

MARRIAGE AND ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE: WOMEN'S SOCIAL STATUS IN JANE AUSTEN'S PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

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Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada Jeyn Ostinning “*Andisha va g’urur*” romanida ayollarning ijtimoiy mavqeining XIX asr boshlaridagi Angliyaning ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy va patriarxal tizimi doirasida qanday tasvirlangani tahlil qilinadi. Ayollar mulkka egalik qilish va moliyaviy mustaqillik huquqlaridan mahrum bo‘lgan davrda, nikoh ijtimoiy va iqtisodiy barqarorlikka erishishning asosiy vositasi sifatida namoyon bo‘ladi. Asarda muhim ayol qahramonlar — Elizabet Bennet, Sharlotta Lukas va missis Bennet obrazlari asosida sifatli matn tahlili olib borilib, nikohning bir tomondan cheklovchi institut, ikkinchi tomondan esa ayollar uchun cheklangan darajadagi ijtimoiy faollik maydoni sifatida qanday faoliyat yuritishi o‘rganiladi. Ijtimoiy-tarixiy, feministik va psixoanalitik yondashuvlarga tayangan holda, maqolada Ostinning kinoya, obraz yaratish va hikoya uslubi orqali gender tengsizligini tanqid qilishi yoritiladi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko‘rsatadiki, ayollarning mustaqilligi ijtimoiy me‘yorlar va iqtisodiy qaramlik bilan cheklangan bo‘lsa-da, yozuvchi axloqiy baholash, o‘zini anglash va psixologik yetuklikni ayollarning murosa asosidagi faolligiga eltuvchi yo‘llar sifatida taqdim etadi. Natijada, roman romantik syujet doirasidan chiqib, gender rollari, ijtimoiy tabaqalanish va ayollarning matonatini chuqur tanqid qiladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: nikoh, ayollarning ijtimoiy mavqei, iqtisodiy qaramlik, patriarxat, psixoanalitik tanqid, Jeyn Ostin

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматривается репрезентация социального статуса женщин в романе Джейн Остин «Гордость и предубеждение» в рамках социально-экономической и патриархальной системы Англии начала XIX века. В условиях, когда женщины были лишены права собственности и финансовой независимости, брак выступал основным средством достижения социальной и экономической стабильности. Посредством качественного текстуального анализа ключевых женских персонажей — Элизабет Беннет, Шарлотты Лукас и миссис Беннет — исследуется функционирование брака как ограничивающего института и одновременно как пространства ограниченной женской субъектности. Опираясь на социально-исторический, феминистский и психоаналитический подходы, статья демонстрирует, каким образом Остин критикует гендерное неравенство с помощью иронии, характеристики и нарративных приёмов. Результаты исследования показывают, что, несмотря на ограниченность женской автономии социальными нормами и экономической зависимостью, писательница представляет моральное суждение, самосознание

и психологическую зрелость как пути к согласованной форме женской агентности. Таким образом, роман выходит за рамки романтического сюжета и предлагает глубокую критику гендерных ролей, социальной иерархии и устойчивости женского характера.

Ключевые слова: брак, социальный статус женщин, экономическая зависимость, патриархат, психоаналитическая критика, Джейн Остин

Annotation: This article explores the representation of women's social status in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* within the socio-economic and patriarchal framework of early nineteenth-century England. At a time when women were denied property rights and financial independence, marriage functioned as a primary means of social and economic security. Through a qualitative textual analysis of key female characters—Elizabeth Bennet, Charlotte Lucas, and Mrs. Bennet—this study examines how marriage operates as both a restrictive institution and a space for limited female agency. Drawing on socio-historical, feminist, and psychoanalytic approaches, the article demonstrates how Austen critiques gender inequality through irony, characterization, and narrative technique. The findings suggest that although women's autonomy is constrained by social norms and economic dependence, Austen presents moral judgment, self-awareness, and psychological maturity as pathways to negotiated agency. The novel thus transcends its romantic plot to offer a sustained critique of gender roles, social hierarchy, and women's resilience.

Key words: marriage, women's social status, economic dependence, patriarchy, psychoanalytic criticism, Jane Austen

INTRODUCTION

In early nineteenth-century England, women's social identity and life prospects were inseparably linked to marriage and financial security. Legal restrictions such as entailment laws prevented women from inheriting property, rendering them economically dependent on male relatives. As a result, marriage became not merely a personal choice but a social obligation and economic necessity. Women's education, behavior, and social conduct were shaped by the expectation that their primary role was to secure a suitable husband.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* offers a nuanced literary exploration of these realities. While the novel is often celebrated as a romantic narrative, it simultaneously exposes the economic pressures and social anxieties surrounding marriage. Austen portrays women who must navigate restrictive norms while attempting to preserve dignity, moral integrity, and emotional fulfillment. This article argues that Austen presents marriage as a complex social institution—one that both reinforces patriarchal control and allows for limited female negotiation. Through her female characters, Austen critiques the social structures that confine women while suggesting the possibility of moral and psychological agency within those constraints.

