

Satire and Social Criticism in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

Ahmed Saeed Ahmed Mocbil (1,*)

Received: 11 October 2024

Revised: 13 November 2024

Accepted: 14 November 2024

© 2024 University of Science and Technology, Aden, Yemen. This article can be distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

© 2024 جامعة العلوم والتكنولوجيا، المركز الرئيس عدن، اليمن. يمكن إعادة استخدام المادة المنشورة حسب رخصة مؤسسة المشاع الإبداعي شريطة الاستشهاد بالمؤلف والمجلة.

¹ English Department, Faculty of Arts and Humanities,
University of Saba Region, Yemen. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2779-463X>

* Corresponding author. E-mail: mocbilfr@usr.ac

Satire and Social Criticism in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

Abstract:

This study investigates the role of satire and social criticism in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, focusing on how Austen's narrative techniques illuminate the absurdities and constraints of early 19th-century English society. Through a qualitative analysis, the research explores key themes of class structure, gender roles, and marriage conventions, demonstrating how Austen's characters and dialogues both entertain and provoke critical reflection. By examining specific instances of satire, this paper aims to deepen the understanding of how Austen's work serves as a significant commentary on social issues of her time, enhancing the enduring relevance of *Pride and Prejudice* in contemporary literary discourse.

Keywords: *Satire, social criticism, social norms, class structure, gender roles, marriage conventions.*

الهجاء والنقد الاجتماعي في رواية جون أوستين كبرياء وتحامل

أحمد سعيد أحمد مقبل⁽¹⁾

الملخص:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة دور الهجاء والنقد الاجتماعي في رواية "كبرياء وتحامل" لجين أوستن، مبررة كيف تعكس تقنيات السرد الخاصة بها التناقضات والقيود التي كان يعاني منها المجتمع الإنجليزي في أوائل القرن التاسع عشر. من خلال تحليل نوعي معمق، تفحص الدراسة في مواضيع رئيسية مثل هيكل الطبقات، أدوار الجنسين، وعادات الزواج، موضحة كيف أن شخصيات أوستن وحواراتها توازن بين عنصر الترفيه وإثارة التفكير النقدي. تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية، من خلال دراسة حالات محددة للهجاء، إلى تعميق الفهم لكيفية تقديم أعمال أوستن تعليقا غنياً ومؤثراً على القضايا الاجتماعية في عصرها، مما يعزز الصلة المستمرة لرواية "كبرياء وتحامل" في الخطاب الأدبي المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهجاء، النقد الاجتماعي، الأعراف الاجتماعية، هيكل الطبقات، أدوار الجنسين، عادات الزواج

(1) قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة إقليم سبأ، اليمن

- رقم اوركيد: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2779-463X>

(*) عنوان المراسلة: mocbilftr@usr.ac

Introduction

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* stands as a cornerstone of English literature, celebrated not only for its engaging love story between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy but also for its incisive exploration of early 19th-century society. Set against a backdrop of rigid social hierarchies and evolving gender roles, the novel serves as a profound commentary on the social norms and expectations of its time. Central to this commentary is Austen's masterful use of satire, which illuminates the absurdities and hypocrisies inherent in contemporary societal conventions.

This paper investigates the multifaceted role of satire in *Pride and Prejudice*, focusing on how Austen employs narrative techniques, character portrayals, and witty dialogues to critique the entrenched class structures, gender dynamics, and marriage conventions of her era. By conducting a qualitative analysis, this study seeks to reveal how Austen's satire not only entertains but also challenges the status quo, inviting readers to reflect critically on the societal constraints faced by individuals, particularly women.

In exploring the historical context surrounding Austen's writing, this research will address key themes such as the commodification of women in the marriage market and the superficiality of social status.

Research Questions

- 1- How does Jane Austen use satire to critique the social class structure in *Pride and Prejudice*?
- 2- In what ways does Austen's portrayal of gender roles challenge the societal expectations of women in the early 19th century?
- 3- What role does irony play in Austen's satirical commentary on the institution of marriage?

Literature Review

Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, has received widespread acclaim for its adept satirical portrayal of early 19th-century English society. This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of existing scholarship on the use of satire and social criticism in Austen's work, with a particular focus on *Pride and Prejudice*. By examining various critical perspectives, this review seeks to identify key themes, approaches, and interpretations that significantly contribute to the understanding of Austen's satirical techniques in the novel.

