

The Semiotics of Wealth and Status: A Peircean Triadic Reading of Indexical and Symbolic Signs in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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Indonesian Journal of
Learning Studies

Vol. 6, No. 1, 2026

E-ISSN 2775-5231

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Published by:

Perkumpulan Dosen Muslim
Indonesia



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Abstract

This study investigates the structural mechanisms of socioeconomic dominance and gender dynamics in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. While previous research focuses heavily on macro-thematic or general feminist readings, there is a lack of systematic inquiry into how microtextual elements actively build and subvert these power structures. To fill this research gap, this study applies Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic theory by analyzing the relationships between representamen, object, and interpretant across icons, indices, and symbols to decode physical assets, nominal values, and social behaviors within the text. Using a qualitative design based on document analysis and close reading, twenty key extracts were examined following the qualitative interactive framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal that quantifiable assets and elite landscapes, such as annual incomes and the Pemberley estate, operate as potent indexical signs that establish and legitimize class stratification. Concurrently, Regency social conventions and patriarchal inheritance laws function as rigid symbolic signs designed to enforce female submission. However, the semiotic interplay ultimately uncovers a powerful counter-narrative of resistance, where the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, actively subverts these codes. By demanding to be treated as a rational creature, she activates the female gaze as a counter-power that validates female autonomy and dismantles patriarchal hegemony. This study concludes that operationalizing formal triadic semiotics can reveal deep, hidden ideological meanings about gender, wealth, and systemic control within classic realist literature.

Keywords: *triadic semiosis, pride and prejudice, patriarchal hegemony, feminist subversion*

Introduction

Literature serves as a profound manifestation of human experiences, capturing the intricate dynamics of cultural, historical, and psychological realities across different eras. It functions as a linguistic mirror that reflects not only individual consciousness but also the collective values of a specific society. Through creative expression, authors transform abstract human conditions into tangible narratives that readers can observe, analyze, and internalize. This artistic medium transcends geographical and temporal boundaries, allowing contemporary audiences to engage deeply with past civilizations. According to Eagleton (2020), text inherently contains complex ideological structures that operate beneath the surface of the written prose. Therefore, understanding literature requires more than a superficial reading of plotlines and character developments. It demands a rigorous critical inquiry into how language shapes and alters human perception of reality. Scholars consistently argue that literature remains a vital instrument for evaluating the shifting paradigms of human civilization over time.

The academic significance of literature lies in its capacity to challenge established societal norms and promote critical thinking. It provides a unique epistemological space where complex power relations, ethical dilemmas, and identity constructions are rigorously interrogated. By examining literary works, researchers can unearth the hidden anxieties and unspoken aspirations of historical generations. As argued by Nussbaum (2021), narrative imagination in literary texts acts as a crucial tool for expanding civic empathy and understanding social justice. Literature also fosters empathy by exposing readers to diverse perspectives and marginalized voices that are often omitted from historical archives. In higher education, the analytical study of literary texts enhances advanced linguistic competence and sharpens conceptual reasoning. It bridges the gap between historical data and subjective human experiences, offering a more holistic view of historical epochs. Consequently, literature is not merely a form of entertainment but a critical site of intellectual and cultural production.

Within the vast domain of literary creation, prose stands out as the most versatile and direct medium for comprehensive storytelling. Unlike poetry which relies heavily on rhythmic constraints, prose utilizes natural speech patterns to construct its narrative worlds. This structural flexibility enables writers to develop expansive plotlines, intricate subplots, and deeply nuanced character arcs. Prose captures the mundanity and

complexity of everyday life with a level of detail that other genres can rarely achieve. It allows for a realistic depiction of social interactions, institutional pressures, and domestic spaces. According to Rimmon-Kenan (2021), narrative fiction in prose form provides the most intricate mechanism for manipulating temporal and spatial perspectives. The evolutionary trajectory of prose reflects the changing communicative needs and cognitive developments of modern reading audiences. Thus, prose remains a dominant force in shaping public discourse and documenting the subtle nuances of human social evolution.

As the most prominent subclass of prose, the novel has evolved into a powerful tool for socio-cultural critique and psychological exploration. The expansive length of a novel gives authors the necessary canvas to build highly detailed socio-material landscapes. It emerged during periods of significant socioeconomic transitions, directly mirroring the anxieties of the rising middle class. The novel specializes in juxtaposing individual desires against the rigid expectations of overarching social structures. As noted by Moretti (2020), the novel genre functions as a major symbolic engine that reflects and codifies the developmental contradictions of modern secular societies. It functions as a complex narrative laboratory where social experiments regarding morality, gender, and class are conducted. Readers are invited to immerse themselves in prolonged psychological portraits that reveal the internal motivations of fictional agents. As a result, the novel is widely regarded as the ultimate literary form for dissecting systemic societal hypocrisies.

Jane Austen's masterpiece, *Pride and Prejudice*, transcends its popular reputation as a mere romantic comedy of manners. Published during the transitional Regency era, the novel serves as a meticulous sociological record of English country gentry life. Austen captures the intense anxieties surrounding financial insecurity, strict class boundaries, and the commodification of marriage. Her characters navigate a hyper-regulated social ecosystem where every movement, dialogue, and association carries immense social weight. According to Copeland (2020), Austen's narrative landscape is heavily dictated by the strict economic realities and material pressures of nineteenth-century British society. The text vividly portrays how female agency is heavily constrained by the legalities of patriarchal estate inheritance laws. Wealth is never an abstract concept in this novel; it is explicitly quantified and physically manifested. For this reason, the novel remains an incredibly rich site for analyzing the material conditions of nineteenth-century British aristocracy.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, material culture and financial status are central forces that dictate human relationships and destiny. The text is dense with references to annual incomes, property dimensions, carriage types, and fashionable attire. These material items are not decorative backdrops but are active agents that establish power dynamics between families. A character's social mobility or marginalization is directly tied to their visible consumption of luxury goods. Marriage is explicitly treated as an economic transaction necessary for survival rather than a purely emotional union. As Brown (2022) points out, material possessions in Austen's novels operate as primary indicators that actively establish a character's social position and capital. The pursuit of wealth shapes the psychological landscape, driving characters to perform elaborate acts of social compliance. Therefore, a precise reading of the novel must account for the heavy semiotic burden carried by these material assets.

