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**TÍTOL: Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*: Traditional
Grand Denouement or Anticlimactic Ending?**

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Abstract

Criticism of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* has repeatedly maintained that the author replicated a fixed storyline in each of her six canonical novels, in which the hero and heroine ultimately find happiness after a previous series of misunderstandings. *Pride and Prejudice*, however, exposes a peculiar structural pattern which is not further reproduced in any of her later novels. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the narrative tension reaches its peak with Mr. Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth Bennet and, as a result, the novel subsequently heads towards a happy yet anticlimactic ending. This paper will take as the departing point how the main characters are introduced to the reader and to each other with a view to determining the causes which are conducive to both the first proposal and the final resolution of the plot brought about by the second proposal.

Key words

Anticlimactic ending, Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet, Mr. Darcy.

Introduction

Jane Austen's ironic aphorism "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (*P&P*, 5)¹ as the opening lines of *Pride and Prejudice* echoes the framework on which the novel will be based. By using words such as 'man', 'fortune' and 'wife', Austen's initial announcement straightforwardly insinuates the main plot of *Pride and Prejudice*: a courtship plot characterised by one of the most emblematic duos in English literature, if not in universal literature more generally, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, the main protagonists of the novel.

Jane Austen's beginnings as a writer were tough and she repeatedly faced disappointment during her early writing career. The first draft of *Pride and Prejudice*, initially entitled 'First Impressions' and probably written in epistolary form, was submitted to the publisher Cadell in 1796 but immediately rejected, so it seemed as if her novels would never see the light (Kelly 1989, 125). Her extreme criticism about her own novel is well known, judging by the letters that she would send to her sister Cassandra, in which she dismissed the novel as "rather too 'light&bright&sparkling'" (qtd. in Bloom 2004, 14). Only after twenty-three years after its initial sketch was the novel finally published.

As an avid reader of eighteenth-century literature, and especially fond of novels of manners and society, the young Austen was very likely inspired by the speech of one of the characters in the last chapter of Fanny Burney's *Cecilia*: "Yet this, however, remember; if to PRIDE AND PREJUDICE you owe your miseries, so wonderfully is good and evil balanced, that to PRIDE AND PREJUDICE you will also owe their termination" (Sabor and Doody 1998, 930; emphasis in the original). Consequently the title of *Pride and Prejudice* had its origins in Fanny Burney's earlier novel on manners and society. Although Austen had already faced some rejections, by the end of the nineteenth century *Pride and Prejudice* was, like the rest of Austen's works, a sensation. Since then, it has remained her most popular novel beyond dispute. Current estimates have indicated that the novel not only has never lost ground as one of the most representative works in British literature but it is still Austen's most translated and printed novel (Bloom 2004, 13). A further indicator of its everlasting value is reflected

1 The abbreviation *P&P* indicates quotes from *Pride and Prejudice*. Bibliographic details of the edition used are given in 'Works cited'.

in the fact that *Pride and Prejudice* continues to be again and again adapted as a film. The last movie, produced in 2005, was a box-office success, even though it was not the first film adaptation to the classic novel and it would probably not be the last one.

Pride and Prejudice, although published two hundred years ago, is still capable of attracting not only readers in very different historical contexts but it also continues to draw the literary critics' attention towards issues of reason, feelings, decorum and independence in 19th century England (Jones 2003, xii-xxiii). Almost every scene provides its readers with a question, a further consideration or a new cultural insight (Stafford 2004, xviii). What role can true *affection*² play in this story and, by the same token, how does matrimony act in connection with the former are questions that revolve around issues of rank and status in a very specific 19th century social context. Thus, the storyline of *Pride and Prejudice* introduces the reader to the world of the Bennets, particularly to the reality that their five daughters are to face. Mrs. Bennet, whose offspring are all female, has only one obsession: to successfully marry off each of her five daughters. The opening lines of the novel as well as the women's necessity to secure their future by means of a good marriage at Austen's time anticipates the author's recurrent storyline in which her heroines frequently go through an emotionally charged process in their choice between potential suitors until they ultimately find happiness, always by means of matrimony. (Brown 1969, 1585)

