

The Influence of Social Norms and Etiquette on the Behavior and Decision-Making of Characters in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract—This research aimed to examine the influence of social norms and etiquette on the behaviors and decisions of *Pride and Prejudice's* (1813) main characters. In this context, the influence of societal expectations on characters' actions, relationships, and identities was influenced by the sociology of literature during Regency-era England. Furthermore, the reflection of class distinctions, gender roles, and cultural values was investigated through adherence to social norms and etiquette drawing on the sociological theories of Erving Goffman, Norbert Elias, and Pierre Bourdieu. The results showed that societal norms and class expectations shaped marriage decisions during Regency-era England. Characters like Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins prioritized social standing and security, while Elizabeth challenged norms by valuing personal worth and respect over status. Additionally, the internal conflict of Mr. Darcy suggested the pressure of conforming to class expectations. The rejection of Elizabeth also showed the resistance to social hierarchy and insistence on personal worth. Austen critiqued the rigid social system and advocated for valuing personal character and emotional connection over societal constraints. The depiction of social norms and etiquette reported the broader social dynamics and the lasting impact on characters' decisions and relationships, emphasizing the role of constructs in shaping individual and collective lives.

Index Terms—social norms, etiquette, Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature comprises a broad spectrum of short stories, poems, novels, plays, and songs crafted by writers from diverse national and cultural backgrounds, using various forms of the English language (Arafah, 2018; Afiah et al., 2022). These

various genres of literature are differentiated by their content, intricacy, and symbols and are admired for their ability to alter the minds of individuals (Jusdalyana et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2025). Furthermore, literature represents written and oral narratives, such as texts and spoken language (Fadillah et al., 2022; Baa et al., 2023), providing a medium for individuals to convey thoughts through words, actions, and writing (Iksora et al., 2022; Ananda & Arafah, 2023). This mode of expression captivated readers by using powerful language in literary works (Sunardi et al., 2018; Asriyanti et al., 2022). Language contains styles enabling the incomprehensibility of the real meaning to make the readers more entertained (Asriyanti et al., 2022; Arafah et al., 2024; Kaharuddin et al., 2023). Therefore, literature is commonly understood as an important work of art (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019; Yulianti et al., 2022). The concept reflects the cultural values of a society (Mokoginta et al., 2021; Hasyim et al., 2023) and helps bridge existential gaps, connecting individuals (Moi, 2009; Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a; Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b).

Based on the description above, culture refers to various social life aspects (Arafah et al., 2023). To show these aspects, literary works are required from a social background of writers (Sunyoto et al., 2022) to serve a societal purpose (Arafah et al., 2023; Arafah et al., 2025). These works show societal happenings and the typical features of the characters (Arafah et al., 2024). Furthermore, language as the main component in literature is a medium to convey cultural meaning associated with social values (Yudith et al., 2023) to obtain numerous benefits (Arifuddin et al., 2024; Arafah et al., 2025; Arnawa & Arafah, 2023). Literary works are provided on online media with multiple languages, granting easy access to individuals (Arafah et al., 2023; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023a). In this context, the provision of digital media with an international language pushes the readers to have language learning beneficial to improve skills (Karamoy et al., 2024; Kuswanti et al., 2023; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023b; Mardiana et al., 2023; Kaharuddin et al., 2024). The cultural aspect holds significant importance within digital literacy providing a framework for understanding the context of the user (Arafah et al., 2023).

The work of Jane Austen grants ordinary individuals a uniquely modern identity. The work excelled at using language to express ideas and often harsh truths of everyday life from an artistic perspective (Ramzan et al., 2023). Austen made the protagonist's flaws more relatable in a time when the ideal woman was expected to be quiet, kind, domestic, modest, and conservative (Chowdhury, 2023). Additionally, Elizabeth was portrayed as an intelligent, quick-witted, outspoken, yet tactful young woman with opinions and biases different from her older sister Jane, who embodied all the 'ideal' qualities of the era (Chowdhury, 2023). Instead of creating conflict between characters, the novel shows the beautiful harmony and bond between the sisters. Therefore, this research aimed to analyze various adaptations based on the discussed approach (Chowdhury, 2023).

