AP English: Comparison/Contrast Essay on Elizabeth Bennet’s Marriage Proposals

Mr. Collins vs. Mr. Darcy

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In “Pride and Prejudice”, a novel written by Jane Austen, two men who have two completely different motives for marrying Elizabeth Bennet present their proposals to her.

Elizabeth is the novel’s protagonist. The second daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, she is the most intelligent and sensible of the five Bennet sisters. She is well read and quick-witted, with a tongue that occasionally proves too sharp for her own good. She is unfortunate enough to receive two very unique proposals; one includes the stupidity and snobbish demeanor of her distant cousin, Mr. Collins, and the other includes the arrogance of the aristocratic, Mr. Darcy who directs insults at her and her family.

Mr. Collins is a pompous, idiotic clergyman who happens to propose to Elizabeth before Mr. Darcy does. He lists his motives in a very business-like manner, expressing no love towards Elizabeth throughout his long and thorough explanation. *“My reason for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish. Secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly, which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness”.* He states his decisions to marry her as though he is merely fulfilling a sense of duty. He truly thinks that he is doing Elizabeth a favor. The proposal is completely self-serving, with no genuine emotions attached to his declaration.

Even when Elizabeth refuses him three times, Mr. Collins continues to think too highly of himself to accept the sincerity of the rejection. *“It is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour”* he states pompously, going on to add that *“sometimes the refusal is repeated a second or even a third time. I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said.”* Elizabeth is somewhat amused by his proposal, but also extremely exasperated by his persistence and neglect to accept her refusal.

After rejecting Mr. Collins, Elizabeth is later, however, to be extremely surprised by the sincere proposal from Mr. Darcy. Darcy is a man of intelligence and honesty, though his excess of pride causes him to look down on his social inferiors. His motives for proposing to Elizabeth lack the calculating and self-serving motives that characterized Mr. Collin’s proposal, yet he too is very insulting. Darcy actually goes into a detailed explanation of how his feelings for Elizabeth have gone extensively against his own better judgment and his family’s wishes and expectations. While he is eloquent in expressing his love, he also conveys *“his sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit.”* Darcy declares that the marriage would not be favorable to him, but admits how passionately he loves her. His apprehension and the anxiety of his love for Elizabeth contrast the stiff and unemotional way that Collins presents himself before her. *”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”.* The reader can easily observe that Darcy’s proposal is entirely unrehearsed, unlike that of Mr. Collin’s. His heart is entirely involved in his affirmation.

Elizabeth responds to Mr. Darcy’s proposal without the slight amusement that she had felt by listening to Collin’s proposal. Instead, she is shocked, appalled, and offended. As she listens to him, her astonishment is pronounced and she is speechless.Darcy’s degradation towards her and her family injures her pride deeply. He rudely states that her entire family, besides she and Jane, present themselves improperly before the public eye. He criticizes both Mr. and Mrs. Bennet’s parenting tactics and expresses his deepest concerns of the younger siblings’ immature behavior in society. The prejudice that Elizabeth has had against Darcy only grows after he insults her family. Everything adds up in angry resentment towards Mr. Darcy, and in the end, Elizabeth adamantly refuses his hand, telling him *“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 bestowed it most unwillingly”.* Unlike Mr. Collins, Darcy understands her reaction and accepts her refusal immediately. However, he is most shocked that she would so readily and bitterly decline his offer.

Even though both Collins and Darcy assume that Elizabeth would benefit from the marriage and both are originally convinced that she will accept, they both proceed very differently after being rejected. Mr. Collins almost immediately proposes to Elizabeth’s best friend, Charlotte, making it quite clear that to him it does not matter so much whom he marries. This is further proof that he had no love for Elizabeth. Mr. Darcy, however, feels the need to defend himself, and writes a letter concerning the accusations which Elizabeth has made against him. He obviously yearns for her good opinion, revealing his genuine affection for Elizabeth. Very differently from Mr. Collins, Mr. Darcy is unable to move on. His heart belongs to Elizabeth.