

On Darcy's character and role in Pride & Prejudice.

Original

Darcy is the hero of the novel Pride & Prejudice not because he marries the heroine but because he plays a very important role and is the central figure in the plot of the novel. ^{apart from Elizabeth.} A curious thing about Darcy is that it is his pride, his priggish nature, his supercilious attitude & his haughty arrogance, that partly go to form the title of the novel & that we begin sharing our prejudice against him right from the start along with Elizabeth, and nourish it till we reach the middle of the novel where Darcy is mocked by fate when his proposal is curtly rejected by Elizabeth. It is from this point onwards that there comes a change in Elizabeth's attitude towards him and the same is the case with us. Subsequently we find his character beginning to improve and he gradually wins our sympathy. Given his intellectual and moral superiority, Darcy's struggle with himself is bound to be acute and he holds our sympathies no less than Elizabeth does.

Darcy, as we gather in the beginning, is a highly educated cultured young man with a high sense of aristocracy. He is always conscious of his social superiority and as a result he regards all others round him below his standard. And here we must understand the full import of the pleasantly ironical way in which the novelist introduces & develops Darcy. Through Darcy Jane Austen shows the evil effects of a money-ridden society on human character. His social attitude has been warped & twisted by his 'inordinate obsession with wealth and aristocratic status'. But this is only a temporary phase, what is genuinely good in him finally asserts itself when we find him falling in love with Elizabeth.

Darcy is out & out an aristocrat ^{manners & feelings} not only in his relations with his friends. His rejection of Elizabeth at the outset of the novel & his remark — 'She is tolerable but not handsome enough to tempt me' — give the starting push to the story. The story advances forward & his role he plays step by step. Seeing that Bingley is deeply attracted by the charm & beauty of Jane, the eldest daughter of the Bennet, he decides to drag his friend out of this love-affair because he does not want that Bingley should enter into relationship with an ordinary family of the type of the Bennets. He is so definite in his infallibility of judgement

that he regards what he does to be correct & appropriate.

Sometimes afterwards Darcy enacts a different role; another phase of his character comes out. He has to realise that the standards of reason & aristocracy are not the only things by which a man is always ruled. Once, he has dragged his friend out of the circles of the Bennets, he finds that he himself is attracted towards Elizabeth Bennet. But here too he plays the part of an egoistic aristocrat. While Elizabeth is at Hunsford, he comes to her and says, 'In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell how ardently I admire and love you.' But to his utter surprise & regret comes Elizabeth's refusal which is a great shock to him. She also tells him her reasons for her dislike of his character.

Darcy's pride is hurt but it has also a very salutary effect on him. This is the turning point of his career & his character assumes quite a different role henceforth.

The future events bring quite a different picture of Darcy. The letter which he writes to Elizabeth explaining his position is free from any demonstration of pride. It shows that a change is coming upon him. The next meeting b/w him & Elizabeth witnesses a great change in his behaviour. It is at Pemberley Mansion that this change is visible. Elizabeth herself realises the change in Darcy.

The best part Darcy plays in the novel after Lydia's elopement with Wickham. What a great sacrifice for & what a great service done to the Bennet family! Darcy goes in search of the man who has always tried to defame him & his family. Not only that, he even goes to the extent of asking him to marry Lydia, lest no slur might come upon the Bennet family. His pride is thus thoroughly subdued by love; the Lydia-Wickham episode serves only to call forth the deeper & nobler part of his character. What is more, all service done, the man does not want his name to be disclosed as the prime mover in settling the things. Nothing but the flame of ardent love for Elizabeth prompts him in doing all this. So in the end he quite deservedly gets his prize.

Darcy exhibits excellent qualities of learning from experience which help him to change & grow. He is the symbol of a changing pattern & it goes to the credit of Jane Austen that a character which in the beginning looked like one who was most disagreeable in the end becomes so much our idol that we begin to admire his role & character.