Several influential studies examined the role of social norms and etiquette in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and provided important insights into Austen's critique of Regency-era society. Deborah Kaplan's *Jane Austen Among Women* (1992) examines the influence of societal expectations on women's behavior and roles, with particular emphasis on the constraints imposed by a patriarchal society. The analysis of the relationships among women characters shows the intricate social etiquette controlling interactions and the restrictions placed on autonomy. Similarly, Margaret C. Sullivan's *The Jane Austen Handbook* (2007) provides a practical overview of Regency-era social customs, courtship practices, and class structures, which are contextual elements to understanding Austen's critique of society. Sullivan's work further reports the extent to which characters in *Pride and Prejudice* conform to or challenge prevailing social conventions, deepening the novel's critique of societal norms.

Heaverly and Kasih (2020) explored the influence of the Industrial Revolution on the social systems portrayed in *Pride and Prejudice*, focusing on class distinctions and the inheritance system. The analysis, using Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism, shows the critique of prevailing social systems, particularly the extent to which economic pressures shaped the practice of arranged marriages. Furthermore, *the Literary and Sociological Approach to the Novel* by Abduxamidova (2023) reported the ongoing relevance of themes such as love, marriage, and gender roles in Austen's work, stressing its significance in today's society. Based on the description, this research emphasized Austen's portrayal of women's agency and individuality, reinforcing engagement with contemporary societal issues.

The significance of this research lies in the deep exploration of social structures, gender roles, and societal expectations shown in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Kaplan's *Jane Austen Among Women* (1992) provided a critical lens for examining the effects of women's relationships and societal norms on characters' actions, particularly within the constraints of a patriarchal society. The analysis shows Austen's critique of the limitations imposed on women and provides essential insights into feminist undertones. Margaret C. Sullivan's *The Jane Austen Handbook* (2007) built on Kaplan's work by offering a practical understanding of the social etiquette, courtship, marriage, and class divisions of Austen. Furthermore, Heaverly and Kasih (2020) added a sociological perspective, exploring the effects of the Industrial Revolution on social systems, particularly class distinctions and economic pressures affecting social mobility and marriage. The 2023 research from Abduxamidova reinforced the novel's contemporary relevance, emphasizing the enduring themes of love, marriage, gender roles, and women's agency. This research offered a comprehensive perspective of *Pride and Prejudice* as a reflection of the historical context and a critique of the societal systems governing personal and social relationships (Asri et al., 2023; Nurcahyadi et al., 2025).

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) continued to have a lasting impact, offering insights into social norms, class, gender, and marriage, themes that remain significant today. This research examined the effects of the novel's depiction of social expectations on current discussions about individual freedom and societal pressures. Johnson (2005) and Brown

(2015) emphasize that Austen's treatment of these issues accepts reflection on contemporary concerns, including social justice and personal autonomy. The relevance of the critique was explored in works such as *Austen and the Modern World* (Wilson, 2018) and *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* (Copeland & McMaster, 1997).

Previous research titled *The Influence of Social Norms and Etiquette on the Behavior and Decision-Making of Characters in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice* provided the readers with a slightly different nuance from previous results. Therefore, this research was considered important and worthy of discussion.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The sociological method of literary analysis had deep historical roots, grounded in the belief that literature is a social product inherently connected to society. This perspective allowed individuals to explore interaction and socialization within a community, stating the connection between a literary work and the social conditions created (Fadillah et al., 2022). Sociology of Literature describes reality and social fact by using language through imagination (Afiah et al., 2022). Furthermore, Glickberg and Goldmann (1975) in Endraswara (2013) supported the view, asserting that the most fantastical works were influenced by social concerns. The sociology of literature analyses the effects of social realities and imagination on literary creations. Literature is used to create an awareness concerning the life of individuals in a cultural society and to capture the environmental situation (Yudith et al., 2023; Arafah et al., 2021; Siwi et al., 2022; Jaelani et al., 2024). This method was valuable for understanding social issues embedded in literature as a fitting tool for social conditions shown in novels.

