



The Struggle and Resistance against the limitations of women's roles in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06- 01	<i>This study explores the struggle and resistance to the limitations imposed on women's roles in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, with a specific focus on the character of Elizabeth Bennet. Set in a patriarchal society where social expectations and marriage norms largely shape women's identities, the novel portrays Elizabeth as a woman who challenges traditional gender norms. This study uses feminist literary criticism and a qualitative descriptive methodology, specifically Simone de Beauvoir's concept of The Other, to analyze how women are positioned as secondary subjects within a male-dominated social structure. The data were collected through close reading and textual analysis of narrative descriptions and dialogues related to women's roles, marriage, and independence in the novel. The findings reveal that Elizabeth Bennet experiences various forms of social pressure to conform to traditional expectations, especially regarding marriage as an opportunity to secure a place in society and financial security. However, she resists these limitations by asserting her independence, valuing emotional integrity, and rejecting marriages that compromise her principles. Her critical attitude toward social hierarchy and her refusal of a financially secure yet loveless marriage show her resistance to patriarchal limitations. This study concludes that Elizabeth Bennet represents an early form of feminist awareness, representing the rights of women and self-expression in a socially restricted environment.</i>
Revised: 2026 06-18	
Accepted: 2026 06-29	
Keywords: Feminism, Literary Criticism, Patriarchal Society, Resistance, Women's Roles	
DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.10040	
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1. Introduction

In many patriarchal societies throughout history, women have been positioned within strict societal systems that limit their independence, specifically in matters of marriage, education, and economic autonomy. Women are often

expected to fit into roles that are socially created to emphasize domesticity, obedience, and dependence on men. This issue persists in contemporary society, and it remains a real crisis. According to UN Women (2023), its *Gender Snapshot* report found that globally, women still spend 2.5 times as many hours on unpaid domestic work as men, limiting their opportunities for economic independence. In some regions, women also face legal barriers in owning property or accessing financial resources without male permission.

These conditions demonstrate that structural dependence on men remains a lived reality for many women, reinforcing gender inequality and positioning women as secondary to men. This condition can be understood through the theoretical framework proposed by Simone de Beauvoir, particularly her concept of *The Other*. Simone de Beauvoir defines this condition through the concept of 'The Other', in which women are socially viewed as secondary beings whose identities are defined as dependent individuals.

At the same time, men are positioned as independent subjects (Beauvoir, 1949). In her view, 'humanity is male, and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being' (Beauvoir, 1949). This perspective provides an important autonomy. Previous studies have also emphasized that patriarchal culture often creates women's identities in relation to male authority, strengthening their position as dependent figures within social structures (Rahman, 2020).

This condition is evident in literary works set in patriarchal contexts, including those written during the Regency era in England. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* portrays a society in which marriage is the primary means for women to gain social status and financial security. In this societal context, women's value often depends on their chances of getting married rather than on their intelligence or life goals. As a result, women experience significant pressure to consent to marriages that are beneficial in society, even if it means sacrificing their own desires. This social reality provides a basis for analyzing the struggle and resistance of female characters, particularly Elizabeth Bennet, who represents an early form of feminist consciousness (Chang, 2014; Guo, 2024).

Several studies have examined feminist themes in *Pride and Prejudice*, particularly regarding women's roles, marriage, and societal expectations. Luo (2024) analyzes various kinds of marriages depicted in the novel and concludes that Austen encourages marriages based on emotion and mutual respect, while criticizing those focused solely on financial concerns. Similarly, Tripathi (2018) explores the feminist journey of the female characters, highlighting their emotional and psychological development under strict social conditions. These studies show how Austen's portrayal of women's experiences and moral development slowly challenges patriarchal norms. Other studies further argue that Elizabeth Bennet's independence and critical perspective illustrate how female characters can negotiate social expectations while maintaining their personal values (Damayanti

& Setyabudi, 2024).

