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Marriage as a Barometer of Social Assertion in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

الزواج كمقياس للتأكيد الاجتماعي في رواية "فخر وتحامل" لجين أوستن

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Abstract: Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) offers a vivid portrayal of the English upper class in the early 1800s, meticulously detailing their customs and social expectations. From its opening lines, the novel establishes marriage as a central theme. During this era, women possessed limited rights and occupied a subordinate position to men, both socially and legally. Consequently, marriage often represented a woman's sole avenue for achieving respectability and financial security. Given that wealth was intrinsically linked to social status, affluent individuals were afforded greater importance. As women typically could not own or inherit property, marrying a wealthy man frequently presented their only opportunity for social advancement. This societal pressure often compelled women to prioritize financial or status considerations over romantic love in their marital choices. This paper examines instances from the novel to illustrate how women perceived marriage for themselves and their daughters, and to define what constituted a "suitable" match. Austen utilizes these examples to incisively reveal the pervasive pressures and expectations surrounding marriage in early 19th-century England. **Keywords**: marriage, wealth, marital, status, match

الملخص : تقدّم رواية *كبرياء وتحامل* (1813)لجين أوستن تصويرًا حيًا للطبقة العليا الإنجليزية في أوائل القرن التاسع عشر، موضحةً بدقة عاداتهم وتوقعاتهم الاجتماعية. ومن السطور الافتتاحية، تبرز الرواية الزواج كموضوع محوري. في تلك الحقبة، كانت حقوق النساء محدودة، كما كنّ يشغلن مكانة دونية مقارنة بالرجال، سواء من الناحية الاجتماعية أو القانونية. ونتيجة لذلك، غالبًا ما كان الزواج يمثّل الوسيلة الوحيدة للمرأة لتحقيق الاحترام الاجتماعي والأمان المالي. وبما أن الثروة كانت مرتبطة ارتباطًا وثيقًا بالمكانة الاجتماعية، فقد كان للأثرياء أهمية أكبر. ونظرًا لأن النساء في الغالب لم يكنّ يستطعن امتلاك أو وراثة الممتلكات، كان الزواج من رجل ثري يُعدّ في كثير من الأحيان الفرصة الوحيدة للارتقاء الاجتماعي. وقد دفعت هذه الضغوط المجتمعية بالعديد من النساء إلى تغليب الاعتبارات المالية أو الطبقية على الحب الرومانسي عند اتخاذ قرارات الزواج. تستعرض هذه الورقة البحثية مواقف متعددة من الرواية لتوضيح كيف كانت النساء ينظرن إلى الزواج لأنفسهنّ ولابنائهنّ، وما الذي كان يُعدّ "زواجًا مناسبًا". وتستخدم أوستن هذه الأمثلة لتكشف بحدة عن الضغوط والتوقعات الاجتماعية المرتبطة بالزواج في إنجلترا في أوائل القرن التاسع عشر.

الكلمات المفتاحية :الزواج، الثروة، الحالة الاجتماعية، زواج مناسب.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), though written during the Romantic period, deviates from many of its conventional themes. Instead, it places a stronger emphasis on social conventions and class distinctions—topics that later became hallmarks of Victorian literature. Early 19th-century England was characterized by stark social stratification, stringent rules of etiquette, and a societal framework where a woman's worth was largely determined by her family background or marital connections. Within this context, women were generally expected to marry not for love, but to fulfill family and societal expectations. Even if a woman harbored affection for someone, this sentiment was usually insufficient to deem him a "good" suitor unless he also possessed considerable wealth and a respectable social standing.

To fully dissect the intricate dynamics of marriage, class, and gender in *Pride and Prejudice*, the researcher will employ Feminist Literary Criticism. This theoretical lens, pioneered by scholars such as Kate Millet, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, scrutinizes how patriarchal ideologies are embedded within literary texts, reflecting and often reinforcing societal gender inequalities (Sandra M. Gilbert, 1979, pp. 3-5) By examining the limited legal and economic rights of women in Regency England, feminist criticism helps us understand how marriage became a primary—often the *only*—avenue for women to secure financial stability, social standing, and a degree of personal agency. It highlights the gendered expectations and pressures that compelled women like the Bennet sisters to prioritize advantageous matches, thus exposing the systemic constraints placed upon them by a male-dominated society.

