

## Pride and Prejudice

### Explore the importance of Pride in the novel, *Pride and Prejudice*.

In the novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen (1813), the theme of pride is mostly presented through the character of Darcy. However, the theme of pride is also presented through Collins' view of the upper classes and also through Lady Catherine's snobbery.

Austen uses Mr Darcy's first impression to portray him as a proud and conceited man. When Darcy is first seen, his very initial portrayal is positive. We are told that he is 'a fine, tall person...' who has 'ten thousand a year' and 'the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Bingley'. This emphasises that Darcy was initially seen as agreeable. The mention of his fortune before the superlative 'handsomer' emphasises the importance of money in the Regency period as the money has made him more desirable to women due to their need to marry for financial security. However, it is soon discovered that Darcy's looks contrast with his personality. The phrase 'he was the proudest, more disagreeable man in the world', uses a superlative to emphasise that he is now thoroughly disliked by everyone at the Meryton assembly due to his pride. Austen uses hyperbole here to create a stronger dislike among the reader so that his character development and relationship with Elizabeth later on in the novel is more shocking. Mr Darcy's pride also leads him to insult Elizabeth. The phrase 'she is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me', emphasises Darcy's pretentious attitude. The word 'me' emphasises that Darcy thinks he is superior to Elizabeth due to his higher class. This immediately initiates Elizabeth's prejudice and she says 'and I could easily forgive his pride if he had not mentioned mine'. This emphasises the importance of first impressions, which is why the novel has initially entitled 'First Impression' as Elizabeth's instant dislike of Darcy due to his pride allows her to misjudge his character for the majority of the novel. Therefore, Austen portrays Darcy's initial pride as detrimental in ruining his interactions with other characters throughout the novel.

However, through Darcy, Austen is able to portray that pride can be overcome. When Elizabeth and Darcy both visit Rosings, Darcy admits that 'I certainly have not the talent...of conversing easily with those I have never seen before'. This shows that Darcy admits to being socially awkward, and so, Elizabeth might have mistaken some of his shyness for pride. The contrast between Darcy's first and second proposal also shows how he had overcome his pride by the end of the novel. In the first proposal, Austen uses free indirect style with the phrase, 'His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which had always opposed to inclination...', to show Darcy's embarrassment over the proposal. The punctuation and the listing here emphasise this as, at the time of the novel, it was very unusual for such a rich man like Darcy to want to marry Elizabeth who is of a much lower class. The dashes here also emphasise Darcy's pride due to his high class as this lengthens out the proposal suggesting that there are many things he is ashamed about.

By contrast, in Darcy's second proposal, he expresses himself 'as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love'. The contrast in Darcy's attitudes towards the two proposals show that Darcy has overcome his pride as he is no longer embarrassed by Elizabeth's poor 'connections' or her shameful 'family'. Therefore, through Darcy's character development and relationship with Elizabeth, Austen is able to show how pride can be overcome.

Moreover, Austen uses the character of Mr Collins to show how pride can make one sound ridiculous and supercilious. Mr Collins is described as 'a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility'. This emphasises his 'pompous' attitude.

Through Elizabeth and Mr Bennet, Austen mocks Mr Collins for this by calling him a 'most conscientious and polite young man'. This creates humour as Collins is also used as a comedic character. Austen also uses Collins to satirise the people in Regency society who put so much importance on wealth and status. The phrase, 'such affability and condescension, as he had himself experience for Lady Catherine' emphasises that Collins admires Lady Catherine as she is a rich aristocrat, and so, he is unable to see any of her rudeness and snobbery. The phrase, 'I consider the clerical office as equal in point of dignity to the highest rank in the kingdom', emphasises Collins' grandiloquent attitude as he thinks that he is of an equal rank to Darcy. Austen, therefore, uses ironic humour here as Darcy is of a very high class whilst Mr Collins' father was 'illiterate'. Therefore, Austen uses Mr Collins' pride to satirise his exaggerated and ridiculous nature.

Finally, Austen uses the character of Lady Catherine to show that pride due to a high social rank can lead to rudeness and snobbery. The phrase 'Elizabeth felt the impertinence of her questions but answered them very composedly', emphasises that Lady Catherine's rudeness due to her pride makes her ill-mannered. Elizabeth, in contrast, remains dignified which allows the reader to see how Lady Catherine is used to highlight and satirise the worst traits of aristocracy. It could also be argued that Austen uses this exchange to show that class does not determine manners. When Elizabeth and Lady Catherine have their disagreement over Darcy, Lady Catherine uses the phrase 'obstinate, head-strong girl! I am ashamed of you' to underline her disgust over Elizabeth's opinion as she has threatened Lady Catherine's pride. It was unusual for someone of Elizabeth's rank to argue with someone of Lady Catherine's higher status and should have been respected. Therefore, Lady Catherine has probably not been challenged like this before but Elizabeth refuses to be intimidated. This shows that Elizabeth's pride is a good thing as it is pride in herself and her intelligence which allows her to stand up to Lady Catherine. Therefore, Austen shows that pride can lead to rudeness and unpleasant behaviour through the character of Lady Catherine.

Overall, Austen uses the character of Mr Darcy to show how pride can damage relationships but it can also be overcome. She uses the character of Mr Collins to emphasise that pride can lead to ridiculous and humorous behaviour. Finally, she uses Lady Catherine to show how pride due to a high status can lead to ill-mannered behaviour in the novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. **[1087 words]**