



Darcy proposes to Elizabeth

The following passage represents a turning point in the novel. It deals with the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, who has taken a prejudiced dislike to the hero, Mr Darcy, a wealthy aristocrat. Though he considers Elizabeth socially inferior, Darcy falls in love with her and finally decides to propose marriage to her.

Jane Austen
Pride and Prejudice
(1813)
Chapter XXXIV

After a silence of several minutes he came towards her in an agitated manner, and thus began,

‘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.’

Elizabeth’s astonishment was beyond expression. She stared¹, coloured, doubted, and was silent. This he considered sufficient encouragement, and the avowal² of all that he felt and had long felt for her, immediately followed. He spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed³, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority – of its being a degradation – of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on⁴ with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding⁵, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit.

In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man’s affection, and though her intentions did not vary for an instant, she was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive; till, roused to resentment by his subsequent language, she lost all compassion in anger. She tried, however, to compose herself⁶ to answer him with patience, when he should have done⁷. He concluded with representing to her the strength of that attachment which, in spite of all his endeavours⁸, he had found impossible to conquer; and with expressing his hope that it would now be rewarded⁹ by her acceptance of his hand. As he said this, she could easily see that he had no doubt of a favourable answer. He spoke of apprehension and anxiety, but his countenance¹⁰ expressed real security. Such a circumstance could only exasperate farther, and when he ceased, the colour rose into her cheeks, and she said,

‘In such cases as this, it is, I believe, the established¹¹ mode to express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned. It is natural that obligation should be felt, and if I could feel gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot – I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed¹² it most unwillingly. [...]’

Mr Darcy, who was leaning¹³ against the mantle-piece¹⁴ with his eyes fixed on her face, seemed to catch her words with no less resentment than surprise. His complexion became pale with anger, and the disturbance of his mind was visible in every feature. He was struggling for the appearance of composure, and would not open his lips, till he believed himself to have attained it. The pause was to Elizabeth’s feelings dreadful. At length, in a voice of forced calmness, he said,

‘And this is all the reply which I am to have the honour of expecting! I might, perhaps, wish to be informed why, with so little endeavour at civility¹⁵, I am thus rejected. But it is of small importance.’

‘I might as well enquire,’ replied she, ‘why with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character? Was not this some excuse for incivility, if I was uncivil? But I have other provocations. You know I have. Had not my own feelings decided against you, had they been indifferent,

- 1 She stared. Sgranò gli occhi.
- 2 avowal. Dichiarazione.
- 3 detailed. Descritti, precisati.
- 4 dwelt on. Sottolineati.
- 5 he was wounding. Stava soffrendo.
- 6 to compose herself. Di calmarsi, di ricomporsi.
- 7 done. Qui: finito.
- 8 endeavours. Sforzi.
- 9 rewarded. Ricompensato.
- 10 countenance. Espressione del volto.
- 11 established. Convenzionale.
- 12 bestowed. Concessa, donata.
- 13 was leaning. Era appoggiato.
- 14 mantle-piece. Mensola del caminetto.
- 15 civility. Educazione, cortesia.



or had they even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man, who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister?

50 As she pronounced these words, Mr Darcy changed colour; but the emotion was short, and he listened without attempting to interrupt her while she continued.

'I have every reason in the world to think ill¹⁶ of you. No motive can excuse the unjust and ungenerous part you acted *there*. You dare not, you cannot
55 deny that you have been the principal, if not the only means of dividing them from each other, of exposing one to the censure of the world for caprice and instability, the other to its derision for disappointed hopes, and involving them both in misery of the acutest kind.'

She paused, and saw with no slight indignation that he was listening with
60 an air which proved him wholly unmoved by any feeling of remorse. He even looked at her with a smile of affected incredulity.

'Can you deny that you have done it?' she repeated.

With assumed¹⁷ tranquillity he then replied, 'I have no wish of denying that I did every thing in my power to separate my friend from your sister, or that I
65 rejoice in my success. Towards *him* I have been kinder than towards myself.'

Elizabeth disdained the appearance of noticing this civil reflection, but its meaning did not escape, nor was it likely to conciliate her.

'But it is not merely this affair,' she continued, 'on which my dislike is founded. Long before it had taken place, my opinion of you was decided.
70 Your character was unfolded¹⁸ in the recital¹⁹ which I received many months ago from Mr Wickham. On this subject, what can you have to say? In what imaginary act of friendship can you here defend yourself? or under what misrepresentation, can you here impose upon²⁰ others?'