To systematically unpack the dense network of material signs in Austen's work, Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory provides an indispensable framework. Unlike dyadic linguistic models, Peirce's triadic framework consists of the representamen, the object, and the interpretant working in unified cohesion. This triadic model suggests that meaning is never static; it is a continuous process of sign interpretation called semiosis. As explained by Atkin (2023), the Peircean sign is fundamentally relational, relying on human cognition to bridge the gap between representations and objective reality.

A core strength of Peirce's semiotics lies in his famous trikotomy of signs, which categorizes signs into icons, indices, and symbols. An icon represents its designated object through direct physical resemblance or structural mimicry. Conversely, an index is a sign that shares a direct, existential, or causal link with its object. For instance, smoke is an index of fire, just as specific physical behaviors in literature indicate internal psychological states. According to Stjernfelt (2022), symbols represent the highest level of sign operation because they rely entirely on arbitrary institutional laws and cultural habits. Symbols require a shared cultural code among individuals to be properly decoded and understood within a specific community. In literary texts, these three sign types constantly overlap, create layers of meaning, and direct reader interpretation. Understanding this trikotomy allows researchers to dissect the exact mechanism through which textual elements project societal power.

Operationalizing indexical and symbolic signs within a novel enables a deep extraction of hidden sociomaterial structures. Indexical signs in literature often manifest as material possessions that directly indicate a character's actual economic power. For example, the grandeur of an estate acts as a physical index of the owner's systemic socioeconomic dominance. On the other hand, symbolic signs manifest as institutionalized behaviors, titles, and linguistic etiquettes governed by societal laws. These symbols dictate who belongs to the elite class and who must remain socially excluded. According to West (2024), literary semiotics becomes powerful when it maps how characters manipulate these established indices and symbols to negotiate power. The interaction between indexical realities and symbolic expectations creates the primary

dramatic tension in realist novels. This semiotic interplay reveals the mechanical operations of class hegemony within the domestic sphere.

While the theoretical foundations of Peircean semiotics are robust, their specific application to Austen's sociomaterial signs requires closer examination. Many contemporary scholars have attempted to evaluate the socioeconomic dimensions of *Pride and Prejudice* from broader critical angles. However, there remains an unresolved tension regarding how micro-textual signs explicitly construct macro-structures of wealth. As argued by Williams (2022), traditional literary analysis often overlooks the precise semiotic pathways through which material objects transform into class power. To fully demonstrate the novelty of this study, it is essential to map the exact trajectories of recent academic discussions. A rigorous review of the closest empirical studies will expose the precise analytical limitations of existing literature. By identifying what previous researchers have overlooked, this paper establishes its unique contribution to nineteenth-century literary criticism. Consequently, the following section will present three benchmark studies to clearly contextualize the research gap that this current study aims to bridge.

The scholarly mapping of Jane Austen's literature frequently centers on how macro-thematic paradigms directly govern the trajectories of character evolution and domestic plotlines. Specifically, Wahyu Sudrajat (2024) in his research titled "*The Influence of Themes on Character Decisions in Pride and Prejudice Novel by Jane Austen*" utilizes an exploratory qualitative research design and close reading to examine this narrative phenomenon. His approach focuses on mapping how the protagonists navigate internal conflicts and external challenges against major thematic constructs. The findings of his study reveal that love operates as a transformative force that challenges social norms, encourages self-discovery, and redefines relational growth. Additionally, his critique of class dynamics and prejudice emphasizes the novel's continued relevance in contemporary discussions on social stratification. However, while his inquiry offers valuable insights into character motivations, it remains primarily tied to a traditional, content-based thematic analysis. It fails to unpack the exact linguistic and material signifiers that encode these overarching themes before they manifest as narrative decisions. Therefore, a more rigorous and structured semiotic framework is required to bridge the conceptual space between thematic abstraction and textual reality.

Beyond general thematic readings, the critical reception of Austen's narrative universe has also been heavily dominated by ideologically driven feminist methodologies. Ivan Nur Rohman Rahayu (2021) in his study titled "*Analysis of the Women's Equality in Pride and Prejudice Movie: A Feminist Approach*" employs a qualitative descriptive method rooted in the feminism approach by Welzel and Inglehart. His methodology focuses on analyzing gender-egalitarian attitudes, economic stability, and self-expression values within the narrative. The results of his research indicate that the author addresses feminism to demonstrate that women can achieve independence and establish careers in the public area. Furthermore, his study presents Elizabeth Bennet as a clever, self-confident, creative, and resilient prototype of women empowerment who resists external domination. Yet, because this feminist reading operates heavily within an evaluative socio-political paradigm, it tends to analyze characters as static representations of ideological positions. It bypasses the fluid semiotic mechanisms and triadic sign relations through which material objects and verbal interactions convert into indicators of empowerment. Thus, contemporary literary scholarship needs to explore how feminist agency is textually encoded through specific sign systems rather than merely evaluating its thematic outcomes.

To further complicate the intersection of gender and narrative structures, recent critical attention has shifted toward unpacking the dynamic manifestations of power within domestic spaces. Fira Maurina Solihin (2023) in her research titled "*Relasi Kuasa Gender dalam Novel Pride and Prejudice Karya Jane Austen*" applies a qualitative method integrated with Sara Mills' critical discourse theory to find patterns of gender power relations. Her analytical framework focuses on the dynamics of power relations that determine the powerful and the dominated subjects within a linguistic product. The findings of her study reveal three discursive limitations across the consistent themes of marriage, family, and society, showing that women are consistently situated in an inferior position due to limited material access. However, her discourse analysis successfully uncovers a paradox where the text activates the female gaze through the heroine as a counter-power against unequal gender dynamics. Nevertheless, by relying strictly on critical discourse analysis, such studies place heavy emphasis on structural linguistics, power dynamics, and sapaan mechanisms. They overlook the specific triadic components of non-verbal signs, physical spaces, and financial commodities that exist prior to discursive formations. As a result, the foundational semiotic mechanics that allow these power relations to be constructed and interpreted remain largely unexamined.

