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本科毕业设计(论文)

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| **专** | **业：** |  |  | 英 语 | |  |
| **论文题目：**Jane Austen’s Views on Marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* | | | | | | |
|  | | 从《傲慢与偏见》看简·奥斯汀的婚姻观 | | | |  |
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2019 年 6 月

**On Jane Austen’s Point of View of Marriage in *Pride and Prejudice***

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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June, 2019

**Declaration**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person or material which has to a substantial extent been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text.

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# Acknowledgments

This thesis has finally come into being to meet critical eyes through two months of hard work. From the very beginning when I chose the topic till the completion of the thesis, I have benefited from many people .

First of all I would like to show my sincere gratitude to my tutor, Hu Aihua. Without her sincere and trustworthy guidance, valuable suggestions and critical comments, it would be difficult for me to accomplish this thesis.Her loyalty to teaching and punctilious work style has profoundly impressed me.

Moreover, I heartily thank all the teachers who have helped me in the past four years, who have provided me with incentives and direction for my study. Thanks are also due to my classmates and friends for their constant encouragement and their ways of assistance in the course of writing.

Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family members, for their selfless support,thoughtfulness and encouragement．

Abstract

Jane Austen was one of the distinguished realistic novelists in the nineteenth- century-English literature. *Pride and Prejudice* is a world wide popular novel published in 1813．Austen set the story in the first decade of the nineteenth century．At that time,marriage was the only way for women to gain social status and recognition. The author of the present thesis will analyze the five marriage patterns from the perspective of sociohistorical literary criticism to explore the important role that money and love plays in marriage. It can be seen clearly that Austen fully expresses her original views on marriage：property, social status and love are three indispensable elements in a marriage．It is wrong to marry for money,but it is unwise to marry without money. Austen’s views on marriage emphasize love and economic condition, but love plays the significant role,which is the predominant aspect at Austen’s time. The thesis tries to draw some inspiration from Austen and provide some hints for modern women in their view of marriage, and add something new into the literary criticism of the great work of Jane Austen.

**Keywords**: *Pride and Prejudice*; views on marriage; love; property; realistic significance

# 中文摘要

简·奥斯汀是十九世纪英国文学史上最伟大的现实主义小说家之一。她的《傲慢与偏见》于1813年问世,是一部享誉世界的著名小说。小说将故事情节置于十九世纪初,十九世纪的英国,婚姻是女性获得社会地位和社会认知的唯一途径。本文使用社会历史批评的方法来分析小说中五种不同类型的婚姻,探讨金钱与爱情在婚姻中的重要作用,从而得出作者简·奥斯汀的婚姻观：财产、门第和爱情是婚姻中必不可少的三个因素,为了金钱而结婚是错误的,然而缺少金钱的婚姻也是不明智的。奥斯汀的婚姻观强调爱情和经济条件,但是爱情起着重要的作用,这一点在奥斯汀所处时代是有重要意义的。本文作者意在借用奥斯汀的一些进步观点为现代女性在婚姻观方面提供一些借鉴,同时为使用文学批评方法研究奥斯汀的这一著作增添一些新的东西。

**关键词**：《傲慢与偏见》；婚姻观；爱情；财产；现实意义

# Introduction

## 1.1 Research background

Jane Austen was an outstanding realistic novelist in the history of English literature.As a daughter of a country clergyman,Austen never entered a formal school,but she was well educated by her family. At the age of about twelve,Austen began to write．She wrote and completed six novels and three minor writings in her life time．She was obviously a fruitful novelist and engaged in writing for all her life．Her works, including Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility, mainly focus on the marriage and life of squire women, and describe the world around her with her unique detailed observation and lively and witty words.

