



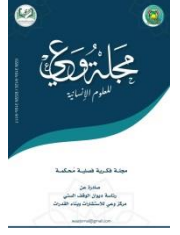
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Social Hypocrisy and Marriage in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract

This paper explores the pervasive theme of social hypocrisy within Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), specifically focusing on the intersection of marriage and the Regency class hierarchy. The central problem addressed is the significant gap between the public performance of propriety and the private reality of economic greed that dominated the nineteenth-century marriage market. The study aims to analyze the manifested forms of social pretense and compare various marital unions to reveal the underlying social values of the era. Furthermore, it investigates how the protagonists, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, navigate these rigid expectations to achieve a relationship based on intellectual equality. The findings indicate that Austen utilizes sharp irony and satire to critique a society that prioritizes rank over individual merit. Ultimately, the study concludes that true happiness and social progress are only achievable when individuals prioritize moral sincerity and mutual respect over material wealth and class boundaries, establishing integrity as the ultimate antidote to systemic hypocrisy.

Introduction

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is widely regarded as one of the most significant works of the nineteenth century. It provides an intricate look into the social fabric of Regency England, a period where the landed gentry lived under a strict set of rules and expectations. In this era, marriage was far more than a personal union based on affection; it was a fundamental social and economic transaction. Because women had limited rights to inherit property or pursue careers, securing a husband with a stable income was a matter of survival. As Mandal (2022) observes, the rigid socio-economic structures of the nineteenth century prioritized the survival of the family estate over individual freedom. Based on this historical reality, the novel provides a realistic representation of how economic necessity dictated the social landscape for the English gentry.

Austen (1813/2003) famously introduces this reality by stating that a wealthy man is always considered to be in want of a wife by the surrounding families. This highlights a society where the needs of the community and the preservation of wealth often outweighed the desires of the individual. Consequently, this environment fostered a culture of social hypocrisy. People often performed a version of themselves that was polite and virtuous in public, while their private motives remained focused on social climbing and financial gain (Srivastava, 2025). According to Tanner (1986), the novel exposes the tension between these outward manners and the inner moral character of the individuals navigating this marriage market.

The significance of this study lies in its exploration of how Austen uses wit and irony to challenge the status quo. By using sharp irony, she critiques a society that values rank over individual character. This research helps clarify the relationship between emotional sincerity and social duty. As Gao (2020) suggests, analyzing the marriage market in the novel provides a deeper understanding of female agency and economic necessity. These themes remain relevant because the conflict between maintaining a social image and being true to one's values is a common human experience.

Despite the extensive criticism available, many readings focus on romance while overlooking the systemic hypocrisy that drives the plot. The central problem is the gap between the public performance of propriety and the private reality of greed. Characters like Mr. Collins represent the height of social pretense, acting out of duty while being self-serving. As noted by Duckworth (1994), marriage serves as the stage where this hypocrisy is revealed. This research aims to show how Austen uses these conflicting choices to highlight the moral failures of the class system (Sams, 2025).

To address the central problem of this research and explore the gap between social appearance and moral reality, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does Austen portray social hypocrisy through her depiction of marriage and class?
2. What do different types of marriages in the novel reveal about the social values of Austen's society?

3. How does Elizabeth Bennet's relationship challenge or conform to these social expectations?

The primary objectives of this study are directly aligned with the research questions mentioned above:

1. To analyze the specific ways social hypocrisy is manifested in nineteenth-century marriage and class practices.
2. To examine and compare the various marital unions in the novel to determine the social values they reveal about Regency society.
3. To investigate how Elizabeth Bennet's relationship serves to either challenge or conform to the established social expectations of her time.

This study adopts a qualitative methodology based on a Socio-Historical Approach to literary analysis. This theoretical framework is used to examine how the specific social and economic conditions of Regency England—such as land ownership, class hierarchy, and the laws of inheritance—directly influence the characters' behavior and choices.

The research relies on a close reading of Jane Austen's original text to identify instances of irony and social critique. This textual analysis is then integrated with the socio-historical framework in the practical chapters to demonstrate the contrast between sincere emotions and hypocritical social performances. Specifically, the analysis in the practical chapters will evaluate how the characters navigate the rigid social "performance" required by their historical era to achieve personal integrity or financial security.