This noticeable convergence of empirical literature reveals a critical, unresolved research gap at the intersection of material culture, power dynamics, and formal semiotic models. While current studies successfully critique the novel's thematic decisions, its feminist archetypes, and its discursive power relations, they consistently treat the signs of wealth and status as passive backdrop elements. There is a distinct lack of systematic inquiry into how micro-textual elements—such as annual incomes, physical estates, and

architectural dimensions—function as active, triadic signs that structurally produce social hierarchy. Traditional sociomaterial critiques direct their attention to macro-sociological conclusions, whereas traditional semiotic readings often strip the text of its heavy socio-economic anxieties. By operationalizing Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model, this current study directly addresses this empirical void by mapping the exact process of semiosis that transforms material objects into ideological tools of class hegemony. To structure this systemic investigation of material culture and power, this paper outlines distinct inquiries into the text's core socio-economic sign systems. Therefore, to ensure a rigorous, micro-textual interrogation of the corpus, this investigation is directed by the following two major research questions. 1. How are the indexical signs of wealth and material culture operationalized to construct socioeconomic dominance and class stratification within the triadic semiosis of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*?, 2. In what ways do the symbolic signs of Regency social conventions and patriarchal laws interact with these material realities to either reinforce or subvert the status of women in the novel?.

Method

This study utilizes a qualitative research design to explore the chosen nineteenth-century novel through a critical lens. Qualitative research does not deal with numbers, statistics, or complex mathematical calculations that track statistical frequencies. Instead, it focuses on understanding deep meanings, cultural concepts, and detailed text descriptions within a historical framework. Following the guidelines established by Creswell and Creswell (2023), a qualitative approach is the best method for exploring human problems and complex social phenomena. Literary analysis naturally requires this kind of deep, text-based, and highly descriptive exploration of underlying power structures. In this research, we use the qualitative method to strictly dissect Jane Austen's masterpiece from a socio-material standpoint. The primary goal of this design is to reveal how linguistic signs actively construct unequal power and oppression in Regency society. Therefore, a qualitative design perfectly matches the Peircean semiotic goals of this study to decode class dynamics.

The data sources for this research are clearly divided into two main components. These two categories are the primary data source and the secondary data sources. The primary data source is the main object of the study itself, which is the novel titled *Pride and Prejudice*. This famous realist novel was written by Jane Austen and officially published in its complete form in 1813. The primary data consists of words, phrases, expressions, sentences, and paragraphs directly extracted from the text. We focus specifically on narrations and dialogues that describe physical properties, annual incomes, architectural spaces, and social etiquettes. On the other hand, the secondary data sources provide essential supporting information to validate the reading. These secondary sources include reputable academic journals, literary books, and contemporary theoretical articles about Regency England. Together, these two types of sources provide us with a very strong foundation for the entire triadic analysis.

This study collects data through systematic library research and document analysis since the corpus is a printed text. Since the research object is a fixed realist novel, field observations, surveys, and live interviews are not needed. Following expert guidelines in qualitative research, the data collection process consists of three systematic steps:

1. Close Reading and Text Immersion: The first step is reading the primary text carefully and repeatedly to achieve familiarity. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), qualitative researchers must completely immerse themselves in a document to understand its core messages. By applying this close reading technique, we gain a deep understanding of the story before extracting any specific socio-material signs.
2. Identifying Key Information: After understanding the entire story, the next step is locating the relevant data. We carefully review the text to highlight important sentences and key paragraphs that capture material status. During this process, we specifically focus on finding quotes that describe incomes, properties, and class boundaries.
3. Documenting and Structuring Data: Finally, we collect all the highlighted quotes and type them into a structured digital file. This systematic documentation organizes the raw data clearly and ensures that no important Peircean signs are missed before the main analysis begins.

After the data is collected, it is analyzed using structured qualitative methods to ensure empirical validity. This study uses the interactive data analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020). Their updated framework consists of three deeply connected steps:

1. Data Condensation: According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), the first step is to select, simplify, and focus on the most relevant information. In this stage, we filter the collected quotes and strictly ignore any unnecessary parts of the story that do not relate to wealth, status, or semiotics.
2. Data Display and Semiotic Categorization: Next, we organize the condensed data systematically within Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic framework. As adapted in recent literary studies, the meaning is analyzed through three specific levels:

- Representamen: We isolate the textual signifiers such as physical objects, money, or behaviors.
 - Object: We link these signs to their existential realities, specifically indexical and symbolic wealth.
 - Interpretant: We examine the ultimate mental effect or ideology that normalizes class hegemony.
3. Drawing Conclusions and Verification: The final step, following the 2020 model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, is drawing verified conclusions. Based on the triadic semiotic analysis, we answer how material realities and social conventions operate to reinforce or subvert patriarchal structures.

Results

In this section, twenty selected textual extracts from the novel *Pride and Prejudice* are systematically presented along with their original chapter and page coordinates to illustrate the empirical dataset of this study. To ensure a rigorous qualitative inquiry, each individual extract is processed through a structured two-tiered narrative and semiotic interrogation. The first paragraph details the immediate domestic narrative context, socioeconomic anxieties, and behavioral dynamics that define the gentry community on the text's surface layer. The second paragraph directly operationalizes Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic framework to unpack how these everyday material conditions act as icons, indices, and symbols that either reinforce or subvert patriarchal dominance. By integrating critical socio-material definitions with formal sign relations, this comprehensive data display establishes a transparent pathway toward uncovering the hidden ideological operations of wealth and status

Extract 1

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

In this famous opening sentence, the narrator establishes the structural framework of the entire society. The text instantly addresses the reader by presenting a shared social expectation as an absolute and unquestionable reality. We observe how a man's identity is directly evaluated by his financial capital before any personal characteristics are introduced. The surrounding families do not care about the individual feelings or personal choices of the wealthy bachelor. Instead, they immediately view him as a piece of legal property that belongs to their daughters. This structural setting highlights the heavy economic anxieties faced by families with unmarried female children. Marriage is presented on the surface not as an emotional union but as an institutional necessity for survival. Consequently, this statement guides the reader's focus toward the sociomaterial pressures of Regency England.

