The Marriage Perspectives in "Pride and Prejudice" and Their Implications

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Keywords: Marriage views, Love, Insights

Abstract: "Pride and Prejudice" is a novel written by the British author Jane Austen, focusing on the themes of marriage and love. The story revolves around the marital affairs of the Bennet family's daughters, portraying their perspectives on marriage. Marriage has always been a timeless human topic. In "Pride and Prejudice," the author depicts and analyzes four types of marriages. The novel's views on love and marriage remain relevant for young men and women in today's era. This article will analyze the choices of marriage partners made by four couples in the book, summarize their views on marriage, and analyze their implications for contemporary young people regarding marriage and love.

1. Introduction

1.1 Author's Background

"Pride and Prejudice" author Jane Austen was born in the English town of Steventon. Her father was a local clergyman, and her mother belonged to a wealthy family. Although Austen's family was not extremely wealthy, they lived comfortably, and this lifestyle and family influence ignited her passion for writing. The rural setting laid the foundation for Austen's writing style, focusing on the lives of a few families in the countryside, earning her the title of "carving humanity in three inches of ivory." During that era, women had limited opportunities to participate in work for their livelihoods compared to men. Women were expected to be good daughters, wives, and mothers but were not encouraged to pursue their own ambitions. Austen, growing up in such an environment, developed the idea of making a living through writing. Her romantic involvement with an Irish lawyer named LeFroy had some influence on her views on marriage. However, their love story faced societal pressure as Austen's family hoped for her to marry into a wealthy household, while LeFroy came from a less affluent background. Consequently, their love did not materialize, and Austen, in her lifetime, chose to reject a proposal from a wealthy suitor. Austen's life reflected a clear perspective on love and marriage. She dedicated her life to novel writing, incorporating her views on love and marriage into her works, addressing the age-old question of the balance between love and financial stability, a theme that has contributed to the enduring popularity of her works over two centuries.

1.2 Historical Background

The novel "Pride and Prejudice" does not explicitly specify the exact time of the events. Based on the story descriptions, it can be inferred that the events occurred around the late 18th century to the early 19th century. This period is known as the Georgian era, starting with the reign of George I in 1714 and lasting until Queen Victoria ascended to the throne in 1837. During this era, British society exhibited distinct class divisions and a hierarchical social structure. The aristocracy held prominent social status and wealth, enjoying privileges and preferential treatment, while the middle and lower classes faced relatively challenging conditions, constrained by their social status and living conditions. Moreover, the late 18th century marked the rise of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. This transformative period witnessed a shift from traditional agricultural economies to modern industrial economies, with the emergence of factories and increasing urbanization. The Industrial Revolution had profound effects on British society, altering lifestyles, social structures, and value systems. In such a historical context, the British people's notions of marriage also underwent changes, as individuals grappled with the dilemma of choosing between love and financial stability. "Pride and Prejudice" explores the love stories between the Bennet and Darcy families, revealing the prevailing prejudices, vanity, and human weaknesses of the time, as well as the pursuit of love, marriage, and social status. It reflects the impact of societal changes on individual lives and family relationships, as well as the courage and resilience individuals demonstrated in the face of societal norms and biases. Jane Austen not only criticizes marriages based on wealth and social status but also emphasizes the importance of mutual understanding, empathy, and respect in marriage^[1].

2. Analysis of Three Types of Marriages

Jane Austen, in "Pride and Prejudice," masterfully delineates three distinct types of marriages, unveiling varied perspectives on this sacred institution.