Both in the west and in China, Pride and Prejudice has got great attention from the critics and many critics have commented it from sociohistorical aspect．Although some scholars analyzed Austen’s views on marriage,the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet is often neglected．

## 1.2 Purpose of the study

So the thesis aims to make a deep analysis of marriages inPride and Prejudice, in order that we can fully understand the original views on marriage,and can add something new into the literary criticism of the great work of Jane Austen．

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## 1.3 Organization of the Thesis

The author of the present thesis will analyze the five marriage patterns from the perspective of sociohistorical literary criticism.Part one will introduce sociohistorical literary criticism in a brief way, and next the thesis will present a sociohistorical anslysis of five marriages in *Pride and Prejudice.*Part three is the significance of Austen’s views on marriage. The positive aspects that Austen emphasizes on love between male and female and on women’s education are included, as well as the limitation. The last part of the thesis is conclusion. Although women become independent in economy, marriage is still their important life goal．Austen’s views on marriage give useful advice for selecting their proper mates．

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# 2. The Sociohistorical literary criticism

Sociohistorical literary criticism first appeared in Italy, but became popular in France．It emphasizes the relationship between literary and social activities．It is thought that literary represents the life and forms in a certain social and historical environment．So the main literary value lies in its understanding of the social function and historical significance．The principle of it is that analyzing,understanding and evaluation of a literary work will be taken into consideration of the work’s social and historical background and the writer’s life and other experiences. Therefore, the analysis of literature must be started from the social and historical situation．

Sociohistorical approach has four main characteristics：

1．Analyzing literary works through specific social and historical context．Each literary work belongs to its age and its people,each has its own special environment．It needs to be placed in the times it has been created．

2. To regard works as a cognitive model to deep understanding of the community．Social and historical criticism tries to analyze works’ social background so as to deeply understand society．

3. To view the degree of reflecting the reality as an important criterion to judge the work．Social and historical criticism requires the writers to reflect real life,and to advocate creation of typical images,that is to see the universality from specificity in order to reflect the reality of real life．

4. When explaining a literary work,society, class and political factors are always in first place so as to explore works’ social,class and political value．

Social and historical criticism has the significance of the original criticisms,as literature is always a product of social history．Using historical perspective to search for the spiritual relations between literary and social history, and combine the reality of society and historical continuity, in order that given due attention to the complex diversity of literary and social history．That is just the essence of social and historical criticism．

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# 3. Sociohistorical Analysis of five marriages in Pride and Prejudice

In *Pride and Prejudice*,Austen opens with a direct reference to money marriage and shows that how the delicate human emotions interact with and are influenced by financial considerations. The brilliant first sentence outlines the plot and states the underlying theme of social criticism：“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife”(Austen,1988:1)．“a good fortune” and “in want of”are two key phrases．“in want of” means the single man needs a wife objectively, while “a good fortune” means that single man becomes a subjective target of the girl who wants to capture him as husband．Such kind of words makes the proposition have more objectivity of “truth”．

Women’s choices in Jane Austen’s society were severely limited．Marriage was not merely a problem of love；what is more,it was a problem of economy．Both Austen and her heroines are more interested in money than in other more important considerations when it comes to choosing husbands．However, it does not mean that Austen’s views on marriage are vulgar. On the contrary, they truly reflect the social and historical conventions of her time．

As a female writer of women’s love and marriage at her time,Jane Austen describes marriage as more for convenience rather than compatibility．Marriage is based on economic and social backgrounds．In other words,it is far more based on money and not on 1ove．Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*,Austen’s views on marriage are conveyed through the marriage of several different characters and their marriage patterns.

## 3.1 Mr. and Mrs. Bennet

The marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet is a typical instance of the traditional marriage in the eighteenth century．Their marriage quite dearly shows that the two have never experienced much mutual love and is done mostly for financial benefit. It is a safe preserve to Mrs. Bennet,but is a tragedy to Mr. Bennet.

Austen depicts Mrs. Bennet as a simple-minded pretty woman who frequently complains about her nerve:Her mind was less difficult to develop．She was a woman of mean understanding,little information,and 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．(Austen, 1988:7)

Mr. Bennet is an intelligent and witty man．He “was so odd a mixture of quick parts,sarcastic humor, reserve and caprice,that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character”(Austen,1988: 3)．It shows that there is no marital happiness of emotional and intellectual understanding between the couple．Mr. Bennet married for beauty and money．After marriage,he soon realized that Mrs. Bennet,due to her intellectual weakness and narrow vision,would not make her an ideal wife．He puts an end to all real affection for her．

