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Jane Austen's Views on Marriage and Relationship as Depicted in *Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract

Aim: *This study examines Jane Austen's views on love, marriage, and women's autonomy in Pride and Prejudice, highlighting how the novel negotiates emotional compatibility, moral integrity, and financial security in marital choice. Focusing on Elizabeth Bennet's relationships with Mr. Collins, Mr. Wickham, and Mr. Darcy, it argues that Austen rejects both marriages based solely on wealth and unions formed without economic prudence.*

Methodology and Approach: *The research adopts a qualitative, text-centered approach grounded in close reading of Pride and Prejudice (Austen, 1813/2005) and supported by relevant secondary criticism. Key moments of proposals, refusals, and shifting affections—Elizabeth's responses to Collins and Darcy, her attraction to Wickham, and her eventual union with Darcy—are examined within their narrative and social contexts.*

Outcome: *The findings show that Elizabeth embodies Austen's rational heroine, rejecting financial expediency without affection and romance without stability. Her marriage to Darcy becomes possible only after mutual moral growth, self-correction, and recognition of economic compatibility.*

Conclusion and Suggestions: *Austen's Pride and Prejudice presents a pragmatic yet progressive model of marriage, where moral integrity and mutual esteem are central, financial security is necessary, and affection provides enduring cohesion. Elizabeth's development underscores women's agency through discernment and self-awareness within social constraints.*

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Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* depicts the psychological condition of women and how it affects their social and personal life. The novel presents a very prudent idea how women should choose their husbands. Jane Austen's heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, is not an emotional fool and stands for a transformed woman who does not marry for her emotional involvement rather for a settled future life. Therefore, Austen's heroines are very wise and practical. They present an idea how a person should approach life in its true practical sense. Austen presents her philosophy of life in a very objective way. She does not associate herself with any of the characters personally; rather she maintains a proper distance from her characters. Wang and Liu have rightly stated, "Different from her contemporary women writers, Austen does not passionately identify herself with any of her characters and none of her books are written in the first person. She gives her heroines an impersonal freedom" (1829).

Austen presents condition of women through Elizabeth Bennet who is the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*. It presents the case of a common middle class family girl who cannot afford to marry a man because of her broken financial condition. However, she does not accept any man because of her poor condition. She primarily rejects Mr. Collins who is the first one to propose to her. He is Mr. Bennet's cousin, and the successor of his property. He is an arrogant man whom Elizabeth does not like because of his arrogance. In a word, he is "a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility man" (Austen 66).

Mr. Collins wants to marry one of Mr. Bennet's daughters to inherit their father's estate. He wants to marry her because he thinks it is a right thing for every clergyman to set an example of matrimony in his parish. Moreover, it will add to his pleasure. His reason for marrying Elizabeth is to please Lady Catherine de Bourgh. He does not love Elizabeth at all. He believes confidently that he will receive a more favorable answer because of his wealth and social status. To his amazement, Elizabeth discards his proposal plainly, although Mr. Collins reminds her "your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications" (Austen 102). However, Elizabeth still replies, "to accept them is absolutely impossible" because "You could not make me happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make you so" (Austen 102).

Elizabeth rejects his proposal at first because she did not fall in love with him. In addition, she even dislikes him because of his pride that results in inspiration for him to improve himself. He behaves like a real man. For instance, he requests Elizabeth to excuse him for having taken up so much of her time and accepts his best wishes for her health and happiness. After having been accused of arrogance and selfishness, Darcy decides to make a change of him. To win the favor of Elizabeth, he invites Elizabeth and her aunt and uncle to visit his Pemberley. It can be noted that his manners have extraordinarily improved, and his behavior has amazingly changed. Then he does his utmost to rescue Lydia and Wickham from their trouble because of his true love to Elizabeth. It is Darcy's behavior and manner that moves Elizabeth and wins her heart finally.

Her easy, unaffected personality and lively talent cast a light on the arrogant and wealthy upper-class young man—Darcy. The novel begins with a series of misunderstandings between Darcy and Elizabeth and ends with Darcy and Elizabeth's true love. Darcy and Elizabeth's marriage epitomize true love that has overcome all the boundaries of prejudices. The emphasis of this novel is at the marriage of the perfect minds that is arrived at the combination of physical life and mental life.

