

# A Critical Literary Study Of Marriage, Class, And Social Criticism In Jane Austen's "Pride And Prejudice"

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**Abstract:** This article represents a single-case qualitative literary analysis, presented in the IMRaD format. This paper investigates, through close reading and reflective interpretation, the narrative patterns, character interactions, and moral development that are richly reflected in a nineteenth-century English novel. The focus has fallen on interpersonal relations, behavioral standards, and changes that take place within the main and secondary characters. It therefore points to the fact that personal values, emotional maturation, and social expectations act as firmly interlinked components to affect human choice and life consequences. The article has retained the original review text within the results section to preserve interpretative integrity, albeit situated within an appropriate academic framework for humanities research.

**Keywords:** Reflective interpretation, secondary characters, behavioral standards, academic framework, narrative, gender expectations.

**Introduction:** Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813/2003) is widely regarded as a novel that explores human behavior, moral development, and interpersonal relationships within a rigidly structured society. Scholars have emphasized Austen's ability to portray individual growth through social interaction and everyday experiences rather than through dramatic events (Tanner, 1986). Her narrative technique allows readers access to characters' inner thoughts and judgments, making the novel particularly suitable for close qualitative analysis (Duckworth, 1971).

Critical studies have noted that Austen's fiction reflects broader ideological concerns of her time, especially regarding propriety, gender expectations, and personal conduct (Johnson, 1988). Through carefully constructed characters, Austen demonstrates how personal values are shaped, challenged, and transformed over time (Poovey, 1984). Moral self-awareness and emotional maturity emerge as central elements of character development, particularly in the progression of the novel's protagonists (Butler, 1987).

This article adopts an IMRaD structure to present a reflective literary analysis based on a written review of the novel. By preserving the original interpretative text,

the study maintains authenticity while situating the analysis within an academic framework commonly used in qualitative humanities research (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000).

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative literary analysis based on close reading. The analysis reflects a personal interpretative review of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, written for the preparation of this article. The approach focuses on thematic examination of marriage, class distinctions, and social propriety as represented through major and minor characters. The review is presented for the analysis of results. All quotations in the Results section retain their original page-number references to the primary text and were not modified during the preparation of this article. All page numbers refer to the 2022 PIR edition of *Pride and Prejudice*.

## RESULTS

In this book by Jane Austen readers can see love-based and arranged marriages and proposals, especially the marriages regarding one's status and wealth are set out and criticized willfully. Author wanted to reveal the class distinctions and other social problems faced by the society at the time when the novel was written.

They are addressed thoroughly by the main characters, Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy who are portrayed to oppose beliefs of the society. To become happy for women at that time was to marry to rich men who could provide their wives financially. You can see it by the example of Mrs. Bennet whose design of living is to find wealthy gentlemen for her beloved daughters and "to get them married" (5). Austen's purpose of writing this book is obviously evident from the beginning of book, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife". At that time the families with daughters were mostly obsessed with searching sons-in-law in high class or the ones who have good fortune. Particularly, parties and hospitality were the best ways to get acquainted males in their preferences. Mrs. Bennet says, "At our time of life it is not so pleasant, I can tell you, to be making new acquaintances every day; but for your sakes, we would do anything..." (8). Let's think about it. How is so unhealthy view? The youth in that age had no pleasure to be able to love, marry and live happily in general with their own preferences. Charlotte Lucas is used to portray as a woman of society filled with false perceptions, and similarly, Mr. Collins marries to her as a matter of obligation in his words. Austen created Elizabeth against the society she was living. All affairs on the novel are analyzed by Elizabeth's perception and readers have full access to her thoughts and feel the same with her all of sudden experiences. Author advances an idea that propriety should not be shaped according to taste of society of the people who have social status and are from high class. Even though different personages with different personalities, such as Mr. Bingley, Jane, Mr. Collins, Charlotte, Mr. Wickham, Lydia, Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet, Lady Catherine de Bourgh are the second characters, they play an important role in originating main idea of the novel, as they have gone through different marriages.

