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## Money and marriage: Pride and Prejudice

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### Abstract

This review examines Jane Austen's "*Pride and Prejudice*," focusing on its portrayal of marriage and social dynamics in 19th-century England. Austen presents marriage not merely as a romantic endeavor but as a strategic alliance influenced by social and economic factors. The analysis explores how the characters, particularly Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, navigate these pressures, evolving from societal expectations to embrace love and mutual respect. Highlighting the role of financial stability in shaping relationships, the study draws on Vivien Jones's critique of how economic considerations impact marital decisions. Jones's analysis offers insight into the complex interplay between love, money, and societal norms in Austen's narrative. The review underscores how "*Pride and Prejudice*" remains relevant today by addressing universal themes of social class, economic pressures, and the quest for personal happiness within societal constraints. By contextualizing Austen's work within its historical backdrop, the review deepens our understanding of her critique of the social structures that limit individual choice, especially for women. This exploration of marriage, money, and class in Austen's novel invites contemporary readers to reflect on the evolution of these themes in today's society, where love and financial stability continue to intersect in complex ways.

**Keywords:** Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, marriage, social dynamics, financial stability, love, Vivien Jones, economic pressures

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### Introduction

*Pride and Prejudice* is a novel written in the early nineteenth century (1813). It depicts the English society of gentry (landowners) and their habits and attitudes towards life. The very opening of the novel points to marriage as its major theme. As women were subordinated to men in the nineteenth century, they could only use marriage as their means of social validation. (Mohammed, 2016) Jane Austen's novel "*Pride and Prejudice*," is regarded as one of the greatest works in English literature, continuing to influence readers and scholars to this day. The novel explores social relationships and marriage in 19th-century England, skillfully reflecting the customs and traditions that dominated society at that time. Marriage during this period was viewed as more than just a romantic relationship; it was seen as a social and strategic alliance with significant implications for financial stability and social status (Brownstein, 2001) <sup>[1]</sup>. Through her works, Austen masterfully addresses themes of marriage, social class, and financial considerations, offering an honest and transparent depiction of the reality of women's roles in that era and their limited position in society. In "*Pride and Prejudice*," Austen highlights the societal pressures that compel individuals to make marriage decisions based on material factors rather than emotions, a theme clearly illustrated through secondary characters like Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins, who choose to marry for financial security rather than love (Smith, 2004) <sup>[10]</sup>.

Among the primary characters in the novel, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy exemplify a relationship that evolves beyond social and financial considerations, ultimately founded on mutual understanding and respect. In her analysis titled "*Money and Marriage: Pride and Prejudice*," Vivien Jones explores how these elements intricately intertwine within the narrative, where Austen critiques societal norms that link marriage to financial stability (Jones, 1997) <sup>[3]</sup>.

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One of the key reasons "*Pride and Prejudice*" continues to captivate both readers and critics is its ability to offer sharp social criticism and address universal human issues that remain relevant today. Through Jones's analysis, we gain a deeper understanding of how the themes of money and marriage in the novel interact and influence the characters' decisions and the development of the plot. This literary review aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of Vivien Jones's research on the themes of money and marriage in Jane Austen's "*Pride and Prejudice*," focusing on how these factors shape relationships and character development in the novel. Additionally, the review will explore the social and historical context in which the work was written, offering deeper insights into Austen's portrayal of the challenges faced by the characters in their pursuit of balance between love and financial stability.

### Expanded Historical and Social Context of "*Pride and Prejudice*"

To understand the complex dynamics that Austen portrays in "*Pride and Prejudice*," it is essential to consider the historical and social context of late 18th and early 19th-century England. This era, known as the Georgian period, was characterized by significant social and economic disparities, with social class playing a crucial role in determining an individual's position, rights, and opportunities in life (Morrison, 2010) [7].

During this time, societal norms and traditions imposed severely limited roles on women, who lacked the right to own property or manage their wealth once married. Marriage was often the only viable means for women to achieve financial stability and social status, and therefore, marital decisions were made with careful consideration, focusing not just on affection but also on economic and social factors (Smith, 2004) [10]. Women who were unable to marry were often stigmatized and faced the prospect of poverty, relying on male relatives for support. These social conditions made marriage a purely strategic endeavor for many individuals. m

### Jane Austen's Critique of Social Norms

The novel was characterised by a very strong objective seriousness that became somewhat similar to the seriousness of Aristotle. For Aristotle, seriousness is one of the loftiest qualities a human can acquire, requiring a level of refined practical judgment that rules an individual in private and public life. While Aristotle's *Politics* is not known for its praise for the role of women's rationality in society, he argues in this text that women can develop the sort of judgment to be serious, and that through this quality they play an important role in the regime, particularly through the experience of married life, for "it can be argued that even within her restricted domestic sphere the woman demonstrates considerably more virtue than Aristotle's official doctrine allows". If romantic love is an important part of the human experience, and marriage is one manifestation of romantic love, understanding the ways that the human personality develops within the experiences of courtship and marriage is an important task. Moreover, understanding the ways that social structures can promote, or impede, the fostering of romantic love, is necessary to consider, especially if we take Aristotle's insight into the importance of marriage to regimes seriously. (Menchaca-Bagnulo, 2020) Jones argues that Austen uses marriage in the novel as a

vehicle to critique the prevailing social norms that link marriage to wealth and status. According to Jones, Austen's criticism is evident in her portrayal of characters like Lydia Bennet and Mr. Wickham, whose impulsive and passion-driven marriage without regard for the consequences illustrates the destructive potential of decisions made without careful thought in a society that values financial stability above all (Jones, 1997) [3].

