

The issues of Antifeminism in Jane Austen's '*Pride and Prejudice*'

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Abstract

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is often lauded as one of the greatest romances in British literature. Its comedic structure entertains readers with the fluctuations of Elizabeth Bennet's relationship with Mr. Darcy. However, this novel is more than a simple love story. Although almost everyone marries by the end of the novel, some of the women of Elizabeth's world are not as well-matched with their husbands as she is with hers. Unlike Elizabeth and Darcy's affectionate relationship, many characters in the story make marriages of convenience. The monetary and social stability that the marriage offers women is more important than the compatibility of the spouses. Austen develops the plot to hint at a more considered view of marriage. Certain formal aspects of the work further inform us of Austen's opinion of matrimony. In the novel, Jane Austen uses satire, characterization, and narrative voice to explore the vocational nature of marriage for women in her society.

Keywords: Matrimony, Love, Property, Patriarchy, Suffrage, Motherhood.

Pride and Prejudice is the story of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and their five unmarried daughters. They live in the estate of Longbourn in Hertfordshire, a rural district about thirty miles from London. The family is not rich. Their property is 'entailed' to pass to the nearest male heir in the family, in this case to Mr. Collins. The main concern of Mrs. Bennet's life is to see that all her daughters are married, preferably to men with large fortunes. She sees an opportunity for her eldest daughter Jane when Mr. Charles Bingley, a wealthy gentleman from the city, occupies the nearby estate of Netherfield Park.

Antifeminism mainly is defined as an opposition to some or all forms of feminism. This opposition has taken various forms across time and cultures. Antifeminists in the late 1800s and early 1900s opposed women's suffrage, while antifeminists in the late 20th century in the United States opposed the Equal Rights Amendment. Antifeminism in the early 21st century has sometimes been an element of violent, far-right extremist acts. Antifeminism derives its insights also from the belief that feminist theories of patriarchy and disadvantages suffered by women in society are incorrect and highly exaggerated and that feminism encourages misandry.

Pride and Prejudice, and you might feel that there's nothing more to be said about Mrs. Bennet. After all, Austen's narrator signs off her beautifully pitched dramatic exposition of Elizabeth's parents with something that sounds like a categorical declaration: "Her mind was less difficult to develop [sic]. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and an uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news."

Take that famous opening sentence, for example: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." Readers have long noted that, as a statement, it's far from "universal"; rather, it's a prime example of the technique, with which Austen experiments from the later parts of *Sense and Sensibility* onwards, of "free indirect style", in which characters' subjective opinions are presented as if they were external judgments. And after all, whose opinions are being presented here? The more one reads about what follows in the novel, the more it looks as if a chapter that closes with a putdown of Mrs. Bennet might also begin with a sentence that channels her thoughts. Nor is this the only incident where the reader is obliged to take on Mrs. Bennet's restricted views; compare the verdict on Darcy's standoffishness at his first public appearance: "His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there again" (prominent among this "everybody" being Mrs. Bennet, of course)

On the other hand, antifeminism is "The conviction that women are not entitled to the same moral and legal rights as men, or the same social status and opportunities". All antifeminist thinkers hold in common the thesis that there are innate and unalterable psychological differences between women and men, differences which make it in the interests of both sexes for women to play a the subordinate, private role, destined for wife-and-motherhood.... Involves the idea that women ought to sacrifice the development of their personalities for the sake of men and children". (*Feminist Dictionary* 54). Austen's art as a whole is an extraordinary aesthetic response to a whole set of contemporary constraints and pressures, whether those pressures be sexual, economic, or simply the claustrophobic atmosphere of populated social spaces; and if Mrs. Bennet is sometimes unbearable,

she's also the symptom of larger causes that are even less bearable. Austen couldn't avoid them, nor does her fiction try to. And whatever else one might lay at Mrs. Bennet's door, she sticks up for her daughters, as when she declares of Mr. Bingley that "he used my daughter extremely ill ... I am sure Jane will die of a broken heart, and then he will be sorry for what he has done". After all, whoever wanted their own mother to be impartial? You might not always want Mrs. Bennet in your space, but there are worse people to have on your side.

In the holy scripture of *The Bible*, it is said that Husbands love their wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; So that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the Church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. (Ephesians 5:25-31)

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is often lauded as one of the greatest romances in British literature. Its comedic structure entertains readers with the fluctuations of Elizabeth Bennet's relationship with Mr. Darcy. However, this novel is more than a simple love story. Although almost everyone marries by the end of the novel, some of the women of Elizabeth's world are not as well-matched with their husbands as she is with hers. Unlike Elizabeth and Darcy's affectionate relationship, many characters in the story make marriages of convenience. The monetary and social stability that the marriage offers women is more important than the compatibility of the spouses. Austen develops the plot to hint at a more considered view on marriage. Certain formal aspects of the work further inform us on Austen's opinion of matrimony. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen uses satire, characterization, and narrative voice to explore the vocational nature of marriage for women in her society.