Other studies focus on women's struggles throughout patriarchal society. Kanez (2012) analyzes the societal limitations placed on women and their attempts to gain independence in a male-dominated society. Meanwhile, Mustika and Lestari (2021) discuss how female characters in Austen's novels represent early feminist awareness by questioning traditional gender expectations. These studies show that *Pride and Prejudice* offers ample material for feminist literary analysis, especially for examining women's resistance to strict social norms. In addition, recent feminist readings emphasize that the novel critically exposes gender expectations and reveals how female characters lead social pressures related to marriage and reputation (Al-Quraishi, 2024; Kenjaboyeva & Ne'matova, 2025).

However, most of these studies tend to approach women's struggles broadly, often examining multiple female characters without providing an in-depth analysis of a single central figure. As a result, the specific processes through which female characters develop resistance and autonomy remain insufficiently explored. Some recent studies also highlight feminist themes in Austen's works, but often focus on broader representations of women rather than on the specific development of Elizabeth Bennet as an independent subject (Nurillloyevna & Axrorovna, 2025).

Although previous studies have deeply explored Elizabeth Bennet and feminist themes in *Pride and Prejudice*, most focus on issues of marriage, morality, and social criticism without examining Elizabeth's struggle and resistance through a specific feminist theoretical framework. More importantly, there is still limited research that applies Beauvoir's concept of *The Other* to analyze Elizabeth Bennet's transformation from a socially defined "Other" into an independent subject. Most studies discuss feminism broadly, but lack a Beauvoir-based identity analysis. As a result, Elizabeth's ways of breaking patriarchal norms and redefining herself as an independent subject have not been fully explained. This gap highlights the importance of a study that uses feminist theories, particularly Beauvoir's, to provide a deeper understanding of Elizabeth Bennet's rejection of the limitations imposed on women's roles.

Based on the identified research gap, this study seeks to address the following research questions: *How does Elizabeth Bennet struggle and resist the limitations of women's roles in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice through the lens of Simone de Beauvoir's concept of The Other?* Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to analyze Elizabeth Bennet's experiences of marginalization, her development of self-awareness, and her efforts to assert her identity as an independent subject. By applying feminist literary criticism, particularly Beauvoir's theoretical framework, this study examines how Elizabeth's critical perspective, moral independence, and personal agency function as forms of resistance within a patriarchal society. This study contributes to feminist literary analysis by offering a more focused examination of identity formation and resistance.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design with a literary analysis approach. Qualitative research is chosen because this study aims to explore, interpret, and understand the representation of women's roles, struggles, and resistance in the literary text. The main focus is on examining the meanings, patterns, and ideological structures of the narrative rather than on collecting numerical data. In qualitative research, data are gained mainly from textual sources, and analytical-qualitative methods are used to interpret and understand the meanings contained within the text (Creswell, 2009)

Data Source

The main data source of this research is the novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen. The data consist of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, and narrative descriptions that reflect Elizabeth Bennet's experiences of limitation, struggle, and resistance against patriarchal expectations. Meanwhile, the secondary data sources included books, journal articles, theses, and other academic publications on feminist literary criticism, Simone de Beauvoir's concept of *The Other*, and prior studies of *Pride and Prejudice* and women's roles in literature.

Data Collection

The data collection technique applied in this study is close reading. The researcher carefully reads the novel repeatedly to identify significant textual evidence related to women's roles, social restrictions, patriarchal norms, and Elizabeth Bennet's responses to them. Relevant data are then selected, categorized, and systematically organized according to their relevance to the research focus. The selection of data is based on their significance in representing the categories of limitation, struggle, and resistance, ensuring that the chosen excerpts directly support the analytical framework applied in this study.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, this study employs feminist literary criticism, particularly Simone de Beauvoir's concept of *The Other*, as its primary analytical framework. The analysis is conducted through several stages: (1) identifying textual representations of women's limitations and patriarchal constructions, (2) classifying the data into thematic categories, namely limitation, struggle, and resistance, and (3) examining Elizabeth Bennet's attitudes, actions, and discourses as forms of struggle and resistance, and (4) interpreting how these elements reflect the process of identity struggle and self-definition.

For example, a quotation that illustrates social pressure on marriage is categorized as "limitation," while Elizabeth's rejection of such exceptions is

categorized as "resistance." These categories are then interpreted using Beauvoir's concept of The Other to explain the transformation from object to subject.

