

Pride and Prejudice

Explore the importance of pride in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Pride and Prejudice is one of Jane Austen's most romantic novels, set in early 19th century England, it successfully portrays how the lives of many characters are dramatically affected by other people's personalities and character traits. The novel evokes many prominent themes in the society of the time such as the reputation of women, the importance of family, first impressions and pride. This essay will focus on the importance of pride and how this is presented by Austen through her characters.

At the beginning of the novel, there is a strong prejudice within the 'whole of Meryton' to Mr Darcy's 'abominable' pride. By using the adjective, 'abominable', Austen makes it very clear to the reader that she regards pride as a negative trait. Mr Darcy is a character who develops and overcomes obstacles and his pride throughout the novel. Mr Darcy is a highly regarded 'business'(man) who understands the importance of family and wealth in the early 19th century and is one of the characters with high social station in the novel who earns 'ten thousand a year'. Although he manages to overcome his extreme pride, he is also portrayed as the personification of wealth and status throughout the novel. Mr Darcy's pride not only distorts people's first impressions of him but also impacts on the Bennet families' self confidence and self worth as they feel they are beneath him.

Mr Darcy (along with Elizabeth) shows a true journey throughout the novel. In the opening chapters at the Meryton Assembly, Darcy describes Elizabeth as 'tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt' [him] which puts him in a disagreeable light to the people of Meryton and the reader. Mr Darcy's pride is one of the prominent reasons for Elizabeth's initial refusal of his proposal as she feels that his pride has highlighted the 'inferiority of her connections' and that his manner has shown that he is not 'bewitched by her'. He has been influenced by society and encouraged to be proud of his achievements. Indeed, Charlotte Lucas tells him that he has the 'right to be proud'. By not concealing his pride and being cold and aloof, he also dents Elizabeth's pride as he shows a certain amount of disrespect for her and her family in his proposal. Darcy's pride therefore is a barrier to the success of his and Elizabeth's relationship as 'he soon began to feel the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention'. In the end, his pent up pride collapses when he finally proposes and tells Elizabeth that 'In vain I have struggled' against my pride and – 'you must allow me to tell you how ardently I love and admire you'. The significance of the word 'struggled' shows how in the Regency Era, a courtship with a woman with little rank' and 'few connections' goes against the social norms. Darcy, like every other man with a fortune, would be expected to marry for social standing and money, not for love. So he has to struggle against the pride that society has encouraged, and indeed admired, and give way to his true feelings.

Elizabeth has no such problems in expressing her true feelings and emotions but her pride is damaged by Mr Darcy, Lady Catherine De Bourg and the Bingley sisters. Along with Darcy, Elizabeth's journey in the novel is about

overcoming obstacles and there are a number of superior people who make it very difficult. At the Meryton assembly, in the first volume of the novel, Elizabeth is described as 'tolerable' which makes some 'defeats in her pride, confidence' and self-worth'. She overcomes Mr Darcy's behaviour at the ball even though her mother regards him as the 'proudest, most disagreeable man'. Mrs Bennet is a character who adds some comedy to the novel. Her use of the superlatives 'proudest' and 'most disagreeable' are indications of her rather hyperbolic mannerisms but also show that she is able to speak her mind to her family. She also may be vocalising what the reader is thinking!

Whilst her mother tries to restore Elizabeth's pride by making the comments about Mr Darcy, Elizabeth is cruelly put down by Lady Catherine who asks a lot of personal questions about Elizabeth and her family. By asking how many sisters she has, if they have 'come out' and how old Elizabeth is, she is clearly trying to indicate that Elizabeth should be married and that her sisters are leaving her behind. Elizabeth is a character who is mature, intelligent and witty however, she is very aware of her social status and those who are seen to be superior to her in class; these characters often seek to dent and lessen her pride. Mr Darcy is guilty of this throughout the novel but she shows obedience and toleration of this but also admits that 'she could easily forgive his pride had he not mortified [her].'

Like Darcy at the beginning of the novel, Lady Catherine De Bourg serves as a representation of pride. She has the highest 'status' of any character in the novel and she is the Aunt to Mr Darcy and his sister, Georgiana. She spends a lot of the novel trying to prevent the courtship between Darcy and Elizabeth as she considers Elizabeth as unworthy of her nephew. When she hears of her nephew's engagement, she is appalled and cries 'Heaven and earth! Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?'. The use of the initial clause 'Heaven and earth' shows that she believes that her family are above the Bennett family as she associates herself with 'heaven' and them as 'earth'. Lady Catherine therefore shows pride throughout the novel by acting as a superior figure which highlights her own pride in her family and their status and also shows how she takes away everyone else's pride and self-esteem by her controlling and unkind manner.

Therefore, to conclude, pride plays a major role in shaping the novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Pride can be seen in many characters and has to be overcome and managed by many others. We can see how pride stands in the way of happiness and it is an important theme which runs all the way through the novel and impacts on virtually every single relationship in some way. It allows the reader to see how pride can be overcome and the romantic endings indicate that although Austen does see pride as a negative human trait; she also believes that it can be overcome and conquered. (1087 words)