

EXTENDED ESSAY

English B

*The usage of the personification of concepts and character
developments in literature.*

To what extent do Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet in “Pride and Prejudice”, personify the concepts of pride and prejudice, and reflect the societal expectations regarding gender roles and class in the Regency Era?

Word Count: 3817

Category 3: Literature

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of Personification of Concepts and “Pride and Prejudice”

“Character conceptualization” can be defined as the thoughts and experiences of a character being constructed and conveyed through language in a literary task. This ensures that the readers grasp the dimensionality of the personalities of the characters, thus facilitating the understanding of the plot and dynamics between the characters. (Rundquist) This is visible in the classical novel of Jane Austen, “Pride and Prejudice”. The novel takes its name from its main characters Fitzwilliam Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet who personify the concepts “pride” and “prejudice” respectively.

The narrative, which is set in the Regency Era England in the early 19th century, explores the themes of love, pride, prejudice, class, and societal expectations. The book starts with the line “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” (Austen, 11), introducing the “societal expectations” theme that is persistent throughout the narrative to the reader.

The narrative follows the Bennet family made up of five sisters with distinct personalities and their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. (Pride and Prejudice, Britannica) Throughout the novel, the Bennet sisters encounter numerous eligible bachelors and navigate through the social environment of the Regency Society and its societal expectations. The narrative revolves around the relationship and interactions of Fitzwilliam Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, the main characters of the novel. Mr. Darcy serves as the personification of “pride” while Elizabeth serves as the personification of “prejudice”. As was stated before, the novel takes its name from its main characters. In the novel, both Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet start as one-dimensional characters; for instance, in the beginning of the narrative, Elizabeth has very strict prejudices towards Darcy due to his wealth and class. However, the characters evolve through time as they face conflicts and primarily love. In the novel, the journey in which Elizabeth and Darcy fall in love with each other helps the characters grow and break free from their one-dimensional personalities.

This brings up the question of how these characters personify their respective concepts and how their character developments reflect the societal values and expectations of 19th-century England. In order to approach this question, the events that led to the character development of these characters will be analyzed. Moreover, the character developments and the societal expectations of the era will be evaluated by evaluating the historical context. I believe that by doing this, I can relate the character development of the figures that personify abstract concepts, like pride, to the historical realities and the societal values of the era.

These steps will be followed throughout the process of writing this extended essay: Firstly, after the book is completely read, a literary analysis revolving around the plotline, characters, and

significant conflicts that relate to the research question will be done. Following that, further research regarding the topic and the chosen novels will be conducted. Next, the quotes relevant to the research question will be underlined in the book and collected in a separate document to utilize them further in the extended essay. After this, the historical context of the book will be considered while analyzing the character development process of the conceptual figures. Afterwards, the impact of the utilization of these conceptual characters throughout the narrative will be evaluated using critical thinking. Finally, by using the information gathered and conclusions drawn from these steps, the extended essay will be composed.

2. Historical and Critical Framework of “Pride and Prejudice”

2.1 Regency Era

The Regency Era is the period in the United Kingdom where George, the prince of Wales” served as regent during his father George III’s madness. “regent” can be defined as someone who rules a country because the actual rightful monarch is incapacitated to do so. (The Regency Period)

The Regency Era was an era of war, revolution, and fundamental social and cultural change. Due to the Napoleonic Wars surrounding the country until 1815 and the Industrial Revolution which surged a growth in railways and factory system, unemployment was an increasing issue in the UK. This unemployment problem, combined with the bad harvest in 1816 and a significant rise in population caused nationwide poverty and welfare loss. The wealthy, upper classes enjoyed the refinements of regency culture while the lower classes were desperately poor with an average lifespan of approximately 22 years in the 1830s.

Nevertheless, the Regency Era also brought intense cultural flowering. Expressing the romantic movement were artists, novelists and poets including Jane Austen, Lord Byron, John Keats, William Blake, Walter Scott, Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Wordsworth, John Constable and JMW Turner. The novel “Pride and Prejudice” is therefore one of the novels that reflect the regency culture.

One of the most beloved activities in the Regency Era, which is also a recurring activity in the novel, is the Ball. In the Regency England, Balls were the setting to show off one’s poise as well as to form and progress courtships and matches. In addition, for both men and women, dancing was considered a vital “accomplishment” to have the proper elegance and poise. (A Walk Through The Regency Era)

All in all, the cultural refinement and traditions during the Regency Era play a crucial role in the novel “Pride and Prejudice”, shaping its social settings and societal classes.

2.2 The Role of Women and Societal Expectations

During the eighteenth century and the Regency Era, Britain had a highly patriarchal social and legal construct. Especially on matters such as inheritance and property laws as well as in social settings, women virtually had no independence. This level of the lack of independence was also tied immensely to women's marital status. (The Rights of Women in Regency Times).