Pride and Prejudice shares this pivotal thematic concern with the rest of Austen's six canonical novels. However, a further feature makes of *Pride and Prejudice* a unique work, which has not been replicated in any of Austen's other works. The first proposal that Mr. Darcy makes to Elizabeth Bennet and her subsequent rejection constitutes the novel's narrative peak and therefore it leads to an anticlimactic ending, since the most interesting and unexpected moment has already taken place. In order to shed light on this peculiar narrative pattern, this paper will analyse how Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy are introduced to the reader, and, most importantly, how they are introduced to each other. Finally, the key events which are conducive to the first proposal and therefore to the moment where the novel reaches its narrative peak will be

2 According to Harold Bloom, what Jane Austen's characters call "affection" we term "love". Affection is understood as more than mere fondness or tenderness for a person (2004, 7). Accordingly, when Austen's novels refer to a marriage based on mutual affection they are making a distinction between a pragmatic marriage based on the exchange of women's domestic labour for the man's income and social prestige. (Weisser 2006, 95)

revised, as well as the aspects which prepare the ground for a second –this time successful- proposal, so that Jane Austen’s traditional happy ending is fulfilled.

1. Introduction to the characters Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy

Jane Austen told her niece Anna that writing about “3 or 4 families in a country village [was] the very thing to work on” (qtd. in Todd 2006, 133). After going through *Pride and Prejudice*’s first chapter, one realises that the seven members of the Bennet family could have easily had the leading role of the novel on their own.

According to the social rules of decorum in 19th century England, gentry girls would be socially isolated until making their debut at age 16 at a grand ball. Nevertheless, the five Bennet daughters have all been introduced already. Accordingly, they would then attend assemblies and dinner parties to meet marriage-minded gentlemen (Stasio and Duncan 2007, 133). The Bennets start the story but it only develops from three of its members – Jane, Elizabeth and Lidia Bennet- and their eventual fiancés respectively. These three interconnected plots arise from the spirited social lives of the girls attending the so called assemblies. Additionally, such multiple plotting in *Pride and Prejudice* is connected by the relationships that exist between characters –Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy are close friends; the latter is the son of Mr. Wickam’s father’s master-. One of the plots develops off stage, as the reader is not explicitly told how Lidia Bennet and Mr. Wickam come to be lovers and eventually decide to elope.

Taking into account that gentry families in Austen’s novels have strong ties to land transferred from one generation of a family to the next, the Bennet daughters, as we see in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) with the Dashwood sisters too, run the risk of losing their home to a distant male relative through the system of ‘entail’, by which female inheritors were highly unlikely to inherit and, consequently, their only hope lied on marrying well (Drum, 2009, 93). Thus, the opening pages of the novel make it clear that the matrimonial prospects of the five Bennet daughters will lead the action.

Despite the multiple plotting that *Pride and Prejudice* exposes, even an incautious reader realises that this is Elizabeth Bennet’s story and that only Elizabeth will stand out sufficiently over any of her sisters to be considered the heroine of the novel (Bloom 2004, 59). Since there are five Bennet daughters, each of them reported to be “unique in temperament and behaviour” (Kruger et al. 2013, 200), it is fair to ask,

then, how the reader jumps to the conclusion that it will be the second Bennet daughter's story. The title of the novel gives neither clue nor a virtual reference to any of the sisters in particular and Elizabeth Bennet is not the storyteller either. Actually, at first it looks as if Mr. Bingley and Jane's love story will attract the main focus, as they are the first ones who are suggested as potential suitors. Mr. Bingley dances twice with Jane over any other girl at the assemblies, as opposed to Elizabeth, who has not shown a particular interest in any of the men attending the social event. What is more, she "had been obliged, by the scarcity of gentlemen, to sit down for two dances" (*P&P* 13). Arguably, the reader is introduced since the very beginning to a character whose time at the assemblies has been far from productive or interesting. There is an overall impression that Elizabeth Bennet does not characterise more climactic events than her other sisters and therefore her perspective does not deserve more attention than any of them. Still, Elizabeth Bennet is put forward constantly. Her father regards her as someone who "has something more of quickness than her sisters", who "are silly and ignorant like other girls" (*P&P* 7) and therefore she is her father's favourite because she has inherited his wit (Bloom 2004, 63).

