

# Parenting in pride and prejudice

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The novel *Pride and Prejudice* involves many topics and symbolizes different aspects of life and behavior of people. In this essay I am going to analyze and discuss the theme of parenthood. I will only comment on the characters that are parents or come over as parents, namely, Mr. Bennet, Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Gardiner, Mrs. Gardiner and Lady Catherine De Bourgh. The last character mentioned may not come over as a parent but she acts like one. To begin with, I will start talking about the Bennet family.

If we look at the Bennets with modern eyes, we could say that their behavior towards their daughters is very different from how parents get along with their children nowadays. In modern society parents do not marry off their children, we could see this as old fashioned.

But in the 19th century the wealthy families wanted that their descendants married other wealthy families in order to save their property. The happiness and feelings of the children did not matter to the parents as we can see in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Mr. Bennet loves his family but he detaches from them in order not to get involved with their lives. He gets on really well with Elizabeth because they both are the most intelligent members of the Bennet family. But as the novel evolves he turns into a father that is weak and in critical moments he fails his family. For instance, he fails his family when Lydia runs off with Wickham. [...] " My dear Mr. Bennet," said his lady to him one day, " have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?" Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

" But it is," returned she; " for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it." Mr. Bennet made no answer. " Do not you want to know who

has taken it?” cried his wife impatiently. “ You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.” [...] (Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Volume I, Chapter I, page 5)

In this short extract of the novel *Pride and Prejudice* a lot is shown about Mr. Bennet and his wife. In the first six lines it is seen that Mr. Bennet does not care that someone has come to live to Netherfield Park. Instead his wife insists on telling him everything she knows about it. Mr. Bennet, to me, does not care and in a way teases his wife by being so uninterested. He knows that this behavior makes his wife very nervous but the last line takes all the tension away.

You expect a huge quarrel but instead you read this line and, at least I was, a little bit astonished because I did not expect that answer, reality from him. Going back to the topic of parenting this extract is quite interesting. It shows that Mr. Bennet is passive about everything that has to do with his daughters but, on the other hand, Mrs. Bennet wants to know everything that is going on because she wants to marry off her daughters to a wealthy gentleman. She can only think of that. She does not care at all about the feeling of her daughters. [...] “ Dining out,” said Mrs. Bennet, “ that is very unlucky.” “ Can I have the carriage,” said Jane.

“ No, my dear, you had better go on horseback, because it seems likely to rain; and then you must stay all night.” “ That would be a good scheme,” said Elizabeth, “ if you were sure that they would not offer to send her home.” “ Oh! But the gentleman will have Mr. Bingley’s chaise to go to Meryton; and Hursts have no horses theirs.” “ I much rather go in the coach.”

“ But, my dear, your father cannot spare the horses, I am sure. They are wanted in the farm, Mr. Bennet, are they not?” (Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Volume I, Chapter 7, page 31)

Here we can see the clear interest of Mrs. Bennet towards Jane, the oldest daughter. She wants her daughter to go to the lunch and to stay over there because it probably will rain. Even though there is a chance that Jane gets ill, Mrs. Bennet insists on Jane going over to the lunch. This behavior shows the readers that she cares about her daughter but, she only wants to be sure that the property and everything that they possess will not end up with Mr. Bennet's cousin. Mrs. Bennet continues to behave in this way during whole the novel. At no point, the reader can see affection from Mrs. Bennet towards her daughters. Certainly, we can see no motherly behavior; she never gets involved with the daily chores of the house or with the personal hygiene of her daughters. Something that mothers nowadays do a lot, getting involved with her children's life.

Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner are very different from Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. The Gardiners do care about the feeling of their children. In this case they get along very well with Jane and Elizabeth and help them with the struggle they have with Bingley and Darcy. We can see that Mrs. Gardiner cares for her nieces because she does things to protect the girls, so as to prevent them to do certain things they might regret in the future. She protects them as a mother should do, she gives them advice, and she listens to the girls.

Mrs. Gardiner is the opposite of Mrs. Bennet. The former involves more in the lives of the girls and guides them through it while the latter just wants that her daughters to marry some rich man in order not to lose their possessions

they have at Longbourn. In the next extract the readers can see what kind of a woman Mrs. Gardiner is: [...] Her aunt assured her that she was; and Elizabeth having thanked her for the kindness of her hints, they parted; a wonderful instance of advice being given on such a point, without being resented. [...] (Austen, Volume II, Chapter III, page 143)

Austen describes Mr. Gardiner in the following way: “ Mr. Gardiner was a sensible, gentlemanlike man, greatly superior to his sister as well by nature as education.”(Austen, Volume II, Chapter 2, page 137) Although Mr. Gardiner does not appear much in the novel he is present every time his carrying wife appears. Frankly, every time Mrs. Gardiner appears I imagine that her husband is involved in the conversation and thought of his wife. Lady Catherine De Bourgh is Darcy’s aunt and she does not want that some girl, especially not with lower social wealth marries her nephew. Lady De Bourgh is a very wealthy woman and with this she thinks that she has to tell other people how, why and when they should do things or not. When she finds out that Elizabeth is very fond of Darcy she asks Elizabeth many questions; on the one hand, to let Elizabeth know that she is more intelligent and from a higher social class; on the other hand, to maybe scare Elizabeth off.

If we analyze this behavior taking in consideration parenthood, we could say that she is protective and cares about her family. After all, the reader knows who and what kind of woman she is and that all those questions are just for personal interest and not to help her nephew Darcy. To conclude, I would like to say that many different manners of being a parent appear in the novel. We have seen the Bennet family, the Gardiner family and Lady Catherine De

Bourgh. We could say that the Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are cold people; they do not care about the feelings of their children and they only care about their reputation and social wealth. On the other hand the Gardiners are protective towards the Bennet girls.

They try to help them by giving them advice and to talk to other people to find out in what situation the girls are putting themselves into. Last but not least, Lady Catherine De Bourgh. She is from a wealthy social class and does everything she can so that no one with a lower social wealth comes into her family. Finally she has to accept that Elizabeth and Darcy get married. In the end I could say that different types of parenthood appear in the novel. To me, parents should get involved in the life of their children, to protect them and prevent them of making mistakes they will regret. Being a good parent involves being there for your children and not to act in your personal interest. The only family that is honest, to me, is the Gardiner family.