

Similarities between 'letters to alice' and 'pride and prejudice'



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Profuse similarities between texts are often exposed by examining the way that authors react to their surrounding society. This notion is regularly expressed between Jane Austen's novel 'Pride and Prejudice', (1813) and Fay Weldon's text, 'Letters To Alice', (1984) where the authors convey how the entrenched gender roles of the Georgian era have adapted over time to allow women's marital rights and also the revolution of education opportunities and expectations of etiquette among females. Although the context of each text varies heavily both authors draw on the universal concern of the fight for equality in society.

Through their literature, Fay Weldon and Jane Austen critique the fluctuating concept of marriage and its ability to provide financial security. Jane Austen's novel 'Pride and Prejudice' reflects the firmly entrenched social classes of the Georgian era and the financial and societal necessity of marriage. During the Regency era, women could not inherit property due to the legal doctrine of entailment, therefore, the only way to secure a pleasing future was to find a husband. The satirical characterization of Mrs Bennet allows Austin to express the implied pressure on women in the 1800's to marry in order to obtain a constant income. It is Mrs Bennet's consistent monetary references like, 'A single man of large fortune ... What a fine thing for our girls.' that depict the constant burden experienced by women during the time. However the caustic tone of Mrs Bennet encourages the reader, who is introduced to Austen's didacticism, to despise this systematic view on marrying only for financial benefits. This urgency to marry is similarly depicted in Austen's ironic quote, 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.' By incorporating

bathos, the reader is once again presented with Austen's critical views of the unambiguous social stratification of the Georgian Era. In heavy contrast to these certified social expectations, Austen's presents Elizabeth as being very likeable and relatable as she subtly suggests an alternative by depicting the romanticism of Elizabeth and Darcy. The novel structure allows for the inclusion of coda, which is specifically displayed as Georgiana observes Lizzie and Darcy together and comprehends ' that a woman may take liberties with her husband'. On final pages of the novel, Georgiana's response to Lizzie and Darcy's union is symbolic of Austen's detailing of a better kind of marriage as well as her readership also being enlightened. Fay Weldon also affirms Austen's original concerns and initiatives in her text ' Letters to Alice' as she expresses that some women, although no longer bound by traditional expectations of marriage, continue to find themselves in unequal partnerships. Weldon is highly critical of women who still allow themselves to be unhappy or unequal, such as her sister Enid, who metaphorically ' waits upon her husband as a servant upon its master.' Her derogatory tone encourages the reader to take dismay in the unfortunate situation Enid is in and look for a more positive alternative. Weldon offers this new insight into the gender restrictions of Austen's time by revising her readers' view of Mrs Bennet. Through her statistical analysis, she teaches us that Mrs Bennet's ' anxiety' was due to the fact that ' Only 30% of women married', with the alternate being difficult and dishonorable jobs such as prostitution, ' so to marry was a good prize.' Weldon's second-wave feminist context allows her to broaden her views by sympathizing with Mrs Bennet's concerns rather than criticizing them. Furthermore, Weldon proves that women no longer experience a financial need to marry as women are able to choose their own

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paths and have more opportunities. The epistolary form allows her to list the varied locations that Aunt Fay writes from, such as ' Cairns' and ' London', reinforcing that she is independently wealthy. Weldon produced this text following the women's liberation movement, where many legal rights were creating equality for women and it was no longer a contextual necessity to marry. Weldon's deliberate silencing of male voices in the text illustrates the reduced dependence on men among women in Weldon's time. During the 1800's, marriages were not usually based on love; however, Austen's portrayal of Lizzie and Darcy's marriage presents her readers with an enlightened view of marriage and paves the way for the social change experienced by the characters in Fay Weldon's text. In ' Letters to Alice', Weldon depicts that marriage is no longer linked to success, however she depicts that the struggle for women to achieve martial freedom experienced by the people of Austen's time is still evident. Thus, both composers reject the social paradigms of their respective eras and encourage their readers to embrace independence and individuality.