In *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700), Mary Astell considers that men should not force women into marriage. In her opinion, it is an equal right of women to take decisions on their marriage, and unmarried women need to devote themselves to education. Mary Wollstonecraft too advocates equal rights for women in marriage.

In the first line of *Pride and Prejudice*, the narrator reveals her satirical approach to matrimony. If it was "a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" then the women in the novel would not have to struggle so much. Mrs. Bennet would not have to actively seek husbands for her five daughters. The marriageable women of the novel would not have to debate between choosing spouses by preference and marrying for financial stability. There would not be any kind of jealousy or competition between Miss Bingley and Elizabeth, or Elizabeth and Miss King. The premise of this first

line in the narrative opposes the action in the novel. A more straightforward description of reality would have been that a single woman in possession of no fortune must be in want of a husband. The irony of this initial sentence introduces the novel masterfully. While Austen flips this truth to provide humor in her narrative, she simultaneously sets the tone for the entire novel and tips readers off to her proposition that marriage is a type of career for the women in her society. The opening line of the novel is an especially amusing statement when read in conjunction with Mrs. Bennet's subsequent scheming to secure Mr. Bingley for one of her daughters, which would be completely unnecessary if he was so desperate for a wife. Austen's witty reflection on marriage is not confined to the implication that it is women who need husbands; it also indicates that the financial situation plays a foremost role in the selection process. Austen wastes no time emphasizing her point that marriage is all about economics.

Pride and Prejudice are inundated with criticism toward the realities of marriage. Elizabeth and Darcy are the model couple in the novel, but there are numerous reminders in the other couples that this goal is seldom achieved. They marry for love, but not everyone has that luxury. Darcy marries Elizabeth because of her merits and his affection for her—instead of marrying to advance his career and economic situation, as Mr. Collins did. Additionally, even while Elizabeth seems unconcerned with Darcy's wealth when she initially rejects and eventually accepts him, there is no avoiding how advantageous a match it is for her. Not only has she provided for herself, but she is also able to support her sister. It is obvious that Elizabeth is the narrator's favorite and that her marriage is the ideal. This supremacy of such an unusual marriage for love indicates that this is what Austen wishes could be the reality. However, she is honest enough to emphasize that it is by no means an everyday occurrence—the truth is much bleaker.

The social asymmetry in *Pride and Prejudice* novel shows the distribution system or the social order of English society which puts into effect the Primogeniture system. Primogeniture is a legacy of the then Rwanda feudal system, in which the distribution of inheritance is given to the elder son only, to the first male child. The position of women in the distribution of inheritance is weak; they do not have a right to get the inheritance. The distribution of inheritance based on Primogeniture causes discrimination between men and women. Besides, *Pride and Prejudice* novel also photographs the style of satire, how the mother is afraid that her five daughters do not get a commensurate mate. In addition, the writer tries to bring the atmosphere of Europe from the nineteenth century to the present day. She completely describes the social conditions, and the complete culture with its sample, as well as the natural situation of the period through the literary form of romance.

Bible has been the prime and foremost source of misogyny. Eve was tempted and deceived by Satan and that resulted in their expulsion from heaven. A

Woman has been considered the cause of the downfall of Eden and along with that miseries and pain associated with the world. If one goes through the verses of the Bible, one can see antifeminist trends in the bible. In one of the verses, it has been asserted that woman has been created out of a man's rib. God first created man, it means a woman has been created for man therefore; her existence is subordinated and

secondary to man. Man has to be by God's will while the woman has to be by man's will. A Woman has to serve a man in every circumstance.

In the nineteenth-century of British society, people live in a materialistic society. Parents are exploiting their daughters as a means to get happiness. Therefore, the parents are thinking that marriage is a good way to achieve a goal. It is because of the roles of parents who are willing to seek rich and noble men for their daughters. These parents hope that their daughters can marry a great person and then she can get true happiness. *Pride and Prejudice* novel describes society's life. Parents always want their children to marry rich men. Therefore, society's view is changed by Elizabeth Bennet, as the main character in the novel. Elizabeth explicitly changes society's view, especially parents. Marriage is not a good way to change the social status in society. The statement is supported by the following quotation.

