

## THE PORTRAIT OF MARRIAGE IN VICTORIAN ERA IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PERSUASION*

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to discuss the portrait of marriage in Victorian era in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. This is a library research in which all the data and the theories are taken from written form which is related to the portrait of marriage in Victorian era including internet browsing to support the data. The theories of marriage, and setting are applied to analyze the data. There are two approaches used to analyze the data. The first approach is sociological approach and the second approach is historical-biographical. The research proves that the portrait of marriage in Victorian era is portrayed in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* through the characters in that novel. At that time, marriage is the way for getting social status. Women in Victorian era will find men with the large fortune to become their husband. Meanwhile, marriage for love happens rarely.

**Key words:** Victorian era, Women in Victorian era, marriage

### INTRODUCTION

Rees states that literature is writing which expresses and communicates thought, feeling and attitudes toward life (1973: 20). The quotation means that literature is a part of human life which also expresses many things in life about what the authors think, what they feel and sometimes about their secret experiences.

Novel is used to entertain and to share someone's imagination, ideas, and experiences in whole life. In another line, Rees states that novel is fictitious prose narrative of considerable length in which characters and actions representative of real life are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity (1973:106).

*Persuasion* (formerly, *The Elliots*) was the last Austen's novel. She wrote this novel when she was seriously ill in 1815. *Persuasion* talks about how a young lady chooses her husband. In Victorian era, most of women were getting married for prosperity or financial purpose, and only some of them who were getting married for sincere love. At that time, the mindset of women was love and marriage deal with money, social class, titles, and accomplishments were measured and weighed in the consideration of a marriage.

This research focuses on the portrait of marriage in Victorian era. Marriage is one of the important things in women's life. Marriage has been important to society for a variety of reason, for instance it is in the family that children learn to become citizens, in the family that children learn about relationships, in the family that children learn about what is expected of them in society, how to act and how to be. Marriage in Victorian Era is the way to get better life. Marriage in Victorian Era is always dealing with wealth, accomplishment, and social

class. In nineteenth century, women lived in an age characterized by gender inequality. They enjoyed a few of legal, social rights and they were expected to remain subservient to their father or husbands. They were still dominated in many ways. Their parents will arrange a marriage for their daughters for material reasons. The condition of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth is as follows:

Middle class women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not encourage to think of themselves as member of nation of individuals. Social decorum taught women to practice self-denial instead of cultivating self-assertion, and to think themselves collectively, in terms of universal of the sex, instead of contemplating individual autonomy, talents, and capacities or right.

[“The Institution of Marriage”. Page 1 of 1.([http://18th century magazine .yolasite. com/the-institution-of-marriage.php](http://18th%20century%20magazine.yolasite.com/the-institution-of-marriage.php)) accessed on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015 ]. The quotation above shows that women at that time had no power and position except as daughters, and after they got married as wives. Their potential husbands would be judged by their wealth, appearances, manners, connections and social class. Women only become property for their parents and their husband at that time. Mc Dowall states that a man thought of his wife and daughters as his property, and so did the law. (1989: 162). It is clear that the position of women is beneath their father and brother, and then after getting married, women belong to their husband.

In the nineteenth century, British women were expected to marry and had children. When a woman got married, her wealth belonged to her husband. If a woman worked after marriage, her earnings also belonged to her husband. Milligan defines that:

Until recent time, women destiny was thought to be marriage. Failure to marry was the fate that was most to be feared for women in the nineteenth century. The inferior status of women was accentuated by their restricted access to education and employment. Such employment as was open to them was limited and ill paid. Then money was undoubtedly necessary and significant in the lives of Jane Austen’ women, because it assured a level of privacy, independence and freedom to maintain certain social values which they (and she) thought worthwhile. For unmarried women the line between independence and drudgery was easily crossed.(1984:67-68)

Women’s destiny in the nineteenth century was to become wife and mother and take care of the family. Wealth, social class, and accomplishment were the important things for women at that time. Parents usually tried to arrange their daughter’s marriage to the upper class.