Semiotic analysis based on Peirce's triadic model reveals that the phrase "good fortune" serves as a powerful representamen of class authority. The object of this sign is the static economic structure of the nineteenth-century gentry where wealth determines human eligibility. In terms of sign typology, the "universally acknowledged truth" operates as a symbol because its meaning is entirely governed by arbitrary societal laws and institutional habits. The interpretant of this triadic relation is the normalization of the sociomaterial myth where human beings are transformed into financial commodities. As Eagleton (2020) suggests, literary texts use these subtle ideological structures to shape the reader's perception of natural reality. Austen introduces this symbol to show that the domestic choices of characters are always pre-determined by overarching capitalist transitions. Therefore, the opening sentence acts as a master signifier that codifies the sociomaterial matrix of the entire community.

Extract 2

"Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!" (Chapter 1, Page 1)

Mrs. Bennet ecstatically informs her husband about the arrival of Mr. Bingley at Netherfield Park. We observe that her excitement is completely driven by the specific nominal value of the bachelor's income. She does not possess any information regarding his moral character, intelligence, or personal disposition. The phrase "four or five thousand a year" is treated as the only essential qualification for a future son-in-law. Her exclamation reveals the desperate material conditions of the Bennet daughters who face financial exclusion due to inheritance laws. The maternal focus is instantly directed toward securing an establishment to guarantee long-term economic stability. This domestic dialogue illustrates how family survival is directly dependent on the successful commodification of female bodies. Thus, financial quantification stands as the primary driving force behind maternal matchmaking decisions.

Operationalizing Peirce's semiotics, the quantified income of "four or five thousand a year" functions as a clear indexical sign. The object of this sign is Mr. Bingley's actual economic power and his elevated position within the socioeconomic hierarchy. It is an index because there is a direct, causal, and existential link between possessing an annual income and holding social dominance. The interpretant produced in Mrs. Bennet's cognition is the instant validation of Bingley as the ultimate marriageable target for her daughters. According to Brown (2022), material assets in Austen's universe operate as primary indicators that actively establish a character's social position. Austen utilizes this indexical reality to expose how the domestic sphere is systematically invaded by transactional values. The numerical signifier completely overshadows individual identity, reducing a human life to a financial asset.

Extract 3

"But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them." (Chapter 1, Page 2)

Mrs. Bennet desperately pleads with her husband to visit the newly arrived wealthy bachelor. She commands him to think about the long-term material future of their five grown-up daughters. The term "establishment" is used here to signify more than just a home or a basic marriage. It represents total financial security, elevated social standing, and protection from future systemic poverty. We see how much pressure the maternal figure experiences as she navigates a rigid patriarchal environment. Her husband's passive and sarcastic attitude deeply frustrates her efforts to secure necessary social connections. The dialogue exposes a deep division between the father's detached intellectual amusement and the mother's realistic socio-material anxieties. Consequently, the pursuit of an establishment becomes the central business of female domestic life.

In a Peircean triadic reading, the word "establishment" functions as a complex symbolic sign within the text. The object of this symbol is the institutionalized security provided by the patriarchal marriage market to dependent females. It requires a shared cultural code among individuals to be properly decoded as a shield against destitution. The interpretant of this sign is the reinforcement of the societal belief that a woman's value is realized only through marriage. This dynamic aligns with the sociomaterial perspective of Williams (2022), who notes that traditional literary analysis often overlooks the precise pathways of material transformation. Austen uses this symbolic sign to reveal the hidden anxieties that dictate female domestic compliance. The term encapsulates the entire socioeconomic vulnerability of the gentry class where women are denied independent survival.

Extract 4

"The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news." (Chapter 1, Page 2)

The narrator explicitly defines the psychological and social boundaries of Mrs. Bennet's daily existence. We receive a clear portrait of a woman whose entire cognitive energy is consumed by one specific purpose. Because she possesses mean understanding and little information, her world is confined to immediate domestic anxieties. The text shows that her continuous gossip and visiting are not just idle forms of entertainment. Instead, these behaviors are active methods to gather intelligence about wealthy bachelors and social shifts. She navigates a hyper-regulated community where missing a piece of news could ruin her daughters' chances. Her narrow focus is a direct consequence of a patriarchal structure that denies women access to public careers. Therefore, her seemingly foolish behavior is actually a desperate response to a hostile economic reality.

From a semiotic perspective, Mrs. Bennet's repetitive behaviors of "visiting and news" operate as an indexical sign of systemic entrapment. The object of this behavioral index is the oppressive domestic confinement that restricts female agency to the matrimonial market. It shares a causal link with her socioeconomic environment; because she cannot participate in public politics, she turns gossip into a serious business. The interpretant generated by this sign is the cultural stereotype of the hysterical, match-making mother. As Moretti (2020) observes, the novel genre functions as a major symbolic engine that codifies the developmental contradictions of secular societies. Austen uses this indexical behavior to demonstrate how patriarchal limitations deform female psychology. The mother's obsession is not an inherent flaw but a direct product of her material vulnerability.

Extract 5

"Observing his second daughter employed in trimming a hat, he suddenly addressed her with: 'I hope Mr. Bingley will like it, Lizzy.'" (Chapter 2, Page 2)

Mr. Bennet observes Elizabeth as she works diligently on an item of personal fashion. He uses a playful and sarcastic remark to connect her domestic task directly to the wealthy bachelor. We see how the presence of Mr. Bingley has completely infected every ordinary activity inside the house. Even the creative act of trimming a hat is immediately viewed as a tool for sexual captivation. Elizabeth's mother quickly responds with resentment, assuming that their lack of social introduction makes her work useless. This domestic scene highlights how ordinary objects are constantly loaded with sociomaterial expectations. The characters are hyper-aware that every visible display of beauty or skill is an investment in the marriage market. Thus, the father's dialogue exposes the pervasive nature of societal pressure inside the private family circle.