To ensure the analysis's trustworthiness, this study employs theoretical triangulation by integrating multiple feminist perspectives and prior studies. In addition, peer validation is conducted through discussion and feedback to minimize subjective bias in interpreting the data.

3. Result

Women's Limitations in Patriarchal Society

Women in *Pride and Prejudice* live within a social structure that strongly controls their roles and opportunities. In the early nineteenth-century British society portrayed in the novel, women are expected to secure social stability mainly through marriage. At the same time, their personal ambitions and intellectual capacities often receive less recognition. These expectations create a set of limitations that shape how women are perceived, valued, and positioned within society.

One of the most dominant limitations is the expectation that marriage functions as the central goal of a woman's life. This idea is clearly introduced at the beginning of the novel:

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." (Austen, 1813, p. 1)

This statement reflects how marriage is constructed as a social norm that organizes relationships between men and women. Women are implicitly positioned as those who are expected to fulfill the role of wives, particularly when a financially secure man is available.

This expectation becomes even more evident in how family members themselves reproduce these social norms. Mrs. Bennet, for example, views her daughters' marriage as her primary responsibility. Her attitude reflects how patriarchal ideology is often internalized and reinforced within the family structure itself.

"The business of her life was to get her daughters married." (Austen, 1813, p. 5)

This statement shows how women's futures are largely defined within the framework of marriage, where personal aspirations are secondary to securing social stability.

Another limitation appears in the way women are evaluated based on physical appearance. In social interactions, women's value is often reduced to attractiveness rather than intellectual ability. For example, during a social event, one character praises a woman mainly for her appearance:

"You are dancing with the only handsome girl in the room." (Austen, 1813 p. 13)

"She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me." (Austen, 1813 p. 14)

These statements demonstrate how women are frequently assessed through standards of beauty, positioning them as objects of evaluation within social settings. Beyond the emphasis on appearance, another limitation faced by women in *Pride and Prejudice* is the expectation that marriage functions as a practical necessity rather than a purely personal or emotional choice. In the novel's social context, women often perceive marriage as the most reliable way to secure stability and social protection—rather than a romantic one.

“Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance.” (Austen, 1813 pp. 29-30)

Charlotte's statement suggests that happiness is not necessarily the main consideration in marriage. Her statement reflects a pragmatic view in which marriage is seen as a means of securing stability rather than emotional fulfillment. Furthermore, women are expected to regulate their behavior to attract potential husbands.

“If a woman conceals her affection... she may lose the opportunity to fix him.” (Austen, 1813 pp. 27-28)

The phrase suggests that women must carefully manage their emotions and actions to align with social expectations.

Overall, these findings indicate that women's lives are shaped by patriarchal expectations that prioritize marriage, physical attractiveness, and social conformity, limiting their ability to define themselves independently.

Emergence of Female Consciousness

Although women in *Pride and Prejudice* live within social structures that strongly reinforce patriarchal expectations, some characters begin to question these limitations. Elizabeth Bennet, in particular, demonstrates an awareness that distinguishes her from other women in her social environment. Rather than passively accepting social norms, she gradually develops a critical perspective on assumptions about women's roles in society.

This awareness becomes visible when Elizabeth challenges the tendency to describe women as merely decorative figures. She states:

“I hate to hear you talk about all women as if they were fine ladies instead of rational creatures.” (Austen, 1813 p. 154)

Through this statement, Elizabeth emphasizes that women should be recognized as thinking individuals rather than objects of admiration. Her words directly question the stereotype that women exist primarily to display beauty and refinement.

Elizabeth's developing awareness is also reflected in her response to Charlotte Lucas's view of marriage. While Charlotte regards marriage as a practical means of securing stability, Elizabeth does not fully agree:

“She has always felt that Charlotte's opinion about matrimony was not exactly like her own.” (Austen, 1813 p. 178)

This difference highlights Elizabeth's belief that marriage should involve more than social or economic considerations. Unlike Charlotte, she values emotional compatibility and mutual respect.