The narrative perspective stays with her as well. Even in the most crucial moments the reader is confined to her. When Jane stays at Netherfield Park due to her having gone on horseback during a heavy rain, the narrator stays in Elizabeth's part, even though Jane's is a fairly more climactic one. When Jane travels to London with her uncles the Gardiners, we stay with Elizabeth as well. Not even after Mr. Wickam and Lidia's elopement do we jump to their perspectives. All these situations involve a higher degree of narrative conflict but, on the contrary, they are kept off stage. Consequently, Elizabeth becomes the principal reflector of the story from a very early stage. This fact tricks the reader into believing that they get first-hand knowledge of Elizabeth's point of view, as the narrative "orientation" of the novel has suggested. Nevertheless, by using a third-person omniscient narrator, Jane Austen refuses to commit herself to a definite position. When the reader thinks he knows everything about the novel's main protagonist, the narrator surprises him with the heroine's unexpected responses to critical situations that she encounters. What her answer to Mr. Collins' proposal as well as to Mr. Darcy's one might be is something we might expect but it is definitely something for which we are not explicitly prepared, nor by the narrator nor by the character herself (Morini 2009, 45-46). At the end of the day, it is in Elizabeth's

independent mind and in her vivaciously intelligence where her appeal lies. (Jones 1996, xii)

Mr. Darcy is not the main reflector of the story and the narrative perspective does not stay with him throughout the novel either. Still, he is soon recognised as the hero of this story. After about two-hundred years of his creation, he remains to be defined as “one of the most enduring and influential fantasy-figures in English literature, if not in Universal literature more generally” (Wootton 2007, 39). Parallel to what happens to the character of Elizabeth Bennet, his role in the novel suggests a weak involvement in the main narrative conflicts of the novel, at least compared to his friend Bingley. It is Mr. Bingley that has become the new tenant of Netherfield Park and therefore the new neighbour of Hertfordshire. By the same token, expectations trick the reader into believing that Mr. Bingley will acquire a more prominent role in the story, and therefore a more plausible suitor for a courtship plot. Mr. Bingley stands in opposition to Mr. Darcy, who is presented as a character whose intention is to stay only for a short period of time in Hertfordshire. But, paradoxically, the narrative discourse constantly puts Mr. Darcy forwards, as it did with Elizabeth Bennet. Mr. Darcy’s prominence can be explained in part because he outweighs Mr. Bingley both in fortune and in beauty:

Mr. Bingley was good looking and gentlemanlike; he had a pleasant countenance, and easy, unaffected manners. [...] but the ladies declared he –Mr. Darcy- was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening. (*P&P* 12)

Taking into consideration the upper-middle class world of Jane Austen’s fiction, which is portrayed as “secure in its values, its privileges and snobberies and, therefore, as the kind of society that defines itself very precisely in terms of land, money and class, accepting rank as an essential guinea-stamp” (Sanders 1994, 369), it is only to be expected that a character who is reported to “having ten thousand a year” (*P&P* 12) is immediately suggested as someone who would epitomise any spinster’s wish-fulfilment. (Jones 1996, xi)

At the same time, irrespective of such promising qualities, Austen seems determined to expose the most disagreeable aspects of Mr. Darcy and therefore as someone averse and unattractive. Since almost his first apparition in the novel

his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend [...] His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there again.

(P&P 12-13)

Not even Mrs. Bennet, whose obsession of marrying off each of her five daughters is made clear by the first pages of the novel, takes further due in asserting that “he is a most disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing” and that she “quite detest[s] the man”. *(P&P 15)*

The reader soon learns that Darcy’s closest relatives are not described in a lighter tone. Sander’s description of the society that Austen portrays in her novels is fulfilled, especially after the introduction of Mr. Darcy’s aunt Lady Catherine de Bourgh. In concordance with her nephew, she “was reckoned proud by many people” *(P&P 65)*. Additionally, “she likes to have the distinction of rank preserved” *(P&P 158)* and “whatever she said, was spoken in so authoritative a tone, as marked her self-importance” *(P&P 159)*. Although Austen writes about a very specific social group –the rural élite during the period of the Napoleonic wars- Lady Catherine is the member of a higher titled family. She typifies the older generation of aristocracy; a group which looks sharply at social distinction (Jones 2004, 299). She works as the personified barrier that exists between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet and therefore as the constant reminder that Lizzy has to be mindful about the boundaries that separate her and Mr. Darcy. Her speech towards the end of the novel declares that the relationship between hero and heroine can by no means be feasible and Lady Catherine even surpasses her nephew’s discourtesy: “Because honor, decorum, prudence, nay, interest, forbid it [...] You will be censured, slighted, and despised, by every one connected with him. Your alliance will be a disgrace; your name will never even be mentioned by any of us”. *(P&P 336)*