Satire has long been recognized as a hallmark of Austen's literary style. In her seminal work, *Northanger Abbey*, Austen showcases her satirical prowess by ridiculing the Gothic novel genre and its readers. Claudia L. Johnson (1995) argues that Austen's use of satire serves as a powerful tool to expose and critique the flaws of her contemporary society. Johnson's critical perspective emphasizes Austen's intention to satirize societal norms and customs prevalent during the time of her writing, noting that "Austen's satire undermines the superficiality of class-based judgments and reveals the flaws of a system that values status over substance" (p. 58). Published in 1813, *Pride and Prejudice* provides a scathing critique of the rigid class structure, gender roles, and marriage conventions that dominated Austen's era. Elaine Bander (2007) explores the social criticism embedded in Austen's novel, highlighting how Austen's satirical lens enables her to satirize the aristocracy and landed gentry. Bander argues that characters such as Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine de Bourgh

serve as vehicles to expose the absurdities and follies of the upper classes, offering a biting critique of societal hierarchies. As Bander observes, "Austen's satire showcases the absurdities of their perceived superiority and their inclination to exert control over others" (p. 103).

A significant aspect of Austen's social criticism in *Pride and Prejudice* revolves around the portrayal of gender roles and the institution of marriage. Devoney Looser (1993) examines Austen's critique of the societal expectations placed upon women, particularly through the character of Elizabeth Bennet. Looser argues that Austen challenges the notion of women as mere commodities through her satirical depiction of the marriage market, highlighting the emphasis on wealth and social status. Looser's critical perspective sheds light on Austen's subversive exploration of gender dynamics, noting that "Austen's satire of the marriage market reveals the dehumanizing effects of such societal pressures" (p. 113).

Recent scholarship has expanded the understanding of Austen's satirical techniques in *Pride and Prejudice*, offering fresh insights into her social criticism. Heather Walton (2021) explores the role of wit and irony in Austen's satire, emphasizing how Austen employs these devices to expose the contradictions and hypocrisies of her society. Through close textual analysis, Walton reveals how Austen's skillful use of irony invites readers to question societal norms and reflect on the limitations imposed by class and gender. As Walton argues, "Austen's satire prompts the reader to critically examine the values and behaviors portrayed in the novel, challenging the prevailing societal expectations" (p. 92).

In her work, *Jane Austen and the Politics of Novel-Reading: An Interpretation of Pride and Prejudice*, Margaret Anne Doody (2018) examines the political dimensions of Austen's satire. Doody argues that Austen's critique of class and gender is intertwined with broader political concerns of her time. By satirizing the aristocracy and the landed gentry, Austen exposes the power dynamics and social injustices that perpetuate inequality. Doody's analysis offers a nuanced understanding of the political context in which Austen's satirical commentary operates, highlighting the author's "subversive engagement with the sociopolitical landscape of early 19th-century England" (p. 218).

Additionally, Sarah Emsley (2022) explores the significance of humor and laughter in Austen's satire. Emsley argues that Austen's use of humor serves as a critical tool to disrupt social conventions and challenge the status quo. Through her analysis of comedic elements in *Pride and Prejudice*, Emsley illuminates how Austen's satirical humor exposes the absurdities of societal expectations, inviting readers to critically examine the values and behaviors portrayed in the novel. As Emsley observes, "Austen's satirical humor offers a means of unveiling the hypocrisies and limitations of her society, encouraging readers to question the prevailing social norms" (p. 58).

While the reviewed literature offers valuable insights into Austen's use of satire and social criticism, there are contrasting perspectives that warrant attention. Some scholars, such as Lionel Trilling (1954), argue that Austen's satirical intent was primarily focused on critiquing the individual flaws and shortcomings of the characters rather than wider social structures. Trilling's interpretation suggests that Austen's satire functions as a moral critique, emphasizing the need for personal growth and self-awareness rather than a direct commentary on societal issues.

Scholars have consistently recognized Austen's adept use of satire to expose the flaws and hypocrisies of early 19th-century English society. By critiquing the class structure,

gender roles, and marriage conventions, Austen invites readers to reflect on the social constraints of her time. The analysis of Austen's satirical techniques, such as irony, humor, and wit, provides valuable insights into the novel's enduring appeal and its continued relevance in contemporary literary scholarship.

