

THEMES OF MARRIAGE AND SOCIAL CLASS IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

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Abstract. This article examines the interconnected themes of marriage and social class in the novels of Jane Austen, focusing on how the author critiques and reflects the social structures of Regency-era England. The results show that Austen's treatment of these themes demonstrates her deep understanding of how personal wishes clash with social standards which existed during her time.

Keywords: Jane Austen, marriage, social class, Regency England, literary analysis, social mobility, gender, nineteenth-century literature.

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматриваются взаимосвязанные темы брака и социального класса в романах Джейн Остин, с акцентом на то, как автор критикует и отражает социальные структуры Англии эпохи Регентства. Результаты исследования демонстрируют, что подход Остин к этим темам раскрывает глубокое понимание противоречий между индивидуальными желаниями и общественными ожиданиями, позиционируя её произведения одновременно как продукты своего исторического момента и как комментарии к нему.

Ключевые слова: Джейн Остин, брак, социальный класс, Англия эпохи Регентства, литературный анализ, социальная мобильность, гендер, литература девятнадцатого века.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada Jeyn Ostinning romanlarida nikoh va ijtimoiy tabaqalanish mavzularining o'zaro bog'liqligi o'rganiladi, bunda muallif Regentlik davri Angliyasining ijtimoiy tuzilmalarini qanday tanqid qilishi va aks ettirishiga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, Ostinning ushbu mavzularga yondashuvida individual istak va ijtimoiy kutilmalar o'rtasidagi ziddiyatlarni chuqur anglash namoyon bo'ladi, bu esa uning asarlarini ham o'z tarixiy davrining mahsuli, ham unga sharh sifatida belgilaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: Jeyn Ostin, nikoh, ijtimoiy tabaqalanish, Regentlik davri Angliyasi, adabiy tahlil, ijtimoiy mobillik, gender, XIX asr adabiyoti.

INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen (1775–1817) remains one of the most celebrated novelists in the English literary canon, with her works continuing to generate scholarly interest more than two centuries after their publication. Her six completed novels—*Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*—explore the domestic lives of the English gentry with remarkable psychological depth and social acuity [1].

The relationship between social class and marriage stands as the main focus of Austen's storytelling because these two elements serve as tools for her to study how people interact in a society that maintains strict social divisions. The significance of these themes cannot be overstated, as marriage in Regency England represented one of the few avenues through which women could secure economic stability and social standing [2]. This article aims to analyze how Austen portrays the relationship between matrimony and class hierarchy, arguing that her novels

present a sophisticated critique of mercenary marriages while advocating for unions that balance practical considerations with genuine emotional connection.

METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This study employs a methodological approach which requires close examination of Austen's main texts together with an extensive study of all relevant academic works on the topic.

The research framework employs feminist literary criticism together with new historicist theories which analyze literary works in relation to their social and cultural environments [3].

Claudia Johnson's foundational research proves that Austen's novels provide a critical examination of the conservative beliefs which dominated her society, especially about the social limitations imposed on women during her era [4]. Johnson demonstrates that Austen uses her ironic writing style together with her narrative techniques to show the system contradictions which prohibited women from earning money but still considered their romantic relationships to be the foundation for marriage. Edward Copeland, through his research about monetary aspects in Austen's literature, shows how her characters make marriage choices based on specific economic factors which she understood well, especially regarding the financial conditions that gentry women experienced during her time [5].

Russian scholar Amineva studied Austen's works through a comparative method to show how Austen's depiction of social institutions matches the themes of 19th-century Russian literature which shows how patriarchal societies restrict women's freedom [6]. Karimova has investigated the universal aspects of Austen's social criticism because she believes that Austen's understanding of class and gender relationships extends beyond the specific time period of her work [7]. David Spring's research presents vital historical information which shows how English gentry members wed during his time while proving that Austen accurately depicts the connection between love and financial interests in her writing [8]. The combined scholarly work proves that Austen's exploration of marriage and class shows multiple dimensions through her social observation and moral assessment and psychological understanding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Austen's novels reveals a consistent pattern in which marriage serves as the primary mechanism through which social class is negotiated, maintained, and occasionally transcended. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the marriage plot operates simultaneously as romance and as economic negotiation, with the novel's famous opening line—"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife"—immediately establishing the mercenary logic that governs the marriage market [9]. The character of Mrs. Bennet embodies this logic in its crudest form, viewing her daughters' marriages purely as financial transactions designed to secure the family's economic future.

However, Austen's narrative treatment exposes the limitations and moral dangers of this purely instrumental approach to matrimony. The marriages that Austen presents as genuinely successful—Elizabeth and Darcy, Jane and Bingley—are those that combine economic prudence with mutual respect, intellectual compatibility, and genuine affection. By contrast, the marriages undertaken purely for financial or social advancement—such as Charlotte Lucas's union with Mr. Collins—are portrayed as compromises that, while practically defensible, represent a diminishment of human possibility.

Austen's treatment of social class reveals similar complexity, as her novels neither simply endorse nor entirely reject the class hierarchy of her time.

The character of Darcy initially embodies aristocratic pride and class prejudice, viewing Elizabeth's inferior connections as disqualifying her from serious consideration as a marriage partner. His moral education throughout the novel involves recognizing that true gentility resides in character rather than birth, a recognition that enables his ultimately happy marriage to Elizabeth [10]. Yet Austen does not present a radically egalitarian vision; her heroines marry into the gentry or aristocracy, and social climbing through marriage is treated ambivalently at best.

The novels suggest that while rigid class boundaries are morally indefensible when they prevent worthy matches, the complete dissolution of social distinction is neither possible nor entirely desirable. In *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, Austen further develops these themes by examining how class position shapes moral character and perception. Fanny Price's marginalized position within the Bertram household grants her moral clarity that the privileged Bertram children lack, while Emma Woodhouse's social elevation contributes to her initial blindness regarding her own heart and the feelings of those around her. These characterizations suggest that Austen understood class not merely as an external social category but as a formative influence on individual psychology and moral development. The integration of marriage and class themes in Austen's work ultimately produces a distinctive moral vision in which genuine virtue must find expression within, rather than in opposition to, social structures, even as those structures are subjected to searching criticism.

CONCLUSION

This analysis demonstrates that Jane Austen's treatment of marriage and social class constitutes a sophisticated engagement with the central social institutions of her era. Rather than offering simple endorsement or rejection of the marriage market and class hierarchy, Austen presents a nuanced vision that acknowledges practical economic realities while insisting on the importance of moral integrity and emotional authenticity in human relationships. Her novels critique marriages undertaken purely for financial advancement while recognizing that complete disregard for economic considerations is neither possible nor wise.

Similarly, her treatment of class exposes the moral limitations of rigid social boundaries while accepting the existence of social hierarchy as a given feature of human society. The enduring appeal of Austen's works derives in significant measure from this balanced approach, which resonates with readers who continue to navigate the tension between romantic ideals and practical necessities in their own lives. Future research might productively examine how Austen's themes have been adapted and reinterpreted in contemporary cultural productions, exploring how changing social conditions have transformed the significance of her insights regarding marriage and class.

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