'You take an eager interest in that gentleman's concerns,' said Darcy in a
75 less tranquil tone, and with a heightened colour.

'Who that knows what his misfortunes have been, can help feeling an interest in him?'

'His misfortunes!' repeated Darcy contemptuously²¹; 'yes, his misfortunes have been great indeed.'

80 'And of your infliction,' cried Elizabeth with energy. 'You have reduced him to his present state of poverty, comparative poverty. You have withheld the advantages, which you must know to have been designed for him. You have deprived the best years of his life, of that independence which was no less his due than his desert²². You have done all this! and yet you can treat the mention
85 of his misfortunes with contempt and ridicule.'

'And this,' cried Darcy, as he walked with quick steps across the room, 'is your opinion of me! This is the estimation in which you hold me! I thank you for explaining it so fully. My faults, according to this calculation, are heavy indeed! But perhaps,' added he, stopping in his walk, and turning towards her,
90 'these offences might have been overlooked, had not your pride been hurt by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented my forming any serious design. These bitter accusations might have been suppressed, had I with greater policy²³ concealed my struggles, and flattered you into the belief of my being impelled by unqualified²⁴, unalloyed²⁵ inclination; by reason, by reflection,
95 by every thing. But disguise of every sort is my abhorrence. Nor am I ashamed of the feelings I related. They were natural and just. Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?'

Elizabeth felt herself growing more angry every moment; yet she tried to
100 the utmost to speak with composure when she said,

16 ill. Male.

17 assumed. Simulata.

18 unfolded. Rivelato, svelato.

19 recital. Racconto.

20 impose upon. Approfitare di.

21 contemptuously. Sdegnosamente.

22 desert. Merito, ciò che gli spettava.

23 policy. Accortezza, diplomazia.

24 unqualified. Incondizionata.

25 unalloyed. Pura.



'You are mistaken, Mr Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared me²⁶ the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner.'

105 She saw him start²⁷ at this, but he said nothing, and she continued, 'You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it.'

Again his astonishment was obvious; and he looked at her with an expression of mingled incredulity and mortification. She went on.

110 'From the very beginning, from the first moment I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit²⁸, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work²⁹ of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you
115 a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on³⁰ to marry.'

26 it spared me. Mi ha risparmiato.

27 start. Traslire.

28 conceit. Presunzione.

29 ground-work. Fondamento.

30 prevailed on. Persuasa.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ lines 1-31 and match the highlighted words and phrases with their Italian translation.

- 1 ulteriormente
- 2 in modo riluttante
- 3 dichiarati
- 4 raccomandare la sua proposta
- 5 ricambiati
- 6 impossibile da esprimere
- 7 non serve a nulla
- 8 ben radicata
- 9 buon senso
- 10 spinta al rancore

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 READ lines 1-31 again and note down: the characters involved; the situation; the expressions referring to the hero's manners; the expressions referring to the heroine's various feelings; the reasons behind the hero's struggle against his own feelings.

3 READ lines 32-85 and answer the following questions.

- 1 Does Elizabeth accept Darcy's proposal?
- 2 What is his reaction?
- 3 Why does Elizabeth reject him? Explain the different reasons.

4 READ the rest of the text and explain:

- 1 what Darcy accuses Elizabeth of;
- 2 what Elizabeth accuses Darcy of.

> COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

5 CONSIDER the whole passage and identify the kind of narrator. From whose point of view is the story mainly told?



6 **WHAT** is the effect of this choice? Tick as appropriate.

- ☐ It subtly mitigates Darcy's offensive remarks.
- ☐ It gains control of the tone, guiding the reader to a correct interpretation.
- ☐ It prevents Darcy from making a fool of himself with his own words.
- ☐ It sustains the tension, mingling dialogue and narration.

7 **CHAPTER XXXIV** marks the worst moment in the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy, and also clarifies the choice of the title of the novel. Explain it providing evidence from the text.

8 **WRITE** 10 lines about the hero's and heroine's characters.

➤ **COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS WITH THE CONTEXT OF THE AGE**

9 **CONSIDER** the social condition of women at the beginning of the 19th century. What particular significance did the term 'proposal' acquire in that context?

10 **DISCUSS.** Elizabeth's rejection of Darcy acquires particular significance if one considers the social condition of women at the beginning of the 19th century. Try to explain Jane Austen's aim.