Analyzing this extract through Peirce's triadic model, the act of "trimming a hat" functions as a representamen or sign vehicle. The object of this sign is the decorative performance of femininity required to attract economic capital. Within Peirce's typology, the hat serves as an icon because it physically represents the grace and accomplishments of a gentry woman. The interpretant of this triadic relation is the subtle commodification of female domestic labor. According to West (2024), literary semiotics becomes powerful when it maps how characters manipulate established signs to negotiate power. Austen uses this iconic representation to show that women are constantly encouraged to alter their material appearance for male approval. The ordinary object is transformed into a signifier of courtship strategy.

Extract 6

"The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud..." (Chapter 3, Page 4)

Mr. Darcy enters the Meryton assembly room and instantly captures the collective gaze of the public. The crowd evaluates his fine person, handsome features, and noble mien with intense visual admiration. We see that his physical body is immediately treated as a public spectacle of aristocratic perfection. However, this admiration quickly turns into deep disgust when his cold manners are revealed to the company. His refusal to interact with the local community insults the pride of the surrounding country gentry. The transition from popularity to hatred shows how local societies enforce rules of social behavior. Darcy's physical attractiveness cannot protect him from public condemnation once his attitude is labeled as arrogant. Therefore, this scene illustrates the constant negotiation of status between an elite outsider and a local community.

In a Peircean semiotic reading, Darcy's physical appearance and "noble mien" function as a complex representamen. The object of this sign is the traditional authority and superior status of the high British aristocracy. It operates as an icon because his physical stature directly mimics the social grandeur of his class. The interpretant produced in the assembly's mind is the initial expectation of perfect gentlemanly benevolence. As noted by Rimmon-Kenan (2021), narrative fiction provides an intricate mechanism for manipulating perspective through these physical descriptions. Austen uses this iconic sign to show how easily society is blinded by superficial aristocratic representations. The sudden shift in public opinion demonstrates that iconic power can be quickly ruined by a failure in symbolic behavior.

Extract 7

"Which do you mean?" and turning round he looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said: "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me; I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men..." (Chapter 3, Page 5)

Mr. Darcy refuses to dance with Elizabeth Bennet during the public ball at Meryton. He directs a brief, cold gaze toward her before dismissing her identity as merely "tolerable". We witness a powerful demonstration of aristocratic arrogance that reduces a woman to an object of visual evaluation. Darcy explicitly states that he will not waste his time on young ladies who are rejected by others. His words inflict a deep wound on Elizabeth's social pride and self-consequence within the community. Elizabeth overhears this harsh insult but manages to tell the story with great spirit and humor among her friends. This interaction establishes the primary dramatic tension and personal prejudice between the two protagonists. Thus, the male gaze is used here as an exclusionary tool to enforce class boundaries.

Operationalizing Peirce's triadic framework, Darcy's cold look and the word "tolerable" function as a sign of elite rejection. The object of this sign is Elizabeth's lower socioeconomic consequence and her lack of connections within his fashionable world. Tipologically, his explicit verbal refusal acts as an index of his social distance and absolute class superiority. The interpretant generated in Elizabeth's mind is not passive submission but a active counter-feeling of resentment and prejudice. According to Nussbaum (2021), narrative details serve to explore how complex power relations are rigorously interrogated. Austen utilizes

this indexical insult to initiate Elizabeth's defensive intellectual resistance. The signifier of male rejection becomes the catalyst for the heroine's subversive verbal agency.

Extract 8

"They were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased... but proud and conceited. They were rather handsome... had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds... and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others." (Chapter 4, Page 6)

The narrator provides a sharp sociological description of Mr. Bingley's wealthy sisters. We observe how their pride and conceited behavior are directly justified by their material wealth. The text explicitly links their fortune of twenty thousand pounds to their right to look down on others. These ladies utilize their private education and high rank to separate themselves from the country community. They forget that their own family wealth was originally acquired through mercantile trade rather than noble inheritance. Their sophisticated manners are used as a social weapon to enforce boundaries against less prosperous individuals. Elizabeth Bennet observes this supercilious treatment and refuses to be blinded by their elegant appearance. Therefore, this passage exposes how financial capital is instantly converted into a false sense of moral superiority.

From a Peircean semiotic standpoint, the specific numerical signifier of "twenty thousand pounds" operates as a representamen. The object of this sign is the systemic economic power possessed by the rising upper-middle class during the industrial transition. It stands as a symbol because the value of money relies entirely on arbitrary institutional laws and economic conventions. The interpretant of this triadic sign relation is the legal entitlement to social arrogance and class exclusion. As Stjernfelt (2022) argues, symbols represent the highest level of sign operation because they rely on shared cultural codes of validation. Austen uses this symbolic asset to deconstruct the hypocrisy of the Bingley sisters. Their material wealth allows them to perform acts of social compliance while hiding their own humble trade origins.

Extract 9

"His pride," said Miss Lucas, "does not offend me so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, everything in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a right to be proud." (Chapter 5, Page 7)

Charlotte Lucas offers a pragmatic defense of Mr. Darcy's arrogant behavior during a conversation at Longbourn. She argues that a man who possesses family and fortune has a legitimate right to be proud. We see how deeply the rules of class stratification are internalized by the characters in this community. Charlotte views Darcy's pride not as a personal flaw but as a natural consequence of his high status. Her realistic perspective reflects her own acute awareness of the harsh material conditions surrounding gentry women. Elizabeth Bennet immediately disagrees, stating that she could forgive his pride if he had not insulted her own. This dialogue highlights a major ideological clash between Charlotte's social compliance and Elizabeth's individual agency. Thus, status is presented here as a valid excuse for violating common etiket.

In a Peircean reading, the terms "family" and "fortune" function as interrelated representamens of systemic authority. The object of these signs is the hereditary hegemony of the landowning class that controlled nineteenth-century British society. Tipologically, Darcy's pride is treated by Charlotte as an index—a direct, logical consequence of his vast material assets. The interpretant produced by this indexical relation is the normalization of aristocratic supremacy as a natural law. According to Copeland (2020), Austen's narrative landscape is heavily dictated by strict economic realities and material pressures. Charlotte's dialogue validates this sociomaterial truth, proving that characters continuously decode physical wealth as a legitimate license for social dominance.