The information that is circulated about the new owner of Netherfield Park throughout the Longbourn provokes the Bennets family to be ready for changes. Mr. Bingley, "A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year" is thought probably to marry one of her daughters by Mrs. Bennet (3). Mr. Bingley is introduced to the whole Bennets family, and the two eldest Bennets are recognized to behave in accordance with propriety by him and his relations when they first met in the ball. This is also acknowledged by Mr. Darcy in his letter to Elizabeth, "The situation of your mother's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison to that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three young sisters, and occasionally even by your

father" (247). The third one, Mary who prefers to be far from society, with just books and likes to "make extracts" has no knowledge of behaving in public places. Lydia is described as the very great disadvantage to them all which must arise from the public notice of her unguarded and imprudent manner (287) by Elizabeth when begging his father not to let Lydia go to Brighton to prevent her from being "the most determined flirt that ever made herself or her family ridiculous" (288). For Kitty, Lydia becomes role model for her in the most part of the course. Kitty is "weak-spirited, irritable, and completely under Lydia's guidance" (288). Both of Jane and Elizabeth know their family's behavior and try to avoid themselves and their family from the view of having lack of propriety in the eyes of society. This improper conduct of the family, which is resulted by being from lower class in their society prevented Mr. Bingley who is "violently in love" with Jane only a few days before (177) from having a pleasure of full happiness with his lover for a while. From the very day on they are acquainted with each other they fall in love and Jane is admired by Mr. Bingley's sisters through her beauty and easiness. However, the difference between status, wealth and connections cause his sisters to neglect them and pretend to love her because of just their brother's admiration. It does not escape Elizabeth's notice and she was conscious enough to see superciliousness in their treatment of everybody while by Jane, this attention is received with the greatest pleasure (25). It becomes so evident for Elizabeth when she has to stay in Netherfield to attend her sick sister. Their attitude varies according to people's status, class, and wealth towards everybody. Because of class distinctions, Mr. Darcy and sisters raise strong objection to their imprudent marriage that is esteemed a most unhappy connection (247). When it is asked why he does it, he just simply answers that he believes her to be indifferent to Mr. Bingley, which in fact, there are also other reasons for it. Despite the obstacles they have, Mr. Bingley and Jane become together happy, writing their engagement everyone they know and accepting insincere letters from Mr. Bingley's sisters.

One of the examples of meaning of this novel is depicted with the sentence of Mr. Darcy about Elizabeth: "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me", which means that she is not from high social status as he is to have the honor of dancing with him (13). He says it loud enough to make Elizabeth hear which influences her first impression on him, as filled with so much pride. Through discussing newcomers, Mary says to this quote related to Mr. Darcy's pride and his manners in the first party that is thought to be filled with pride, but in fact, he is not prone to pride. He just

wishes to seem proud in the eyes of people.

"Pride is a very common failing, I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that it is very common indeed; that human nature is particularly prone to it, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary. 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" (24).

What does it make Mr. Darcy love Elizabeth? Even though Mr. Darcy always looks down on her, he finds her "uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes" and he is caught by her manners' easy playfulness (28). Both of them should overcome pride and prejudice to get in a way of happiness. Elizabeth shows her pride and prejudice, waiting for true love and refusing proposals that she thinks would not bring happiness. It requires many struggles for Mr. Darcy to be able to resist his society's beliefs, which are absorbed by him from his childhood. His prejudice towards lower-class people and pride, which is brought up with and told repeatedly by his father have greatly suffered. "I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. As a child I was taught what was right, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit" (455). Most part of the novel, Elizabeth has showed a strong dislike to loving him, which stands for prejudice and resistance to the first proposal of Mr. Darcy and that of Mr. Collins, which means pride. The first impression of Mr. Darcy and unforgivable offenses made on him by his enemy, Mr. Wickham led Elizabeth to strong prejudice. After the first proposal of Mr. Darcy, which he gives with pride and receives prejudice from Elizabeth in return, the former has to write letter to correct two misunderstandings of Elizabeth. The first is about the role of Mr. Darcy in separating her sister and Mr. Bingley, and the second is cruelty of him towards Mr. Wickham. Elizabeth discovers the misinformation Mr. Wickham gives while comparing the story of Mr. Darcy and that of Mr. Wickham, who involves in to deepen her prejudice towards Mr. Darcy in a great degree. Although her opinion about Mr. Darcy changes after reading his letter, she does not experience any love till she visits Pemberley which is Mr. Darcy's property. Her love for Mr. Darcy increases so much after awareness of Mr. Darcy's help to find Lydia, who elopes with Mr. Wickham, and their marriage.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh, the aunt of Mr. Darcy from his mother's side, whose daughter is engaged with him from their infancy visits Longbourn suddenly in the

morning to have Elizabeth's word not to marry Mr. Darcy. Her utmost attempt to separate them leads to their marriage because after her visit, Elizabeth becomes sure that she loves him. Like Mr. Bingley's sisters, Lady Catherine has a tendency to treat people according to wealth and social status and thinks that two splendid fortunes should be united in the light of a marriage. Besides, the engagement is the "favourite wish" of Mr. Darcy's mother, Lady Anne Darcy, whose her name is repeated several times because of her great will, in spite of being dead throughout the novel (437). Lady Catherine never hesitates to offend Elizabeth's family and also deliberately adds shameful elopement of her youngest sister, Lydia as a proof.