Culture and society are inseparable entities influencing human existence (Takwa et al., 2024; Takwa et al., 2025). A society maintains traditions, customs, and languages as parts of local wealth reflected in social norms (Takwa et al., 2024; Mofu et al., 2024). In this context, social norms are described as "patterns of behavior or values based on expectations concerning an action" (Constantino et al., 2022). Social norms, or "collectively agreed-upon guidelines for social behavior" were developed and upheld through interactions among members of social groups (Barta & Andalibi, 2021). The term was commonly used to refer to any norm regulating social behavior within groups or societies (Chung & Rimal, 2016; Xenitidou & Edmonds, 2014). Implementation of cultural values leads to the formation of behavioral patterns into habitual actions (Mokoginta & Arafah, 2022; Takwa et al., 2022; Arafah et al., 2025). In seminal works, Bicchieri (2006) delineated social norms from customs, conventions, and moral norms. Social norms were specific behavioral rules that individuals adhered to, grounded in both empirical and normative expectations. This theoretical framework was widely acknowledged as a leading explanation of social norms (Wietmarschen, 2021). Goffman (1959) examined the guidance of behavior in social interactions using norms, while Asch (1951) reported the powerful influence of conformity on individual actions. Geertz (1973) stressed the need to understand norms within cultural contexts. Granovetter (1973) analyzed the spreading of norms through social networks. Merton (1968) contributed to the understanding of norms evolution in response to societal change. The pressure of the changes in society demands individuals to esteem social norms (Arifin et al., 2022; Suhadi et al., 2022). As the most intelligent creature, a human can perform appropriate or inappropriate actions (Manugeran et al., 2023). The term "etiquette" refers to the conventional guidelines for social behavior or professional conduct. These unwritten rules served as norms followed by all professionals working within a specific organization or department. In essence, etiquette includes behaving in a refined manner than expectation (Dash, 2022). The concept established a set of rules and conventions governing social and professional conduct (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

The Regency Era was remembered as a time of rich culture and literature, marked by significant achievements in art, architecture, and fashion. The political and historical period, defined by the Parliamentary Regency Act of 1811, began when George IV became Prince Regent. This occurred because "The Mad King George," was unable to fulfill the required duties because of mental health issues. The Regency period was often considered to extend from 1795 until the Victorian era, officially lasting from February 5, 1811, to January 29, 1820 (Arora, 2023). This period was known for the refinement and cultural focus, primarily among the elite social classes, while the masses suffered in poverty due to a rapid population increase. The era was characterized by an emphasis on style among the aristocracy, who lived in fashionable areas and were largely indifferent to the struggles of the poor in the slums. During this time, society upheld strict distinctions between social ranks, believing that a smooth-running, civilized world required these divisions. Relationships were expected to occur within defined societal niches, and deviation was considered scandalous, leading to the ostracism of individuals transgressing the boundaries (Arora, 2023). Regency England has continued to captivate generations, maintaining a lasting appeal through the literature, music, architecture, and the glamorous lifestyle of the upper class, marked by balls, parties, and gossip. The society of the Regency era was governed by strict rules and etiquette expected to be followed by all individuals. Social positions were well understood, and individuals who attempted to deviate were excluded from the more prestigious social circles (Martynková, 2022).

