

# An Analysis of Elizabeth's Emotional Process and Marriage View from the Perspective of Environmental Psychology

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## Abstract:

*Pride and Prejudice*, as a classic masterpiece about love and marriage, has been widely discussed, and the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy is widely praised. The psychological and behavioral changes of the female protagonist in the text touch people's hearts and drive the continuous progress of their relationship. This article applies the concept of personal space in environmental psychology and its following effects to analyze the reasons for Elizabeth's psychological and behavioral changes. This opens up new analytical perspectives, establishing the connection between Elizabeth's personal spatial changes and her psychology and behavior. Her first impression of Darcy causes a large personal space. The reaction to repeated violations of her personal space becomes stronger. And then, when Darcy is proved innocent, causing a dramatic change in her personal space, ultimately resulting in a positive outcome. It reveals the specific content of equality, mutual respect, independence, sincere communication, and adherence to principles based on love in Elizabeth's views on marriage and love. This article also analyzed the connection between the author Jane Austen herself and the influence of 18th-century British social factors and provides inspiration for contemporary views on marriage and love.

**Keywords:** Environmental psychology, personal space, Elizabeth, views on marriage and love

## 1. Introduction

Applying theory to interpret texts and exploring their connotations are important forms of literary criticism. This article uses concepts and theories from environmental psychology to study the fate and underlying reasons of the protagonist, Elizabeth, in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Environmental psychology is the main theory applied in this article and has become an independent discipline since the 1960s. It studies the relationship between human psychology, behavior, and the environment, belonging to the field of applied social psychology. It combines natural and social environments and explores their impact on human behavior. In *Pride and Prejudice*, complex and rich natural and social environments are presented, among which the description of the social environment is detailed. Elizabeth's fate is naturally presented in a specific environment in the work. Throughout the process, Mr. Darcy has the greatest influence on her. The changes in Darcy's emotions make her go from unfamiliarity to prejudice, and finally to enlightenment, facing her heart and firmly determined. During this process, Elizabeth's psychological and emotional changes are complex and

subtle, changing with her attitude towards Darcy, which is related to the size of her personal space. The changes in personal space size and the resulting behavioral changes can be analyzed using the concepts of personal space, escape behavior effects, arousal effects, and attack effects in environmental psychology. In existing research, there is no analysis of this work from this perspective. This study opens up a new perspective and analyzes the classic images, author intentions, and social influence in Western literary masterpieces from a new dimension. It concludes that personal space may play a role in interpersonal communication and Jane Austen's views on marriage and love. It is hoped that this can provide inspiration for modern interpersonal communication and marriage and love, and also inspire more innovative research in the future.

## 2. Explanation of Important Concepts in Environmental Psychology

### 2.1 Personal Space

Personal space is not a specialized term in psychology; it is widely used and discussed in biology, anthropology, and architecture. In *Environmental Psychology*, the definition of personal space is summarized as the boundary

regulation mechanism between individuals. This mechanism includes two goals: protection and communication. Individuals protect themselves from potential external threats and realize a suitable way of communication and degree of intimacy by adjusting the distance of interpersonal communication. Once personal space is violated, different degrees of consequences will occur, including escape behavior effects, wake-up effects, and attack effects. In the text analysis of this article, the main focus is on how escape and wake-up effects caused by the invasion of personal space influence the development of character behavior and plot progression [2].

### 2.2 Escape Behavior Effect

It is defined as the escape behavior caused by stimuli in the body, which is a defensive behavior. In the second half of the last century, multiple scientists conducted experiments on the changes in people's behavior after personal space was invaded. The experimental results showed that after being invaded, people often take compensatory and coping measures, such as avoiding eye contact, setting obstacles, and murmuring to themselves. After experiencing the invasion of personal space, people will try to reduce communication with the outside world as much as possible and regulate their personal space more through their inner activities [2].

