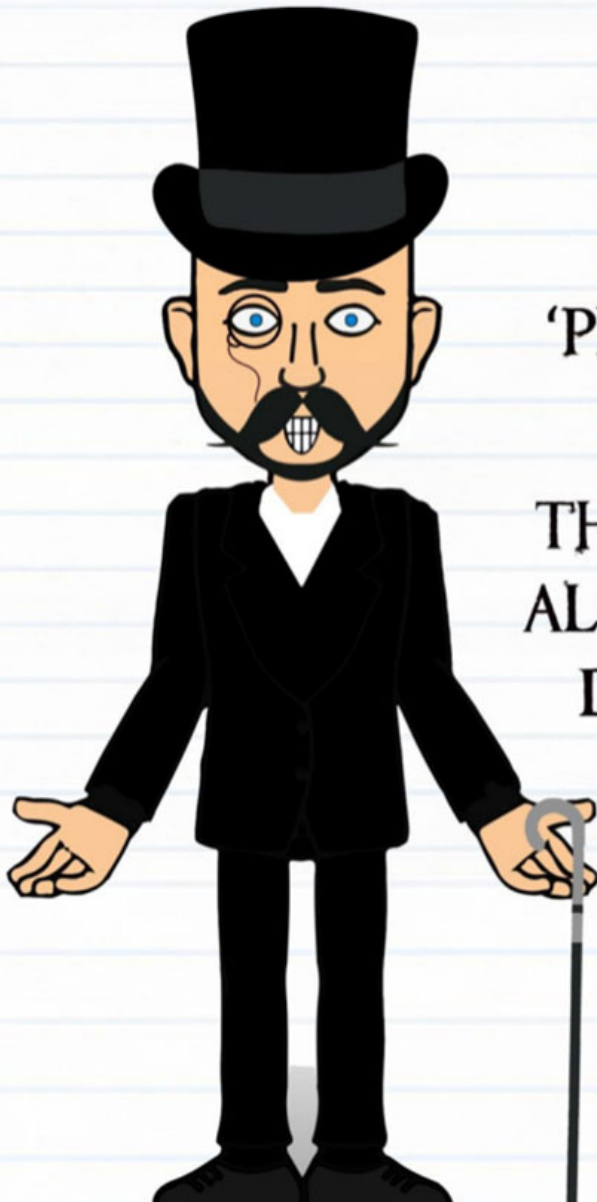


MR Bruff's
Guide To

Mr Bruff

ONLINE REVISION

JANE AUSTEN'S 'PRIDE AND PREJUDICE'



YOUR GUIDE TO
'PRIDE AND PREJUDICE'

THE COMPLETE NOVEL
ALONGSIDE MR BRUFF'S
DETAILED ANALYSIS

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SAMPLE

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN 'PRIDE AND PREJUDICE':

Firstly, let me give you a few brief notes on the treatment of women in 1800s England:

- When a woman married, she became the legal property of her husband ☒ Women could not testify in court
- Women could not vote
- It was believed that women were incapable of rational thought
- Many female writers published their works anonymously or under male pseudonyms in order to boost book sales (Jane Austen published all of her novels anonymously). Although women could publish, women's literature was not taken as seriously as that written by men. In order to be taken seriously, many women published anonymously.

Now that we have some idea of the role of women in society, let's examine the key quotations from the text on this topic.

One of the earliest points established is the fact that women are there to be admired physically by men. In chapter 5, Charlotte Lucas explains that she overheard Mr Robinson asking Mr Bingley 'whether he did not think there were a great many pretty women in the room'. It is perhaps odd to see even high society acting in such a sexual manner – the men surveying the women and judging who is the most attractive. It is surprising how open and indiscreet this conversation between the men was; all of the surrounding women could hear how they were being talked about. Even more shocking is the fact that the women, on recounting the story in this chapter, are proud and celebratory of the comments Jane received.

Whilst men may act as improperly as they feel, brazenly and openly judging women on their looks, women may not. It is Charlotte Lucas once again who explains the role a woman must take if interested in a man. She argues that 'in nine cases out of ten a woman had better show more affection than she feels'. The role of women is here made very clear – they must work hard to attract the men they are interested in. Men may act with a careless nonchalance, but women must 'fight for their man'.

The importance of physical appearance is further explored in the same chapter in Austen's description of Mary who 'having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments'. This once again enforces the idea that a woman's looks are vital in all pursuit of marriage. If you suffer the misfortune of not being beautiful, you will have to make up for it with knowledge.

When Mr Darcy comments on Elizabeth's eyes, also in the same chapter, he explains that women's eyes can give a man 'great pleasure'. Once again we see that women's physicality serves the purpose of giving pleasure to men.

However, women put a great deal of pressure on themselves too. When Elizabeth walks to Longbourn to see the sickly Jane, the Bingleys mock the fact that she decided to 'walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles in dirt'. Here we can see that the Bingley sisters reinforce the concept that a woman should be attractive to the eye at all times.

In the same chapter, Mr Hurst is amazed to see Elizabeth reading a book. He asks her 'do you prefer reading to cards?...that is rather singular'. In Austen's time, card games were a regular past time. Mr Hurst's amazement suggests that he expects women to spend their time in meaningless fun and games, not to become better educated through reading a book.

At this point it is clear that women are not taken seriously, but are merely seen as existing for the pleasure of men. However, Mr Darcy and Caroline Bingley together define the 'accomplished woman' a little later in chapter 8:

"A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half - deserved."

