Pride And Prejudice: Issues Inherent In The Title

In her novel, Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen addresses that no one is completely free of pride by having each character display an extent of conceit. Elizabeth’s refusal to dance with Mr Darcy and Mr Collins’ reasonings as to why Elizabeth should marry him express an extent of pride. However, Austen also highlights that with the proper moral upbringing one may overcome pride to lead a life of modesty.

In passage one, Austen portrays that during the Regency era, people were often ostracised and a victim of prejudice based on their social class. From the first encounter with Mr. Darcy, we are able to see his pride. 'She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me.' Through his conversation with Mr. Bingley, Mr. Darcy not only reveals his haughty attitude but causes Mrs. Bennet, as well as Elizabeth, to mark him as 'the most disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing.' Mr. Darcy's reason for being proud is a simple one: he is of the upper class. In this society, class matters almost more than anything. Elizabeth is of the middle-class, and to himself and others, it would be ridiculous for him to settle for a woman of a lower class. As a result of his pride, Elizabeth is “determined” to reject Sir William’s proposal to dance with Mr Darcy based solely on a poor first impression and a misjudgement of his character. Elizabeth's pride is not full of conceit, she is instead proud of her intelligence, comprehension, and independence. Through this, Austen confirms that the devastating consequences of social class separate individuals of regency era and result in an extent of pride.

Austen addresses the importance of matrimony for someone of the upper class to uphold their reputation, dignity and pride. In passage two, Rather than using the more sensible emotional appeal in his marriage proposal to Elizabeth, Mr. Collins starts off by logically stating the main reasons why he should marry Elizabeth Bennet. He states that his first reason is that as a “clergyman”, it is the “right thing” for him to marry because it will set a good example of matrimony is his parish. Although it is factual and unobjectionable, the particular reason is unemotional, and the phrase connotes that it’s a ‘must’ for him; an obligation and it is not like he actually wants to marry her. He continues to state objective but dispassionate reasons to marry Elizabeth, and soon brings up the fact that their marriage would be convenient since he is supposed to inherit her father’s estate after his death. Mr. Collin’s conveys that when her father dies, the “melancholy” event wouldn’t be as sad for her if she didn’t have to lose the estate as well. Although it is supposed to be a romantic speech, he mentions about her family and situation, implying that by declining his offer, she is giving up her family's best hope to hold on to their home. Elizabeth interrupts to decline, but Mr. Collins responds that women will typically reject an offer two or three times. This highlights his overly narcissistic and proud character as he supposes that Elizabeth will marry him for money and class rather than for the sole purpose of marriage: love. Austen evaluates the importance of matrimony for a person of a high social class to sustain their pride and dignity within their parish.

Austen addresses the ways in which one may overcome their pride. This is evident throughout the novel as Elizabeth and Darcy allow their impressions of one another to continually change. Mr. Darcy’s initial contempt of Elizabeth is evident when he forms an immediate impression of Elizabeth the first time he sees her at a ball. He says, “She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me”. However, his attitude toward her changes fairly rapidly. He finds that

instead of looking for fault in her, her manners please him and he notices her expressive eyes, intelligence, and nice figure. To his own surprise, he wishes “to know more of her”. Thus, the evolution begins. He eventually sees that factors other than wealth determine who he should truly be wedded with. Elizabeth also starts out with a negative first impression of Mr. Darcy, but it takes her a little longer to change her opinion of him. During her frequent encounters with Mr. Darcy at Rosings, Elizabeth begins to see a more civil side of him. In turn Mr. Darcy shows Elizabeth that her judgments were often rash and she realizes that they were based on vanity, not on reason. Visiting Pemberley proves itself the real turning point for Elizabeth and as she stands in his home, she thinks, “Of this place… I might have been mistress.'' Darcy's and Elizabeth's awareness of a mutual implies that Austen resolves love as a theme independent of social themes. As their encounters reveal more truths, they let go of their prejudices towards each other and fall in love. Austen implies through their interactions that in order to overcome one’s pride, one must step back from any judgement they made and rejudge one another based on the new information and understanding they have acquired.

Jane Austen illustrates in her novel that everyone expresses an extent of pride. This is portrayed as a result of the exclusion and victimisation of prejudice based on social class and the significance of marriage for someone of the upper class to uphold their pride. She also explores how one can learn from others and change for the better to lead a life of virtue.