"I never considered the distance as the reason for a wedding, 'said Elizabeth.' I would never say that Mrs. Collins decided because he would live adjacent to the family." (Page: 264).

The quotation above explains that the woman (Elizabeth) has the dream to find partners who have abundant treasures who can protect and guarantee their life. Therefore, long-distance relationships will not be influential to women. Besides, the parents always support their daughter to look for a husband from high social status. It is because wealth will become a prominent aim. Therefore, Elizabeth changes society's view that marriage with men who are from high social status and abundant wealth can guarantee their happiness the distinguished English novelists of the 19th century are several women. Women novelists began to appear in English during the second half of the 18th century. But some gifted women of the 19th century made such contributions to the development of the English novel that they have just won their places in the front ranks of the brilliant realists headed by Dickens and Thackeray.

Jane Austen is one of these remarkable women novelists. Jane Austen, her life was, on the surface, even and serene, but her work reveals a mind of enormous vitality and scope and a powerful understanding of human behavior. Born on December 16, 1775, in the Hampshire village of Steventon where their father was a clergyman, she grew up in an affectionate family, whose members were all great novel readers. She was educated at home and began to write at an early age. There was a small table in the sitting room, on which she wrote her now famous novels

including six complete ones, and left behind three fragments. When a visitor entered, she would throw a sheet of paper or a piece of sewing over her work, and she modestly refused to acknowledge that she was the author of her novels, which were published anonymously owing to the prejudice prevailing at the time concerning the writing of novels by a lady. She never married, and she ignored literary circles, ridiculing the popular gothic novel and rejecting the tenets of Romanticism. Among her six articles, pride and Prejudice is the most widely read. Since its immediate success in 1813, it has remained one of the most popular novels in the English language. Jane Austin called this brilliant work “her darling child”. Austin began to write it when she was 21. But the manuscript “went begging” for 16 years at the doors of publishers before it was published in 1813. It is the story of a young girl who rejects an offer of marriage because the young nobleman is rude to her family. In the development of the entire world, there is a conception in the human mind for a very long time that man is a hero, a magnificent object to be admired. Woman only depends on the man. So man will never admit woman’s intellectual superiority, or even their equality and their possession of normal human equipment of thought. This conception also affects literature. In the long history of literature, man has taken relative priority in this area. The readers ignore the books which were written by females. So these prejudices led many women to publish their first novels anonymously. There was no exception to Austen. Austen’s first published novel, Sense, and Sensibility appeared with the title page reading “By a Lady”. And her second published novel Pride and Prejudice was published “By the Author of Sense and Sensibility”. They do have much faith that women are too naive and foolish to create articles. They have incurable prejudice against females. So, for a very long time, English literature is filled with articles with male splendid writing ways. As a result, during the 18th and 19th centuries, there were almost no great articles created in England in such 40 years. However, there were a handful of remarkable women bringing us some monumental works. They used their special narrative perspective to describe stories and describe characters. They told the whole world that women had fine and fluent intelligence. In truth, women are not only intelligent, but they also have almost a monopoly on certain of the subtler and more utile forms of intelligence. It might be reasonably described as a special feminine character. So, their judgment in many matters of capital concerns is more subtle and searching than men. They can see the actual things within. Women decide the larger questions of life correctly and quickly, not because they are lucky guessers, not because they are divinely inspired, not because they practice magic inherited from savagery, but simply and solely because they have sense. They see at a glance what most men could not see with searchlights and telescopes; They are at grips with the essentials of a problem before men have finished debating its mere externals. They are the supreme realists of the race. They are the possessors of a rare and subtle super-logic. To my mind, Jane Austen was the outstanding writer among these remarkable female

writers. She distinguished her writings from male ones. Her articles are the foundation of her experiences. What she did was to bring her feminine sharpness of wit, and to bear upon her feminine clear-thinking. In summary, western literary history is overwhelmingly male or, more accurately, patriarchal. People all assume that literature had to be male. So we can see woman writers doing this over and over again- they search for a female model not because they want dutifully their "femininity" but because they must legitimize their rebellious endeavors. At the same time, like most women in a patriarchal society, woman writers do experience gender as a painful obstacle or even a debilitating inadequacy. In other words, like most patriarchally conditioned women, they are victimized by the real condition. Thus the loneliness of the female artists, their feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with their needs for sisterly precursors and successors, their urgent sense of their need for a female audience together with their fear of the antagonism of male readers, their culturally conditioned timidity about self-dramatization, their dread of the patriarchal authority of art, their anxiety about the impropriety of female invention-all these phenomena mark the woman writers' struggle for artistic self-definition and the differentiation of their efforts at self-creation from those of their male counterparts.

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