Complementing this, Marxist Literary Criticism will be utilized to analyze the pervasive influence of economic class and property on marital alliances and social hierarchies. Drawing on the principles established by thinkers like Terry Eagleton, this approach views literature as a product of its socioeconomic context, where class struggle and material conditions significantly shape character motivations and plot developments (Eagleton, 1976, pp. 3-6) In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen meticulously details incomes, inheritance laws, and the accumulation of wealth, making these economic factors not merely background details but the fundamental drivers of social interaction and individual destiny.

This framework allows for an examination of how marriage functions as an economic transaction, a means to maintain or elevate class position, and how material possessions define one's power and opportunities within the novel's rigidly stratified society.

This paper contends that, in Austen's time, marriage was frequently the only means for women to attain social respect and stability, owing to their limited legal and financial rights. Marriage, therefore, transcended mere romantic partnership; it was a critical instrument for maintaining or improving one's social standing.

The first section of this paper explores Austen's depiction of society in *Pride and Prejudice,* focusing on elements such as class structure, property ownership, inheritance laws, and the expectations placed upon women. The second section analyzes how women sought to establish a reputable social standing through marriage, family connections, and appropriate conduct, examining what society deemed a "good" marriage.

1-Social Stratifications in Regency-Era England and Their Representation in *Pride and Prejudice.*

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is often erroneously categorized as a Victorian novel, primarily due to its realistic portrayal of early 19th-century English society. During this period, England remained profoundly influenced by aristocratic traditions, even as the burgeoning Industrial Revolution began to reshape class structures. In her essay "Class and Money," Julia Prewitt Brown elucidates that English society was broadly segmented into three principal classes: upper, middle, and lower, each further subdivided into more granular groups. For the purpose of this paper, the upper class is of particular significance. According to Brown, the upper class could be disaggregated into three categories:

a-The aristocracy: the wealthiest landowners, possessing estates exceeding 10,000 acres, most of whom held noble titles such as duke, earl, or baron.

b-The gentry: smaller landowners with estates ranging from 1,000 to 10,000 acres and annual incomes between £1,000 and £10,000.

c-The squirarchy or independent gentlemen: landowners who did not need to work, living on annual incomes of approximately £700 to £1,000.

Converting the monetary figures mentioned by Julia Prewitt Brown into contemporary terms, the aristocracy's wealth would equate to millions of pounds today, the gentry's to hundreds of thousands to millions, and independent gentlemen would typically possess hundreds of thousands. Fitzwilliam Darcy, a

principal character in *Pride and Prejudice*, perfectly exemplifies these divisions within the upper class. His annual income of £10,000 from his estates, including Pemberley, firmly places him among the exceedingly wealthy landed gentry. However, despite his immense wealth, Darcy does not belong to the aristocracy because he lacks a hereditary title such as duke, earl, or baron—titles that were essential for aristocratic rank in early 19th-century England.

This distinction is significant. It reveals that in Austen's era, social status was not solely predicated on wealth; it also depended on ancestral background and official titles. Darcy occupies an intermediate position: he is exceptionally rich and respected, and many individuals treat him as a person of high standing, yet he remains outside the titled nobility. His situation illustrates that even substantial wealth could not entirely supersede the value placed on noble birth and inherited privilege in that society. As Prewitt Brown observes, this demonstrates how class relations were structured not only by financial means but also by deeply entrenched traditions of lineage and rank:

> To qualify as an aristocrat, one had to be of titled rank, to own an estate exceeding 10,000 acres, to have enough money in revenues to live opulently, and to own a house in London to go to during the social season. Obviously there were exceptions—some ancient titles had declining fortunes—but in order to participate fully in the social life of the aristocracy, one had to have these things.
>
> (Brown, 1997, p. 74)

Most characters in *Pride and Prejudice* belong to the gentry class. The Bennet family, along with many residents of Meryton and the surrounding area, have incomes considerably lower than Mr. Darcy's, typically ranging from £2,000 to £5,000 per year. Mr. Bingley, however, represents a slightly different case. Although he is not part of the titled aristocracy, he is still regarded as a gentleman—a man of independent wealth, refined manners, and clear social respectability. Austen portrays Bingley as potentially originating from "new money" or being the younger son of a gentry family who did not inherit land, yet was raised with the values and behaviors expected of the upper class. When Bingley arrives in the neighborhood, his considerable wealth and charming manners quickly establish him as an ideal suitor for one of the Bennet sisters.