This research is specifically focused on the novel *Pride and Prejudice* and does not attempt to cover Austen's entire body of work. The scope is limited to the themes of marriage, class hierarchy, and social hypocrisy. While the paper acknowledges the historical setting, it will not go into an in-depth political or economic history of the early 1800s beyond what is necessary to understand the characters' motivations.

1. Section One: Society, Class, and the Institution of Marriage

This section establishes the socio-historical framework of Jane Austen's era to demonstrate how the rigid structures of the nineteenth century fostered a culture of social hypocrisy. By examining the intersection of class hierarchy, economic necessity, and the legal limitations placed on women, this section illustrates that marriage was rarely a private matter of the heart. Instead, it served as a public performance designed to maintain the landed gentry's status, often at the expense of moral sincerity and personal happiness.

1.1. Overview of Early Nineteenth-Century English Society

Society in *Pride and Prejudice* was built on a rigid hierarchy that defined the lives of the landed gentry, where status was determined by land ownership rather than merit. This era, known as the Regency Period, was characterized by a strict code of etiquette that often served to mask the true financial motives of the upper class. Austen introduces this theme in the novel's famous opening sentence: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen, 1813/2003, p. 5). By using the word "possession," Austen ironically suggests that society views marriage as a financial

acquisition rather than a moral union, establishing the foundation of social hypocrisy where people pretend to care about "truth" while focusing on "fortune." According to Williams (1973), this system was a closed economic circle where wealth remained within specific families to ensure their power.

This social structure prioritized public reputation over individual integrity, forcing characters to judge others based on superficial labels. When Mr. Darcy first appears at the Meryton ball, the community's reaction is based entirely on his wealth and appearance: "his character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world" (Austen, 1813/2003, p. 12). This immediate "decision" about his character proves that Regency society operated on a hypocritical system of snap judgments, where a person's public "image" was fixed by the community before any true acquaintance occurred. Gupta (2018) explains that these social realities forced characters to navigate a world where public reputation was the only currency of value.

The "performance" of manners was a central tool used by the elite to maintain their distance from those they considered inferior. The Bingley sisters exemplify this, as they are described as "fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased... but proud and conceited" (Austen, 1813/2003, p. 15). Austen uses the sisters to show that "good manners" were often a hypocritical mask; they were only polite when it served their social interests, proving that etiquette was a weapon of elitism rather than a sign of true virtue. Mandal (2022) observes that etiquette in this period functioned as a strategic tool to maintain class distance while appearing morally superior.

1.2. The Social and Economic Pressures on Women to Marry

Women in the Regency period faced extreme economic pressure due to the laws of entailment, which prevented them from inheriting family property and made marriage their only means of survival. This legal reality turned marriage into a "career" or a transaction, forcing women to adopt a mask of romantic interest to secure their financial futures. Austen highlights this when discussing the Bennet daughters: "Marriage had always been her [Mrs. Bennet's] object; it was the only provision for handsome women of small fortune" (Austen, 1813, p. 120). This "object" of marriage highlights the systemic hypocrisy of a society that expected women to be sentimental while simultaneously treating them as marketable commodities. Chen (2024) emphasizes that in such an environment, marriage was a calculated survival strategy rather than a romantic choice.

Charlotte Lucas serves as the most honest representation of how economic desperation leads to social hypocrisy. When she accepts the foolish Mr. Collins, she justifies her decision by stating: "I am not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only for a comfortable home" (Austen, 1813, p. 123). Charlotte's admission reveals the gap between the public ideal of a "happy marriage" and the private reality of financial necessity; she is forced to live a hypocritical life, performing the role of a wife for a man she does not respect. Soni (2023) argues that this highlights a "moral vacuum" where the pressure for financial security consistently outweighs personal feelings and integrity.

The expectation for women to be "accomplished" was another layer of social pretense designed to increase their value in the marriage market. Caroline Bingley lists the

requirements for an accomplished woman, claiming she must have a "thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages" (Austen, 1813, p. 39). This focus on "knowledge" of the arts was often a hypocritical display; these skills were not for the woman's personal growth, but to create a "refined" appearance that would attract a wealthy husband. Hossain (2023) notes that this "performance of accomplishment" was a form of social currency used to hide the purely transactional nature of most marital negotiations.