2.1 Romantic Marriage Based on Love

(1) Elizabeth and Darcy

Elizabeth Bennet, the second daughter of the Bennet family and the novel's central figure, exudes intelligence, elegance, and charm, setting her apart in societal gatherings. Fitzwilliam Darcy, born into affluence and bestowed with a refined education, possesses striking handsomeness, a sense of responsibility, yet is initially perceived as aloof and arrogant. Their fateful encounter transpires at a ball, where Darcy's initial coldness leaves an unfavorable impression on Elizabeth. Despite continued interactions, Darcy maintains an air of pride. However, as circumstances unfold, Darcy becomes captivated by Elizabeth's grace and intellect. A failed confession follows, marred by Darcy's haughty language and condescending demeanor, leaving Elizabeth with a negative bias. Despite this initial setback, subsequent encounters foster mutual understanding and harmony. Darcy's instrumental role in resolving Lydia's elopement exposes his generosity and kindness, reshaping Elizabeth's perception of him. Despite societal disparities, Elizabeth refuses to feel inferior. Even after Darcy's aunt humiliates her due to class differences, Elizabeth adheres to her convictions and accepts Darcy's renewed proposal. The author's perspective on marriage manifests in Elizabeth's attitude - she pursues genuine love and seeks spiritual equality. Elizabeth would not recklessly pursue love for the sake of self-righteous passion, as her sister Lydia did. She also would not marry for material wealth in married life, like her friend Charlotte. Instead, she would follow her own heart based on her subjective values and judgments^[2]. Her acceptance of Darcy stems from his comprehension and respect for her, transcending his prior arrogance. Elizabeth yearns for a romantic love, eschewing the commodification of marriage for financial gain. Darcy's wealth inevitably leads to arrogance, but through interactions with Elizabeth, he recognizes the distress his pride inflicts upon others and undergoes a transformative change. Their union relies on mutual tolerance and understanding, embodying the author's ideal marriage—one marked by physical allure, material foundation, and, most importantly, intellectual parity.

(2) Jane and Bingley

Jane Bennet, the eldest daughter of the Bennet family, possesses unparalleled beauty and gentleness among her five sisters. Revered for her kindness and physical allure, Jane's reserved nature nearly causes her to overlook opportunities for happiness, serving as a stark contrast to her sister Elizabeth. Charles Bingley, a wealthy, friendly, and cheerful young gentleman, perfectly aligns with the ideal spouse criteria sought by young women. Despite occasional indecisiveness, Bingley exudes humility and affability. Their paths intertwine at a ball, coinciding with Bingley's family renting a nearby estate. Jane is immediately captivated by Bingley's amiability, while Bingley finds himself enamored by Jane's beauty and gentleness. Yet, the interference of Bingley's sister Caroline and his friend Darcy seeks to impede their blossoming romance. Caroline deems Jane's modest background unsuitable, scheming to unite Bingley with Darcy's sister, Georgiana. Darcy shares this perspective, suspecting Jane's attraction to be rooted in Bingley's wealth. Their meddling introduces challenges to Jane and Bingley's love. Despite a brief separation, Jane and Bingley's affections endure, fortified by trust, understanding, and unwavering support. Assisted by Elizabeth and Darcy, the couple overcomes obstacles, ultimately uniting in marriage and embarking on a joyous marital journey. Without a doubt, Jane and Bingley stand as an enviable couple. Overcoming setbacks, their love evolves into a marital union characterized by compatibility in thoughts, mutual admiration, and a cherished love story within the narrative of "Pride and Prejudice."

2.2 Rational Marriage Based on Interest

(1) Charlotte and Collins

Charlotte Lucas, a friend of Elizabeth Bennet, hails from an ordinary family—neither affluent nor impoverished. While lacking the status of an aristocratic lineage, her family commands a respectable position in society. This position might not elevate her to the upper echelons, but it ensures a decent life within the middle class. Charlotte, perhaps not the most striking in physical appearance among the novel's characters, is nonetheless characterized by a modest beauty. She is a pragmatic and realistic woman who values social status and societal norms. Believing that marriage is the only choice for women in society at that time, Charlotte adopts a pragmatic attitude, unlike other characters who pursue romantic love. Her focus lies on practical benefits and economic stability, which explains her acceptance of Mr. Collins's proposal despite lacking romantic affection.