As Julia Prewitt Brown underscores, class and money are fundamental to the world of *Pride and Prejudice*. She writes, "Class and money are givens in [this novel]. They are to the novelist as the clay is to the potter, for they are not only the substance with which characters must structure their lives; they define character and social life" (Austen, 1932, p. 70). In essence, these are not mere

background details; they actively shape individuals' identities and opportunities. This close intertwining of economic status and individual identity is a central tenet of Marxist literary criticism, which views literature as a reflection of societal class struggles and economic conditions (Eagleton, 1976, pp. 8-10). From this perspective, Austen's meticulous detailing of incomes and property (like entailment) is not just setting, but the very engine of the plot, dictating the character's motivations and limitations.

Brown also notes that "[c]lass and money are the media through which [characters] must shape their lives. Jane Austen was not interested in people who try to find themselves by going outside of society" (Austen, 1932, p. 69) This implies that Austen's characters do not attempt to escape or reject their social system. Instead, they operate within its confines, navigating the limitations imposed by birth, class, and financial status. In *Pride and Prejudice*, social status remains largely immutable, with alterations arising primarily from significant economic changes—typically through marriage, inheritance, or financial downfall, all of which are relatively uncommon occurrences.

To further illuminate this social dynamic, Lawrence Stone likens class not to a fixed group but to something more fluid. He posits that "a class is not a finite group of families but rather a bus or hotel, always full but always filled with different people" (23). This metaphor suggests that while the upper class is consistently comprised of individuals, its specific members can change over time as wealth is acquired or lost. This concept helps us understand the paramount importance of money in 19th-century English society. Money was not merely a means of survival; it was the primary determinant of social rank. Julia Prewitt Brown concurs with Stone's perspective, suggesting that:

> In the early nineteenth century, the nexus of social change was to be found more in the gentry and middle class than either the working class or aristocracy. Austen shows over and over again that the apparent stability of class position is an illusion created by the slowness of change through marriage and the peculiar stability of class character, resulting from the chameleon-like adaptability of new families. (Brown, 1997, p. 78)

Throughout history, money has been intimately linked to power. In 19th-century England, possessing wealth was often the gateway to the upper class. However, as Julia Prewitt Brown clarifies, "this [did] not mean that everyone who [was] rich [was] a member of the upper class. But without money, people sink awfully fast" (Brown, 1997, p. 71) In *Pride and Prejudice*, this idea is vividly illustrated through Mr. Bennet's frequent admonitions to his wife and their two youngest daughters, Lydia and Kitty, urging them to curb their spending

because "they were in the habit of spending more that they ought" (Austen, 1932, p. 10)

Even modest sums of money in the early nineteenth century represented more than mere convenience; they ensured social stability. Mr. Bennet's income is sufficient for him to live without working, yet the family's financial security hinges on prudent budgeting. This financial anxiety is seldom discussed openly in polite society. Nevertheless, Mr. Bennet alludes to this tension when he states, "Mrs. Bennet had no turn for economy, and his love of independence had alone prevented their exceeding their income" (Austen, 1932, p. 177)

Beyond financial worries and the fear of poverty, another source of anxiety in *Pride and Prejudice* is the pride and exclusivity inherent in the upper class itself. As the social ideal, the upper class is not only admired but also emulated. Yet, it frequently displays narrow-mindedness and condescension towards those of lower status. Members of this class often deem others unworthy and can be overtly snobbish and dismissive. Austen conveys this through several characters, particularly in their initial reactions to Mr. Darcy. Upon Darcy's arrival with Mr. Bingley, people swiftly judge him based on his reserved and proud demeanor. Without truly getting to know him, "his character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there again. Amongst the most violent against him was Mrs. Bennet, whose dislike of his general behaviour was sharpened into particular resentment by his having slighted one of her daughters" (Austen, 1932, p. 07)