1.3. Marriage as a Reflection of Class Hierarchy and Social Mobility

Marriage functioned as a "gatekeeping" mechanism to protect the boundaries of the class system and prevent social mobility. The upper class used the language of "propriety" and "duty" to mask their desire to keep wealth within their own circles. Mr. Collins' reasons for marrying exemplify this performative duty, as he states: "it is a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances... to set the example of matrimony in his parish" (Austen, 1813, p. 103). By calling marriage a "right thing" and an "example," Mr. Collins uses religious and social language to mask his personal ambition and his desire to please Lady Catherine. Uddin (2021) argues that the marriage market was a site of constant class conflict where families used "politeness" to hide their true prejudices.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh represents the height of class-based hypocrisy, as she uses her high status to bully others while claiming to protect "honor." During her confrontation with Elizabeth, she sneers: "He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal" (Austen, 1813, p. 338). While Lady Catherine speaks of "equality" in rank, her behavior is arrogant and rude, proving that she uses social standards as a hypocritical tool to

maintain power over those she considers inferior. Zarei (2021) suggests that Austen uses these tensions to reveal the hypocrisy of a society that claims to value virtue but values only rank and title.

Finally, the desperate social climbing of the middle class, seen in Mrs. Bennet, mirrors the hypocrisy of the elite. Mrs. Bennet's only goal is the outward "success" of her daughters' marriages, even if the marriages are morally questionable. When Lydia elopes with the villainous Wickham, Mrs. Bennet's only concern is the public display of the wedding: "To be at Pemberley again... and to see my dear Lydia married at last!" (Austen, 1813, p. 301). Mrs. Bennet ignores the lack of virtue in the match because the public title of "marriage" is all that matters to her, proving that for her, the public image of success is more important than the private reality of integrity. Srivastava (2025) concludes that this focus on "outward rewards" proves that the institution of marriage was often more about social mobility than sincerity.

2. Section Two: Austen's Critique of Social Hypocrisy

This section moves beyond the socio-economic framework established in the first part to provide a practical analysis of the narrative techniques Austen employs to unmask the pervasive hypocrisy of Regency society. By biting satire and irony, Austen reveals that individual characters often use the mask of "propriety" to hide their selfish and ambitious motives. By examining the satirical portraits of the clergy, the nobility, and the performative nature of middle-class social climbing, this section demonstrates how the social performance of virtue often conceals a profound lack of true moral foundation.

2.1. Satirical Representation of Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine

Jane Austen uses the character of Mr. Collins to satirize the hypocrisy inherent in the religious and social institutions of her time. Although Mr. Collins is a clergyman, his primary concern is not spiritual guidance, but the public performance of his social duties to secure his own financial position. This is most evident in his mechanical approach to marriage, as he explains his first motive for proposing to Elizabeth: "it is a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances... to set the example of matrimony in his parish" (Austen, 1813/2003, p. 103). This statement exposes his deep hypocrisy; he views the sacred union of marriage as a mere "example" or social duty performed to satisfy his rank rather than a matter of sincere affection. According to Tanner (1986), Mr. Collins represents the hollow performance of morality where etiquette is completely separated from true spiritual values.

The character of Lady Catherine de Bourgh serves as a primary vehicle for Austen's critique of the aristocratic class and their performative arrogance. She believes that her high rank gives her the right to intrude into the lives of others, yet her behavior consistently lacks the true grace and kindness that should accompany noble status. During her confrontation with Elizabeth, she demands: "I will not be interrupted. Hear me in silence. My daughter and my nephew are formed for each other" (Austen, 1813/2003, p. 336). Lady Catherine's demand for "silence" and her attempt to dictate the domestic lives of others prove that her "noble manners" are a hypocritical facade used to protect her family's wealth at the cost of individual dignity. Johnson (1988) argues that Lady Catherine represents the arrogance of the elite, using social rules as a tool to maintain power over those she considers inferior.

The relationship between Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine reveals a "double layer" of social hypocrisy through the act of sycophancy and flattery. Mr. Collins' constant praise of his patroness is a calculated effort to maintain his financial security through a mask of extreme humility and gratitude. He describes Lady Catherine as being "all affability and condescension," yet the reader sees her only as a rude and domineering woman (Austen, 1813, p. 65). The irony in the word "condescension" highlights the hypocrisy of the class system; what Mr. Collins performs as respect is a reaction to Lady Catherine's arrogance, proving that their social interaction is built on mutual pretense. As Zarei (2021) observes, this dynamic shows how the social hierarchy encourages individuals to adopt hypocritical masks of obedience to secure their own material advancement.