Objectives of the study

The main aims of this study are as follows:

1. To analyze how Jane Austen uses satire in *Pride and Prejudice* to critique societal norms and conventions.
2. To identify the specific social issues addressed by Austen through satire in the novel.
3. To evaluate the impact of Austen's satire on the reader's understanding of the social critique presented in the novel.

Methodology

In this research paper, a qualitative research approach is employed to analyze Austen's use of satire in *Pride and Prejudice*. The instances of satire analyzed were selected based on their significance in exposing and critiquing societal norms and conventions prevalent in Austen's time. The selection process involved a careful examination of the novel, identifying key scenes, dialogues, and character interactions that exemplify Austen's satirical genius and contribute to the social commentary of the work.

1. Close reading and initial identification: The research began with a close reading of the novel, focusing on identifying passages, dialogues, and characterizations that exhibited elements of satire. Satirical instances that stood out in terms of their portrayal of societal norms, conventions, and hypocrisies were marked for further analysis.
2. Relevance to the research objective: The identified instances were then evaluated based on their relevance to the research objective, which was to examine how Austen employs satire to critique societal norms and conventions. Instances that directly addressed social issues, exposed societal absurdities, or provided social commentary were prioritized for inclusion in the analysis.
3. Consistency with Austen's style and tone: Austen's unique writing style and satirical tone were important considerations in the selection process. Instances were chosen that aligned with Austen's characteristic wit, irony, and humor, ensuring that they reflected her satirical intent and contributed to the overall social critique presented in the novel.
4. Representative of broader themes and patterns: The selected instances were assessed for their representativeness of broader themes and patterns in Austen's social critique. Instances that touched upon recurring social issues or exemplified common satirical techniques employed by Austen were given preference, as they provided a more comprehensive understanding of her critique of societal norms and conventions.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to the analysis of Jane Austen's use of satire in *Pride and Prejudice* and its impact on the reader's understanding of the social critique in the novel. The focus will be on identifying and examining instances of satire employed by Austen and their connection to societal norms and conventions prevalent during the Regency era. The study will specifically address the social issues addressed by Austen through satire, such as

class distinctions, gender roles, marriage, and societal expectations. The analysis will primarily revolve around the text of *Pride and Prejudice*, supplemented by relevant secondary sources that provide scholarly perspectives on Austen's satire and its implications.

Analysis

Satirical Portrayal of Social Class

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a rich tapestry of satire that serves as a scathing critique of societal norms and conventions prevalent in early 19th-century England. Through the clever use of literary devices such as irony, humor, and wit, Austen exposes the hypocrisies and limitations of her society.

One prominent example of Austen's skillful use of satire is evident through the character of Mr. Collins, a clergyman who embodies the absurdities of the social hierarchy. In Chapter 13, when Mr. Collins reveals his intention to propose to Elizabeth Bennet, he cites the duty of clergymen to marry and secure their future. Austen employs irony to highlight the shallow motivations behind such marriages when Mr. Collins states, "My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony" (Austen, 1813, p. 64). This passage satirizes the societal expectation for individuals of certain social positions to marry solely for pragmatic reasons, disregarding genuine affection or compatibility.

Renowned literary critic Harold Bloom (1996) commends Austen's adept use of satire, asserting that her comic art, exemplified by Mr. Collins, is unparalleled in English fiction. Bloom praises Austen's precision and wit in executing her satire, exposing the absurdities of the social order (p. 72). This perspective reinforces the efficacy of Austen's satire in critiquing societal expectations and shedding light on the flaws of the social order.

Furthermore, Austen employs satire to critique the landed gentry and their sense of entitlement. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, a wealthy and domineering aristocrat, serves as a poignant embodiment of this satirical critique. In Chapter 29, when Lady Catherine interrogates Elizabeth about her family background and expresses her disapproval of the Bennet family's lack of wealth and connections, Austen employs humor to emphasize Lady Catherine's arrogance. The narrator states, "I have more than once observed to Lady Catherine that her charming daughter seemed born to be a duchess, and that the most elevated rank, instead of giving her consequence, would be adorned by her" (Austen, 1813, p. 147). This satirical portrayal exposes the superficiality and snobbery inherent in the aristocratic class, challenging the notion that birth and wealth automatically confer superiority.