Extract 10

"Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us." (Chapter 5, Page 7)

Mary Bennet delivers a pedantic philosophical distinction between pride and vanity during the family discussion. She attempts to display her deep reflection and knowledge derived from reading great books. We see that her narrative role is to provide abstract moral commentary on human behavior. Her definition positions pride as an internal condition of self-complacency, while vanity depends on public opinion. However, her constant focus on threadbare morality lacks genuine taste and real emotional insight. She uses these rigid definitions to gain attention within a family where she is the only plain sister. Her speech exposes how women often turn to academic achievements when they lack physical attractiveness in the marriage market.

Therefore, her dialogue illustrates the desperate search for personal distinction within a restricted domestic sphere.

Operationalizing Peirce's framework, Mary's philosophical statement functions as a representamen that attempts to map human psychology. The object of this sign is the collective moral failing that dominates the gentry community, particularly visible in Darcy and Mrs. Bennet. Within Peirce's typology, her structured definition acts as a symbol because it relies on learned academic conventions and text-based definitions. The interpretant of this symbol is the ironic exposure of Mary's own vanity, as she defines pride merely to impress her listeners. As argued by Atkin (2023), the Peircean sign is fundamentally relational, relying on human *kognisi* to bridge representations and reality. Austen uses this symbolic definition to satirize how abstract morality fails to solve the concrete material anxieties of daily life.

Extract 11

"Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other or ever so similar beforehand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation..." (Chapter 6, Page 8)

Charlotte Lucas explains her cynical and pragmatic philosophy of marriage to Elizabeth Bennet. She argues that personal compatibility and deep understanding are completely irrelevant to future domestic happiness. We observe the cold calculation of a woman who views marriage strictly as an economic transaction for survival. Charlotte advises that a woman should secure a rich husband first before worrying about falling in love. Elizabeth laughs at this plan, believing that it is not sound and that Charlotte would never act upon it. This conversation foreshadows Charlotte's future decision to accept the pompous Mr. Collins. The dialogue exposes the absolute lack of romance in the choices available to dependent gentry women. Thus, marriage is stripped of its emotional value and reduced to a matter of chance and financial strategy.

From a Peircean semiotic standpoint, Charlotte's cynical statement functions as a representamen of economic pragmatism. The object of this sign is the harsh legal reality of the Regency era where unmarried women faced total social marginalization. Tipologically, her philosophy operates as a symbol that codifies marriage as a legal contract rather than an emotional bond. The interpretant generated by this sign is the destruction of romantic illusions in favor of *sosiomaterial* security. According to Brown (2022), material possessions and establishments operate as primary indicators that dictate human choices. Austen introduces this symbolic argument to prepare the reader for the structural compromises that characters must make. Charlotte's words act as a realistic text signifier of female survival strategies.

Extract 12

"But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she hardly had a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes." (Chapter 6, Page 9)

Mr. Darcy undergoes a significant psychological shift as he continues to observe Elizabeth Bennet. Initially, his critical eye saw only a lack of perfect symmetry and a face without fashion. However, he suddenly discovers that her dark eyes project an uncommon intelligence and easy playfulness. We witness the subversion of his arrogant class gaze by an individual physical feature. Elizabeth remains completely unaware of this interest, still viewing him as a proud man who rejected her. Darcy begins to attend to her conversations with others to learn more about her mind. This internal change demonstrates that individual human attraction can break through rigid class prejudices. Therefore, this moment marks the secret beginning of Darcy's emotional transformation.

In a Peircean triadic framework, Elizabeth's "dark eyes" function as a powerful representamen or sign vehicle. The object of this sign is her independent mind, her quickness of observation, and her unconventional agency. It stands as an index because the expressive brightness of her eyes is a direct physical result of her active intellect. The interpretant produced in Darcy's *kognisi* is the subversion of his initial negative judgment, forcing him to acknowledge her attraction. As West (2024) notes, literary semiotics maps how characters manipulate or are caught by indices to negotiate power. Austen uses this indexical feature to break down Darcy's defensive class boundaries, proving that individual human traits can disrupt systemic arrogance.

Extract 13

"My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow." (Chapter 6, Page 11)

Mr. Darcy confesses his romantic reflections to Caroline Bingley during a public party. He explicitly names Elizabeth Bennet as the lady who inspired his thoughts about "fine eyes". We observe Caroline's immediate astonishment and jealousy as she repeats Elizabeth's name with deep disdain. Caroline instantly uses sarcastic remarks about Mrs. Bennet and Pemberley to punish Darcy for his interest. Darcy receives her bitter witticisms with perfect indifference and calm composure. This dialogue shows how the mention of Elizabeth's features disrupts the elite circle's expectations. Darcy's public acknowledgment of her eyes challenges the class-based standards of beauty held by his peers. Thus, a specific physical feature becomes a site of ideological conflict between characters.

Operationalizing Peirce's semiotics, the phrase "fine eyes" operates here as a complex symbolic representamen in public discourse. The object of this sign is the growing emotional attachment that Darcy feels despite Elizabeth's inferior connections. Tipologically, his verbal declaration acts as an index of his internal psychological transformation and his breaking of class rules. The interpretant generated in Caroline Bingley's mind is an intense threat to her own matrimonial ambitions. According to Moretti (2020), the novel genre functions as a symbolic engine that reflects and codifies sociomaterial contradictions. Austen uses this indexical confession to show how individual desire begins to threaten the rigid boundaries of aristocratic exclusion.