In Victorian period, a man also owned his wife’s property and also his wife’s body so he can beat his wife easily. Mc Dowall states that:

Until 1882, a woman had to give up all her property to her husband when she married him. And until 1891, husbands were still allowed by law to beat their wives with a stick “no thicker than a man’s thumb”, and to lock them up in room if they wished. (1989: 162)

When a man and a woman get married, a husband takes control over his wife. If his wife works, all the money that she earns also belongs to her husband. Besides that, a man is allowed to beat his wife if it is needed and it is supported by the law. Hence, women in that period had no power.

## METHOD

The method of collecting the data is library research. Library research is a method of collecting the data in the form of written materials. Mann states that library research refers simply to the alphabetical arrangement of articles without regard to their length, and thus is often synonymous with “encyclopedia” (2005:3).

There are two approaches which are used to analyze the data, namely sociological approach and historical- biographical approach. Sociological criticism explores the relationships between the artist and society. Sometimes it looks at the sociological status of the author to evaluate how the profession of the writer in a particular milieu affected what was written. [“Critical Approaches to Literature”. Page 16 of 33. (<http://www.yourbac.weebly.com>) accessed on May 27, 2015 ]. It means that sociological approach gives enlightenment when the literary work was written. It was about the condition in Great Britain known as Victorian Era, in which love and marriage were always determined by prosperity and social class. Therefore, this approach is suitable to be applied as the further analysis in Elizabeth Elliot’s and Anne Elliot’s character and point of view toward marriage.

Whereas, the second approach which is used to analyze the character’s point of view toward marriage is historical-biographical approach. Some information dealing with the author’s historical background and life is needed in order to understand what happened at that time. Guerin (2005: 51) stated “put simply, this approach sees a literary work chiefly, if not exclusively, as a reflection of its author’s life and times or the life and times of the characters in the work.” It is clear that historical biographical approach is suitable to be applied to make understand about what happened at that time as seen through the literary work briefly.

The next step is analyzing the data The first step is reading the novel in order to understand the story. The second step is establishing the topic which will be analyzed, that is the portrait of love and marriage in Victorian era and the third step is using the theories and the approaches to analyze the topic. Later, the fourth step is analyzing the problem uses the approaches, namely sociological approach, and historical biographical approach. The final step is concluding the result of the research.

## DISCUSSION

This part is the most essential thing in this study because it analyzes the data comprehensively. The analysis intended is conducted in order to find out the portrait of marriage in Victorian Era in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*.

### a. The Portrait of Marriage in Victorian Era in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*

There are two kinds of marriage at that time namely marriage for getting social status and marriage for love.

In Victorian era, marriage was an important tool of class mobility, and also for social security for both man and woman. Since middle and upper class women had no job opportunities, marrying was women’s main avenue for achieving financial security.

[“Persuasion Packet”. Page 5 of 22. (<http://www.uwsp.edu/english/acorn/documents/PersuasionPacket.pdf>. accessed on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016]. Women who get married for getting social status usually find perfect men who have title, wealth and high social status in society.

Elizabeth Elliot, the eldest daughter of Sir Walter Elliot is one of the portrait of Victorian's woman who gets married for getting social status. Elizabeth finds a perfect husband by judging his class, title and wealth since she does not want to marry a man beneath her class. Meanwhile marriage for love is being married for one reason, love. Marriage for love does not depend on social class and status therefore it happens rarely. Captain Frederick Wentworth and Anne Elliot have proved it. Their love is pure and can not be separated easily. Consequently, they get married for love. The portrait of marriage in Victorian Era will be analyzed in these subchapters bellow.

