

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

TITLE

It is a well-known fact that Austen first intended to call her novel 'First Impressions' before settling on Pride and Prejudice as the final choice. As the former title implies the novel examines the fallability or unreliability of first impressions. But Pride and Prejudice is a more apt title as narrator focuses on every character using the lens of pride and prejudice. However, it is the varying degrees to which each character exhibits pride and prejudice that distinguish them from each other and render them flat or round accordingly.

- As early as chapter 5, Mary Bennet makes an interesting observation regarding pride and vanity. She observes: "Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us." She is referring to the opinion of the people of Meryton Assembly regarding Darcy while observing thus. In fact Darcy is the one character who is perceived consistently as a proud man. To a great extent, his reserved behaviour and social aloofness justify the epithet of pride. But Austen tries to show that Darcy's pride is neither immoderate nor inflexible. By the end of the novel, Elizabeth Bennet, the character who had always criticized him for his pride can be seen defending him to his father as an eligible suitor by declaring that he does not have any improper pride.
- Darcy's behaviour does have broad hints of aristocratic pride. At the Meryton Assembly he abstains from the social gathering and ignores Elizabeth Bennet. He is also scornful of Elizabeth's low connections and says as much in his first proposal to her. He is also instrumental in separating Bingley from Jane by the same token. While Elizabeth is staying at Netherfield in the early part of the novel, Darcy tells Elizabeth that he did not think that pride was a flaw or weakness. He remarks "where there is real superiority of mind, pride will be always under regulation". Although Elizabeth finds Darcy's pronouncement dramatic, the events of the novel bear out the fact that Darcy is indeed able to moderate his pride and acquit himself before Elizabeth. After Elizabeth accepts his second proposal, he concedes that being born in an aristocratic family he was given good principles but left to follow them in 'pride and conceit'. This gave him a narrow worldview and led him to think meanly of people beyond his social circle. It was only when Elizabeth reprimanded him for his ungentleman like manner of proposal was he able to rectify his behaviour and make amends. The effect was seen by Elizabeth in her visit to Pemberley and attested by the Gardeners. It must also be noted that while Darcy represents aristocratic pride which has an underlying quality of merit and substance, Lady Catherine is the epitome of conservative aristocracy where vanity was substituted for pride.

- Like Darcy, Elizabeth is also guilty of pride. In fact her prejudice against Darcy stems from her pride in her discernment. She realizes after learning the facts from Darcy that she had courted 'prepossession and ignorance' while favouring Wickham over Darcy.
- As Austen sees it, most of the characters are prone to some kind of pride or prejudice and are flawed. Collins' pride in his station makes his character all the more absurd, whereas Caroline Bingley's pride symbolizes her willingness to be seen as an aristocrat. Mr. Bennet's aloofness regarding the affairs of his daughter's also shows him up as a proud man.
- Thus the vices of pride and prejudice are universally prevalent in the world of the novel. Austen, through her ironic gaze seems to find all her characters guilty of these twin frailties. Yet it is Elizabeth and Darcy who do their best to overcome these shortcomings and become better versions of themselves.

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