Strong feminists' traits are also found in the novel, which are reflected in two ways, narrative content and characterization. In narrative content, Austen focusses on women's routine life, love and marriage. She is at her best in writing about young girls, because she understands them surprisingly well. Therefore, she disregards the narrative modes used by male writers of her time who concerns much about important historical events. In characterization, Austen always makes the female figures main characters of her novel and makes them the centers of the stage. She describes women as what they really are and advocates a new idea of love and marriage. (Wang and Liu 1828-29)

Jane Austen's works always emphasize the everyday life rather than the important historical or political subjects. This might be called the limitation of Austen. In fact, in a broader sense, the big social problems can be seen through the description of the daily life in the small town—a very narrow world. It is just from these unimportant domestic affairs of countryside that the social relations and class conditions of England at that time could be reflected. As readers of

today, her novels remain fresh, providing not only an enjoyable sight but also an opportunity to examine human nature in a different historical setting. Thus, Jane Austen has enjoyed steadily growing popularity, especially in the 20th century, and she has sometimes been ranked among the truly great English novelists by critics and literary historians. (Gao 384).

Pride and Prejudice throws light on trivial matters of love, marriage and family life between country squires and fair women in Britain in the 18th century. The opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*— “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” —immediately establishes the centrality of advantageous marriage, fundamental social value of Regency England. The arrival of Mr. Bingley (and the news of his fortune) is the event that sets the novel in motion because it creates the prospect of a marriage of wealth and good connections for the eager Bennet girls. The opening sentence has an elusive, unspecified meaning. In its declarative and hopeful claim that a wealthy man must be looking for a wife, it hides the truth of such matters: a single woman must be in want of a husband, especially a wealthy one. (Gao 385)

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen gives her heroine, Elizabeth, high spirit and courage, wit and readiness, good sense and right feeling. She is obviously superior to the people in her atmosphere. She perfectly deals with her own love and marriage and gets her real happiness in the end. Elizabeth Bennet is Austen’s favorite character. Austen exemplifies her personal value in her heroine and is pleased with the result. So, Austen writes to her sister about Elizabeth. “I must confess that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print and how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like her at least I do not know” (Austen 66).

Austen also presents that her heroines are not blind followers of love and attachment. They have a strong practical sense and love that comes at the cost of financial insecurity is not acceptable to them. For example, Wickham is the first man Elizabeth loved. However, their relationship ends without any result. The reasons why her attitude towards Wickham changes are as follows.

When Elizabeth first meets Wickham, “his appearance was greatly in her favor; he had all the best part of beauty—a fine countenance, a good figure, and

very pleasing address” (Austen 68) and “whatever he said, was said Well; and whatever he did, done gracefully. Elizabeth went away with her head full of him. She could think of nothing but of Mr. Wickham” (Austen 79). She once holds good feeling for Wickham, considering him to be the most agreeable man she has ever met. Meanwhile, when she had learned of Wickham’s poverty-stricken situation, she thought it is too indiscreet to fall in love with him. She says to her aunt, Mrs. Gardiner, “I will take care of myself and of Wickham too. He shall not be in love with me, if I can prevent it.” (Austen 181)

Elizabeth’s attitude towards Wickham represents Austen’s approach to life. A man without property cannot be Austen’s ideal man. As for Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth’s choice is partly because of his wealth and social status. She was so impressed with the wealth of Darcy that she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something! “With these rooms I might now have been familiarly acquainted! Instead of viewing them as a stranger, I might have rejoiced in them as my own, and welcome to them as visitors my uncle and aunt.” (Austen 224)

In the end, Elizabeth moves to Pemberley and gets married to Darcy. She lives in a comfortable, elegant and fascinating life. Their marriage results from dispelling mutual misunderstandings. Nevertheless, economic fundament is indispensable safety for their successful marriage. When Elizabeth’s sister, Jane asks her how long she have loved him, she replies, “It has been coming on so gradually that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley” (Austen338). Here Pemberley stands for wealth and family status. Even Elizabeth herself also admits that property and social status play a significant role in their ideal marriage:

In modern society, sometimes marriage is not the only form to get together. However, these qualities from the novel cannot be omitted: the respect for others, the understanding of one’s own heart, and the correct principles learned by lessons and the pursuit of happiness and love. Although the marriages of economic needs have decreased rapidly in modern society, the concept of “money determines everything” is still rooted in some people’s mind. A lot of parents try hard to interfere in their children’s marriages. Education background, possessions, and jobs remain

the main reasons that may influence one's marriage. The prerequisite of marriage still calls for the reflection of people. (Gao 387-88)

According to Austen, it is not sensible to marry for money, but it is silly to marry without money. Marriage is associated with property and social status, but it is not resolved by them. The first step to choosing an ideal husband is to examine his virtue and personal qualities. It is nightmare to live with a hooligan. The second one is to take his social status into consideration. Adequate living conditions could not be the first element but an important component. A person could be judged by his living and educational background. Finally, it is true love. Love is a magic power to bring two strangers into one, which dispels pride and prejudice between lovers, and constructs mutual respect and understanding. The lesson from the novel is far from enlightening. (Gao 387-88)

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