Socio-Historical Context of Women's Status

The social structure of early nineteenth-century England was deeply patriarchal, positioning women as dependents within both family and society.

Property laws ensured that wealth and land passed through male inheritance, leaving daughters financially vulnerable. Families without male heirs, such as the Bennets, faced the constant threat of social decline, intensifying the pressure on women to marry advantageously.

Women's upbringing during this period focused on social accomplishments—music, drawing, polite conversation—rather than intellectual or professional development. Such skills were designed to enhance marital prospects rather than encourage independence. Scholars have noted that female propriety and submission were valued above critical thinking, reinforcing women's limited social roles. Austen reflects these realities while subtly challenging them, exposing the tension between individual desire and economic necessity. By situating *Pride and Prejudice* within this socio-historical framework, Austen highlights the structural inequalities that govern women's lives.

Marriage as a Social and Economic Institution

Marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* operates as a central mechanism through which women's social and economic status is determined. Rather than portraying marriage as purely romantic, Austen presents it as a strategic response to economic vulnerability. Charlotte Lucas exemplifies this pragmatic approach. Aware of her limited prospects and lack of fortune, Charlotte accepts Mr. Collins's proposal to secure financial stability and social respectability. Her decision illustrates how economic survival often outweighs emotional fulfillment for women.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Charlotte's choice reflects the ego's negotiation between personal desire and societal pressure. Her marriage is not an expression of happiness but a rational adaptation to restrictive circumstances. In contrast, Mrs. Bennet embodies the social obsession with marriage, viewing it as the sole measure of female success. Her relentless matchmaking reflects the anxieties of women who recognize marriage as their daughters' only safeguard against poverty.

Through these characters, Austen critiques a system that reduces women's value to marital outcomes, exposing the emotional and psychological costs of economic dependence.

Elizabeth Bennet: Moral Judgment and Female Agency

Elizabeth Bennet stands in contrast to the more conventional responses to marriage. Intelligent, self-reflective, and morally independent, Elizabeth resists marriages based solely on economic advantage. Her rejection of Mr. Collins represents a refusal to sacrifice personal dignity for financial security. Although her position is still constrained by social expectations, Elizabeth insists on respect, mutual understanding, and moral compatibility.

Elizabeth's psychological development throughout the novel reflects Austen's belief in self-awareness as a form of agency. From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, Elizabeth demonstrates a balanced ego, capable of mediating between emotional impulse and moral reasoning. Her transformation after reading Darcy's letter marks a moment of self-criticism and growth, as she reassesses her prejudices and assumptions.

Austen's use of free indirect discourse allows readers to engage directly with Elizabeth's thoughts, reinforcing her intellectual autonomy. Through Elizabeth, Austen suggests that while women cannot escape social limitations entirely, they can assert agency through judgment, integrity, and emotional maturity.

Austen's Narrative Technique and Social Critique

Austen's critique of women's social constraints is conveyed through subtle irony, characterization, and narrative voice. Irony exposes the absurdity of a society that evaluates women primarily through marriage, particularly in the exaggerated concerns of Mrs. Bennet. By presenting a range of female characters—pragmatic Charlotte, impulsive Lydia, anxious Mrs. Bennet, and reflective Elizabeth—Austen illustrates diverse strategies for navigating patriarchal norms.

Free indirect discourse plays a crucial role in Austen's artistic method, allowing insight into characters' psychological states while maintaining narrative distance. This technique enables Austen to critique social conventions without overt moralization. Humor and irony soften the critique, yet the underlying message remains clear: women are forced to negotiate identity and survival within restrictive systems.

Conclusion

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen presents marriage as the primary determinant of women's social and economic status in early nineteenth-century England. Through the contrasting experiences of Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth Bennet, and Mrs. Bennet, the novel reveals a spectrum of female responses to patriarchal constraint—from pragmatic acceptance to moral resistance. While economic dependence limits women's autonomy, Austen emphasizes the importance of judgment, self-awareness, and psychological growth as forms of negotiated agency.

By combining social realism with narrative sophistication, Austen transforms a domestic novel into a lasting critique of gender inequality. Her portrayal of marriage as a site of social negotiation rather than romantic fulfillment alone underscores the enduring relevance of *Pride and Prejudice* in discussions of women's rights, social identity, and moral resilience.

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