Although Lydia is the youngest of all her sisters, she is the tallest in physical appearance (8). The most favorite daughter of Mrs. Bennet is much more like her mother and is allowed to come out earlier thanks to being favorite. Before elder sisters marry to someone, it is considered to be shameful for younger sisters to come out. This is claimed by surprise of Lady Catherine, "The younger ones are out before the older ones are married!" (208). Lydia has "high animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence" (55). Initially she is recognized to be so harmless and good-humored, she does a great deal of ruin in her family's reputation by her elopement with Mr. Wickham. Her youth and good humor give a charming countenance to be center of officers' attention. She never cares about gentlemen as her sisters do and always shows interest towards officers. Mr. Wickham is the officer who has "all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure" (90). He has no intention of marrying to Lydia while eloping, as he just wants to escape the debts of gambling, consequences of his dirty actions in Brighton. Like Mr. Wickham, Lydia never thinks about marrying and if it were, what a good joke it would be! (358). Their marriage is arranged one by involvement of Mr. Darcy because Mr. Wickham shows no inclination to marry a lady without money. With the help of Mr. Darcy financially, family at least gets rid of embarrassing situation of elopement of Lydia who refuses to leave Mr. Wickham without marrying to him when Mr. Darcy is ready to take her to her family happily. Mr. Darcy only decides to do it for the sake of "only" Elizabeth (451). Lydia is totally careless about her family's sufferings and always thinks about her own significance, saying, "Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman" (389). Her opinion of marriage is peculiar, "I am sure my sisters must all envy me. I only hope they may have half my good luck. They must all go to Brighton. That is the place to get husbands" (390). Her "way of getting husbands" is not approved by Elizabeth. According to

Elizabeth's opinion, Mr. Wickham's attachment is not strong as Lydia's, and their marriage is so reckless and impulsive as they are that they always spend more money than they ought to, change their place in the search of "cheap situation" and have Jane or Elizabeth pay their bills or debts. Lydia is the tangible result of her parent's unsuitable marriage which leads to lack of parental guidance and discipline

Elizabeth is the most favorite daughter of Mr. Bennet who always improves understanding and view of him by reading book. Although Mrs. Bennet is blessed with beauty and good humor, it does not reflect the expectations of his husband about total happiness in marriage. His wife's "mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper" (4) has made him be deprived of "his views of domestic happiness" (294). He is "so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice" (4). He has sharp satirical eye on everything around him and this also allows him to prefer mindful Elizabeth to his other daughters. Austen expresses great criticisms by this personage. He cannot find intelligence and wisdom he expects in his wife. Though his choice of teasing, disrespecting and laughing at his wife always gives so much pain to Elizabeth, what she has seen in behavior of her father to her mother have been always overlooked because of his father's "abilities" and "affectionate treatment of herself" (294). However, this type of unsuitable marriage results in children who have unacceptable behavior and inappropriate manners. Although he is unable to influence his wife's mind in right way, he can engage with his daughters, using his talents in right way, instead of exposing their imprudent mother to the children. Maybe at least, it may prevent them from being considered to have a lack of propriety, which attends to sufferings of Jane's and Elizabeth's happiness which delays thanks to their nearest relations' unsuitable actions.

Another form of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* is showed by the example of Mr. Collins and Charlotte Lucas's marriage. Mr. Collins, who is relation of Mr. Bennet, a clergyman of the Church of England has great connections with Lady Catherine de Bourgh and intends to visit Longbourn. By his letter to Mr. Bennet, he talks about the relationship of his father and Mr. Bennet and entail of Longbourn estate, as Mr. Bennet has no sons to inherit. Regarding this he shows the intention of visiting estate, without first asking permission of it. Main purpose of his visitation to estate is to find a wife from one of the Bennets' daughters that matches to his duty as a man of church and helps him to appear kind towards his relations for inheriting their father's estate. He thinks it an excellent one, full of eligibility and suitability, and excessively generous