Extract 14

"Mr. Bennet's property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year, which, unfortunately for his daughters, was entailed, in default of heirs male, on a distant relation..." (Chapter 7, Page 11)

The narrator provides the foundational economic conflict that controls the destiny of the Bennet family. We learn that Mr. Bennet's income of two thousand a year is tied to a strict legal entail. Because he lacks a male heir, his five daughters are legally blocked from inheriting the family estate. This material reality places the female characters in a position of extreme financial insecurity. Their mother's small fortune of four thousand pounds cannot fix this systemic deficiency. The entail law forces the daughters to look at the marriage market as their only escape from destitution. This legal constraint explains Mrs. Bennet's frantic matchmaking behavior throughout the narrative. Therefore, the text establishes that legal and economic laws are the true jailers of female agency.

From a Peircean semiotic standpoint, the "legal entail" functions as a master symbolic sign that dictates the text'salur. The object of this symbol is the patriarchal legal structure of Regency England designed to keep land property inside male lines. It is a symbol because its authority is derived entirely from arbitrary institutional laws and cultural conventions. The interpretant of this sign relation is the continuous domestic panic that forces the Bennet sisters to seek establishments. As argued by Solihin (2023), the family operates as the closest social unit that perpetuates gender-based adjustments. Austen introduces this symbolic legal sign to show that female vulnerability is not a natural condition but a legally enforced oppression.

Extract 15

"To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles in dirt, and alone, quite alone! What could she mean by it? It seems to me to show an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to decorum." (Chapter 8, Page 13)

Caroline Bingley aggressively criticizes Elizabeth Bennet's sudden arrival at Netherfield Park. She expresses deep disgust because Elizabeth walked three miles alone through the mud to visit her sick sister. We observe how the elite ladies interpret this physical exertion as a violation of social decorum. The phrase "abominable sort of conceited independence" reveals their fear of a woman who acts outside hyper-regulated norms. They focus heavily on her dirty petticoat and untidy hair to prove her social inferiority. However, Mr. Bingley defends her action, viewing it as a pleasing sign of sisterly affection. Darcy also admits that the exercise brightened her complexion and enhanced her fine eyes. This scene exposes how female mobility is judged by upper-class standards of confinement.

In a Peircean semiotic reading, the "dirty petticoat" and the "mud" function as a powerful indexical representamen. The object of this sign is Elizabeth's active mobility, family devotion, and disregard for superficial class performances. It is an index because the mud is a direct, physical consequence of her real journey through the landscape. The interpretant produced in Caroline's mind is a negative sign of low breeding and lack of decorum. Conversely, the interpretant in Darcy's kognisi is an iconic enhancement of her physical vitality. According to Solihin (2023), Austen uses this spatial transgression to activate the female gaze and challenge masculine visual expectations. The mud becomes a symbol of independence that breaks through the static decorations of gentry femininity.

Discussion

1. The Semiotic Deconstruction of Wealth and Material Culture in Constructing Socioeconomic Dominance

The empirical findings of this study directly answer the first research question by exposing how material items within the text operate as active triadic signs that structurally produce social hierarchy. Denotatively, the text anchors gentry status to quantifiable figures and physical landscapes, such as Mr Darcy possessing ten thousand per annum and the architectural grandeur of Pemberley House. Within Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework, these material possessions do not function as passive descriptive backgrounds, but rather act as potent indexical signs that have a direct causal and existential link to systemic socioeconomic dominance. The interpretant generated within the community's cognition, particularly visible in Mrs Bennet's frantic matchmaking behaviors, is the instant validation of human beings as mere financial commodities to be traded in the matrimonial market. This semiotic operation aligns with the socio-material arguments of Sudrajat (2024), who states that class dynamics in the novel create a rigid highly constrained social framework that heavily dictates character choices and limits individual mobility. Furthermore, as observed in the sharp contrast between the understated elegance of Pemberley and the aggressive over-decorated display of Rosings Park, Austen utilizes these physical icons to measure the actual moral and social worth of the aristocracy. By decoding these material signifiers, the analysis uncovers that economic capital covertly transforms into absolute moral authority, allowing wealthy outsiders to control the domestic destiny of less prosperous families. Therefore, the triadic semiosis of wealth demonstrates that material culture is the primary mechanism used by the landowning class to reinforce and naturalize their ideological superiority over the country gentry.

The deep integration of financial quantification and physical spaces in the novel reflects a broader ideological process where social standing is continuously materialised and validated. According to Eagleton (2020), literary texts use these subtle sociomaterial structures to shape and regulate the reader's perception of historical reality. In the universe of Longbourn and Netherfield, numbers like the four or five thousand a year belonging to Mr Bingley are not neutral mathematical values. Instead, they function as indexical representaments that immediately signify the legal and social boundaries of human eligibility within a capitalist transition. Families within this hyper-regulated ecosystem decode these indexical realities with an intense psychological focus on long-term economic survival. This behavioral pattern proves that the pursuit of wealth heavily shapes the domestic landscape, driving characters to treat marriage as an explicit transaction. As argued by Moretti (2020), the novel genre operates as a major symbolic engine that codifies the developmental contradictions of secular communities. Austen's careful indexing of property dimensions and annual incomes serves to expose the moral limits of a society that values human life primarily through its visible accumulation of capital.

Ultimately, the triadic semiosis of material culture uncovers that architectural signs and luxury commodities are weaponized to enforce class boundaries and marginalize lower gentry families. The specific physical descriptions of aristocratic estates like Pemberley serve as an iconic representation of hereditary power and established cultural hegemony. This spatial authority is further re-examined by modern critical semioticians who note that physical spaces are never ideologically empty but actively record and reproduce societal power. As analyzed by Brown (2022), material possessions in Austen's narratives function as primary indicators that establish a character's actual social capital and moral legitimacy. When Mr Darcy or the Bingley sisters use their immense wealth to look down on others, they are utilizing their material superiority as a social weapon. The local country gentry often internalize these indexical signs, accepting their own lower position within the class hierarchy as an unchangeable law. This dynamic illustrates how the landowning class successfully converts economic capital into unquestionable social authority. Consequently, the semiotic reading reveals that ordinary domestic objects and architectural scales are central to the maintenance of class oppression.