Mr. Collins is a distant cousin of Mr. Bennet, characterized by his obsessive self-importance and hypocrisy. Initially occupying a low social status, he secures a position as a clergyman due to the patronage of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mr. Darcy's aunt. Collins places great importance on his social standing and, therefore, displays excessive flattery towards Lady Catherine. He arrogantly views himself as an outstanding clergyman, overestimating both his abilities and virtues. However, his attainment of the clerical position is primarily attributed to his sycophantic behavior towards Lady Catherine. Additionally, Collins emphasizes social etiquette and traditional values, but his flattery often appears overly rigid and insincere. His actions are more about conforming to societal expectations than genuine self-expression. Collins harbors a strong desire for social status and wealth, attempting to elevate his standing by marrying a wealthy woman. Yet, he lacks a deep understanding and appreciation for the true meaning and emotions of marriage. Despite his self-perceived greatness, Collins lacks genuine self-awareness and independent critical thinking. He blindly follows societal expectations and traditional views, neglecting his inner voice and genuine emotions. The union

between Charlotte and Collins is a marriage devoid of love, characterized by a transaction of interests. Their union lacks a deep emotional foundation; the concept of "each getting what they need" perfectly encapsulates this marriage^[3]. Collins views marriage as a task to be completed, a means to pursue social wealth and status. He disregards whether there is love between him and his prospective spouse. His absurd proposal to two different women in a single day exemplifies this. Charlotte approaches marriage with a rational and realistic mindset. While lacking affection for Mr. Collins, she recognizes her ordinary status, lack of property, and the need for a husband with social status and wealth. After weighing the pros and cons, she chooses to accept Mr. Collins's proposal. Post-marriage, they manage their household amicably. Both Collins and Charlotte are individuals who prioritize reality and approach marriage with rationality, shaping their unique perspective on marital unions.

2.3 Absurd Marriage Based on Desire

(1) Lydia and Wickham

Lydia Bennet is the youngest daughter of the Bennet family, characterized by a lack of responsibility and maturity. Her impulsive and selfish nature leads her to act recklessly without considering the consequences, displaying a lack of responsibility towards her family and sisters.In pursuit of higher social status and a better marriage, Lydia disregards morality and family reputation. She craves excitement, admires wealth and fame, and desires attention. Lydia is easily influenced by those who flatter her. Simultaneously, she holds misguided views on marriage, believing it to be purely romantic and assuming that everything can be overlooked as long as she pursues her ideal partner. This perspective leads to an irrational and thoughtless approach to her choice of marriage. Lydia and Wickham's elopement has negative repercussions on her sisters, especially Elizabeth and Jane. Lydia's indulgent and irresponsible behavior causes trouble for the entire family. Her decisions not only impact her own future but also influence the marriages and social statuses of her sisters. Overall, while Lydia may be vain and selfish, she possesses a certain degree of spontaneity. Her actions reflect the challenges and dilemmas faced by some young women in the society of that time. Strictly speaking, Lydia is also a victim. Wickham is a complex and deceptive character. With charming looks and a respectable profession as a soldier—a highly desirable trait among young women of the time-Wickham successfully attracts the admiration of many, including Lydia. Additionally, Wickham excels in rhetoric and socializing, adding to his appeal. However, beneath this misleading exterior lies a deceitful heart. Wickham's character is morally questionable, lacking a sense of ethics and responsibility. He often prioritizes his own interests, resorting to deception to achieve personal gains. Wickham, with his charming appearance and eloquence, successfully deceives many women, including Elizabeth Bennet, to gain their affection. In pursuit of Elizabeth's approval, he does not hesitate to slander and betray Mr. Darcy. Utilizing his charm and social status, he induces women to believe that his feelings for them are sincere, when in reality, he is only pursuing his own selfish interests. Wickham treats relationships recklessly, pursuing his desires without considering the feelings and interests of others. His marriage to Lydia is a transaction based on deception, as he blackmails the Bennet family. Wickham marries Lydia not out of love, but to satisfy his desires for a young and beautiful body as well as financial gains. His excessive pursuit of wealth and social status makes him value money above all else. His concept of marriage is built on the pursuit of wealth and status, rather than genuine emotions and responsibilities. While Wickham initially navigates social circles effortlessly, his true nature is eventually revealed. His deceitful actions are exposed, leading to the loss of trust and respect from others. His fate becomes a symbol of punishment for moral corruption and fraudulent behavior. During the Bennet sisters' shopping outing, they coincidentally encounter Wickham, and Lydia becomes acquainted with him. Under Wickham's deception and seduction, Lydia develops a strong interest in him and quickly succumbs to his charm. Her infatuation with Wickham, driven by her youthfulness and impulsiveness, plunges her into blind pursuit. Lydia's feelings towards Wickham are solely based on his appearance and words, without considering his true intentions and background. However, Wickham's true goal is to pursue Lydia's family property and social status, rather than genuine emotions. Lydia mistakenly believes that there is sincere love between her and Wickham, but, in reality, this is merely an infatuation with a romanticized fantasy. She fails to recognize Wickham's true character and is blinded by her own illusions. Although Wickham and Lydia choose to marry, this union is evidently bought by the Bennet family with money. The marriage between Wickham and Lydia is not based on genuine love; it is more of an exchange of desires. This plot reveals the novel's criticism of false love and infatuation, as well as a warning against blind pursuits.