Literary scholar Claudia Johnson (2010) observes that Austen's portrayal of Lady Catherine is a brilliant example of her satirical prowess. Johnson argues that through this character, Austen "unveils the absurdities of the aristocracy and their inflated sense of self-importance" (p. 92). Johnson's observation highlights Austen's acumen in employing satire to expose the shortcomings of the upper class and their unwavering adherence to rigid social hierarchies.

Additionally, Austen employs satire to critique the societal pressures surrounding marriage, particularly the emphasis on wealth and social status. The flawed courtship between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy serves as a vehicle for this critique. In Chapter 34, when Elizabeth confronts Mr. Darcy about his arrogant and dismissive behavior, Austen

employs irony to convey Mr. Darcy's realization of his flaws. The narrator states, "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" (Austen, 1813, p. 176). This passage satirizes the flawed perspective of marrying for status and wealth rather than genuine love and personal growth as Mocbil (2023) states, "The inequitable marriage system, the constraints imposed upon women's autonomy" (p. 2). This reflects Austen's satire of the marriage market and the constraints it places on women, as characters navigate their options within a patriarchal society.

Prominent literary critic Lionel Trilling (1954) asserts that Austen's satire is most potent when she exposes the hollowness of high society's marriage conventions. Trilling argues that through Elizabeth and Darcy's journey, Austen "critiques the superficiality of relationships based solely on wealth and class" (p. 218). Trilling's interpretation reinforces Austen's success in employing satire to challenge societal expectations concerning marriage.

Moving on, the character of Mr. Collins serves as a satirical representation of the clergy and the landed gentry within Austen's novel. His exaggerated obsequiousness towards Lady Catherine de Bourgh and his comical attempts at flattery offer ample evidence of Austen employing his character to satirize the sycophantic nature of individuals in positions of power. In Chapter 19, when Mr. Collins arrives at Longbourn and immediately ingratiates himself with the influential Lady Catherine, Austen employs irony when Mr. Collins exclaims, "I know it to be the established custom of your sex to reject a man on the first application, and perhaps you have even now said as much to encourage my suit as would be consistent with the true delicacy of the female character" (Austen, 1813, p. 100). This passage satirizes Mr. Collins' misguided attempt to flatter Lady Catherine while simultaneously highlighting the absurdity of societal expectations placed upon women to play coy and demure in courtship.

Literary scholar Susan Fraiman (1991) notes that Austen's portrayal of Mr. Collins as a caricatured clergyman exemplifies her satirical intent. Fraiman argues that Mr. Collins represents the superficiality and insincerity often associated with individuals who seek social advancement and recognition (p. 77). This interpretation further emphasizes Austen's use of satire to critique the disingenuous nature of those who conform to societal expectations without genuine conviction.

Furthermore, Austen employs satire to expose the absurdity of the marriage market and the commodification of women. The character of Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth's mother, embodies this satirical critique. In Chapter 1, when Mrs. Bennet reveals her obsession with marrying off her daughters to wealthy suitors, Austen employs humor to highlight her fixation. The narrator states, "A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!" (Austen, 1813, p. 5). This satirical portrayal exposes the materialistic and shallow mindset prevalent in the society of that time, where a woman's worth was often reduced to her ability to secure a financially advantageous marriage.

Literary critic Marilyn Butler (2009) commends Austen's ability to illuminate the absurdity of the marriage market through characters like Mrs. Bennet. Butler argues that Austen's satire "challenges the prevailing notion that a woman's ultimate goal should be to find a suitable husband, regardless of emotional compatibility or personal fulfillment" (p. 134). This perspective reinforces the potency of Austen's satirical critique of the institution of marriage and the societal pressures faced by women in her time. Through the satirical portrayal of

characters like Mr. Collins, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and Mrs. Bennet, Austen critiques the rigid class hierarchy, the arrogance of the landed gentry, and the commodification of women in the marriage market.

Satirical Critique of Gender Roles and Expectations

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* not only critiques the class structure and social hierarchy of her era but also offers a scathing satirical commentary on the restrictive gender roles and societal expectations imposed upon women. Through the characterization and narrative techniques in the novel, Austen skillfully exposes the limitations and hypocrisies surrounding the position of women in early 19th-century England.