This moment of realization becomes a turning point in her self-awareness. A deeper level of awareness appears when Elizabeth reflects on her own judgments after reading Darcy's letter:

"Till this moment I never knew myself." (Austen, 1812 p. 287)

This moment marks a turning point in her self-understanding. Elizabeth begins to recognize her own misjudgments and re-evaluates her previous assumptions. Her willingness to reflect and revise her perspective indicates a strong sense of intellectual independence.

Overall, these findings show that Elizabeth Bennet gradually develops a critical awareness of the limitations imposed on women, marking an important stage in her transformation toward independent thinking.

Women's Resistance and the Assertion of Female Freedom

While Elizabeth Bennet gradually develops a critical awareness of the limitations imposed on women, her character is not defined solely by reflection. She actively asserts her independence in ways that challenge the expectations of her society. Unlike many women who passively accept social conventions, Elizabeth consistently expresses her own opinions and refuses to conform when those expectations contradict her values.

Elizabeth's resistance is evident in her assertiveness, particularly in interactions with men of higher social status. For example, she openly criticizes Darcy's attitude:

"YOUR defect is to hate everybody." (Austen, 1813)

This remark demonstrates her willingness to speak directly and challenge male authority. In a social environment where women are expected to remain polite and avoid confrontation, Elizabeth's response rejects passive behavior.

Elizabeth's resistance is also visible in her approach to relationships. Rather than accepting admiration passively, she emphasizes the importance of mutual recognition:

"This is an advantage which he must divide with me." (Austen, 1813 p. 256)

Through this statement, Elizabeth suggests that relationships should be based on equality rather than hierarchy. Elizabeth positions herself as equally deserving of respect, challenging traditional expectations that subordinate women.

Elizabeth's most significant act of resistance appears when she asserts her right to make decisions based on her own judgment:

"I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to you." (Austen, 1813 p. 495)

Through this statement, Elizabeth clearly prioritizes her own understanding of happiness over external expectations. She refuses to be influenced by social

pressures or authority, demonstrating a strong sense of independence.

Overall, these findings indicate that Elizabeth Bennet expresses resistance through assertiveness, the demand for equality in relationships, and the ability to prioritize her own judgment, reflecting her growing independence within a restrictive social structure.

4. Discussion

Women as “The Other” in Patriarchal Society

The findings in the Results section demonstrate that women in *Pride and Prejudice* are consistently positioned within social structures that define their value through marriage, beauty, and social conformity. These patterns reflect what Simone de Beauvoir describes as the condition of women's “The Other.” In this framework, women are not recognized as autonomous subjects but are instead defined in relation to men, particularly through their roles as wives or objects of attraction.

The emphasis on marriage as a social necessity and the evaluation of women based on physical appearance illustrate how patriarchal society constructed women's identities externally. This explains why female characters in the novel are often directed toward fulfilling socially assigned roles rather than developing independent identities.

Identity Formation and the Emergence of Consciousness

Elizabeth Bennet's development reflects a gradual process of identity formation that begins with critical awareness. As shown in the Results, her rejection of stereotypes about women as merely decorative figures and her disagreement with Charlotte Lucas's pragmatic view of marriage indicate an early stage of consciousness.

This awareness arises because Elizabeth can reflect on and question the norms that shape her social environment. Rather than internalizing these expectations, she creates a critical distance from them. This process is crucial because it allows her to move beyond passive acceptance and begin constructing her identity based on personal judgment.

In this sense, Elizabeth's realization, particularly in moments of self-reflection, illustrates how identity is not fixed but develops through experience and critical evaluation. Her awareness marks the transition from being shaped by social expectations to actively questioning them.

Resistance as the Assertion of Agency

The Results further show that Elizabeth's awareness does not remain at the level of reflection but develops into active resistance. Her assertiveness, her insistence on equality in relationships, and her decision to prioritize her own happiness demonstrate how resistance emerges as a form of agency.

This resistance occurs because Elizabeth refuses to accept externally imposed definitions of womanhood. Instead, she asserts her own values and judgment, which allows her to function as an active subject rather than a passive object. In this way, resistance becomes a mechanism through which identity is not only recognized but actively constructed.