Mrs. Bennet's negative opinion of Darcy persists until Elizabeth becomes engaged to him. At that juncture, she awkwardly endeavors to accept him, balancing her prior animosity with his elevated social rank: "I am quite sorry, Lizzy, that you should be forced to have that disagreeable man all to yourself. But I hope you will not mind it: it is all for Jane's sake, you know; and there is no occasion for talking to him, except just now and then. So, do not put yourself to inconvenience" (Austen, 1932, p. 218). This shift highlights how social prejudices can dissipate when individuals perceive the advantages of social advancement. It also underscores Austen's critique of superficial politeness and the hypocrisy prevalent in class-based attitude.

The central flaws of the upper-class society depicted in *Pride and Prejudice,* as suggested by the novel's title, encompass pride, prejudice, and vanity. The affluent often exhibit excessive pride in their wealth and lineage, leading to vanity and a condescending attitude toward those of lower social standing. This class-based prejudice results in a failure to recognize individuals' personal virtues, reducing people to mere representatives of their family

background and social rank. Consequently, such prejudices foster tension and misunderstanding between different social groups, as genuine emotions and personal qualities are frequently disregarded.

Mary Bennet's distinction between vanity and pride illuminates the detrimental nature of self-absorption: "Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us" (Austen, 1932, p. 13). Darcy further reflects on this distinction, acknowledging that "vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride—where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good regulation" (Austen, 1932, p. 36)

Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen portrays several characters—such as Mr. Bingley's sisters, Mrs. Bennet, and her younger daughters—as embodiments of vanity, despite their varied positions within the social hierarchy. Darcy's comment about Jane Bennet's future highlights the class prejudice common in the upper classes: "I have an excessive regard for Miss Jane Bennet, she is really a very sweet girl, and I wish with all my heart she were well settled. But with such a father and mother, and such low connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it" (Austen, 1932, p. 23). Austen criticizes this type of elitism by having Darcy ultimately recognize Elizabeth's true worth despite her lower social status. This transformation in Darcy's character demonstrates that while he retains a degree of pride, he overcomes vanity by developing genuine admiration and respect. However, alongside criticizing pride, prejudice, and vanity, Austen's narrative also reflects the patriarchal society of the 19th century. Elizabeth's future security and social standing ultimately depend on Darcy's decision, underscoring the gender power imbalance of the era. This patriarchal structure, where women's fates are tied to male decisions and property, is a key concern of Feminist Literary Criticism, which analyzes how literature reflects and challenges gender inequalities and the social construction of gender roles (Showalter, 1979, pp. 13-15)

In *Pride and Prejudice*, women are largely denied autonomy over their lives and futures, with marriage functioning as their primary—if not sole—means of social and economic advancement. The pressure placed upon characters like Charlotte Lucas to marry for stability, rather than love, highlights the limited agency afforded to women within this rigid system. Even Elizabeth, often celebrated as a progressive and independent heroine, must ultimately navigate her path within the confines of male-dominated structures. Her eventual union with Darcy, while seemingly romantic, also represents a reconciliation with the very societal norms that constrain her. Thus, Austen's work subtly castigates the

gendered limitations of her time, while simultaneously revealing how deeply embedded those constraints are in the social fabric of early 19th-century England.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is widely regarded as a quintessential example of the novel of manners—a genre that foregrounds the social conventions, behavioral expectations, and class-based norms governing interpersonal relations in a specific historical and cultural context. However, through a feminist lens, these codes of 'manners' are not merely reflections of etiquette but instruments of patriarchal control, particularly over women's conduct, autonomy, and roles in society. As Frederick R. Karl observes, Austen's characters are preoccupied with dignity, breeding, and gentility—elements that constitute the framework of manners (Karl, 1961, p. 158). Feminist literary criticism reveals how such preoccupations serve to reinforce gendered expectations, where women are judged and constrained by their adherence to socially sanctioned forms of decorum.