The sociological approach to literary analysis offered valuable insights into the reflection of literature by social conditions of the time. The powerful role of societal factors in influencing characters, behaviors, and narratives is understood by examining literary works through the lens of social norms, etiquette, and cultural expectations. The Regency Era served as a prime example of social norms and etiquette in the lives of individuals, particularly the upper classes. Despite the glamour and cultural refinement associated with the period, there were strict social divisions that defined individuals' roles and behaviors, with deviation from these norms leading to exclusion. This era's lasting influence

in literature, music, and architecture reflected the complex interplay between societal norms and individual actions, emphasizing the importance of social context in understanding human experience. Therefore, the sociology of literature provided an important framework for exploring the use of imagination to comment on and influence the social realities of time.

III. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods were used to examine the portrayal of social norms and etiquette in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). In this context, this research aimed to enhance understanding of social behaviors within the novel. Sociological theories investigated the representation of etiquette and contributed to existing discussions on social norms. This approach enabled a deeper exploration of the role etiquette played in shaping characters and interactions.

The adopted data was collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary source was the first edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, published in 1813 by T. Egerton in London, which served as the main text for analyzing social norms and etiquette among characters. Meanwhile, secondary sources included scholarly articles, previous research, and theses related to *Pride and Prejudice*.

The process of data collection followed several steps. First, information was observed from all available sources to obtain a comprehensive understanding. Second, examples of social norms and etiquette were identified within the novel through the characters' interactions. The data were analyzed using the Library Research method to identify patterns and draw conclusions about the representation of social norms and etiquette in *Pride and Prejudice*. This research was concluded with insights based on the results, contributing to a broader understanding of the novel's portrayal of social structures in the early 19th century.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Jane Austen portrayed marriage as a complex institution influenced by societal expectations and personal emotions. Marriage during the early 19th century was often seen as a social and financial contract, specifically for women to secure futures and social standing. Characters such as Mrs. Bennet and Charlotte Lucas embodied the view that marriage was more about securing financial stability and social respectability. Mrs. Bennet's obsessive quest to marry off the daughters to wealthy suitors reflects societal pressure. In contrast, Charlotte pragmatically accepted a proposal from Mr. Collins for security, understanding that marriage was a necessity for women. Mr. Darcy viewed the concept through the lens of class and status but chose to marry Elizabeth Bennet for love, challenging the rigid social norms of the time. The union represented Austen's ideal of marriage based on mutual respect and affection, transcending societal constraints. Austen critiques the class-based system that governed marital choices, using characters such as Lady Catherine de Bourgh to exemplify the evolving relationship between elitist attitudes restricting marriage to social rank. In contrast, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy suggest that love should transcend social class and rigid propriety. Through characters such as Mr. Collins, Austen exposes a form of marriage etiquette rooted in social obligation rather than in genuine affection. Conversely, Lydia Bennet's impulsive elopement with Mr. Wickham shows the consequences of disregarding social norms, leading to scandal and a damaged reputation. Austen presents marriage as an institution often shaped by social pressures and financial motivations but grounded in love, mutual respect, and personal compatibility. This critique serves as a reflection of the societal constraints of time and advocacy for more progressive views on marriage.

The following paragraph reflects Mrs. Bennet's preoccupation with securing advantageous marriages for the daughters. This is a central concern for women of social class during the time of Austen. The statement, "*When I can see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield, and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for,*" encapsulates the belief that a woman's primary objective was to marry well, ideally to a wealthy and socially prominent man. The phrase "*happily settled at Netherfield*" refers to Mr. Bingley, a prosperous suitor, and shows Mrs. Bennet's perspective of marriage as a method of achieving financial stability and social advancement, rather than a relationship founded on love or personal compatibility. The wish for the daughters to be "*equally well married*" supports the notion that securing wealthy husbands guaranteed a respectable future. This quote shows Mrs. Bennet's pragmatic and superficial perspective of marriage, where social standing and financial stability are prioritized over personal happiness.

Sir William had been delighted with him. He was quite young, wonderfully handsome, extremely agreeable, and, to crown the whole, he meant to be at the next assembly with a large party. Nothing could be more delightful! To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love, and very lively hopes of Mr. Bingley's heart were entertained.