To Mr．and Mrs. Bennet,their marriage is a social responsibility, even when love disappears,the marriage still can be continuing．Through their marriage,Austen tries to show that Mrs. Bennet is unfairly treated,and the women’s social status is very low in the patriarchal society．As a typical woman of that time,she was merely educated in pleasing the male．But in the real life．she could not satisfy with her husband．Austen seems to ridicule Mrs. Bennet,in fact,she criticizes this unequal society. She believes that both men and women should enjoy equal treatment．Although the world is dominated by men,and men are considered as intelligent and sensible,not all of them are qualified．Mr. Bennet provides a good example．He has intelligence and insights,but he is not a qualified husband,nor a qualified father．

## 3.2 Jane and Bingley

Jane,the eldest daughter of Bennet family, is a good-natured and gentle woman with introverted disposition．Bingley is a wealthy, handsome,cordial and simple young man who is easy to approach and constant in love．At a dancing party in Meryton,Jane and Bingley fall in love with each other at first sight．Jane expresses her true feelings to Bingley：“He is just what a young man ought to be,”…“sensible,good-humored,lively；and I never saw such happy manners!--so much ease,with such perfect good breeding” (Austen,1988: 10). In the eyes of Bingley, Jane is “the most beautiful creature I ever beheld”(Austen,1988: 8)．

The marriage of Jane and Bingley is based on mutual love．Both of them possess so many common virtues．They are good-tempered and modest．They share a mutual understanding and always think best of others．However they also have weaknesses．To conceal her passions to Bingley shows that Jane lacks strength and self-confidence．Pleasant and modest as he is,Bingley can not to be a man with strong and determined disposition．His indecisive character determines that he lacks independence in his marriage．Both of them are weak in judgment and easy to be influenced by others so they need help in some moments．It is fortunate enough that Jane and Bingley can always receive considerate and beneficial advice from Elizabeth and Darcy．

## 3.3 Elizabeth and Darcy

Elizabeth,the second daughter of Bennet family and the protagonist of *Pride* *and Prejudice*,is an intelligent and quick-witted young lady．She is Jane Austen’s own favorite and she wrote her sister when it appeared：“I must confess that I think her [the heroine,Elizabeth] as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print；and how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like her at least I do not know” (Rubinstein 345)．Austen’s dreams which could not be realized in the reality have been realized by her favorite female creature in the novel．Elizabeth is certainly a striking and satisfactory self-portrait of Austen．

Darcy is a “fine,tall person,with handsome features,．．．”(Austen,1988:7). His proud is further emphasized with his offensive rejection of dancing with Elizabeth. However, Darcy is increasingly attracted by Elizabeth’s dark eyes,disposition and intelligence.But his haughty proposal insulted Elizabeth’s self-esteem．She feels that she is not treated equally with Darcy．She is by no means to sacrifice her self-respect to accept his offer．The temptation of money and social status can not make her disregard the inequality between men and women．Therefore she firmly turned down his offer and rebukes him rashly．Elizabeth’s refusal makes him recognize his faults of pride and social prejudice．The visit to Darcy’s home makes Elizabeth’s judgment of Darcy radically change and makes her recognize that she loves Darcy and she at last accepts a prefect-going Darcy．

The marriage between Elizabeth and Darcy is an ideal one．It is based on affection,esteem and passion．In the time when the couple lived,economic conditions and status took a significant role in marriage．They also have a great influence on Elizabeth and Darcy’s marriage．When Elizabeth sees Pemberly, she feels regretful for her refusal of Darcy’s proposal. Her feeling towards Darcy changes. Through their marriage,Austen shows that the power of love can overcome social status and prejudice and further implies that such prejudices is unfeeling and unproductive．

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## 3.4 Lydia and Wickham

Lydia, the youngest daughter of the Bennet family, is idle,foolish．She is an empty-minded and uncertain flirt,who never ceased seeking her own fun and sexual excitement,but sees no purpose to life．Like her mother, marriage is the business of her life．However, unlike her two eldest sisters,she never regards love as a serious matter, and takes it into serious consideration．She lacks any sense of virtue, propriety or good judgment．She is fascinated by the attention and attractiveness of Wickham,a young soldier. Ironically, under the gentlemanlike appearance,Wickham turns out to be a disreputable and demoralized young man.