According to Charles Hinnant, in any of Jane Austen’s canonical novels “whoever will eventually win the hand of the heroine is easy to recognise early in the

narrative from his prominence, if not from his obvious moral, social or intellectual capacity” (2006, 294). Nevertheless, this principle has been debunked since the very beginning; Mr. Darcy’s role as one of the main protagonists is doubtful. He is not presented as a fixed member of Hertfordshire but an occasional visitor. Moreover, his first impressions have been not only the opposite of a moral person but the most proud one, rejecting to relate with any other characters in the novel. So far, the reader is warned against, if not forced to accept or recognise Mr. Darcy as a potential suitor, least a worthy partner for the heroine of the novel, Elizabeth Bennet, who has been described in opposite favourable terms.

With a view to ultimately revealing Mr. Darcy as the ideal match for her heroine, Austen had to change the most unappealing aspects of the character and substitute them by appropriate ones which had been hidden or, on the contrary, provide a plausible justification for his pride and unchivalrous conduct. So as to win both Elizabeth’s and the reader’s approval as a worthy suitor, Austen had to reveal more of Mr. Darcy than of any of her previous heroes in *Northanger Abbey* (1818) or *Sense and Sensibility* (1811)³. Darcy’s intimacy needs to be disclosed sharply (Brooke 1999, 173). Some of the inducements involved in Mr. Darcy’s way of proceeding towards Elizabeth and her family, were they in possession of the rest of society, it would be a shame for him and his own relations.

2. Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet’s courtship before the first proposal

Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet are presented, since the very first time they are introduced, as binary opposites and therefore as not seeing each other at all (Todd 2006, 72). Their determination to dislike one another leaves no room for a courtship plot, least for a happy ending. Not only has Darcy given offence at a providential dance by being ill-mannered to the women sitting partnerless in it, but he has also dismissed Elizabeth as “not handsome enough to tempt [him]”. (*P&P* 13) (Wooton 2007, 35)

Notwithstanding, first impressions are deceptive and after some encounters during Mr. Darcy’s time in Hertfordshire he starts to see Elizabeth Bennet from a

3 Although Jane Austen’s six completed novels were all published in the nineteenth century and within a seven-year time span from 1811 to 1818, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Northanger Abbey* (1818) were written in the 1790s and begun even earlier. (Drum 2009, 94)

different, yet still immobile perspective. If Elizabeth Bennet the character was capable of enthralling her own creator, who uttered the following words: “I must confess that I think her as delightful a character as ever appeared in print” (qtd. in Bloom 2004, 14), Elizabeth Bennet was unconsciously successful in delighting her initial antagonist Mr. Darcy too. He eventually claims that he “had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her. He initially believed, that were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger” (*P&P* 51). We jump to the conclusion that it is social difference that constrains Mr. Darcy; it is the only objection that he can find in Elizabeth.

The introduction of a new character, Mr. Wickam, is a very significant shift in the plot and at the same time plays a key role in Elizabeth’s opinions about Mr. Darcy. As a settled soldier at Meryton, Mr. Wickam is presented as the true suitor, yet deceitful in the end, that the heroine had been waiting for. She is immediately bewitched by “the happy man towards whom every female eye was turned, and Elizabeth was the happy woman by whom he finally seated himself” (*P&P* 75). When Elizabeth declares that Mr. Wickam is “beyond all comparison, the most agreeable man [she] ever saw” (*P&P* 142), the reader finds the heroine for the first time particularly interested in this new character. Elizabeth really sees Mr. Wickam as a worthy suitor, as opposed to Mr. Darcy, whom she still regards “as the worst of men” (*P&P* 136). She finds in Mr. Wickam not only a man compensating for Mr. Darcy’s arrogance but also someone that is her equal in rank and status. Some literary critics such as Janet Todd have argued that if Elizabeth gives a favourable response to him, it is in part because she considers that they are the same in the social scale and therefore there could be no further interests than true affection between them. (2006, 63)

As Elizabeth gets to know more of Mr. Wickam, she gets to know more of Mr. Darcy as well. Mr. Wickam pictures Mr. Darcy as someone whom “almost all his actions may be traced to pride; -and pride has often been his best friend. It has connected him nearer with virtue than any other feeling” (*P&P* 80). There are almost sixty references to pride in *Pride and Prejudice*, mostly connected to Mr. Darcy. It is Mr. Darcy’s pride which has undeniably created Elizabeth’s prejudice. Mr. Wickam’s account provides her with true evidence to dislike Mr. Darcy even more.