Austen meticulously situates her characters in credible social contexts to help readers grasp the unspoken rules of Regency society. Characters are expected to conform to their class and gender roles, and Austen's irony often targets those who deviate—even slightly—from these social expectations: "her irony is directed at those who wander ever so little from the expectations of society" (Karl, 1961, p. 158)

Transgressing social rules often leads to severe consequences, particularly for women. Lydia Bennet serves as a clear example. When she elopes with George Wickham without the sanction of marriage, she not only jeopardizes her own reputation but also risks bringing ignominy upon her entire family. Her reckless actions harm her sisters' prospects for advantageous marriages. In Austen's strict moral universe, an individual's misconduct is rarely perceived as isolated; it profoundly affects the entire family's social standing and can lead to a collective loss of respect. The severe repercussions for Lydia, a woman, compared to the often lesser consequences for men in similar situations, further highlights the gendered double standards inherent in a patriarchal society, a common observation within feminist critiques of the period (Sandra M. Gilbert, 1979, pp. 45-47)

It is evident that wealth played a pivotal role in early nineteenth-century English society, serving as the primary determinant of social class and, consequently, individual identity. For women, whose societal value was often measured by their familial connections and marital prospects, financial status was of paramount importance. This emphasis on wealth frequently gave rise to pride and vanity, leading to prejudices that not only marginalized those of lower social

standing but also fostered divisions within the same class. As Mary Bennet astutely observes, "Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us" (Austen, 1932, p. 130)

Austen critiques these societal flaws through the character development of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. Their journey toward mutual understanding and respect underscores the value of personal integrity and emotional connection over superficial judgments. Ultimately, Austen suggests that true happiness and social harmony are achieved not through rigid adherence to class distinctions but through the cultivation of sensibility and the overcoming of pride and prejudice.

2-Adventageous Marriage as a Vehicle for Social Validation

In nineteenth-century England, as depicted in Victorian literature, the paramount goal for women of the upper and middle classes was to secure a socially advantageous marriage. Nancy Armstrong emphasizes this point, stating that “finding a husband was the greatest task of women of the upper and middle class in the nineteenth century” (Armstrong, 1999, p. 113). While women in this period experienced an increased degree of agency in choosing marital partners compared to previous eras, their autonomy remained heavily circumscribed by prevailing social norms. The ideal spouse was expected to possess equal or superior social standing, as a woman’s identity as a “white, respectable English woman” was intimately tied to her marital alliance. Moreover, the honor of the family and the broader social order depended on such unions (Armstrong, 1999, p. 113). These societal pressures on women, restricting their choices and tying their identity and social standing almost exclusively to marriage, are a central focus of Feminist Literary Criticism, which examines how patriarchal ideologies in literature contribute to the oppression and marginalization of women (Millett, 1970, pp. 25-26)

Through *Pride and Prejudice,* Austen offers a pointed critique of the societal expectations that compelled women to prioritize financial security over genuine emotional connection in selecting a husband. During this period, it was widely accepted that women should seek advantageous marriages, and from an early age, girls were socialized to value wealth and social status above personal affection in a prospective partner. From a feminist perspective, this pragmatic—and often economically driven—approach to marriage, expressed by several female characters, underscores how women’s choices are shaped by systemic gender inequalities, compelling them to prioritize financial security over personal autonomy in the pursuit of socially sanctioned unions.

Given women's restricted legal rights and lack of economic independence, marriage served as an essential mechanism for obtaining social legitimacy.

Unmarried women remained under paternal authority and were generally excluded from inheritance, as property succession predominantly followed the male lineage. Upon marriage, a woman's dowry was transferred to her husband's control. Consequently, securing a favorable marriage was not merely a social aspiration but a vital necessity, constituting the primary means through which women could attain financial stability and social recognition. This economic imperative, where marriage functions as a transaction for property and social capital, is also a key area of inquiry for Marxist Literary Criticism, which explores how economic base shapes social superstructures like marriage and family (Eagleton, 1976, pp. 12-14)

Jane Austen foregrounds the centrality of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* with the novel's opening line: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen 2). This statement immediately positions marriage as a predominant concern for the upper classes, emphasizing its dual significance: not only as a means for women to secure financial and social stability but also as a marker of social legitimacy for wealthy men. Consequently, marriage emerges as both a personal aspiration and a societal imperative, shaped by the intersection of economic considerations and prevailing gender norms.