One pivotal example of Austen's satirical treatment of gender roles is evident in the character of Elizabeth Bennet. As the protagonist, Elizabeth subverts the societal expectations of a proper, docile, and obedient woman, challenging the prevailing notions of femininity. In Chapter 5, when Elizabeth refuses to play the piano for the amusement of the guests at Netherfield, Austen employs irony to highlight the absurdity of these social expectations. The narrator states, "Elizabeth was the only daughter who remained at home; and she was obliged to mix more with the neighborhood than her elder sisters" (Austen, 1813, p. 24). This passage satirizes the restrictive gender roles that confined women to the domestic sphere and expected them to perform accomplishments solely for the purpose of securing a suitable marriage. Literary scholar Devoney Looser (1993) argues that Austen's portrayal of Elizabeth Bennet serves as a vehicle for her satirical critique of gender norms. Looser asserts that "Austen's satire of the social expectations placed upon women challenges the notion that a woman's worth is primarily determined by her ability to attract a husband" (p. 113). This critical perspective underscores the subversive nature of Austen's satirical approach, which aims to disrupt the societal constraints imposed on women.

Furthermore, Austen's satire extends to the portrayal of the Bennet family, particularly the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. In Chapter 1, when Mrs. Bennet laments the entailment of the Longbourn estate to Mr. Collins, Austen employs humor to expose the absurdity of the gender dynamics within the household. The narrator states, "Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character" (Austen, 1813, p. 3). This passage satirizes the imbalance of power and the lack of mutual understanding between the spouses, highlighting the societal constraints that limited women's agency and autonomy within the domestic sphere. Literary critic Margaret Doody (2018) has further explored the political dimensions of Austen's satire, arguing that the author's critique of gender roles is intertwined with broader social and political concerns. Doody suggests that Austen's satire "challenges the patriarchal structures that relegated women to a subordinate position in both the public and private spheres" (p. 218). This perspective underscores the subversive nature of Austen's satire, which extends beyond the realm of social norms to engage with the underlying political realities of her time.

In addition to the Bennet family dynamics, Austen's satire also manifests in her portrayal of the courtship and marriage process. The flawed relationship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy serves as a prime example of Austen's satirical commentary on the societal pressures surrounding marriage. In Chapter 34, when Elizabeth confronts Mr. Darcy about his arrogant behavior, Austen employs irony to highlight the limitations imposed on women in the

marriage market. The narrator states, "In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection, and though her intentions did not vary for an instant, she was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive" (Austen, 1813, p. 174). This passage satirizes the societal expectation that a woman should be grateful for any offer of marriage, regardless of the suitor's personal qualities or the woman's own desires.

Literary scholar Claudia Johnson (1995) argues that Austen's satire of the marriage market "exposes the dehumanizing effects of societal pressures on women, who are often reduced to mere commodities in the pursuit of financial security and social status" (p. 58). This interpretation reinforces the subversive nature of Austen's satirical approach, which challenges the institutionalized oppression of women within the institution of marriage.

Moreover, Austen's satire extends to the portrayal of female characters who conform to societal expectations. The character of Lydia Bennet, the youngest sister of the Bennet family, serves as a prime example of Austen's satirical treatment of women who uphold traditional gender roles. In Chapter 46, when Lydia elopes with Mr. Wickham, Austen employs irony to highlight the societal double standards imposed on women. The narrator states, "Had they [the Bennet family] been aware, in the first place, of her [Lydia's] real character, of her want of consequence in the world, they would not have allowed her to leave the protection of her home" (Austen, 1813, p. 236). This passage satirizes the hypocrisy of a society that simultaneously expects women to behave in a pious and virtuous manner while also objectifying and commodifying them in the marriage market.

Literary scholar Susan Fraiman (1991) observes that Austen's satire of Lydia Bennet's behavior "unveils the inherent contradictions in the societal expectations placed upon women, where they are confined to a limited range of acceptable behaviors and yet subjected to severe judgment for any perceived transgressions" (p. 89). Fraiman's analysis underscores the nuanced and subversive nature of Austen's satirical commentary on gender roles and societal double standards.