2.2. The Contrast Between True Affection and Materialistic Marriage

Austen highlights social hypocrisy by contrasting marriages based on financial survival with those founded on genuine emotion, exposing the hollowness of transactional unions. The marriage of Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins is a tragic example of a union forced by economic necessity, where the public image of a "happy home" hides a private reality of absolute indifference. Charlotte justifies her cold decision by stating: "considering Mr. Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast" (Austen, 1813/2003, p. 123). Charlotte's rejection of romance is a calculated survival tactic that forces her into a lifelong social performance, pretending to be a satisfied wife in what is essentially a financial contract.

Recent research by Hossain (2023) emphasizes that such choices reflect a response to a hypocritical society that offers women no other path to security.

This materialistic approach to marriage is further revealed through the deceptive behavior of the Bingley sisters, who use "politeness" to mask their class-based cruelty. They pretend to be Jane Bennet's friends while secretly plotting to destroy her happiness because of her family's lack of wealthy "connections." Austen unmasks their character by noting: "They were in fact very fine ladies... but proud and conceited... they were rather handsome... but they had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds" (Austen, 1813, p. 15). The contrast between their "fine" appearance and their "proud" hearts demonstrates that their social etiquette is a hypocritical mask used to protect their family's rank from "inferior" associates. As Mandal (2022) points out, this "polite" deception is a form of systemic hypocrisy where characters use social standards to justify their internal disdain for others.

In contrast to these transactional unions, the sincere affection between Jane and Bingley is almost ruined by the materialistic interference and greed of those around them. Even Mrs. Bennet, who claims to care for her children's future, views Jane's engagement purely through the lens of social climbing and the acquisition of wealth. When she hears of the engagement, she exclaims: "Oh! my dear Jane... How rich and how great you will be! What jewels, what carriages you will have!" (Austen, 1813, p. 331). Mrs. Bennet's immediate focus on "jewels" and "carriages" rather than her daughter's emotional fulfillment is the height of middle-class social hypocrisy; she masks her maternal duty with pure materialistic

greed. Srivastava (2025) argues that this focus on the "outward rewards" of marriage proves that for the middle class, the institution was often more about status than personal integrity.

2.3. Irony and Narrative Tone as Tools of Moral Criticism

Irony is Austen's most effective weapon for exposing the massive gap between social appearance and the actual moral reality of her characters. The narrative voice of the novel often mocks characters who are obsessed with superficial qualities, forcing the reader to see the hollowness of Regency social values. This is evident when Mr. Darcy first appears and society's "admiration" shifts based only on the report of his annual income: "the report which was in general circulation... of his having ten thousand a year" (Austen, 1813, p. 10). By listing his income alongside his physical features, Austen ironically shows that society's "respect" is a performative act triggered by wealth rather than virtue. According to Gupta (2018), this narrative technique exposes the hypocrisy of a community that pretends to value character while worshipping capital.

The use of Free Indirect Speech allows Austen to slip into the minds of her characters, revealing the hidden, often hypocritical thoughts behind their polite public words. This creates a "double perspective" for the reader, who can see the selfish motives driving a seemingly "polite" social performance. A clear example is Caroline Bingley's fake concern for Jane's health while she secretly wishes for Jane to leave the house: "I am determined to think that she is very well... and I should be very sorry if she were not" (Austen, 1813, p. 41). The irony here is that Caroline is performing "friendship" while feeling the exact opposite, a technique Austen uses to unmask the internal hypocrisy of the social elite. Soni (2023)

suggests that this narrative style is essential for the novel's moral criticism, as it encourages the reader to value sincerity over superficial propriety.

Ultimately, the tone of the novel serves to educate the reader on the importance of integrity in a world dominated by social pretense and performance. By mocking the follies of characters like Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins, Austen provides a "moral map" for navigating the hypocritical landscapes of class and marriage. The final resolution of the novel confirms that Austen's irony is not just for humor, but for moral correction, showing that only sincerity leads to true happiness. As the narrator concludes about the Bennet family's future: "To be at Pemberley again... was the object of her [Mrs. Bennet's] highest ambition" (Austen, 1813, p. 301). Mrs. Bennet's final ambition confirms that for hypocritical characters, the "house" will always be more important than the "character," serving as a permanent critique of materialistic values. Sams (2025) highlights that this consistent satirical tone remains relevant because it addresses the universal conflict between public image and private truth.