(2) Mr. and Mrs. Bennet

The marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, though less explored in the narrative, is quite typical and bears resemblance to real-life situations. Mr. Bennet is a perceptive and understanding individual, admired by readers for his wit and humor. His keen observations often reveal the essence of people, expressed through humorous remarks. Despite Mr. Bennet's intelligence and humor, he displays an indifferent and nonchalant attitude towards his family, especially his wife. His coldness towards family and contempt for his wife often create tension in their relationship. Mrs. Bennet is an emotional and impulsive person, driven by feelings rather than rationality. Anxious about her daughters' marriages, she frequently frets over finding suitable matches. Mrs. Bennet places great importance on social status and wealth, hoping to elevate the family's status and wealth through her daughters' marriages. Mrs. Bennet, in her views on marriage, never considers the foundation of love between the partners. For her, as long as the man is "wealthy" and has status, it is sufficient^[4]. This mindset results in excessive expectations and demands regarding her daughters' marriages. She often fantasizes about her daughters marrying wealthy bachelors, treating them as commodities that can be bargained for. While these actions may seem to stem from genuine concern for her daughters' future happiness and love as a devoted mother, she overlooks her daughters' true feelings. Mr. Bennet, captivated by Mrs. Bennet's beauty in his youth, chose to marry her. However, as they spent more time together, he discovered her to be frivolous and ignorant, leading to his choice of adopting an indifferent attitude towards her. Their lack of shared interests and significant personality differences hinder effective communication between them. Mrs. Bennet prioritizes socializing and family status, while Mr. Bennet leans towards solitude and reading. This divergence results in poor communication and a lack of genuine exchange between the spouses. Mrs. Bennet's anxiety about her daughters' marriages leads her to excessively interfere in their lives. While aiming to improve the family's status and wealth through their marriages, she lacks rationality and employs incorrect methods. This interference exacerbates tension in the marital relationship. Mr. Bennet often expresses contempt for Mrs. Bennet's anxiety and behavior, further straining the relationship. His indifference and disdain deepen Mrs. Bennet's insecurity and dissatisfaction. Despite these challenges, they choose to maintain their marriage rather than opting for divorce to pursue true love. Although they lack the romantic love of Elizabeth and Darcy, they sustain their marriage through mutual tolerance and compromise. This marriage model reflects the reality of many contemporary unions. The Bennet family's financial situation is characterized by Mr. Bennet's estate being entailed, meaning that it can only be inherited by a male heir. As Mr. and Mrs. Bennet have only daughters, the estate will pass to a distant male relative upon Mr. Bennet's death. This financial constraint adds an additional layer of complexity and stress to their marriage. The lack of a male heir jeopardizes the family's future, intensifying Mrs. Bennet's focus on securing advantageous marriages for her daughters to ensure their financial wellbeing.

3. Insights from Three Types of Marriages for Contemporary Young People

3.1 The Material Foundation of Marriage

The economic foundation determines the superstructure. Whether in marriage or other relationships, material aspects are indispensable. For marital relationships, a good material life is particularly important. It can be said that a high-quality material life is a prerequisite for a happy marital life, making material aspects one of the cornerstones of marriage.