Mrs. Bennet's fixation on economic security is further illuminated in her reaction to Elizabeth's refusal of Mr. Collins' proposal. Despite Mr. Collins' lack of personal appeal and Elizabeth's evident discomfort, Mrs. Bennet cannot comprehend rejecting a suitor poised to inherit the Bennet estate. She castigates Elizabeth's decision as reckless and selfish, declaring:

> Aye, there she comes, (...) looking as unconcerned as may be, and caring no more for us than if we were at York, provided she can have her own way. But I tell you, Miss Lizzy—if you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer of marriage in this way, you will never get a husband at all—and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead. (Austen, 1932, p. 69)

This response encapsulates the pervasive economic anxiety faced by women of the era, underscoring that marriage was not merely a romantic ideal but a pragmatic necessity and financial survival. This anxiety and the pressure it puts on women like Mrs. Bennet and her daughters is a direct consequence of patriarchal legal and economic systems, a point often highlighted in Feminist Literary Criticism (Sandra M. Gilbert, 1979, pp. 65-67)

In Mrs. Bennet's view, Mr. Collins—despite his disagreeable nature—is deemed a suitable suitor solely by virtue of his position as the future heir to the

Bennet estate. For her, his economic standing and social prospects sufficiently justify marriage. Conversely, Elizabeth wholly repudiates this utilitarian approach, prioritizing personal happiness and mutual respect over financial considerations. She rejects Mr. Collins not out of mere personal distaste, but as a deliberate refusal to conform to the patriarchal expectation that women should marry for economic security rather than affection or autonomy. This conflict between mother and daughter encapsulates the broader tension in the novel between societal expectations and individual agency in matrimonial matters. This tension between personal desire and economic necessity underscores both feminist concerns about female agency and Marxist concerns about the material basis of social decisions.

In contrast, Miss Lucas readily accepts Mr. Collins's proposal upon its presentation. Austen explicitly characterizes Charlotte's decision as pragmatic rather than affectionate, motivated "solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment," with indifference toward the timing of this "establishment" (Austen, 1932, p. 74). The narrative underscores the constrained options available to women in Charlotte's socio-economic position, noting that marriage was "the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune," and while it might not guarantee happiness, it offered "the pleasantest preservative from want" (Austen, 1932, pp. 74-75). Charlotte's explanation to Elizabeth—that she desires "a comfortable home" and regards Mr. Collins as a reasonable match "considering [his] character, connection, and situation in life" (Austen, 1932, p. 76)—elicits surprise from Elizabeth, who finds Charlotte's pragmatism unsettling. Nonetheless, Austen presents Charlotte's choice with a degree of empathy, acknowledging that given the period's constraints, prioritizing security and social standing over romantic affection was a common and understandable course of action. Charlotte's "rational decision" is a poignant illustration of how women's lives were shaped by economic exigencies, a reality often analyzed through Marxist Literary Criticism (Eagleton, 1976, pp. 12-13),further intensified by the limitations imposed by patriarchy, as explored by Feminist Literary Criticism (Showalter, 1979, pp. 14-16)

Similarly, Miss Bingley adheres to contemporary social conventions by employing her charm to attract Mr. Darcy, whom she regards as an ideal husband. As a member of the upper class, Miss Bingley would never contemplate marriage to someone beneath her social rank. Darcy epitomizes the desirable suitor: affluent, well-educated, courteous, and handsome. Yet, not all characters share this admiration. Mrs. Bennet initially expresses disdain for Darcy after the first ball, describing him as "the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world" (Austen, 1932, p. 07) and mocks his aloof demeanor, lamenting that he was "not

handsome enough to dance with" (Austen, 1932, p. 09). However, Mrs. Bennet's attitude undergoes a dramatic transformation upon learning of Darcy's assistance to Lydia and his engagement to Elizabeth. She becomes effusive, exclaiming: "Oh, my dear Lizzy!... Mr. Darcy!... how rich and how great you will be!... Such a charming man!—so handsome! so tall!" (Austen, 1932, p. 220). This abrupt shift reveals her deep valuation of wealth and social prestige. Through these characters, Austen illustrates how, within their social milieu, marriage functioned more as an instrument of economic and social advancement than as a pursuit of romantic love.