After marriage, the wife became "feme covert", that is a woman under the protection of her husband. In the marriage, the woman and man was one, that one being the man. Married women had no right to their property or income, the right belonging to her husband. Moreover, a married woman had no right to her own children. In cases of divorce or separation, the child's custody would automatically belong to the father. Thus, it can be said that when married, a woman's legal identity was subsumed by her husband.

However, this did not mean that being unwed was a reasonable approach from women. Even though single women technically had rights to their own property and income, the education and employment opportunities for women were extremely limited; therefore, especially women from less wealthy families did not have much chance to survive without the legal and financial "protection" of a husband. Moreover, women could not inherit properties even of their father; the possession of an estate would pass onto a male relative. In addition to the financial problems being unwed possibly brought, women faced societal pressures to get married. Unwed women were viewed as "spinster" or "old maids" if they passed a certain age. Furthermore, some professions were closed off to single women since they seemed unfit for certain positions especially past a certain age. Therefore, one can argue that being married was more of a social and economic necessity than a choice for women.

The novel "Pride and Prejudice" is primarily centered on this issue of women's social and legal role in the Regency Era. The novel opens with the line "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of good fortune, must be in want of a wife." (Austen 11), which illustrates the importance of marriage in the era. Furthermore, the potential suitors of Bennet sisters and in general matches and marriages in Netherfield play a crucial part in the narrative as the author portrays the era's societal status through them.

Overall, the role of women is very limited during the era in which the novel "Pride and Prejudice" takes place. The novel reflects these roles and the societal expectations from women through matches and marriages as they are an integral part of the narrative.

2.3 Personification as a Literary Device

Personification can be defined as a literary device utilized to attribute human identity or face to something that is not human. Even though personification is often spotted in literary pieces, it rarely elicits major scholarly attention that evaluates its form and function. However, considering its various

and common usage throughout literary history, it can be argued that it serves a specific purpose in evoking concrete ideas for the readers regarding abstract concepts. Moreover, art historians such as Ernst Gombrich have emphasized the role personification plays in animating abstract ideas beyond textual interpretation. According to Gombrich, personification derives its power from its ability to vividly portray ideas by giving them a lifelike psychological or physiological being. So, it is plausible to argue that personification, as a literary device, allows certain abstract concepts to become more concrete by vividly portraying them with a physiological or psychological presence. (Melion and Ramakers)

Jane Austen is a novelist who often uses personification in her novels. This can be seen particularly in her infamous novel “Pride and Prejudice”. The narrative relies heavily in personification as Fitzwilliam Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, the main characters, personify the concepts “pride” and “prejudice” respectively. It is reasonable to assert that Austen utilizes these personifications to reflect the societal norms and expectations of the Regency Era which will be discussed further. However, it is crucial to note that in the novel “Pride and Prejudice”, characters Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy do not stay as mere allegorical personifications of these concepts, but they develop out of them.

3. Elizabeth Bennet as the Personification of Prejudice

3.1 The Role of Elizabeth Bennet in the Regency Society

Elizabeth is the second eldest daughter of the Bennets, a respectable, but financially vulnerable family. While she belongs to the gentry, she cannot enjoy its wealth and security as her family’s estate, Longbourn, is entailed away from the daughters of the family and to Mr. Collins, the male heir. Therefore, due to her financial status, Elizabeth’s future in the society relies on her marriage. This creates a conflict between her social obligations and her personal desires. This conflict shapes her social interactions and her character development.

In the Regency Society, women are expected to be polite, modest, and accomplished in numerous cultural activities including music, drawing, and languages. A beneficial marriage was seen as the primary purpose of women in order to secure their status in the society. Nevertheless, Elizabeth does not blindly accept these norms. The line “I am perfectly serious in my refusal. You could not make me happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who could make you so.” (Austen, 140) during her rejection of Mr. Collins’ shows that she places grave importance on character, emotional compatibility, and her own happiness. However, even with her independent nature, she is still influenced by her environment. She judges people on their limited interactions in social events. The Regency culture dictates that good manners show good character, and thus,

Elizabeth trusts her ability to read people's character depending on their behavior. However, her confidence in her ability becomes a source of error, and it exacerbates her prejudices.

Elizabeth Bennet portrays a combination of resistance and conformity. Even though she has to operate accordingly to the standards that limit her ability to act unanimously as a woman the Regency society sets, she insists on maintaining her own happiness and integrity. Her character demonstrates a contrast between societal expectation and personal stance that Austen uses to critique the Regency society.