The marriage between Lydia and Wickham is based on lust,not based on affection. Strong passion is the main reason for their marriage．To marry a man like Wickham can never bring true happiness to a woman．Shortly after their marriage,“his affection for her soon sunk into indifference；hers lasted a little longer；…”(Austen,1988:331)．When passion fades away, they seem to feel miserable with their married life and constantly try to avoid meeting each other：Lydia enjoys regular visiting her elder sisters and Wickham constantly visits London or Bath,alone.Austen suggests,without stating,that perhaps Wickham is not the loyal husband that Lydia perceives him to be．

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## 3.5 Charlotte and Collins

Charlotte Lucas is one of several children of a former tradesman,Sir William Lucas. She is Elizabeth’s intimate friend．Apart from Mr. Bennet,Charlotte is the person in Elizabeth’s world who is closest to her in temperament and intelligence. She has her own ideas and is fair and objective on issues. Being such a“sensible , intelligent young woman” (Austen,1988:14),her marriage with Collins,however,shocks people most,but proves her sense and wisdom．

Mr. Collins is a stupid clergyman who will inherit estate of Longbourn upon Mr. Bennet’s death．His real intention of visiting Longbourn is to find a wife there. He is pompous and narrow-minded man possessing no conception of love. He plans to get married only because Lady Catherine de Bourgh,his patroness,strongly advices him to do so．Like Mrs. Bennet,he approaches marriage as a business．

The marriage between Collins and Charlotte is obviously just a deal in the marriage market. Charlotte clearly knows that “Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable；his society was irksome,and his attachment to her must be imaginary”(Austen,1988:106)．But she still accepts Collins as her husband．She is unwillingly gives up the hope of personal fulfillment through marriage．She wants to marry for the sake of security and status；but considering her plainness,her lack of fortune,and her age,she does not expect to have much choice in the selection of a husband. Since most marriages turn out unhappily anyway, there is not much point in being particular．

Jane Austen does not intend to blame Charlotte for her realistic and materialistic choice so that she does not make Elizabeth to “break with her friend on account of her marriage”(Rubinstein 348-349)．But her understanding does not mean that Austen herself was willing to sacrifice real respect and affection in marriage to accept safety on such terms. In a marriage,Austen is fully aware of the importance of money and social status,and also conscious of the importance of emotional feelings．The attitude towards Charlotte’s marriage indicates that Austen prefers true love rather than material satisfaction in a marriage．

Among the five marriage patterns portrayed in the novel,Elizabeth’s marriage is obviously an ideal one．Her marriage overcomes economic and status differences which strongly attack on money-oriented marriage system．In her marriage,she gains not only financial security, but also enjoys respectable and equal relationship with her husband．Jane’s marriage is also a happy one．In addition to solid economic foundation,the couple shares many common virtues which are the sources of the happiness. Compared with above-mentioned two marriages,the remaining three are not very satisfactory．Charlotte’s marriage is totally a business deal．Except money, no human feeling is existed. Lydia’s marriage is the most unpleasant one．It lacks both money and love and it is solely based on passion．When the sexual attraction fades away, her marriage will exist in name only. Mrs. Bennet’s marriage is based on superficial attraction and wealth．There is no real happiness in her marriage．Through five marriages,Austen thoroughly expresses her views on marriage：Marriage can not only depend on property and social status,while without considering these two is not wise,either. Marriage without love is immoral; Marriage without property is unstable.Happy marriage should be based on love and solid financial foundation.Besides love,other factors also determine a happy marriage,such as mutual respect,mutual understanding,common virtues,passion,and reason

# 4. Significance of Austen’s views on marriage in Pride and Prejudice

## 4.1 Progressiveness of Austen’s views on marriage

As a progressive female writer, Austen’s original views on marriage expressed in her masterpiece *Pride and Prejudice* obviously have progressiveness．