and disinterested on his own part (88). Jane Austen demonstrates her great writing skill by ridiculing Mr. Collins. He is a satirical character of novel as the one who has tendency to show exaggerated humility to the rich and powerful people with total unawareness of it. He thinks no more than power, wealth and prosperity which his job offers through the means of marriage. Flattering remarks of Lady Catherine and her "Ladyship" unnecessarily given by him gives a hint to his character that perceives anybody with a narrowed mind, exactly the eyes of silly man (170). Jane Austen also tries to criticize the moral duty of churches in her religion that hired some clergymen of lack of religious dedication through the character of Mr. Collins. Opinion of marriage of his allows him to easily change his choice from Jane to Elizabeth when Mrs. Bennet throws a hint to that Jane is soon to be engaged. Elizabeth is, of course, "equally next to Jane in birth and beauty" (88). One of the sharp ironies of the novel attends during Elizabeth's refusal to Mr. Collins's proposal. He reveals to give a second proposal to Elizabeth after her rejecting, thinking it the custom of elegant females to reject it though they mean secretly to accept and make males propose a second or even third time (134). She replies that she is not that type of women to say yes after saying no:

"Upon my word, sir, your hope is a rather extraordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal. You could not make me happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who could make you so..." (135).

Mr. Collins never doubts that he can get wife he wants through his valuable living with his connections, social status and wealth. Certainly, it makes Mrs. Bennet so anxious about that there is a danger of becoming homeless after her husband's decease and loss of a ready son-in-law with a valuable situation. She encourages her husband to make Elizabeth have Mr. Collins and never sees her daughter if she does not marry. Mr. Bennet's reply is, "I will never see you again if you do". He is in favor of his dearest daughter and always believes that she is sensible in her decisions and actions, and therefore, respects her choice.

Elizabeth shows her desire to marry someone who truly loves. Unlike Elizabeth, Charlotte Lucas, who then becomes the wife of Mr. Collins holds entirely different opinion on marriage as a part of her society: "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance..." (27). Yet for Elizabeth, marriage should not be a matter of chance but lasting relationship that make her feel loved and happy with the partner she is marrying to. To



describe the mortifying situation of society Austen chooses Charlotte to be a wife for Mr. Collins. Elizabeth's intimate friend betrays her with the engagement of Mr. Collins. Charlotte makes her choice regarding "comfortable home", "Mr. Collins's character, connection, and situation in life" (158). The age of twenty-seven for women was believed to be that of spinster at that time and it was the exact age of Charlotte. For Charlotte, "Mr. Collins, to be sure, was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband...however, uncertain of giving happiness" (155). It is the most unsuitable match in the world for Elizabeth. Although Elizabeth expresses her gratitude, she is not sure that marriage makes Charlotte happy wife.

### DISCUSSION

The review shows how *Pride and Prejudice* satirically addresses the prevailing norms related to matters of marriage, especially those related to money, status, as well as the roles of gender. Through an analysis of the characters, the text explains how the novel compares love marriages with those conducted due to obligation or other pressures. The defiance of Elizabeth Bennet against the norms can be seen as an affirmative reflection of Austen's progressive views regarding the freedom of females, and, on the other hand, Mr. Darcy's transformation denotes the need to conquer pride and prejudices to attain self-satisfaction.

Austen alludes to love which always contributes more people's happiness as opposed to money, which is recognized as a great contributor to one's happiness. The different marriages and opinions about them form the heart of *Pride and Prejudice*, and the meaning of the book heavily depends on them. *Pride and Prejudice* of Jane Austen is written to reveal the defects of society, and therefore, viewed as the greatest peak of her career. Novel is filled with various characters and urges you to experience various fates. Also, it is claimed that mostly, pride and prejudice in life bring about bad consequences to people. Mrs. Darcy and Mr. Darcy succeed to master both of them eventually with the contribution and hindrances of secondary characters whose opinions vary greatly on marriage according to their personalities, and who take action on it accordingly.

### CONCLUSION

It can be observed in this analysis that the novel provides a very clear insight into human behavior and ethical development through the characters' experience. Through the characters' decisions and emotional outlooks regarding human interactions, the analysis shows how ethical growth can be developed

through self-analysis and exposure to misunderstandings. The growth of the main characters shows that happiness and fulfillment can be attained without adhering to societal expectations and standards. The supporting characters of the novel add further insight to this interpretation by offering different outlooks regarding human decisions and thus making the novel more complex. The analysis verifies the timeless value of the novel as a form of literary writing that can lead the reader to analyze his or her personal values and the human behavior resulting from ethical judgments.

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