

Manners and etiquette of pride and prejudice essay sample



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In 19th century England, manners played a big role. In her book *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen portrays many different aspects of English social manners in the 1800s, and these facets of English etiquette, including traveling etiquette, social propriety, and dancing, greatly affect the plot of the book. One aspect of English social etiquette was the set of strict rules for how one was to act to appear as a socially adept person and therefore a desirable match for marriage. They were for the most part unspoken rules, but during the 19th century there began to be a growing selection of etiquette books available, for instance, Dr. Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*. Mr. Collins' attempt to read this book aloud to the Bennet girls is received with little enthusiasm, especially from Lydia (Austen 321). One wanted to follow these rules well so as not to appear socially awkward (Article). Most rules were quite commonsensical, like one that states that a gentleman must always be introduced to a lady (Article). Making introductions the other way round would be quite unacceptable. There were some rules that were aimed towards protecting the respectability of a young lady.

Two such rules were that a lady was never to wear pearls or diamonds before noon, and that she should never call on a gentleman unless it was a matter of business. Doing either of these things would establish a woman as a lady of loose reputation (Article). However, it was possible to follow the rules too well (Article). Mr. Darcy's main criticism of Jane Bennet is that, in his opinion, she does not love Mr. Bingley; he says, "... [Jane] I also watched. Her look and manners were open, cheerful, and engaging as ever, but without any symptom of peculiar regard, and I remained convinced from the

evening's scrutiny, that though she received his attentions with pleasure, she did not invite them by any participation of sentiment" (Austen 413-414). In other words, Mr. Darcy does not think that Jane is in love with Mr. Bingley because of her calmness and collectedness while speaking to him. Jane is following the rules, but a little too well. These circumstances affect the plot greatly. Because of this, Mr. Darcy is determined to break up Mr. Bingley and Jane's relationship since he thinks there is no real affection involved. Mr. Darcy takes the first opportunity to do this, which happens to be when Mr. Bingley goes back to London for a while. Convinced that Jane does not love him, Mr. Bingley decides to stay in London the entire winter.

These are major events in the plot, and they come about because of the strict social rules of English society. In the 19th century, dancing was a cultural and social staple. It was enjoyable and served many purposes, one being an opportunity to show off the figure and gracefulness in movement of a young lady or gentleman; "[Dancing] allowed the figures of young people to be exposed to public gaze at parties, dances and balls" (Article). This was often advantageous to the dancer: a chance to show off their elegance. However, in some cases it had the opposite effect; " Mr. Collins, awkward and solemn, apologizing instead of attending, and often moving wrong without being aware of it, gave [Elizabeth] all the shame and misery which a disagreeable partner for a couple of dances can give" (Austen 337). When Mr. Collins dances with Elisabeth, he shows himself to be an awkward dancer, and this inelegance seen here in dancing is observed also in his social life. As with Mr. Collins, dancing also served to provide a look into the character of a young lady or gentleman (Article). In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr.

Darcy's offensive behavior with regard to dancing during the ball reinforces the public opinion of his disagreeable nature.

His refusal to dance with anyone but Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley shows his pride, especially after he slights Elisabeth, saying " She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me" (Austen 278-279). In contrast, Mr. Bingley is an amiable and polite character. He dances every dance, is very courteous, and pays special attention to Jane (Austen 278-279). Because of these two characters' different behavior at this first ball, they establish their reputations; Darcy gets a bad reputation as a proud and disagreeable man, and Mr. Bingley gets a reputation as an amiable man who is fun to be around. Mr. Bingley through dancing also got an opportunity to show Jane that he cared about her; in the 1800s, if a gentleman asked to dance with a lady twice it usually meant that said gentleman was interested in the lady. At the first ball, " Mr. Bingley danced with [Jane] twice..." (Austen 279) and thereby showed his affection for her, an affection that grows stronger throughout *Pride and Prejudice*. Dancing also affects the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*. During the ball at Netherfield, Darcy dances with Elizabeth, and two important things happen during this dance. First, Darcy's affection for Elizabeth begins to flourish. As he is dancing with her, they have a little argument. After the dance, Darcy begins to be angry at Elizabeth, but "...in Darcy's breast there was a tolerable powerful feeling towards [Elizabeth], which soon procured her pardon, and directed all his anger against another."