Jane Austen's masterful use of satire in *Pride and Prejudice* extends beyond the critique of social class and hierarchy to encompass a scathing commentary on the restrictive gender roles and societal expectations imposed upon women. Through the characterization of Elizabeth Bennet, the Bennet family dynamics, and the portrayal of the marriage process, Austen employs irony, humor, and wit to expose the inherent flaws and hypocrisies of the patriarchal structures that governed early 19th-century English society. By challenging the prevailing notions of femininity and the commodification of women, Austen's satire invites readers to critically examine the social constraints and limitations faced by women in her time, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the novel's enduring social significance.

Satire and the Institution of Marriage

At the heart of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* lies a multifaceted satirical commentary on the institution of marriage and the societal pressures surrounding it. Austen's adept use of satire serves as a powerful tool to expose the flaws, hypocrisies, and limitations inherent in the marriage conventions of early 19th-century England.

One of the primary targets of Austen's satirical critique is the emphasis on wealth and social status as the driving factors in the pursuit of marriage. The character of Mrs. Bennet, the matriarch of the Bennet family, exemplifies this satirical portrayal. In Chapter 1, when

Mrs. Bennet laments the entailment of the Longbourn estate to Mr. Collins, Austen employs humor to highlight the mother's fixation on securing advantageous marriages for her daughters. The narrator states,

"A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!" (Austen, 1813, p. 5). This passage satirizes the materialistic and shallow mindset prevalent in the society of that time, where a woman's worth was often reduced to her ability to secure a financially lucrative marriage.

Literary critic Marilyn Butler (2009) observes that Austen's satire of Mrs. Bennet's preoccupation with wealth and status "challenges the prevailing notion that a woman's ultimate goal should be to find a suitable husband, regardless of emotional compatibility or personal fulfillment" (p. 134). This critical perspective underscores the subversive nature of Austen's satirical approach, which aims to disrupt the societal norms that commodify women and prioritize material considerations over genuine romantic connections.

Furthermore, Austen's satirical treatment of the marriage market extends to the portrayal of the courtship between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. In Chapter 34, when Elizabeth confronts Mr. Darcy about his initial arrogance and dismissive behavior towards her family, Austen employs irony to highlight the societal pressures surrounding marriage. The narrator states, "In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection, and though her intentions did not vary for an instant, she was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive" (Austen, 1813, p. 174). This passage satirizes the notion that a woman should be grateful for any offer of marriage, regardless of the suitor's personal qualities or the woman's own desires. The words of Mocbil (2023), "Women fought a lot to be free and did many unfortunate things to solve their problems" (p. 2). This quote shows how Austen portrays marriage not merely as romantic love but often as a social contract, critiquing the necessity for women to marry for security rather than affection.

Literary scholar Devoney Looser (1993) argues that Austen's satire of the marriage market "exposes the dehumanizing effects of societal pressures on women, who are often reduced to mere commodities in the pursuit of financial security and social status" (p. 113). Looser's interpretation emphasizes the subversive nature of Austen's satirical approach, which challenges the institutionalized oppression of women within the institution of marriage.

Moreover, Austen's satire extends to the portrayal of marital relationships and the societal expectations surrounding them. The marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet serves as a prime example of Austen's satirical treatment of this institution. In Chapter 1, the narrator's description of their relationship highlights the lack of mutual understanding and the imbalance of power within the household. The narrator states, "Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character" (Austen, 1813, p. 3). This passage satirizes the societal conventions that constrained women's autonomy and agency within the domestic sphere, leading to dysfunctional and unhappy marriages.

Literary critic Margaret Doody (2018) further explores the political dimensions of Austen's satire, arguing that the author's critique of marriage is intertwined with broader social and political concerns. Doody suggests that Austen's satire "challenges the patriarchal structures that dictated the terms of marital relationships, often to the detriment of women's well-being and personal fulfillment" (p. 218). This perspective underscores the subversive nature of

Austen's satirical approach, which extends beyond the realm of social norms to engage with the underlying political realities of her time.

