Inactivity of the Inhabitants of Hertfordshire

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Inactivity of the Inhabitants of Hertfordshire

A freeholder of Hertfordshire’s “The Necessity of Associating for the Purpose of Obtaining a Parliamentary Reform, Enforced” (1792) helps to explain how the setting of Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice contributes to the complete lack of political discussion in it. This essay, anonymously written, explains the lack of political stance of the men of Hertfordshire, where a majority of the novel takes place, and their decisions not to create an assembly of men to promote political reform. The author makes clear that most other counties have already created such assemblies and that Hertfordshire should be next. This author particularly explains the men of Hertfordshire creating an assembly of “Gentlemen [who] are not to be intimidated from a steady pursuit of that object which is so just in itself, and so absolutely necessary for this Country, that in the End it must be attained, notwithstanding all the opposition that interested wickedness may raise against it” (4). The author then gives an account of “all [the government’s] abuses and corruptions” (7) and states that the men of Hertfordshire must want nothing to do with these ignoble causes. This culminates into the idea that the author hopes “the Inactivity of the Inhabitants of Hertfordshire will no longer be complained of” (8) and that they will join their fellow countrymen in support of a massive reform of the political system of England.

This address insists we understand Pride and Prejudice as being purposefully set in Hertfordshire as one of the few locations in England which would allow for political discourse to not exist. It seems very clear that Austen intentionally left out arguments and discussion on politics as the Napoleonic wars were at the forefront of every Englishman’s mind. There are a number of ways to read this, including that although war is at the doorstep of the English people the gentry seem unconcerned or that this novel actually includes a criticism of the apolitical men of Hertfordshire. Having this knowledge of the political viewpoints of the freeholding men of Hertfordshire increases the reader’s interest in what is lacking from the novel and what that indicates in the novel’s view of itself. If the novel imagines itself as a courtship novel which lays out the proper and improper ways to build a relationship, politics would take away from that main idea and may hide the central concept too deeply. Jane Austen had to choose a location where not only would it be acceptable to not discuss politics, but where this was normal. However, if the novel imagines itself as being primarily concerned with economics, there might be more need for interest in politics and the effect imposed taxes for war have on the community. One thing may be assumed safely, the novel does not imagine itself as primarily a political novel because it does not so much as mention anything about the wars or the regency at large. At best Pride and Prejudice can be viewed as having political commentary by its complete lack of politics as allowed in Austen's chosen setting.