3.2 Early Prejudices of Elizabeth Bennet

As the portrayal of "prejudice", Elizabeth Bennet quickly evaluates people and their characters when she meets them initially. It is plausible to argue that the most important prejudices she has are the prejudices she has towards Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham.

During the first ball Mr. Darcy attends at Meryton, he is first regarded as a handsome man with a considerable fortune. This can be observed with the line "Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year." (Austen, 20). However, due to him not getting in conversation or dancing with anybody, the thoughts regarding him change swiftly as people declare him a man too proud and disagreeable. In addition, after his friend Mr. proposes dancing with Elizabeth Bennet to him, he says "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me..." (Austen, 23) This sparks Elizabeth Bennet's first prejudice towards Mr. Darcy which lasts for the majority of the narrative. A key quote regarding this situation is "I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine." (Austen, 33). This is during Elizabeth's discussions of the ball with her sister Jane and her friend Charlotte Lucas. One could argue that this leads a confirmation bias which is defined as "the fact that people are more likely to accept or notice information if it appears to support what they already believe or expect," (Cambridge Dictionary) which causes her tendency to interpret everything about him negatively.

The first impression of Elizabeth Bennet towards Mr. Wickham is quite positive. They first meet in Meryton, a local market town, where he is introduced to her by Mr. Denny, shortly after the arrival of the militia to the town. Elizabeth views Wickham as a pleasant, handsome, and charming man with good manners. This can be seen from the following line: "Mr. Wickham was as far beyond them all in person, countenance, air, and walk..." (Austen, 102)." After that meeting, they come together again at the Bennet sisters' aunt and uncle's residence in Meryton in a small party. There, Elizabeth and Wickham fall into a natural conversation as Wickham chooses Elizabeth to sit by among all other females in the room. Elizabeth's prior positive prejudice towards Mr. Wickham is strengthened because of their mutual dislike of Mr. Darcy during the conversation in which Mr. Wickham tells Elizabeth a story about how Mr. Darcy denied him the church living Darcy's father

allegedly promised him. Because this story aligns with Elizabeth's pre-existing prejudice towards Mr. Darcy, she accepts it without question. This can be linked to her confirmation bias as well.

Despite her independent personality, her false confidence in her judgement is not the only cause of her prejudice towards both Darcy and Wickham. Elizabeth is still somewhat bound by the standards and expectations set by the Regency Society. She also has the view that manners reflect personal morality. In addition, because it is expected that wealth, high class, and status are to be accompanied with excellent manners, in Elizabeth's eyes, Darcy's obnoxious pride is not excusable. Elizabeth's own relatively inferior social status makes her more sensitive to Darcy's poor behavior and makes her read it as class arrogance. On the other hand, because of Wickham's sociability, charm, and humility, his manners are much more acceptable in the Regency Society. Moreover, because his humility appears to be a trait he has despite hardship, Elizabeth finds him and his manners much more respectable in comparison to that of Darcy. This shows that Elizabeth's prejudice is not only shaped by her false confidence in her own judgement but also by the standards set by the environment which she is in.

Fitzwilliam Darcy as the Personification of Pride

3.1 The Role of Fitzwilliam Darcy in the Regency Society

Fitzwilliam Darcy represents the uppermost class of the Regency society with his considerable wealth and strong familial connections. He owns the Pemberley, a large estate in Derbyshire, and the description of the Pemberley House: "It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground" (Austen, 307) demonstrates the aristocracy of his settlement. Unlike the Bennet family's financial instability, Darcy's fortune is secure. Along with his wealth, his powerful and noble familial connections, like Lady Catherine De Bourgh on his mother's side, reinforce his position in the uppermost gentry, making him part of a rather aristocratic class of the society.

Darcy's social environment is characterized by rank, hierarchy, and exclusivity as the Regency society dictates. From his private education to his close circle of friends and relatives, his surroundings and perspective is highly dependent on class, birth, and wealth. Therefore, it can be said that he is accustomed to having unquestioned authority. His aristocratic status also shapes how he is perceived in other social environments. This is evident from the attention he receives upon his arrival in Hertfordshire which can be seen in the line "he was looked at with great admiration for about half of the evening" (Austen, 20-22). In the Regency Society which places major importance on wealth and class, Darcy's status makes him a part of the uppermost gentry.

Ultimately, Fitzwilliam Darcy represents how wealth, class, and connections are viewed in the society of the Regency Era. His character also shows that these privileges also bring certain

expectations of his behavior and manners in social environments, and it shapes his interactions throughout the narrative.

