200 years ago. It applies to marriage choices, but also to all our relationships: To define someone by external indicators, false information, or presupposed suspicions of a person’s character will cause us to miss the thing we desire most in life: to know and be **known**; to love and be loved.

As the stories of these characters unfold, there are plenty of hilarious moments, but in the midst of our laughter, we feel a pang of conviction. The pride and prejudices of the characters mirror our own inconsistent behavior patterns and invite us to allow the truth to set us free.

Tess McKinley,
Director