### Conclusion on Vivien Jones's Perspective

Vivien Jones believes that through "*Pride and Prejudice*," Jane Austen offers a profound social critique of the economic and social practices associated with marriage in her era. Jones highlights how the novel goes beyond mere tales of love and marriage to underscore the importance of achieving a balance between emotion and rationality in human relationships. She argues that pursuing love alone or wealth alone can lead to adverse consequences. In this way, Jones encourages readers to gain a deeper understanding of the societal standards that prevailed during Austen's time and how these norms restricted women's lives, forcing them to make decisions that were not necessarily based on personal desires but on fulfilling societal expectations.

### Critical Perspectives and Modern Interpretations

Jane Austen's "*Pride and Prejudice*" continues to receive significant attention from scholars and literary critics, who analyse its social and economic themes from a perspective that transcends its original time. Many researchers agree that Austen employed marriage in the novel as a means to comment on Georgian British society, particularly regarding the role of economic factors in marital decisions. These perspectives help to understand the complexity of themes like money and marriage as presented by Austen.

### Exploring Scholarly Views on Money and Marriage

Researchers such as Katherine Searle argue that Austen used the theme of money as a tool to define the boundaries of social relationships between different classes, portraying marriage as a mechanism for maintaining wealth and social status. Searle adds that the relationships in the novel reflect Austen's critique of societal constraints that force women to seek financial security over romantic affection. Conversely, scholars like William Derby (2015) [2] offer a more modern interpretation, suggesting that Austen successfully provided an implicit critique of the British class system by emphasizing the interaction between different social strata. Derby believes that Austen's use of wealth as a determinant for marriage highlights her ability to examine the socio-economic structure of Georgian society through her narrative.

### Modern Interpretations of Changing Social Norms

In contemporary contexts, readers interpret the themes of money and marriage in "*Pride and Prejudice*" differently due to significant shifts in social norms. Marriage is no longer seen as a purely financial arrangement as it was in Austen's time; it is now more commonly based on love and emotional compatibility. This shift in modern readers' perspectives influences how they evaluate the relationships in the novel, where characters like Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins may appear less appealing or acceptable by today's standards. Modern critics like Rebecca Mead (2018) [5] argue that Austen's novel illustrates the intricate connection between

love and economics, even in contemporary settings, but the most significant change today is that love has become the primary focus, not money. Mead points out that while the novel's romantic relationships remain instructive examples of how economic factors influence decisions, modern society tends to view these issues through a more liberated and nuanced lens.

### Comparing Vivien Jones's Analysis with Contemporary Scholars

When comparing Vivien Jones's analysis to contemporary scholars, it is evident that Jones places considerable emphasis on the socio-economic dimensions of marriage and how these interact with social classes (Jones, 1997)<sup>[3]</sup>. In contrast, modern scholars often expand the discussion to include broader social critiques of gender roles and evolving cultural values. Jones highlights the strategic nature of marriage in the context of the novel, reflecting perspectives influenced by 19th-century conventions, whereas contemporary critics focus more on the role of love as a vital component in modern relationships.

Jones's perspective, juxtaposed with those of contemporary scholars, reveals that the themes of money and marriage remain subjects of ongoing debate and critique. These discussions demonstrate how these themes have evolved over time, shaped by changing cultural and societal values, making "*Pride and Prejudice*" relevant and insightful when viewed through the lens of 21st-century readers.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that Jane Austen, through her novel "*Pride and Prejudice*," utilized the themes of money and marriage as an effective means to present a sharp social critique of the prevailing norms and traditions of her society. The various characters and relationships in the novel reflect the complexities of marriage during that era, where financial stability and social status were seen as essential factors in marital decisions. Through comparisons of marriages such as those between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, and Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins, Austen highlights the tension between love-based marriages and those motivated by economic considerations.

Vivien Jones's analysis places significant emphasis on the interplay between economic and social factors in relationships, noting that, in Austen's time, marriage was more than just an emotional bond; it was a necessity for financial stability and the preservation of social standing. In contrast, contemporary critics view these themes through a different lens, where love and mutual respect have become the foundation of modern marriages, reflecting the cultural and societal changes over time. This analysis reaffirms that "*Pride and Prejudice*" is not merely a romantic novel but a work rich in social critique that remains relevant even in the modern era. By understanding the complexities of marital relationships depicted by Austen, we can gain insight into the challenges faced by women during that period and how society's views on marriage and relationships have evolved. It can be said that Jane Austen successfully offered a profound perspective that continues to inspire reflection and analysis, making "*Pride and Prejudice*" a timeless piece of literature that still provokes discussion and critical thought today.

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