### 2.3 Awakening Effect

It is defined as the physiological arousal caused by various stimuli in the environment, increasing the autonomous response of the body and activating various dormant bodily activities. Scientists conducted an experiment to explore changes in arousal levels after subjects experienced personal spatial invasion. The experimental results reveal a wake-up effect when personal space is invaded, evident in its impact on task execution. However, individuals are affected differently based on the complexity of tasks; simpler tasks result in less impact, while more complex tasks have a greater impact on individuals [2].

### 2.4 Attack Effect

Attack is a psychological term applied in social psychology, which refers to any form of behavior aimed at harming an individual who seeks to avoid such harm. Its primary characteristic is that the attacker intends to harm the physical or mental health of others and takes action. In the field of environmental psychology, it can refer to aggressive behavior that may occur after personal space is invaded.

## 3. The Rise and Fall: From Extreme Prejudice to Soul-Matching Love

Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* is a woman full of wisdom, rich thoughts, and a good upbringing [3]. In the

article, the maintenance of personal space between her and the people around her is relatively more fixed and comfortable compared with the space between her and Mr. Darcy. The change in attitude towards Mr. Darcy and the size of the personal space established between her and him profoundly influenced her final fate. This change can be summarized into four stages based on changes in spatial size and Elizabeth's personal psychological changes.

### 3.1 First Encounter: A Casual Approach without Emotional Baggage

The first time Elizabeth saw Mr. Darcy at the ball, an important space that provided opportunities for young people to know each other, his arrogant speech, contemptuous criticism, and impolite behavior were criticized by almost all the people there [4]. Although in 18th-century British society, Darcy's annual income of £ 10000, handsome appearance, and noble background were the top choices for many unmarried women and families with unmarried daughters [5]. However, even in such an era where income and social status were highly valued, Darcy's words and actions still caused much dissatisfaction [6]. Mrs. Bennet, who was very eager to choose a good son-in-law for her daughters, did not have a good impression of him either. Unlike others, although Mr. Darcy directly refused to dance with Elizabeth and criticized her appearance, Elizabeth, a talented and knowledgeable woman, did not attach great importance to Darcy's contempt. She is enthusiastic, lively, and easy-going, treating such experiences as a post-dinner conversation and private joke with her sister. At this moment, Elizabeth only regarded Darcy as a very unique and slightly comical person who had just appeared in the village without any unnecessary emotions. At this point, Elizabeth's personal space was still maintained at a reasonable level, which was appropriate for ordinary strangers.

### 3.2 Confrontation: Unveiling Emotions Through Acquaintance

After their first meeting, Darcy and Elizabeth had several more opportunities to talk. When Elizabeth's sister Jane fell ill and temporarily stayed at Mr. Bingley's house, Elizabeth went to take care of her. Mr. Darcy had several conversations with her and Miss Bingley. Although the process was not very pleasant, both of them gradually felt the same wisdom and abundance in each other's hearts, especially Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth's strength, wisdom, intellect, and charming eyes captivated Darcy step by step. He gradually fell in love with her. Although Elizabeth did not develop the same emotions towards Darcy, changes in Darcy's actions and attitude were a violation of the personal space that Elizabeth initially established between

them. Elizabeth's personal space has been violated, and at this time, Elizabeth's behavior and psychological changes are thought-provoking.

When Mr. Darcy invites her to dance a Scottish dance, Elizabeth is stunned by Darcy's changes, including Darcy's change in attitude and his tenderness and thoughtfulness. The complex emotions and overstepped personal space prompted her to engage in escape behavior. When walking with Mrs. Hurst and encountering Darcy and Miss Bingley, she adopts the strategy of „escaping the scene“, setting up social barriers and avoiding Mr. Darcy. The article does not explicitly demonstrate Elizabeth's psychology but rather conceals her complex and fresh emotions towards Mr. Darcy through her joy at her sister's early recovery from a serious illness, making the character's personality more complex, destiny more subtle, and more vibrant.