"If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield," said Mrs. Bennet to her husband, "and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for". (Austen, 1813, p. 10)

In this passage, Mr. Collins's proposal to Elizabeth Bennet shows the shaping of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by social expectations and conventions. This justified the desire to marry based on duty as a clergyman expected to set an example of marriage. Mr. Collins experienced personal happiness in fulfilling the role. Additionally, Lady Catherine de Bourgh also showed the effects of social hierarchy and respect for authority on decisions. In this context, marriage was viewed as a social obligation rather than a personal choice driven by love.

My reasons for marrying are, firstly, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced that it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly--which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honor of calling patroness. (Austen, 1813, pp. 90-91)

Charlotte Lucas explained the reasons for accepting Mr. Collins' proposal, stating a pragmatic view of marriage. The admission of not being romantic reflects a prioritization of a comfortable home and financial security over romantic love. The decision reflected the expectation that marriage was used to secure financial stability and social respectability due to the social norms of the time, where women often had limited choices. The chance of happiness was good considering the position held in society by marrying Mr. Collins. The choice of Charlotte shows the influence of societal expectations in prioritizing security over personal affection.

"I see what you are feeling," replied Charlotte. "You must be surprised, very much surprised--so lately as Mr. Collins was wishing to marry you. But when you have had time to think it over, I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connection, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state". (Austen, 1813, p. 108)

In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Jane Austen stated the restrictive gender roles and societal expectations governing the lives of men and women in the early 19th century. For women, marriage was often seen as the only route to financial security and social respectability. Several women were preoccupied with securing wealthy and socially advantageous marriages for their daughters. In this environment, there were limited choices and prioritization of stability and status over personal happiness. Some women married for the security that came with an advantageous match. However, there were women in the story who challenged the norm, valuing love and mutual respect above societal expectations.

Men faced different types of pressures, where marriage was often connected to maintaining family legacy and social status. In this context, marriage could be influenced by duty, specifically, the need to marry within the social class. Some men refrained from proposing to women due to the belief that the matches failed to meet the expectations of social rank. These characters advocate for unions grounded in love, showing personal conflicts when societal duty clashes with genuine emotion. Therefore, Austen challenges the restrictive norms and reports the significance of personal choice and emotional connection in marriage.

The following quotation *"If I can see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield, and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for"* reflected social norms of 19th-century England, where a woman's future and status were largely defined by marriage. Mrs. Bennet's focus on securing advantageous marriages for the daughters shows emphasis on social rank, wealth, and financial security, rather than personal happiness or love.

Sir William had been delighted with him. He was quite young, wonderfully handsome, extremely agreeable, and, to crown the whole, he meant to be at the next assembly with a large party. Nothing could be more delightful! To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love, and very lively hopes of Mr. Bingley's heart were entertained.

"If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield," said Mrs. Bennet to her husband, "and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for". (Austen, 1813, p. 10)

In this quotation, Lady Catherine de Bourgh's behavior reports the strict social norms and gender roles governing marriage during the Regency era. Marriage was viewed as a personal decision, a matter of family interest and social standing. Lady Catherine believed that Mr. Darcy should marry an individual of equal rank.

Women were often viewed as commodities in marriage, with value tied to family connections and social status. Lady Catherine's insistence on controlling Darcy's marriage exemplified the effect of societal expectations on individual desires. This showed the tension between personal happiness and the pressure of conforming to societal and family expectations.

Insincere YOU may choose to be, you shall not find ME so. My character has ever been celebrated for its sincerity and frankness, and in a cause of such moment as this, I shall certainly not depart from it. A report of a most alarming nature reached me two days ago. I was told that not only your sister was on the point of being most advantageously married, but that you, that Miss Elizabeth Bennet, would, in all likelihood, be soon afterward united to my nephew, my nephew, Mr. Darcy. Though I KNOW it must be a scandalous falsehood, though I would not injure him so much as to suppose the truth of it possible, I instantly resolved on setting off for this place, that I might make my sentiments known to you. (Austen, 1813, p. 294)

Mr. Darcy's declaration of love for Elizabeth shows the tension between personal feelings and social expectations. During the Regency period, men of higher social standing were expected to maintain a composed and controlled demeanor, concerning matters of romance. Showing emotional vulnerability in a woman-centered manner was not considered appropriate.