3- Section Three: Elizabeth and Darcy: Beyond Social Pretense

This chapter focuses on the moral journey of the novel's protagonists, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, who eventually manage to transcend the social hypocrisy of their environment. Unlike the static characters of the previous chapters, Elizabeth and Darcy undergo a significant transformation by abandoning their social "performances" and embracing absolute sincerity. By analyzing their development from pride and prejudice to mutual respect, this section demonstrates that Austen's ideal of marriage requires the rejection of class-based pretense in favor of individual moral integrity.

3.1. The Moral Development of Elizabeth and Darcy

The moral journey of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy is the primary way Jane Austen shows that individuals can overcome social hypocrisy by achieving true self-awareness. Elizabeth's transformation begins when she realizes that her "prejudice" was just as performative and blinded as the pride of the upper class. After reading Darcy's explanatory letter, she undergoes a moment of painful sincerity, exclaiming: "Till this moment, I never knew myself" (Austen, 1813/2003, p. 202). This moment of self-correction is a direct rejection of her own intellectual pride and the hypocritical judgments she made based on superficial social observations. According to Mandal (2022), this development is a process of "internal sincerity" where the character learns to strip away the filters of social rank to see the moral truth.

Mr. Darcy also experiences a major transformation by learning to value personal merit over the "performance" of aristocratic superiority. He must learn that being a true gentleman is not about his family name or estate, but about his moral actions toward those whom society considers his inferiors. He confesses his past arrogance to Elizabeth, stating: "I have been a selfish being all my life... I was given good principles but left to follow them in pride and conceit" (Austen, 1813, p. 349). Darcy's willingness to admit his faults is a complete break from the hypocritical role society expected him to play as a superior aristocrat, showing that he now values character over status. Gupta (2018) explains that Darcy's development shows that personal integrity is more valuable than maintaining a proud social image, marking his victory over class-based pretense.

The final union of Elizabeth and Darcy is only possible because they both abandon their social masks and choose to communicate with absolute honesty. This level of sincerity is a direct challenge to a society that values "polite" deception over emotional truth in the marriage market. When Darcy proposes for the second time, he rejects all social "games," saying: "You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once" (Austen, 1813, p. 346). The use of the word "trifle" highlights Darcy's new-found desire for sincerity, as he refuses to participate in the hypocritical etiquette of courtship in favor of a direct emotional connection. Srivastava (2025) argues that this transformation allows the characters to communicate with a level of honesty that serves as the ultimate antidote to social hypocrisy.

3.2. Overcoming Class Boundaries through Sincerity

The union of Elizabeth and Darcy represents a successful challenge to the rigid class boundaries that fostered hypocrisy throughout Regency society. In a world where marriage was often a tool for social climbing or consolidating wealth, their relationship is based on mutual respect rather than a financial contract. This is most evident in Darcy's secret decision to help the Bennet family during the Lydia-Wickham scandal without seeking any public credit or social gain. As Darcy later explains his motive: "I thought only of you" (Austen, 1813, p. 347). Darcy's secret act of kindness is the direct opposite of social hypocrisy, which always seeks public approval; it proves that his values are now independent of social expectations. Sams (2025) argues that this action represents a complete break from the

"marriage market" mentality, where every act is a calculated performance for social advantage.

Elizabeth also demonstrates her integrity by refusing to be intimidated by the power of the social elite, specifically during her confrontation with Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Elizabeth rejects the idea that Darcy's rank makes him "forbidden" to her, asserting her own moral equality as a gentleman's daughter. She famously tells Lady Catherine: "I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal" (Austen, 1813/2003, p. 338). This act of defiance is a direct strike against the hypocritical rules that kept the classes apart; Elizabeth chooses moral truth over the demands of nobility. Uddin (2021) suggests that Elizabeth's refusal to conform to Lady Catherine's demands is a turning point where personal values successfully challenge and dismantle the class-based pretense of the era.

The eventual marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy is a victory for merit and love in a world dominated by the worship of money and "connections." By choosing to marry Elizabeth despite her family's lower status, Darcy effectively "humanizes" his high rank, choosing a partner based on her "liveliness of mind" rather than her bank account. Austen describes their final happiness as being built on "gratitude and esteem" (Austen, 1813, p. 344). This foundation of "esteem" is the direct opposite of the hypocrisy seen in transactional marriages like that of Charlotte and Mr. Collins, proving that integrity can overcome the pressures of a shallow society. Zarei (2021) observes that through this conflict, Austen shows that the rigid hierarchy of rank is a false barrier that prevents the recognition of true human merit.