2. The Interplay of Symbolic Conventions and Patriarchal Laws in Reinforcing or Subverting Female Status

To address the second research question, the analysis reveals a complex ideological battleground where symbolic signs of Regency social conventions either enforce female submission or facilitate sharp feminist subversion. Symbolic signs in this realist universe manifest as institutionalized codes, including the patriarchal estate entailment laws, rigid etiquette systems, and the competitive performance of female accomplishments required to please the masculine gaze. These symbols require a shared cultural code among characters to function as tools of social exclusion, effectively reducing a woman's intrinsic value to a transactional credit score within the domestic sphere. This structural entrapment directly mirrors the discourse analysis by Solihin (2023), which uncovers how the institutional domains of marriage, family, and society work systematically together to preserve a woman's inferior position. However, the findings also document a profound trajectory of resistance, where the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, actively manipulates these established symbols to break through patriarchal expectations. Her physical transgression through the

mud, her witty rejection of Mr Collins's pompous proposal, and her refusal to give a direct answer to Lady Catherine's impertinent questions represent an activation of individual agency. This subversive behavioral index supports the feminist reading by Rahayu (2021), proving that Elizabeth serves as a crucial prototype of female empowerment who achieves independence in thought, thought-processing, and decision-making.

The operation of patriarchal symbols inside the family circle serves to illustrate how legal structures devalue female intelligence and restrict independent survival. According to Rimmon-Kenan (2021), narrative fiction provides the most intricate mechanism for manipulating social and legal perspectives within the domestic sphere. The legal entail on Longbourn estate acts as a master symbolic sign that forces the Bennet sisters to look at the marriage market as their only shield against future destitution. This legal constraint completely shapes maternal psychology, transforming Mrs Bennet's matchmaking into a desperate business for family survival. When characters like Mr Collins treat women as interchangeable commodities that can fit into a parsonage house, they are executing the explicit commands of patriarchal law. This objectification is further supported by arbitrary societal expectations that demand women perform decorative achievements like netting purses or covering screens. As detailed by Stjernfelt (2022), symbols represent the highest level of sign operation because they rely entirely on arbitrary institutional rules and cultural habits. Austen uses these symbols to demonstrate how heavily female agency is constrained by the legalities of inheritance.

In the final analysis, the heroine's consistent rejection of these patriarchal signs transforms the traditional marriage plot into a radical assertion of female autonomy. Elizabeth Bennet stubbornly refuses to view herself as an economic commodity or an elegant female intending to plague a respectable man. Her dialogue explicitly demands that she be treated as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart, a direct deconstruction of gentry conventions. According to Atkin (2023), the Peircean sign is fundamentally relational, relying on human cognition to bridge the gap between fixed representations and objective reality. By turning her sharp irony back against Darcy's arrogance and Lady Catherine's dictatorial manners, Elizabeth activates the female gaze as an active counter-power. Her final mental victory over Darcy's pride forces a complete reconstitution of masculine within the text, blocking the traditional exploitation of patriarchal privilege. This semiotic shift proves that individual human traits and intellectual integrity can successfully dismantle systemic class boundaries. Therefore, the interaction between symbolic expectations and indexical realities establishes a powerful counter-narrative where female agency achieves legitimate

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study successfully examines Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* through a rigid triadic semiotic lens to decode the hidden structural operations of wealth and status. By strictly applying Charles Sanders Peirce's framework of representamen, object, and interpretant, the research proves that socioeconomic dominance in the novel is not a mere thematic backdrop but a finely coded system of sociomaterial signs. The analysis reveals that quantifiable assets and elite properties, such as Mr. Darcy's annual income and the physical expanse of Pemberley House, operate as potent indexical signs that actively establish and legitimize class stratification. Simultaneously, the arbitrary conventions of Regency society, including patriarchal inheritance laws and the performance of female accomplishments, act as rigid symbols designed to enforce female submission. However, the interplay between these signs ultimately facilitates a powerful counter-narrative of feminist subversion through the actions of the heroine. Elizabeth Bennet's persistent rejection of these patriarchal codes successfully redefines the traditional marriage plot, turning the masculine gaze into a counter-power that validates female autonomy. Therefore, the study demonstrates that individual intellectual integrity can systematically dismantle the mechanical operations of class and gender hegemony.

Furthermore, this research successfully bridges the methodological and empirical gaps identified in previous nineteenth-century literary scholarship. While prior studies heavily relied on broad thematic criticism (Sudrajad, 2024), evaluative feminist approaches (Rahayu, 2021), or macro-sociological discourse analysis (Solihin, 2023), they frequently overlooked the precise micro-textual pathways of sign generation. This paper addresses that limitation by providing a structured semiotic categorization that demonstrates how ordinary domestic objects, nominal figures, and spatial scales carry heavy ideological weights. The triadic reading exposes that the most deep-seated forms of gendered and class control are covertly hidden and normalized inside standard everyday interactions. By showing that characters actively read and negotiate these material indices, the study provides a more empirical and less speculative model for literary interpretation. The text is ultimately decoded as a dynamic arena where material realities and symbolic expectations constantly collide to reshape human relationships. Consequently, this investigation establishes a vital perspective for future critical readings, proving that formal semiotics can uncover profound socio-political insights within classic romance literature.

Based on the critical insights generated by this triadic semiotic analysis, several key directions are suggested for future academic inquiries within political and gender literary studies. Future researchers are encouraged to expand this Peircean methodological framework to examine other major texts within Austen's

oeuvre, such as *Emma*, where the heroine possesses significant financial independence from the outset. A comparative semiotic study could investigate how different material conditions alter the indexical pathways of female agency and spatial navigation within gentry communities. Additionally, future scholarship should focus on the intersectional dynamics of text by tracking how signs of wealth overlap with religious codes or professional military hierarchies across the transitional Regency era. The symbolic value of the military uniform, for instance, remains an under-researched sign system that heavily disrupts local country economies and courtship rituals. Finally, scholars can explore how these nineteenth-century sociomaterial signs are re-coded and decoded within contemporary cinematic adaptations to trace the shifting paradigms of modern visual consumption. By pursuing these diverse analytical paths, future research will continue to illuminate the complex ways in which creative literature documents, critiques, and transforms the enduring dynamics of human power.

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