Mr. Darcy challenged the norms of the time by confessing love despite societal pressures. The decision to profess feelings to Elizabeth showed that love was a personal and emotional connection. This moment showed the shifting attitudes towards marriage, where love and affection were more important than social rank or family connections. The struggle of Darcy to repress feelings shows the level of values attached to Elizabeth.

He sat down for a few moments, and then getting up, walked about the room. Elizabeth was surprised but said

not a word. After a silence of several minutes, he came towards her in an agitated manner and thus began: "In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you". (Austen, 1813, p. 161)

In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Jane Austen painted a clear picture of the class divisions that defined 19th-century England. The rigid social hierarchy was evident in the characters' interactions and relationships, where social standing had a significant influence on marriage prospects and behavior. For example, Mr. Darcy came from a wealthy, aristocratic background, while Elizabeth Bennet belonged to a lower social class. This difference in status created tension between the characters, specifically when Darcy initially struggled to reconcile feelings for Elizabeth with the perceived social inferiority.

Austen shows the significant influence of social class on characters' decisions and actions, particularly in matters concerning marriage throughout the novel. Mr. Darcy's initial reluctance to propose to Elizabeth is from the perception of failing to meet the social standards expected of a suitable match, despite the intelligence and strength of character. Conversely, characters such as Mrs. Bennet and Lady Catherine de Bourgh regard marriage primarily as a vehicle for securing or enhancing social status. Mrs. Bennet is preoccupied with finding affluent suitors for the daughters, viewing marriage as the sole method of achieving financial stability and upward mobility. Similarly, Lady Catherine advocates for a union between the daughter and Mr. Darcy to maintain the social standing of the family. Meanwhile, Austen offers a critique of the class-conscious mentality of the era, suggesting that societal expectations are restrictive and inherently unjust.

Austen did not portray class as an obstacle to love and personal happiness but used Elizabeth Bennet's character to challenge norms. Elizabeth refused to marry for financial security or societal approval, prioritizing love, mutual respect, and personal connection. The relationship with Darcy evolved from social tension to emotional depth since personal qualities should outweigh class distinctions. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) questioned the value placed on social status, advocating for a world where love and individual merit are more important than birthright and wealth.

In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), the quotation "*She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me*" was spoken by Mr. Darcy in the early chapters of the novel when introduced at the Meryton ball. This line shows the character of Mr. Darcy and is also indicative of social norms and class stratification influencing behavior and decisions.

At this point in the novel, Mr. Darcy is portrayed as a man deeply entrenched in social hierarchy. The remark about Elizabeth Bennet reflected the initial disdain because the standards of beauty or social status were unmet. In the context of the early 19th-century Regency period, social class played a significant role in determining relationships, and Darcy was expected to marry within social rank. Individuals from lower classes were viewed with disdain, specifically in terms of romantic interest. The comment "*handsome enough*" suggested concerns about appearance and social standing. This statement exemplified social norms of the time, where class distinctions governed the context of marriage and personal connections were often secondary to financial and social considerations. The behavior of Darcy reflected the aristocratic mindset that the worth of an individual was tied to family background, wealth, and social status. Therefore, Darcy did not form an attachment to the lower social class, even though the individuals were capable of intelligence, wit, and personal qualities.

"Which do you mean?" and turning round he looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said: "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me I am in no humor at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men. You had better return to your partner and enjoy her smiles, for you are wasting your time with me". (Austen, 1813, p. 13)

The following quotation from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) was obtained from Mr. Darcy's proposal to Elizabeth Bennet, where enduring feelings were expressed despite societal barriers being insurmountable. In the context of class stratification, this moment showed the tension between personal affection and social expectations, a central theme in the novel.