3.2 Early Pride of Fitzwilliam Darcy

Fitzwilliam Darcy serves as the personification of “pride” in the narrative. His social rank, wealth, and his noble connections reinforce his pride in such a way that he separates himself from those beneath him in social hierarchy. This is very evident when he is first introduced during a ball in Meryton, right after his arrival in Hertfordshire. Even though he initially sparks the attention of most, because of his behavior reflecting superiority, he is perceived as an arrogant man, regardless of his fortune. This can be observed from the line “and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance” (Austen, 22), showing that even though rank and wealth is important in the Regency society, the expectation of behavior and manners still holds grave value regarding the perception of people.

Along with his remark of Elizabeth regarding her being “not handsome enough to tempt” Darcy, his intervention of the relationship between his friend Charles Bingley and Elizabeth’s sister Jane Bennet further illustrates his early pride as he views the Bennet family being unsuitable and beneath his social rank. This shows that his pride does not only affect his life but also the lives of people around him and that it creates a social barrier that serves as a mechanism to protect his place in the uppermost gentry.

Fitzwilliam Darcy’s early pride demonstrates a combination of social arrogance and aristocratic values. His consideration of social class justifies how he intervenes in others’ interactions and affairs. This later on sparks the conflict between him and Elizabeth. His obvious arrogance is what creates Elizabeth’s prejudice regarding his personality. Austen uses Darcy’s early obnoxious pride to strengthen the effect of his character development.

4. The Shared Turning Point and Character Development

Darcy’s first proposal to Elizabeth and her rejection is a mutual turning point for both of their character development. Up to this moment, their interactions are shaped by Darcy’s obnoxious pride and him considering Elizabeth as socially inferior, as well as Elizabeth’s prejudice. In this proposal, even though Darcy approaches Elizabeth with genuine affection, the manner in which he proposes to her still demonstrates his view on her and her family’s social inferiority. This causes a sharp reaction from Elizabeth which is visible in the line “I felt you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry.” (Austen, 248). Her reaction is primarily rooted in his view towards her family and his intervention on Jane and Mr. Bingley’s relationship. Her rejection is the driving force of his self-reflection and eventual character growth as he is forced to reflect on the consequences of his

manner towards others and his obnoxious pride. This process of self-reflection sets off his character development and him breaking free of his one-dimensional personification of pride.

The real catalyst of especially Elizabeth's growth is Darcy's letter in which he defends his interference in her sister's and his friend's relationship and exposes Wickham's true personality. These revelations push Elizabeth to reevaluate her existing beliefs about Darcy and Wickham and to self-reflect on her confidence in her judgement as she realizes that her unquestioned belief in Wickham's story was caused by the fact that it reassured her preexisting prejudice of Darcy. This is evident in the line "her anger was turned against herself" because of her unfair condemnation of him. So, it is plausible to argue that this is the breaking point at which Elizabeth breaks free of her single faceted personification of prejudice and is the driving force behind her eventual character development.

As was stated before, the proposal and Darcy's letter set off significant behavioral change for both Elizabeth and Darcy. This can be seen when Elizabeth's Pemberley visit at which Darcy greets her and the Gardener's with unexpected humility. His housekeeper's praise further assures Elizabeth of Darcy's integrity beyond public impression. Moreover, Darcy's quick intervention in Wickham and Lydia's elopement to save the Bennet family's reputation further demonstrate his actions have matured from prideful desire to selfless concern. It can be said that Pemberley represents Darcy's true character, that he is not a man of conspicuousness but integrity with show. It shows that Darcy does not rely on charm or self-promotion, but his integrity solidifies with his quiet actions. Thus, this visit to Pemberley and his following actions play a central role in changing Elizabeth's prejudice.

Ultimately, Darcy's first proposal and his letter pave the way for the growth of both characters. Elizabeth learns that first impressions might not always reflect people's true characters, while Darcy learns to respectfully polish his pride. Their shared growth eventually brings them closer together and forms a relationship based on empathy and respect. Their interactions and eventual marriage challenge the societal norms of the Regency Era regarding class and gender. Darcy's choice of marrying Elizabeth challenges the expectation of marrying in the same circle of status. Elizabeth's initial rejection of Darcy and her latter choice of settling down with him show that she defies the expectations from women and that she values character and compatibility over wealth and status.

5. Conclusion

Overall, in "Pride and Prejudice", the dynamic relationship and development of Fitzwilliam Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet demonstrates that pride and prejudice are not fixed character traits but they can be overcome. Even though Darcy and Elizabeth initially embody these concepts, their mutual turning point (Darcy's first proposal and the letter he sent to Elizabeth following her rejection) sets off their character development and a process of self-reflection which ultimately lays the foundation of

their eventual marriage. This marriage and their mutual growth serve as a defiance to the Regency Era's norms regarding gender, class, and status.

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