3.3. The Ideal Vision of Balanced Love and Respect

The marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy is presented as the ideal model of a "balanced" relationship that resists the materialistic and hypocritical standards of the landed gentry. Their union is described as a partnership of equals where both parties contribute to each other's moral and intellectual growth, rather than a static social contract. Austen notes that they were both aware of their mutual influence: "it was a union that must have been to the advantage of both... by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened... and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit" (Austen, 1813, p. 295). This "mutual advantage" is a moral victory over the stagnation of social hypocrisy; it shows that marriage should be a site of personal growth rather than a performative social arrangement. Gao (2020) suggests that this balanced union represents an early feminist ideal where intellectual respect is the most important part of a marriage.

The setting of Pemberley serves as a physical symbol of this ideal, representing a house and a character that are "natural" and "sincere" unlike the artificial displays of the elite. When Elizabeth first sees Pemberley, she notices that it has "less of splendor, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Rosings" (Austen, 1813/2003, p. 235). The contrast between the "real elegance" of Pemberley and the "artificial splendor" of Lady Catherine's home mirrors the contrast between sincerity and social hypocrisy. Chen (2024) notes that the Darcy-Bennet marriage humanizes the class system by introducing merit and love into a rigid hierarchy, symbolized by the welcoming and sincere atmosphere of Darcy's estate.

In conclusion, Austen uses the final union of Elizabeth and Darcy to offer a hopeful vision of a society where individuals are judged by their integrity rather than their "connections." While the class system remains in place, the protagonists have created a personal space that is free from the pervasive hypocrisy of the landed gentry. Their story suggests that social progress starts with individual moral courage and the willingness to look beyond rank. Ultimately, by showing that integrity can lead to both happiness and social stability, Austen proves that sincerity is the only true foundation for a lasting and honorable life. Soni (2023) concludes that this final resolution provides a powerful message that personal virtue can eventually triumph over the pervasive hypocrisy of a shallow society.

Conclusion

This study has explored the complex relationship between social hypocrisy and the institution of marriage in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The research has shown that in Regency England, marriage was primarily an economic contract driven by class interests and financial necessity. As discussed in the earlier chapters, the legal and social limitations on women forced many characters into transactional relationships where personal sincerity was sacrificed for security. According to Srivastava (2025), Austen's narrative serves as a powerful tool for revealing how "polite manners" often mask a moral vacuum defined by greed and social climbing. The analysis of characters like Mr. Collins and the Bingley sisters has illustrated how social decorum can be used as a cover for selfish and manipulative motives.

Furthermore, the research has highlighted the contrast between hypocritical social "performances" and genuine moral integrity. While most characters in the novel surrender to the pressures of the "marriage market," Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy represent a successful rejection of these materialistic standards. Their moral development shows that true happiness is possible only when individuals choose to look beyond the rigid boundaries of class and wealth. As Gupta (2018) notes, the novel suggests that social progress begins with individual self-awareness and the courage to act with sincerity. By prioritizing intellectual respect and mutual esteem, Elizabeth and Darcy provide a model of marriage that humanizes a rigid social hierarchy.

The conclusion of this research is that Jane Austen uses irony and satire to advocate for moral sincerity over social pretense. Through her portrayal of different marital unions, Austen proves that a society which values rank over character is destined to foster hypocrisy. The characters who succeed in finding true happiness are those who, like Elizabeth, maintain their independence and refuse to conform to the cold expectations of the elite. Recent studies by Sams (2025) emphasize that Austen's critique remains relevant because it addresses the universal human conflict between public image and private truth. This research has demonstrated that the themes of class and marriage in the novel are not just historical details but are central to Austen's moral evaluation of human nature.

In the end, *Pride and Prejudice* suggests that while class structures may define the external world, they should not define the internal character of the individual. The marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy is a victory for merit and love in a world dominated by money and

status. As Gao (2020) suggests, this union offers a hopeful vision of a society where individuals are judged by their integrity rather than their "connections" or annual income. By rejecting the hypocritical rules of the landed gentry, Elizabeth and Darcy establish a relationship that is both sincere and lasting. This study concludes that Austen's work is an enduring defense of intellectual freedom and the importance of being true to oneself in a world of social pretense.

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