### 1) Marriage for getting Social Status

In Victorian Era, it is such a common thing if a woman find a perfect husband for them, A perfect husband means a man with a large fortune. During Victorian period, wealth, title, and classes were very important. Women at that time were unique in the social class. Their rank can rise or fall, and it depends on their husbands' social classes. In contrast, a man can not rise his rank by marrying a well-born woman, his wife will fall into his level. Hence, choosing a perfect marriage partner is so important. The situation is portrayed through one of female characters in the novel. She is Elizabeth Elliot, the eldest daughter of Sir Elliot. Consider the following quotation :

“She had, while a very young girl, as soon as she had known him to be, in the event of her having no brother, the future baronet, meant to marry him; and her father had always meant that she should.” (*Persuasion*, 1993: 6)

Choosing well-born man to be her marriage partner is so important for Elizabeth. Elizabeth Elliot comes from noble class in which offered her a chance to live luxurious and pampered lifestyle. She will not marry a man beneath her social class as it makes her rank fall into her future husband's level. She will find a perfect baronet to be her husband. The perfect baronet means a man with a large fortune and also well-born man who comes from high society as equal as hers. Sir Walter Elliot also considers about the social status of the baronet who will marry his daughter.

During at that time, women will fall in love with men with wealth, high social status, and prosperity. Many women marry to the men with the high social status in order to change their social classes. Elizabeth Elliot sees that Mr. Elliot is a perfect future husband for her since both of them have the same social status and classes. As the heir of Kellynch Hall, Elizabeth is hoped to get married with Mr. Elliot, a single educated man. The Kellynch Hall is the luxurious property which owned by Sir Walter Elliot, Elizabeth's father.

“He was at that time a very young man, just engaged in the study of the law; and Elizabeth found him extremely agreeable, and every plan in his favour was confirmed. (*Persuasion*, 1993: 6)

A single educated man is perfect for Elizabeth. So Elizabeth put her hopes to get married with him. She will get someone who can maintain her life and fullfil her needs. At that time, such a system in which marriage is categorized by wealth, title, accomplishment, rank and social status so it influences Elizabeth to marry an educated man who has higher social status.

“There was not a baronet from A to Z, whom her feelings could have so willingly acknowledged as an equal. (*Persuasion*, 1993: 7)

Being born into upper classes makes Elizabeth concerns with keeping up appearances and associating only with important people. In her life, she commits to marry with a future baronet, a man who is equal with her classes. For Elizabeth, marriage depends on title, accomplishment, wealth, and prosperity that owned. She believes that she will find a perfect man who has the same social classes with her. Her family and friends will guide her in finding the best man from a good family background.

Elizabeth Elliot also considers the social position of women within the class system. In Victorian Era, Middle class women were not as wealthy as the noble class. Mrs. Clay is a daughter of Mr. Shepard a civil, cautious lawyer of Sir Elliot. She sees Mrs. Clay is not a suitable marriage partner to Sir Elliot as she comes from lower birth, freckled and not so attractive. Mrs. Clay hopes that she will marry Sir Elliot since she knows that from her marriage her social status will be risen.

“ ‘Mrs Clay,’ said she warmly, ‘never forgets who she is; and as I am rather better acquainted with her sentiments than you can be, I can assure you, that upon the subject of marriage they are particularly nice; and that she reprobates all inequality of condition and rank more strongly than most people. And as to my father, I really should not have thought that he, who has kept himself single so long for our sakes, need be suspected now. “ (*Persuasion*, 1993:26)

It is clear that women at time will be judged by their social class. Elizabeth considers the different class between Mrs Clay and her father. Mrs Clay comes from middle class while Sir Walter is a noble man, a landed baronet. She believes that her father will not marry Mrs Clay because she is not much pretty to be Sir Walter’s wife. Elizabeth also thinks if Mrs Clay becomes her father’s wife, she will be ousted from her position as first lady of Kellynch Hall.

## 2) Marriage for Love

Love is patient, love is as strong as death. No great love ever comes without great struggle. Marriage for love does not depend on social class and status therefore it happens rarely. At that time, women actually want to get married to fulfill their necessity. Hence, marriage for love is difficult if they come from different social class. Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot have proved their everlasting love. When the pain and struggle come in their love story, their love can not be separated. At that time, she was persuaded to break her engagement because she should not marry beneath her social class. If it happens, her social rank will fall into her husband’s level. However, her love for Wentworth is truly and everlasting. This condition is portrayed through the beautiful and educated woman in the novel, Anne Elliot.