Men, too, were influenced by considerations of wealth in marriage, as exemplified by George Wickham. He sought to marry affluent women on multiple occasions—initially targeting Darcy's sister and subsequently Miss King, whose fortune became a motivating factor only after her grandfather's death (Austen, 1932, p. 91) Ultimately, when Wickham elopes with Lydia Bennet, his agreement to marry her is contingent upon Darcy's financial intervention, highlighting the transactional nature of the union. Wickham is not unique in this regard; Colonel Fitzwilliam candidly admits to Elizabeth his intention to marry a wealthy woman, as Julia Prewitt Brown explains: "brought up to lead an aristocratic life and honestly unwilling to give it up, he needs a monied marriage to maintain the expensive leisure to which he is accustomed. He cannot afford the luxury of falling in love with a poor woman" (Austen, 1932, p. 69) This illustrates why economic considerations heavily influenced marital choices—many men of the upper class sought to preserve their accustomed lifestyle through financially advantageous marriages. These examples of men, like women, being driven by economic motives in marriage, further reinforce the applicability of Marxist Literary Criticism in understanding the materialist basis of social relations in the novel (Eagleton, 1976, pp. 10-12)

Austen's work transcends mere social commentary; it provides a keen psychological and cultural insight into the lives of women in Regency England. As a female author navigating the constraints of her era, Austen was uniquely positioned to portray the gendered limitations imposed on women, shedding light on their aspirations, fears, and pragmatic choices. From a Feminist Literary Criticism perspective, Austen's narrative is invaluable as it lays bare the societal mechanisms that oppressed women and restricted their agency. She repeatedly underscores that for most women, marriage was fundamentally a means to secure economic security and social validation in a system that offered few alternatives. The societal ideal of happiness for women was often framed in terms of acceptance of their marital roles, the fulfillment of domestic duties, and the hope

of nurturing affection within those confines. This deep analysis of women's constrained choices and their pursuit of agency within a patriarchal framework is a cornerstone of Feminist Literary Criticism, which helps us understand how gender roles were constructed and enforced, and the limited avenues available for female self-actualization.

Conclusion

In nineteenth-century England, a society deeply rooted in patriarchal structures, women's legal and economic rights were severely limited compared to those of men. Women rarely owned property independently, and their social standing was intricately tied to their relationships with male relatives—fathers, brothers, or husbands. The imperative to maintain or elevate one's social status left many women with little choice but to marry men of equal or superior rank, thereby securing financial stability and social respectability. In this context, marriage was less a matter of personal affection than a strategic alliance, a reality that Jane Austen vividly depicts in *Pride and Prejudice*. The novel offers multiple examples illustrating how economic necessity and social ambition often overshadowed romantic love in matrimonial decisions.

The researcher's option for Marxist criticism to get a deeper understanding of *Pride and Prejudice* provides a powerful framework for understanding the underlying economic motivations. It highlights how marriage, far from being solely a romantic endeavor, functioned as a crucial economic transaction, consolidating wealth and maintaining social stratification. The pursuit of a financially advantageous match, and the anxieties surrounding inheritance and property, are central to the plot, demonstrating how economic base influences the social superstructure of manners and relationships. Austen thus reveals the complex interplay between individual desires and social imperatives, highlighting the tensions between love, wealth, and status, ultimately demonstrating how class consciousness and economic capital dictate life choices.

Ultimately, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* remains a powerful reflection on the gendered realities of her time, illustrating that for many women, marriage was a crucial but complex institution—one that shaped not only their futures but also their identities. The novel's enduring relevance lies in its nuanced exploration of these themes, combining sharp social observation with a subtle critique of the patriarchal and class-driven structures that defined women's lives in nineteenth-century England. By applying Feminist and Marxist lenses, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of how gender inequality intersected with economic disparity to shape personal destinies, revealing Austen's astute

commentary on both the oppression of women and the pervasive influence of class in her society.

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