Marriage was deeply influenced by class distinctions, and was rare for individuals to marry outside social circles without facing criticism (Tang et al., 2025). Mr. Darcy, as a wealthy gentleman, was aware that his feelings for Elizabeth from a less privileged family went against the norms of class stratification. In the novel, the reluctance of Darcy to openly pursue Elizabeth is due to social standing.

The line, "*You are too generous to trifle with me,*" reflected Darcy's recognition of Elizabeth's integrity and the unwillingness to entertain a proposal out of social convenience. Furthermore, the plea "*tell me so at once*" showed respect for the judgment and willingness to leave the matter, without forcing a decision based on social pressures. This moment marked a significant departure when the behavior of Darcy was shaped by class, particularly condescending attitudes toward individuals viewed as socially inferior.

Elizabeth was too much embarrassed to say a word. After a short pause, her companion added, "You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. MY affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject forever". (Austen, 1813, p. 306)

In the quotation, Elizabeth Bennet responded to the proposal of Mr. Darcy with firm rejection. This is because the manner of proposing reflected arrogance and a sense of superiority. The narrative shows the extent to which social norms and class stratification shape interpersonal interactions. Mr. Darcy's initial proposal is marked by condescension,

reflecting a belief in superiority due to wealth and social status, and an assumption that Elizabeth should feel honored. However, Elizabeth refuses to be influenced by social standing and rejects the proposal, asserting that the response might have been more conflicted when approached with respect and humility rather than arrogance.

Social etiquette plays a significant role in shaping individual behavior. Mr. Darcy's conduct is shown by the adherence to class distinctions and societal status, while the response of Elizabeth reflects a rejection of prevailing norms. The decision shows a commitment to personal integrity and mutual respect valued over the advantages associated with social position. In this context, the novel offers a critique of class stratification and rigid social expectations since genuine relationships should be founded on equality and respect rather than wealth or status.

Elizabeth felt herself growing more angry every moment, yet she tried to the utmost to speak with composure when she said:

"You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way than as it spared the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner". (Austen, 1813, p. 166)

Pride and Prejudice (1813) by Jane Austen offers a critical examination of the influence of class stratification on personal relationships and decision-making in 19th-century England. The novel explores the effects of prevailing social norms and expectations on individual behavior, concerning marriage. The initial hesitation of Mr. Darcy in proposing to Elizabeth Bennet based on lower social standing reflects the deep belief in the primacy of class. Therefore, societal expectations often place greater value on wealth and status than on personal virtue and emotional connection. Elizabeth challenges these class-based conventions by rejecting the proposal of Darcy due to arrogance and failure to acknowledge intrinsic worth. The response affirms the importance of mutual respect and personal merit over social hierarchy. Austen critiques the rigidity of the class system through character interactions, advocating for a more egalitarian view where individuals are judged by character rather than social position. Generally, the novel promotes the idea that genuine love and respect can transcend class boundaries and personal integrity should prevail over societal expectations.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Jane Austen critiqued the societal norms and gender expectations of the Regency era, concerning the impact on marriage decisions. The novel showed that women were often compelled to prioritize financial security and social status over personal happiness and romantic fulfillment. Austen emphasizes the societal pressure to marry for stability rather than affection through characters such as Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins, and Charlotte Lucas. In contrast, the development of the relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy challenged conventional expectations by advocating for marriages founded on mutual respect, emotional connection, and individual worth. The narrative also critiqued the rigid class system, as reflected in the initial hesitation of Darcy to marry Elizabeth due to a lower social standing. This exposed the restrictive gender roles limiting the opportunities of women where marriage was frequently regarded as the only viable path to financial security. In this context, Austen promoted a shift toward a more egalitarian view of relationships, where love, respect, and personal agency were prioritized over social obligation, class hierarchy, and economic advantage.

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