### 3.3 Prejudice: Slander Heard, Conflicts Arose

Mr. Darcy invaded her personal space, triggering a wake-up effect that transformed Elizabeth from a dormant state to an active one. She began to pay attention to and be curious about Mr. Darcy's past and character. The arrival of Officer Wickham shattered Elizabeth's only calmness and reserve. She began to further understand Darcy through Wickham. At the same time, the effect of the attack also emerged. When talking to Officer Wickham about Darcy, her evaluation was „he is a detestable person“ and „his temper is not very good“. This represents the aversion and attack towards intruders that arise after personal space is invaded. When Wickham recounted the fact that he had been harmed by Darcy before, Darcy's already uncomfortable image plummeted to the bottom. In Elizabeth's eyes, he became more arrogant and cunning. In environmental psychology, different images of intruders would have different effects on those who were invaded in their personal space. Faced with such a „snobbish“, „arrogant“, and „jealous“ intruder, she was even more eager to get rid of such an „unwelcome guest“ in her personal space, and escape behavior and attack effects were stimulated [7].

For example, when encountering Mr. Darcy at a dance party, she cannot calmly reply to him, insists on not saying a word to him, and angrily leaves. She intentionally mentioned Wickham while dancing with Mr. Darcy in an attempt to embarrass him. In order to prevent encountering Darcy in the garden, she specifically told him the wrong place she liked to walk. These were all caused by Mr. Darcy's intrusion into Elizabeth's personal space with a bad image. Elizabeth set obstacles in their relationship, wanted to avoid getting along with Darcy, and became irritable. She chose to attack and confront when communication is necessary and unavoidable. Her inner activities

also become more complex, including dissatisfaction with Darcy and sympathy for Wickham, continuously pushing their relationship to a climax. This paved the way for Elizabeth's rejection of Darcy's first proposal.

### 3.4 Transformation: Prejudice Dissipates as Distance Narrows

After rejecting Mr. Darcy's first proposal, Elizabeth received a letter of explanation from him. Sincere words shook her preconceptions about him, and she began to develop a liking for Darcy, leading to a change in attitude and a narrowing of the distance between the two. Elizabeth's personal space is gradually becoming smaller and more suitable.

She would fantasize about the situation after agreeing to the proposal, feel embarrassed and guilty due to Darcy's gentleness and humility, be afraid of leaving a bad impression on him, and feel great comfort because Darcy wanted her to meet his sister. After learning that Darcy was working hard for her sister Lydia's marriage and lowered his status to persuade someone he used to dislike, Elizabeth completely changed her view of him, believing that he was a loyal and compassionate person. In the process, she experienced the comfort of love and gradually entered a better state, generating positive emotions.

However, changes in personal space also bring negative effects on emotions. For example, Elizabeth would be swayed by Darcy's coldness, have wild thoughts, and be emotionally tense. Doubts about the future of them arose due to the arrival of Darcy's aunt Catherine. However, these emotions and changes, whether positive or negative, made Elizabeth more and more determined in her choices. In the end, the size of her personal space was harmoniously adjusted, and the two eventually became married, ushering in a happy ending.

## 4. The Author's Intention and Social Influence behind Character Analysis

By utilizing several concepts of environmental psychology to analyze Elizabeth's psychological and behavioral changes, her image has become more vibrant. Her several emotional changes, delicate yet with rational light, reveal a love and marriage philosophy that broke through the constraints of common societal beliefs at that time, similar to the author Jane Austen's own concept of love and marriage. By creating an independent, self-esteemed, and intelligent female image, the author's ideal marriage concept and values are also expressed.

Jane Austen lived in England from the late 18th century to the early 19th century. In Lawrence Stone's book *Family, Sex, and Marriage in England*, the description of the British family during this period was a „closed nuclear

family“. The thinking of British citizens is generally conservative and closed [8]. In the middle-class concept of marriage, marriage is defined as the combination of interests and the consolidation of social status rather than the free combination based on sincere love between men and women. Jane Austen has read extensively since childhood and scoffed at the artificial „sentimental novels“ prevalent in the literary world at that time. Therefore, in the process of writing, she constantly expressed her views on marriage and love through female images - pursuing gender equality, mutual respect, freedom, and understanding, and also adhering to principles in her own life, rejecting wealthy suitors she does not love. Elizabeth, as a typical character in her creations, fully embodies her ideas. Faced with Darcy, who had satisfactory wealth and a prominent position, she did not lower herself. Instead, she communicated equally, faced her emotions directly, and refused the arrogant and „morally inferior“ Darcy. She refused the combination of interests without love and decisively rejected the proposal of a distant relative who has inheritance rights. Knowing that she misunderstood Darcy, she corrected the mistake in a timely manner and reconsidered this relationship. Facing Catherine’s criticism, she expressed the values of equality and freedom without being humble or arrogant.