The courtship plot between Mr. Wickam and Elizabeth comes to an end rather quickly, as he is prone to place his attentions in other women.

I am now convinced, my dear aunt, that I have never been much in love; for had I really experienced that *pure and elevating passion*, I should at present detest his very name, and wish him all manner of evil [...] There can be no love in all this.

(*P&P* 147) (italics mine)

Elizabeth reckons to her aunt Mrs. Gardiner that she has not felt “pure and elevating passion”, related to true affection, for Mr. Wickham. This quote makes sense for two main reasons: firstly because in a previous episode the reader has already learnt Elizabeth’s ideas on marrying someone who truly deserves her admiration. It is when Charlotte Lucas becomes engaged with Mr. Collins that we see for the first time that Elizabeth would have never “sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage” (*P&P* 123), even though Charlotte is only doing what the social and economic realities of her time force her to do (Tanner 2003, 398). Irrespective of Charlotte’s commonsensical opinions, which above all do portray the reality for women at the time, she is determined to live up to her principles (Weisser 2006, 95). Moreover, she is conscious enough that she is not willing to replicate her own parent’s matrimony:

Had Elizabeth’s opinion been all drawn from her own family, she could not have formed a very pleasing picture of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort. Her father captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour, which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. (*P&P* 228)

The several marriages portrayed in *Pride and Prejudice* are described neither in a positive nor in an exemplary way. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet’s marriage is said to be the fruit of passion. Once beauty has faded away, Mr. Bennet always looks forward to remain confined in his library, where his wife cannot disturb him. If marriages which have been settled already when the story starts are described in such a cynical tone, most of the ones which are settled throughout the course of the novel are not portrayed in a better light. Lydia and Wickham’s union correlates Mr. and Mrs. Bennet’s one, it is the result of selfish lust. Charlotte’s marriage to the tedious Mr. Collins is a further example of the pragmatic marriage with no real affection at all (Weisser 2006, 95). Not even Jane and

Mr. Bingley's engagement satisfies what someone would expect of a romantic story; their determination to seduce one another is so weak that Darcy's attempt to discourage Mr. Bingley succeeds rather easily. *Pride and Prejudice* has not provided a single marriage worthy of admiration so far.

Recalling the course of the story, Jane is still in London awaiting any news from Mr. Bingley, whereas Elizabeth's time in Hunsford is far more productive. After several meetings at Lady Catherine's place, Darcy's visits at the Collinses have started to increase notably, "but why Mr. Darcy came so often to the Parsonge, it was more difficult to understand" (*P&P* 176). Conversational exchanges take up the greatest part of *Pride and Prejudice*, with a ratio paralleled only in *Emma* (1815) (Morini 2009, 45). Nevertheless, Mr. Darcy is constantly at a loss of words when it comes to having a conversation with Elizabeth, and in the end their verbal exchanges would consist only of "a few formal enquiries", "an awkward pause", and some "odd unconnected questions" (*P&P* 178). It is precisely because of Darcy's continuous failures in communicating with Elizabeth that his first proposal is totally unexpected.

3. Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth's courtship after the first proposal

"In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (*P&P* 185). This is, perhaps, one of the most bizarre proposals of marriage in all literature (Yoder and Edwin 2008, 608). The awkwardness of the moment lies not in one but in several reasons. It is a foregone conclusion that the reader does neither expect nor is explicitly prepared for Darcy's proposal (Morini 2009, 46). First off, the reader is not expectant to this very moment because he has no evidence that Darcy's prejudices against the defects of Elizabeth's family have disappeared yet. Secondly, there is no evidence either of Elizabeth's change of opinion towards Darcy. He is still regarded as a self-important and proud man and therefore there are no virtual references to the "elevating passion" that goes hand in hand with Elizabeth's idea of marriage. Arguably, there is a clear absence of signs which denote a proper courtship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy. When Darcy started thinking of Elizabeth as his wife-to-be remains an unsolved mystery for the reader. These unfolded questions irremediably produce a thirst for answers for which the reader finds no explanation, at least not immediately. At the same time, it is because of these unsolved questions and the tension that they provoke that the

novel reaches its peak in this precise moment. On the absence of a further exciting event, the final resolution of the plot can be nothing but anticlimactic.