Also, during this dance Elizabeth's view of what happened between Mr.

Darcy and Mr. Wickham, that Mr. Darcy has shamelessly exploited Mr.

Wickham, is established in her own mind. Without dancing, the plot of *Pride*
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and Prejudice would not be the same. Another thing that affected the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* was traveling etiquette. In Jane Austen's time, having a friend over meant much more than just a sleepover. Houseguests would often stay for two months or more, although some visits did last for only a couple of hours. Just as there are today, there were guidelines for traveling as well as hosting or being a guest, although they were a good bit stricter in the 19th century than they are now. While traveling, one wanted to be seen in a respectable carriage. The best sort of transportation was a chaise and four: a four-horse carriage. Optimally, the chaise and four would be closed in on all sides and decorated with a coat of arms. The next best thing was a curricle, drawn by two horses. While inferior to a chaise and four, a curricle was owned by most wealthy people in the 19th century, and is roughly equivalent to today's yacht.

A gig was the last thing any respectable person would want to be seen in. A gig was just a basic one-horse vehicle with two wheels, and a great source of embarrassment for any individual unfortunate enough to be caught riding in. Barouches, landaus, and phaetons, while being inferior to a curricle or chaise and four, were still superior to a gig (Article). After dealing with socially acceptable traveling, when a guest arrived at their destination, they had to behave as a guest should. If the destination was at such a distance from the guest's home that a short visit would be impractical due to the length of time spent traveling, the guest would be expected to stay a long time, at least two months (Article). As Elizabeth's visit to the Collins's draws to an end, Lady Catherine de Bourgh remarks that she seems out of spirits and assumes that it must be because she is going home soon; " But if that is the

case, you must...stay a little longer” (Austen 423) she says. When Elisabeth politely declines the offer on the grounds of having to be in town on Saturday, Lady Catherine protests, “ Why, at that rate, you will only have been here six weeks. I expected you to stay two months... Mrs. Bennet could certainly spare you another fortnight” (Austen 423). The way Lady Catherine says it, a fortnight is a trivial amount of time to add on to a visit, whereas today a fortnight is a fairly long time to stay at a friend’s house.

There were also rules for how a host should behave to her guests. For example, one of these rules was to not send a guest home in bad weather conditions or when the guest’s health would not allow it. In the beginning chapters of *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bennet has Jane ride to the Bingley’s home on a horse instead of a carriage, in hopes that it might rain (Austen 293). This is an example of a guest using the rules to bend her host’s will. If it starts raining, it would be very impolite for Miss Bingley to send Jane home after the visit in the pouring rain without a carriage to keep her dry.

Therefore, the only socially acceptable thing for Miss Bingley to do would be to invite Jane to stay until the rain lets up. However, things do not go exactly as planned. It starts raining as Jane is on her way to the Bingleys, and she gets soaked through. Upon arriving at the Bingley’s home, she finds the rain has made her sick with a bad cold, which in turn forces Miss Bingley to follow the rules and insist upon Jane’s staying until she feels better.

Netherfield is only three miles from Longbourne, but Jane’s stay ends up being longer than normal for such a short distance because Mrs. Bennet toyed with the rules. This is an example of how the rules of etiquette affect the plot. This visit is a crucial part in the friendship between the Bingleys and <https://assignbuster.com/manners-and-etiquette-of-pride-and-prejudice-essay-sample/>

Mr. Darcy and the Bennet sisters. When Elizabeth comes to see Jane, she is invited also to stay until her sister is better. Many important things happen during this visit. Miss Bingley's disagreeable nature is established, Mr. Darcy's love for Elizabeth begins to flourish, and Miss Bingley's competition with Elizabeth over Mr. Darcy is begun, although most of the competing is done on the side of Miss Bingley. In *Pride and Prejudice*, traveling etiquette causes Jane to become acquainted with the Bingleys, social etiquette causes Mr. Darcy to break up Jane and Mr. Bingley's relationship, and dancing causes Mr. Darcy to fall in love with Elizabeth. All three of these are aspects of English high society etiquette, and all three cause major events that greatly affect the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen.

Works Cited

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