The formation of Jane Austen’s concept of marriage is not only due to her upbringing environment, personality, and thoughts, but also influenced by society. In Lawrence Stone’s book *Family, Sex, and Marriage in England*, the growth of emotional individualism in the middle class in the 17th and 18th centuries led to a growing demand for autonomy and the exercise of rights according to one’s own will [8]. The growth of emotional individualism, on the other hand, reflected in marital arrangements and relationships, exhibited an independent choice of partners and a criticism of patriarchy. Jane Austen, who was born into a middle-class family and received a good education, inevitably came into contact with this emerging ideology, which also had an impact on her ideological formation. Moreover, in the 19th century, with the rise of the industrial revolution, some avant-garde women began to struggle for equality [9]. Jane Austen was one of the representatives. She shaped female models in her creations and life choices, adhered to her own principles, and encouraged more women to pursue freedom, equality, and liberation. Despite differences in times, regions, and cultures, Elizabeth’s views on marriage and love can still provide inspiration for modern times. Her concept is that when facing a relationship, we should coexist on an equal footing, respect each other, be independent of each other, communicate sincerely, adhere to principles, use love as the foundation of marriage, follow our true selves, and be straight-

forward, instead of going with the flow and being greedy for worldly status and wealth. For example, the marriage between Charlotte and Collins was a combination of interests, although it may seem glamorous on the surface, it was inevitably dull and uninteresting. However, Jane and Bingley, Elizabeth and Darcy had a certain material foundation, but more importantly, a combination based on love [10]. This was a more ideal form of marriage. The creation of Elizabeth’s female image has had an impact on literary creation in later generations. In modern society, material desires are rampant, and people are inevitably restless. From such classic works, one can draw healthier values and gain sincere emotions.

## 5. Conclusion

The concepts of personal space, escape behavior effects, arousal effects, and attack effects in applied environmental psychology are used to explain and analyze the psychological changes in Elizabeth and Darcy’s communication process. Darcy’s intrusion into Elizabeth’s personal space and changes in Darcy’s image have a significant impact on Elizabeth’s attitude and behavior, affecting the development and changes of their relationship. Darcy’s arrogant and impolite first impression allow Elizabeth to establish a larger personal space. Darcy’s gentle and considerate behavior, which deviates from normal intimacy, infringes upon Elizabeth’s personal space and leads to a series of escape, awakening, and attacking behaviors. The despicable deeds of Darcy make Elizabeth’s reaction to the invasion of her personal space even stronger. Darcy is proven innocent and tries his best to help Lydia make Elizabeth’s personal space undergo a dramatic change. She sees through her true emotions and marries Darcy. Elizabeth’s psychological and behavioral fluctuations are closely related to the personal spatial changes established with Darcy.

This article uses the concepts of environmental psychology in the field of applied social psychology to analyze the psychological and behavioral changes of the female protagonist in *Pride and Prejudice* and explores the marriage and love views reflected in the characters, as well as the author’s intentions and social factors. It provides inspiration for contemporary interpersonal communication and attitudes towards love and marriage, expands new analytical ideas in academia, and has certain social significance. This article only analyzes personal spatial changes and psychological and behavioral relationships from Elizabeth’s perspective. Other characters in the text also have analytical value. If comprehensive and detailed analysis can be conducted to compare the changes and reactions of different characters, the theme and writing intention of

the work can be more deeply understood. This is the limitation of this article and the part that future research can further explore.

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