Pride and Prejudice's conflict, brought about by the first proposal, and the novel's subsequent anticlimactic conclusion become one of its unique characteristics. Only in *Persuasion* (1817) would Jane Austen place a character –Captain Frederick Wentworth- having to face a second proposal after Anne Elliot has already rejected him once. Still, Austen would not repeat the magnificence of Mr. Darcy's eccentric proposal of marriage. *Persuasion* appears to begin *in medias res* and the reader is not provided with full details of the whole process –of the courtship- which is conducive to the first proposal of marriage that Captain Wentworth makes to Anne Elliot. Consequently, the reader does not carefully witness the entire process as he does in *Pride and Prejudice*.

After Darcy's famous yet bizarre declaration we now have full knowledge of his struggle. Although his first instinct was to look to Elizabeth Bennet as someone beneath him, he is willing to cross the barrier that separates them in terms of social difference so as to “be rewarded by her acceptance of his hand” (*P&P* 185). Nevertheless, Elizabeth not only rebukes Darcy but “her intentions did not vary for an instant” (*P&P* 185). Apart from her earlier main objection –Darcy's pride-, she has now “other provocations” (*P&P* 186) due to which she is determined to reject him. Mr. Wickam's account of Darcy's insensibility towards him, Colonel Fitzwilliam's confirmation that it was Darcy who deliberately separated Jane and Mr. Bingley and Darcy's own imputation of her family's standing make it impossible for Elizabeth to ever consider Darcy as a prospective husband. In a stratified society, Darcy's rank and status have failed in having a positive impact on Elizabeth's response.

Remnants of *Pride and Prejudice*'s initial epistolary form can be appreciated in Darcy's *éclaircissement* by means of a letter. Darcy's letter plays an important role in the disclosure of the knot of misunderstandings and is undeniably one of the most powerful elements in *Pride and Prejudice*'s twist of plot. Elizabeth Bennet reads and re-reads Mr. Darcy's letter up to the extent that she “was in a fair way of soon knowing [it] by heart. She studied every sentence” (*P&P* 206). After learning that Darcy was not responsible for Mr. Wickam's loss of fortune and that he could have had a further justification to separate Mr. Bingley from an apparently disinterested Jane explains Mr. Darcy's way of proceeding. It is from this point onwards that Elizabeth really starts to reconsider her initial ideas on Darcy:

She could see him instantly before her, in every charm of air and address; but she could remember no more substantial good than the general approbation of the neighbourhood, and the regard which his social powers had gained him in the mess. (*P&P* 200)

Mr. Darcy is not informed of Elizabeth's *partial* change of attitude towards him. This fact explains that it is not Elizabeth who has a part in Darcy's restoration, similar to that of Pamela's in Lovelace in *Pamela* (1740), as some literary critics have suggested (Stove 2007, 13). In Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, Pamela reforms her master Mr. Lovelace by keeping chaste and refusing to submit to his attempts of seduction. By doing so, she wins a reward whose value surpasses any material good: she gains her master's true love and, subsequently, his respect. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth does neither persist in Mr. Darcy's reform nor lets him be in hopes of a further acceptance. It is fair to ask, then, why should Darcy be willing to go through a process of reformation without having been explicitly asked to do so. If we compare the situations where the characters of both *Pamela* and *Pride and Prejudice* are involved, it is difficult to draw connections. Firstly because Elizabeth does not look at Darcy as a worthy suitor yet, as opposed to Pamela, who does love Mr. Lovelace even though he, as a lusty lover, does not pursue matrimony. Secondly, because Pamela encourages Mr. Lovelace, yet not always explicitly, to see her as a true wife-to-be, as opposed to Elizabeth, who has already received a proposal of marriage but irrevocably asserts that Mr. Darcy "could not have made [her] the offer of [his] hand in any possible way that would have tempted [her] to accept it" (*P&P* 188).