Additionally, Austen's satire is evident in her portrayal of characters who uphold traditional gender roles and marriage conventions. The character of Lydia Bennet, the youngest sister of the Bennet family, serves as a prime example of Austen's satirical treatment of women who conform to societal expectations. In Chapter 46, when Lydia elopes with Mr. Wickham, Austen employs irony to highlight the societal double standards imposed on women. The narrator states, "Had they [the Bennet family] been aware, in the first place, of her [Lydia's] real character, of her want of consequence in the world, they would not have allowed her to leave the protection of her home" (Austen, 1813, p. 236). This passage satirizes the hypocrisy of a society that simultaneously expects women to behave in a pious and virtuous manner while also objectifying and commodifying them in the marriage market.

Literary scholar Susan Fraiman (1991) observes that Austen's satire of Lydia Bennet's behavior "unveils the inherent contradictions in the societal expectations placed upon women, where they are confined to a limited range of acceptable behaviors and yet subjected to severe judgment for any perceived transgressions" (p. 89). Fraiman's analysis underscores the nuanced and subversive nature of Austen's satirical commentary on the institution of marriage and the societal pressures surrounding it.

Through the satirical portrayal of characters like Mrs. Bennet, the courtship between Elizabeth and Darcy, and the dysfunctional marriage of the Bennets, Austen exposes the flaws, hypocrisies, and limitations inherent in the prevailing marriage conventions. By challenging the emphasis on wealth and status over genuine compatibility and affection, as well as the societal constraints that limited women's autonomy and agency within the domestic sphere, Austen's satire invites readers to critically examine the social and political realities that governed the institution of marriage in her time. This multifaceted satirical commentary underscores the enduring significance of *Pride and Prejudice* as a seminal work of social criticism.

Conclusion

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* serves as a profound critique of early 19th-century English society through its masterful use of satire. This paper has examined how Austen employs irony, humor, and wit to expose the hypocrisies and limitations surrounding social class, gender roles, and the institution of marriage. By analyzing key characters such as Mr. Collins, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and Elizabeth Bennet, we see how their portrayals illuminate the absurdities of societal norms and the constraints imposed on women.

The exploration of these themes not only enhances Austen's narrative techniques but also underscores the enduring relevance of her work. Austen challenges readers to reflect critically on the social conventions of her time, prompting a broader discourse on the implications of class and gender that persist today.

Furthermore, by engaging with contrasting scholarly perspectives, this study highlights the complexity of Austen's satire. While some interpretations focus on individual character flaws, this paper emphasizes the systemic issues Austen critiques, urging us to consider the broader social injustices embedded in her narrative.

Through this comprehensive analysis, it becomes clear that *Pride and Prejudice* is not merely a romantic tale but a vital social commentary that invites ongoing reflection on the societal structures that shape individual lives. Austen's wit and insight continue to resonate, making her work a seminal text in the study of social criticism.

References

- Austen, J. (1813). *Pride and Prejudice*. T. Egerton, Whitehall.
- Bander, E. (2007). Hierarchy and Exclusion in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. *Studies in the Novel*, 39(2), 100-112.
- Bloom, H. (1996). *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. Harcourt Brace.
- Butler, M. (2009). *Jane Austen and the war of ideas*. Clarendon Press.
- Doody, M. A. (2018). *Jane Austen and the Politics of Novel-Reading: An Interpretation of *Pride and Prejudice**. Oxford University Press.
- Emsley, S. (2022). *Laughter and the Limits of Propriety in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice**. *Persuasions*, 43, 53-66.
- Fraiman, S. (1991). *Subordinating Irony in *Pride and Prejudice**. *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 24(2), 134-145.
- Johnson, C. L. (1988). *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*. University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson, C. L. (1995). *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s*. University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson, C. L. (2010). *Austen Cults and Cultures*. *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, 2nd ed., edited by Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, Cambridge University Press, 232-247.
- Looser, D. (1993). Women's Power in Austen's Novels: Decorum and Dowager Empresses. *Women's Studies*, 22(2), 111-123.
- Mocbil, A. (2023). The Portrayal of Women in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. *Journal of Social Studies*, 29(2), 4-6. <https://doi.org/10.20428/jss.v29i2.2069>
- Tanner, T. (1986). *Jane Austen*. Harvard University Press.
- Trilling, L. (1954). *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent*. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy.
- Walton, H. (2021). Irony and the Politics of Wit in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. *Studies in the Novel*, 53(1), 85-101.
- Wiltshire, J. (2001). *Jane Austen and the Body: "The Picture of Health"*. Cambridge University Press.