This finding supports the idea that resistance in patriarchal contexts does not always take the form of radical opposition, but can also appear through everyday acts of self-assertion and independence.

Relation to Previous Studies

These findings both support and extend previous research on *Pride and Prejudice*. Similar to earlier research, this study confirms that Austen portrays women's experiences within restrictive patriarchal structures and highlights the importance of marriage, social expectations, and gender roles (Luo, 2024; Tripathi, 2018).

However, unlike many previous studies that examine multiple female characters or focus broadly on themes such as morality and marriage, this study provides a more focused analysis of Elizabeth Bennet as a central figure. By applying Beauvoir's concept of "The Other," this study offers a deeper explanation of how Elizabeth's identity develops through stages of limitation, awareness, and resistance.

Thus, this study not only aligns with existing research but also provides a more specific theoretical interpretation of Elizabeth's transformation. This study contributes to feminist literary analysis by applying Simone de Beauvoir's concept of 'The Other' to reveal Elizabeth Bennet's transformation from a socially defined object into an independent subject. Through this approach, the study highlights how identity is constructed through the interaction between patriarchal limitations, critical awareness, and resistance.

5. Conclusion

This research examines the representation of women's position and agency in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen through a feminist perspective, particularly the concept of women as subjects proposed by Simone de Beauvoir. The analysis focuses on how the novel portrays the limitations imposed on women in patriarchal society, the struggles of the female protagonist, and the forms of resistance that unfold throughout her development.

The findings reveal that the novel reflects various social limitations placed on women, specifically through expectations surrounding marriage, female behavior, and intellectual expression. Women are often positioned within restrictive social norms that define their value mainly in relation to marriage and social propriety. These limitations illustrate how patriarchal structures shape women's roles and opportunities within the society shown in the novel.

Despite these constraints, the narrative also portrays the slowed development of female consciousness through the character of Elizabeth Bennet. Throughout the story, Elizabeth shows a growing awareness of the social expectations placed upon women and critically reflects on the assumptions surrounding marriage, reputation, and gender roles. This awareness gives an important stage in the process of moving from passive acceptance toward critical self-understanding.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that Elizabeth's development finally leads to various forms of resistance against patriarchal expectations. Through her assertiveness, independent judgment, and insistence on choosing marriage based on mutual respect and personal happiness, Elizabeth challenges traditional gender norms that limit women's freedom. Her character illustrates the possibility for women to assert themselves as thinking individuals rather than passive objects within social structures.

However, this research is limited to textual analysis of selected excerpts from the novel and focuses mainly on the feminist theory proposed by Simone de Beauvoir. As a result, the analysis does not explore other possible perspectives, such as historical, sociological, or other approaches that may further enrich the interpretation of women's experiences in the novel.

Overall, this study clearly shows that *Pride and Prejudice* presents not only the social limitations faced by women but also the potential for female consciousness and resistance within a patriarchal environment. Through Elizabeth Bennet's development, the novel reflects the possibility for women to move beyond passive roles and assert their independence in social and personal relationships. This study also highlights the continuing relevance of Austen's work in understanding gender issues beyond its historical context.

Although the novel is set in the early nineteenth century, many of the expectations surrounding women's roles, particularly in marriage, behavior, and social perception, can still be seen in contemporary society. In modern contexts, women may have greater access to education and independence; however, subtle forms of patriarchal expectations continue to influence how women are perceived and how they navigate their personal and social lives.

Moreover, this study reinforces the importance of examining literary texts not only as forms of artistic expression but also as a reflection of social realities that shape and influence human perspectives. By analyzing the experiences of female characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, this research highlights how literature can provide valuable insights into the complexities of gender relations and the ongoing negotiations of women's roles in society.

6. Acknowledgement

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to the lecturers for their valuable guidance. Constructive feedback and meaningful suggestions throughout the development of this research. Their support and academic insight

have significantly contributed to the completion of this article. The researcher is also thankful to the English Literature program for providing an academic environment that encourages critical thinking and intellectual growth. This work would not have reached its present form without their continuous support and mentorship.

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