Jane Austen regularly expresses her concerns surrounding the lack of educational opportunities in the Georgian era, a welcome alternative to this is illustrated as Fay Weldon describes how women's education and rights have evolved to suit the postmodern era. Genteel women were expected to be well rounded and ' accomplished' throughout society, however these attributes were pressured whilst women lacked the formal education opportunities offered to men. According to Miss Bingley, who is deliberately characterized to be absurd and abhorrent, an 'accomplished' woman should have " a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and the

modern languages". This lexical chain incorporated by Austen solidifies this extensive expectation established for women and further expresses the requirement of improved educational opportunities and gender equality. However, following Caroline Bingley's petty observation, Mr Darcy adds his personal opinion of the situation " and to all this she must yet add something more, the improvement of her mind by extensive reading." Although Miss Bingley describes the uniform expectation of women in the genteel era, by echoing Mr Darcy's considerations of the matter, Austen expresses the desire for women to achieve more unconventional characteristics, although methods of self development and moral enlightenment such as reading were generally discouraged for women of the time. These restrictions placed on women of the 1800s created a devastating unfair advantage and heavily limited the ability for women to achieve their full potential. It is evident throughout the text that Austen felt this full potential of knowledge could only be achieved through self-enlightenment, this is illustrated by Lizzie's reflective exclamation; ' Till this moment, I never knew myself,'. Austen expresses that it is only when Lizzie and Darcy are able to self-reflect, see themselves truly, and learn from their interactions with each other, that they are able to find true happiness. Fay Weldon depicts the immense improvement in educational privileges since Austen's time and also how women were are no longer limited by entrenched gender roles throughout society. During this period, women were now allowed and were readily attending universities and ultimately had the same educational opportunities of men, and women writers were being valued at universities for the first time. Fay Weldon illustrates that the importance and value of literature is intrinsically tied to the importance of education, reflected in ' Letters to <https://assignbuster.com/similarities-between-letters-to-alice-and-pride-and-prejudice/>

Alice', through the characterization of Aunt Fay who strongly encourages Alice to read, ' You must read, Alice, before it's too late.... it will help you put the twos and twos of life together.' Weldon believes that literature is the basis of true knowledge and enlightenment and therefore, through the use of second person imperatives, her didacticism is directed at both Alice and the reader as she suggests that Alice's university education is not enough to sufficiently provide her with the skills to succeed in life. This assertion is kept consistent in letter two where Aunt Fay states with high modality; " you must know how to read a novel before setting out to write one". Once again Weldon critiques the formal, ' intellectual' university education that was so highly regarded at the time, depicting the timeless significance of quality literature. Weldon also creates the extended metaphor of ' The City of Invention', ' that celestial city'. Here she is exploring a similar notion to the one depicted in ' Pride and Prejudice' as she suggests that people are exposed to new ideas in books, and thus learn possibilities for moral improvement and self enlightenment. Jane Austen actively educates her readers on this lack of educational opportunities and subtly challenges the dominant discourses surrounding social expectations and educational rights, hence inspiring new ways of considering what was socially acceptable for women. Fay Weldon depicts the extent to which women's educational opportunities have progressed and furthermore, recognizes that it was because of Austen's inspirations that women are no longer bounded by societal expectations. Thus, both composers show that the true value of literature lies in its ability to enlighten its readers, as both texts strongly advocate for the evolution of equality surrounding education opportunities.

It is a timeless idea that women have been unfairly bound by regiment marriage expectations and unequal educational opportunities among societies. It is evident in her text that Jane Austen recognized the ability for literature to transform her readers' perceptions and beliefs, hence, she utilized this advantage to pave the way for progressive social change.

Furthermore, Fay Weldon recognized and affiliated with Austen's concerns of the importance of extensive education and through her didacticism, instructs her readers to seek their own education in order to intellectually and morally grow. Ultimately, by closely examining the concepts explored throughout both texts it can be established that both Jane Austen and Fay Weldon occupied complementary views on society.