“- No one had ever come within the Kellynch circle, who could bear a comparison with Frederick Wentworth, as he stood in her memory.” (*Persuasion*, 1993: 21)

It shows that Anne can not erase Wentworth from her mind since she is still in love with him. None can replace him in her heart and memory. She does not stop thinking about Frederick Wentworth, her Captain. Anne does not blame Laddy Russel who persuaded her to break her engagement. Laddy Russel is a woman of considerable birth and wealth who serves as advisor to the Elliot family. She does not want to contradict her friend’s advice because she knows that she is too young and naive at that time.

To fall in love is giddily exciting but staying in love can be quite a pain. Anne does not open her heart for other man since she still loves Wentworth. Even though she has been pursued by a young man from the same social rank.

“She had been solicited, when about two-and-twenty, to change her name, by the young man, who not long afterwards found a more willing mind in her younger sister; and Lady Russell had lamented her refusal; for Charles Musgrove was the eldest son of a man, whose landed property and general importance, were second, in that country, only to Sir Walter’s, and of good character and appearance.” (*Persuasion*, 1993:22)

Charles Musgrove is also a well-born man who comes from a good family background. He owns landed property, educated man, and the heir of the great house at Uppercross. He pursues Anne to be his wife but she refuses it. Anne is not a woman who gets married for getting social status. She is typically a woman who gets married because of love. She does not regret with her decision to reject Charles Musgrove’s marriage proposal who finally becomes her younger sister’s husband.

The reason why a man and a woman fall in love is to get married. In Victorian Era, it is easy to get married if both a man and a woman comes from the same rank. In contrast, it becomes so difficult if they come from different class. Therefore, parents will arrange their children marriage. They will choose with whom their children will get married.

‘Such excellent parents as Mr and Mrs Musgrove,’ exclaimed Anne, ‘should be happy in their children’s marriages. They do everything to confer happiness, I am sure. What a blessing to young people to be in such hands! Your father and mother seem so totally free from all those ambitious feelings which have led to so much misconduct and misery, both in young and old!’ (*Persuasion*, 1993:170)

Anne describes that marriage for love is a blessing. Marriage for love is full of happiness and far from any ambition such as wealth and social status. Ambition in marriage led the marriage into so much misery. Anne sees the happiness comes from Mrs Musgrove’s children marriage as there is no reason behind the marriage except love.

Marriage is more than agreement to life together but it has consequence for the individual in all spheres of public and private life. Anne Elliot tries to hold her conviction to get married with someone she falls in love with.

“Anne was tenderness itself, and she had the full worth of it in Captain Wentworth’s affection. His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness less; the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor’s wife.” (*Persuasion*, 1993:199)

Anne’s heart is full of joy. She does not regret eight and a half years ago when she had to break engagement because finally she can marry someone she loves. Anne and Captain Wentworth renew their love and announce their engagement. Soon, Anne becomes a sailor’s wife and she does not worry about her social rank since Captain Wentworth has become a man with the large fortune. Captain Wentworth’s social status has changed. Both of them has been in the same social class.

## CONCLUSION

Marriage became one of the important things in women's life in Victorian Era. In the nineteenth century, marriage was not an act of love, but rather an act of survival. At that time, marriage is the key to get a better future life for women. So the purpose of marriage is to gain wealth and stability in society. There are two kinds of marriage at that time namely marriage for getting social status and marriage for love. Women who get married for getting social status usually find perfect men who have title, wealth and high social status in society. Their rank can rise or fall, and it depends on their husbands' social classes. In contrast, a man can not rise his rank by marrying a well-born woman, his wife will fall into his level. Hence, choosing a perfect marriage partner is so important. The situation is portrayed through one of female characters in the novel. She is Elizabeth Elliot, the eldest daughter of Sir Elliot. Meanwhile marriage for love is being married for one reason, love. Marriage for love does not depend on social class and status therefore it happens rarely. Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot have proved their everlasting love. When the pain and struggle come in their love story, their love can not be separated.

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