Firstly, material provides the basic conditions for the survival of marriage. Whether it's the living environment, daily sustenance, or needs related to education and healthcare, all require material support. The satisfaction of these basic needs is a prerequisite for the maintenance and development of marriage. Without an adequate material foundation, the pressure on both partners in life increases, leading to conflicts and tensions that affect marital stability. Secondly, material reflects the quality of life and values of both spouses. Having a certain material foundation makes married life more comfortable and enjoyable, facilitating the pursuit of a better quality of life and future planning. Material conditions also indicate the pursuit and planning for life quality, contributing to mutual understanding and identification. To some extent, material conditions influence the social and interpersonal relationships of both spouses. With a sufficient material foundation, couples can confidently engage in social activities, expand their social circles, and enhance social support—a crucial aspect for the healthy development of marriage. The marriages of the admired couples in "Pride and Prejudice," namely Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, as well as Jane and Mr. Bingley, are based on a solid material foundation, an essential condition for their happy lives.

Therefore, when young men and women seek partners, they should not prioritize blind romanticism or physical appearance. Alongside enjoying romantic love, it is essential to consider both your and your partner's economic conditions. Analyzing the current economic foundation and potential to create material wealth in the future is crucial. After completing these considerations, the suitability for marriage should be assessed. True marriage is not solely about overwhelming romance but also about daily life—the mundane aspects. Without a solid material foundation, marital relationships are unstable and susceptible to various external factors, ultimately harming both parties.

However, it's crucial to note that while material aspects are one cornerstone of marriage, they are not the sole factor. The happiness of marriage also depends on various aspects such as the emotions, communication, understanding, and tolerance between the spouses. Therefore, while pursuing material conditions, both spouses should also focus on cultivating and maintaining their emotional connection, jointly working towards the happiness of their marriage.

3.2 Love is the Soul of Marriage

Marriage only truly begins when there is love. Without love, it cannot be called a marriage. A loveless marriage is nothing more than an empty shell, a casual cohabitation between two individuals. Such a marriage lacks happiness and only brings endless suffering to those involved. Love, as a profound expression of human emotion, is undoubtedly the most core and precious aspect of marriage. It is not only the foundation of marriage but also the driving force and source for its continuous development. Therefore, it can be said that love is the soul of marriage.

Firstly, love injects vitality and dynamism into marriage. Nurtured by love, marriage becomes more than a mere contractual agreement but rather an emotionally vibrant union. When two individuals come together out of love, they share the ups and downs of life, exchanging dreams and aspirations. This profound emotional bond makes marriage more meaningful and valuable. Secondly, love enhances communication and understanding between spouses. With a foundation of love, couples can openly communicate their thoughts and feelings, fostering a deeper understanding and trust in each other. This profound communication helps address conflicts and tensions that may arise in marriage, allowing spouses to better adapt to challenges together. Additionally, love brings boundless warmth and happiness to marriage. Basking in the glow of love, couples can support and care for each other, creating beautiful memories and experiences together. This warmth and happiness not only strengthen the bond between spouses but also contribute to a harmonious and peaceful family environment, providing a positive atmosphere for the growth of children. Undoubtedly, Elizabeth and Jane found love in their marriages, making them happier. Lydia's marriage, lacking love, is destined to collapse, and she won't find lasting happiness in it. Although Charlotte manages her loveless marriage with some success, it is ultimately a compromise to reality, leaving room for regret.

In summary, when young men and women seek partners, they should not only focus on the economic conditions of the other person but also consider their own feelings. A loveless marriage may persist due to other factors, but those involved are undoubtedly unhappy. If faced with setbacks, a marriage without love is likely to become unsustainable.

However, it's essential to note that love is not static. With the passage of time and life changes, the feelings between spouses may be influenced by various factors. Therefore, maintaining the freshness and longevity of love requires joint efforts from both spouses. Through continuous communication, understanding, tolerance, and care, couples can sustain and elevate their emotional connection, allowing the soul of marriage to endure.