Darcy is not entirely guilty of the accusations that have been imposed on him and still, since the moment that Elizabeth rejects Darcy, both go through a simultaneous process by which they are equally humbled. Darcy learns that rank and social connections represent no real barrier between him and Elizabeth and Elizabeth realises that her first impressions, as Jane Austen appropriately named the first manuscript of *Pride and Prejudice*, did not let her identify true gentlemen and that good manners proved to be a façade for the real rascals of the story; "how differently did every thing now appear". (*P&P* 201)

Only after visiting Pemberley does Elizabeth completely realize how wrong she was: "It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I

believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley” (*P&P* 353). Two further conclusions can be drawn from these lines. The first one does nothing but reinforce the fact that the love story which emerges between both characters comes as a surprise for both the reader and for the characters themselves. The reader had been endlessly reminded of their antagonism since the first chapters of *Pride and Prejudice*. The characters had been so blinded by their prejudice against each other that they can hardly identify where the affection started. Secondly, the reader is placed and therefore is able to identify the moment when it all started without his even realising it. On the grounds of Darcy’s property, his housekeeper’s opinions and his portrait Elizabeth comes to appreciate Darcy’s gallantry and inner qualities. Pemberley becomes the metonym of the real Mr. Darcy, not Elizabeth’s previous prejudiced idea about him. (Tanner 2003, 385)

Additionally, Darcy’s part in marrying Lidia and Mr. Wickam after they have eloped saves the Bennet family from eternal shame, but Darcy’s attempts to win Elizabeth’s approval go further than that: he reunites Jane and Mr. Bingley and has a part in their marriage as well. On the basis of these latter events, Austen inevitably prepares the ground for a second proposal of marriage, but this time very predictably. Once and for all, after benefitting from a period of self-reflexion, both hero and heroine have successfully gained mature judgement and emotional fulfilment: “dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled” (*P&P* 349). Elizabeth’s feelings had now changed completely towards the so called “pure and elevating passion”. The happiness that her positive answer provoked on Darcy “was such as he had probably never felt before”. (*P&P* 346)

As all the heroes and heroines in her novels, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet have finally paved the way for Jane Austen’s traditional grand denouements in which the main protagonists always live happily ever after by means of a matrimony. Even though Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth’s matrimony is not but one out of the four marriages that take place in *Pride and Prejudice*, preceded by the Collinses, the Wickams and the Bingleys, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth’s steps towards their engagement undeniably contribute to the uniqueness of the novel. It has been the process towards their engagement and not the final result of it that has put forward *Pride and Prejudice*’s distinctive narrative pattern over Austen’s traditional storylines.

Conclusions

Jane Austen's six canonical novels keep being subject to literary criticism. It has been routinely maintained that Austen reproduced a very similar storyline brought about by nearly the same pivotal thematic concerns in each of her six completed novels. In her works, Austen's already universally recognized heroines are headed towards a grand denouement once they have completed a process of mature judgement and emotional fulfilment. If Austen's six storylines (of Austen's six canonical novels) share both similar storylines and main themes, Austen's traditional happy endings show unvarying techniques as well, since they always culminate with matrimony between the so called heroines and the most appropriate suitors. Nevertheless, such shared features have never undermined the reputation of her works.

Pride and Prejudice not only maintains its everlasting appeal but it still continues to be re-edited and adapted as a film. This paper attempted to demonstrate that *Pride and Prejudice*'s uniqueness lies in the fact that, despite the numerous connections that can be drawn with Austen's other novels, there is a further feature which has not been replicated in any of them. Mr. Darcy's bizarre proposal constitutes the main narrative tension of the novel and therefore provokes a twist plot which leaves Austen's traditional grand denouement in the shade. A second proposal is suggested once the main protagonists have gone through a process of self-development. Still, the individuality of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet's –this time successful- engagement is debunked by two weddings and a further engagement which take place at the end of the novel and therefore almost parallel to Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth's one. This fact produces an effect of collapse between marriage proposals and consequently obscures Jane Austen's traditional majestic conclusions. As a result, *Pride and prejudice*'s denouement lacks a proper climax.

In addition, the overall tone of the novel represents matrimony as an ambiguous social institution: marriage is suggested as cynical and lacking proper affection. At the same time, though, most of *Pride and Prejudice*'s female characters prove that matrimony is their only means of survival in 19th century England. Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy are exempt from such sarcastic portrayal. By their process towards self-knowledge both come to respect and appreciate each other so that "it is settled between [them] already, that [they] are to be the happiest couple in the world" (*P&P* 353).

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