In Austen’s day, women had to obey men and depended on them to gain comfortable living conditions．In this sense,marriage was merely a decent way of survival for women．Women had few expectations of emotional feelings in their marriages．Austen,however, believes that marriage determined by economic and social status can not bring real happiness for women．Love should be a significant factor of a happy marriage．In *Pride and Prejudice*,Austen portrays Jane’s and Elizabeth’s marriage,which are based on true love．She definitely appreciated their marriages because they were a dream that she could not realize forever in her own life．

Elizabeth is a sensible,intelligent and self-respect young woman．Such a lady wins the heart of aristocrat Darcy．Through Elizabeth,Austen intends to indicate that women educated by traditional education system could not be attracted and satisfied with men．They should receive education to enhance their capacities of judgment．Their education degree determines their senses and insights．They may have prosperous future in marriage life as long as they receive equal education with men．

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## 4.2 Limitations of Austen’s views on marriage

The formation of Austen’s views on marriage stems from the social and historical environment in which she lived．It is unlikely for her to go beyond her social environment when she developed her own views on marriage．Although they had significant points,it also had a limitation．

As a middle class woman,Austen looked down upon two jobs for women：being a governess and a lady’s companion．She chose writing as a way of living．She once wrote Cassandra“was more interested in gaining money and independence,by my writing than fame…”(Rubinstein 353)．Nevertheless,she had no income until a few years before her death．For all her life,Austen is supported by her father and brothers．Austen believes that women are equal with men．But her perception of this equality might just in marriage．In economic field,however,she fails to offer solutions for women to be independent in economy．Like other gentry women,she also wants to marry a rich husband to secure her future life．In *Pride and Prejudic*e,none of the heroines is ambitious enough to take up a job to change her life．In the male-dominated society, their ultimate goals are to be “accomplished” women and to hunt wealthy husbands．Their intelligence,sense and manner only serve as a means to increase their attractiveness and opportunities of marrying well．Once married,such qualities are neglected by their husbands．

Austen believes that economic security is the foundation of a marriage．However, she fails to be independent economically for her and her heroines in order to seek and settle perfect marriage．On the contrary, she intends to improve women’s economic condition through marriage．As a matter of fact,“Economic base determines superstructure．” If women can not get economic independence,they will become the subordination of their husbands and can not get their own human dignity．Therefore,women should have their own careers to live on themselves no matter how wealthy their husbands are．Only in this way, women can gain real respect from men and their marriages will become happier and last long．

# 5. Conclusion

Jane Austen was truly one of the greatest literary figures in the English language．She lived a peaceful life in villages,in which each of her novel set．Her fiction’s subject is limited,describing the ordinary daily life of country and its gentry which she was so acquainted with in a wonderful way．The plot of all her novels is simple,because she deals with one thing：courtship and marriage．She was concerned about how women without splendid property marry appropriate husbands．

Marriage was fully expressed in *Pride and Prejudice*．Austen puts all the five marriages depicted in the novel into the real social and economic realities．Marriage was a combination of economic and social status,not the combination of human’s true feelings．Women frequently have to sacrifice feelings for the sake of financial security．To a large extent, women married money, not their husbands．Property plays a guiding role in a marriage．Austen shows her great sympathy for the disastrous fate of women．She fiercely criticizes this money-oriented marriage system．She values true love in marriage．Marriage based on true love is viewed as a happy marriage．

In modem era, the status of women improves greatly．They have gotten economically independent position,and are entitled to the choice of their own husbands．Marriage is no longer a way for their survival．Instead,it becomes an important embodiment of self-realization．For many women,marriage continues to be a major goal in life．They have high expectations for marriage and want a strong and long-lasting relationship in marriage．Austen’s novels provide beneficial guidance for their husbands’ selection．Love,intelligence,economic condition,educational background as well as family background have influence on marriage match．When making a marriage choice,one should take all these elements into consideration , while love places a decisive role．After marriage,husband and wife should establish

equal and mutual respect relationship．

Although Austen’s time has gone,her views on marriage have not become obsolete and they bring inspiration to modern people．The more we change,the more we stay the same．That is a very unique characteristic for Austen and her *Pride and Prejudice*．

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