3.3 Tolerance is the Preservative of Marriage

What is marriage? It is a relationship where two individuals from different families, with distinct values and ways of handling things, come together to form a new family and continue their lives. Due to diverse upbringing, even if two people get along well, differences and conflicts may arise. In such situations, tolerance becomes exceptionally crucial. In marriage, only by learning to be tolerant can it be sustained for the long term and remain vibrant over time.

Firstly, tolerance can defuse conflicts between spouses. In marital life, disagreements and conflicts are inevitable. However, if both parties approach these situations with a tolerant mindset, it can prevent conflicts from escalating. By openly listening, understanding, and respecting each other's perspectives, couples can find common ground, resolving differences and maintaining marital harmony and stability. Secondly, tolerance enhances understanding between spouses. Each person has their own personality, habits, and values, and spouses are no exception. In married life, if both parties can accept each other's differences with a tolerant attitude, they can better comprehend each other's actions and thoughts. This understanding helps eliminate misunderstandings and prejudices, fostering trust and intimacy between spouses. Additionally, tolerance can spark love between spouses. When both parties approach each other's flaws and shortcomings with a tolerant mindset, they feel cared for and comforted. This love and warmth strengthen the bond between spouses, making married life sweeter and happier.

Whether in the course of marriage or during courtship, both sides must learn the quality of tolerance. Tolerance enhances marital stability, allowing it to last longer. The marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet is undoubtedly a good example. In their long marital life, the initial passion has long faded, and they may not even like each other. Still, mutual tolerance allows this marriage to endure.

However, tolerance does not mean unconditional concessions. In married life, both spouses should adhere to their principles and boundaries while respecting each other's independence and individuality. Tolerance should be built on a foundation of mutual respect and understanding, rather than unilateral forbearance and sacrifice.

4. Conclusion

In human society, marriage is one of the crucial social relationships. It expresses different attitudes towards love and family, constituting an essential part of societal values and serving as an indirect reflection of the current social situation^[5]. Throughout history, people from various backgrounds have engaged in prolonged discussions about the topic of marriage. Different individuals have different answers to questions about what marriage is and what constitutes an ideal marriage. Jane Austen, in her romantic work "Pride and Prejudice," also provides an answer. According to Jane, an ideal marriage should encompass both material foundation and love, emphasizing the necessity of both bread and love in marriage. Additionally, Jane vividly portrays the diverse forms of marriage, including those that gain love, compromise for interests, and enter into marriage due to desire. These various facets of marriage, analyzed by Jane, not only express her own views on marriage but also offer guidance to the perplexed young people. Love, marriage, money, and social status are closely intertwined. Marriages solely based on status, wealth, or physical beauty are considered erroneous. However, marriages founded on love should also consider economic factors; the two aspects are indispensable to a successful union^[6].

The present era is marked by complexity. With societal openness and progress, people's perspectives on marriage are continually evolving. Traditional notions of "men should marry when old, and women should marry when mature" are gradually being challenged, replaced by more liberal and egalitarian views on marriage. An increasing number of individuals now prioritize the quality of marriage over its formalities, seeking emotional resonance and spiritual connection with their partners. This shift is undoubtedly a positive development and a reflection of societal progress. However, not everything is improving; in recent years, many countries and regions have witnessed a decline in marriage rates and an increase in divorce rates. Economic pressure emerges as a significant factor in contemporary marriages. As the cost of living, including housing, education, and healthcare, rises, many young people feel overwhelmed when contemplating marriage. Some choose not to marry or postpone marriage due to economic reasons, while others may face marital crises triggered by financial issues.

In this complex world, people's primary focus has become work and earning money, turning marriage into a challenge for many. For numerous young men and women, pursuing marriage becomes a dilemma—they want to get married but are afraid to, and they desire love but succumb to various pressures. Some even find themselves at the point where discussing marriage becomes intimidating. Is marriage really that terrifying? What kind of marriage is genuinely healthy? It is hoped that Jane Austen's ideas from a century ago can provide some insights for young men and women today.

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