"All this she must possess," added Darcy, "and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading."

Unsurprisingly, Elizabeth is perplexed at this definition, arguing that she herself 'never saw such a woman'. Here the voice of Jane Austen shines through, criticising the unrealistic expectations placed on women in the Regency period.

Women were expected to be perfect. It would later be known in the Victorian period as the 'angel in the house' the expectation that women would be submissive, beautiful, passive, powerless, self-sacrificing and more. The problem with this expectation of women is that no such woman exists. As a result, women were under extreme pressure to try to be the perfect woman, and here Austen is showing just how unrealistic these expectations were. The list of ideals from Miss Bingley and Mr Darcy is as follows:

- Can play music
- Can sing
- Can draw
- Can dance
- Can read and speak a number of languages
- Should walk in a certain way ☐ Should talk in a certain way
- Must read extensively

Although this list is ridiculously excessive, these are the areas in which upper class girls would be tutored at a young age. Only men would learn of law, medicine, science, maths and the like. A woman's education and whole life was based around possessing a variety of skills which would be pleasurable to her husband – what a sad life to live! This expectation of women is juxtaposed with the minimal expectation of men in society. Just take Mr Collins as an example. He is a laughable idiot and yet has risen to a fair height in society; the same could never be said of a woman.

If the life of a woman in Austen's era is unfair, it is also unavoidable. In chapter 13, Mr Bennet reminds his daughters that Mr Collins has a right 'when I am dead...to turn you all out of this house as soon as he pleases'. What Mr Bennet refers to in this chapter is the act of entailment.

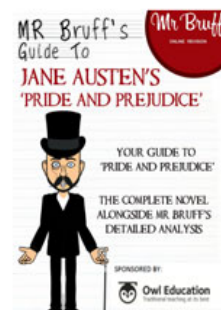
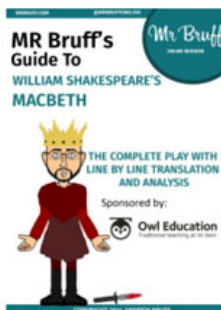
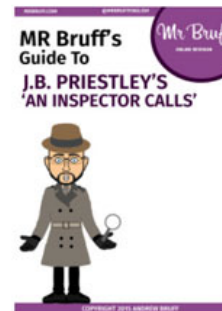
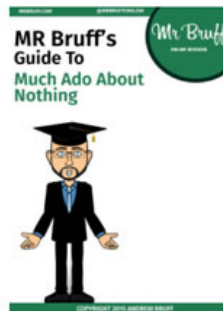
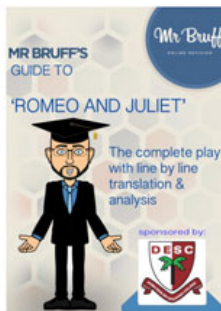
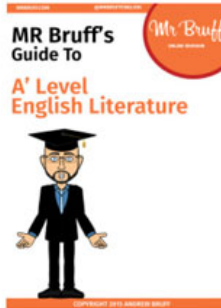
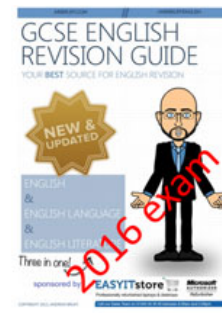
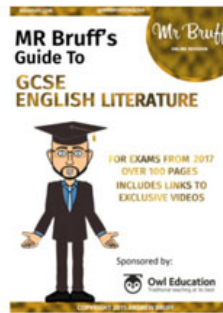
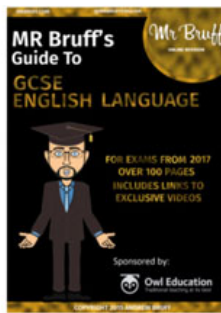
As the Bennets were a rich family, Mr Bennet's father entailed his property. This means that the entire wealth went to one person – the eldest son. That way, the wealth and property would remain strong and undiluted. What does this mean? Well, if Mr Bennet's father had five sons, the wealth would soon be divided into such small amounts that it would not count for much at all. So Mr Bennet, as the eldest son, inherited everything. Mr Collins' father (Mr Bennet's brother) inherited nothing. This tradition passes on to future generations too, but Mr Bennet has no sons and so the nearest male heir inherits everything. The big point here is that women were seen as so inferior that they were not recognised in entailment laws. This is further explained in chapter 50:

‘When first Mr. Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless; for, of course, they were to have a son. This son was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as he should be of age, and the widow and younger children would by that means be provided for. Five daughters successively entered the world, but yet the son was to come; and Mrs. Bennet, for many years after Lydia's birth, had been certain that he would. This event had at last been despaired of, but it was then too late to be saving. Mrs. Bennet had no turn for economy, and her husband's love of independence had alone prevented their exceeding their income’.

An estate did not have to be entailed, as we see with Lady Catherine's estate which will be inherited by her daughter. However, once an estate was entailed, there was no room for females to inherit anything. This left many women in a very tough situation – they simply had to marry a rich man in order to live a rich life (see the chapter on marriage for more on this).

Women are often portrayed in negative terms in the novel. In chapter 15, the younger Bennet girls are looking for ‘a very smart bonnet indeed, or a really new muslin in a shop window’. This vain obsession with fashion is seen throughout the novel, although it perhaps cannot be blamed on the girls when we have already established the importance of marriage and the fact that men will judge them solely on their looks.

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