

Review #33 : *Pride and Prejudice* (1995)

Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle



Jane Austen's classic novel *Pride and Prejudice* is a gem that is hiding in plain sight, and it requires multiple readings to get the full scope of the story and the characters' inner turmoil. In just over 300 pages, it imbues its characters with more depth than most book series ever hope to do. It is captivating in its plot and perfectly paced so that it lets the characters and the story unfold in just the right ways so the reader is genuinely surprised by every plot twist. **And I'm going to talk about how a 5 hour long 1995 BBC miniseries flawlessly captured everything that makes *Pride and Prejudice* the best romantic novel ever written.**

I'm a romantic sort of girl. I believe in love in the traditional sense, where a man and a woman are chaste during their courtship and then if they decide they are right for each other they get married and live happily ever after. It turned out that *Pride and Prejudice* was right up my alley. The English culture of the time was so refined and honourable that even a hint of impropriety was scandalous.

There have been numerous attempts to translate the book into a film – including the 2005 version starring Keira Knightley. But none of them managed to be as effortlessly charming as the book. If anyone could get it right, I thought, surely the British could.



REVIEW

The film stars Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth as Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. And yet, I don't see any actors in this movie. They all embody their characters so precisely that I just feel like I am watching the book come alive. Jane, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Collins, George Wickham, and everyone else are perfectly portrayed...

This movie has the luxury of taking its time and it does so in the best possible way. It doesn't feel the need to jump from plot point to plot point. Instead, things happen naturally and it feels like we're witnessing a piece of history rather than a deliberately told story.

It cleverly embeds some of the most famous lines into the characters' dialogue such as *It is a fact universally acknowledged that a man in possession of a fortune must be in want of a wife*. But its faithfulness to the source material never devolves into fan service. Everything that happens feels as fresh and engaging. I love that it doesn't feel the need to verbalize every memorable line from the book. For example : *What are men to rocks and mountains ?* is replaced by Elizabeth looking at a gorgeous view of the mountains and simply saying : *Beautiful*. And *Angry people are not always wise* is summed up in the look on Ms. Bingley's face after she induces Mr. Darcy to declare how beautiful he thinks Elizabeth is.

The musical score is fantastic as well. The theme music of Mr. Collins, Charles Bingley, Lady de Bourgh, and others reflects their personalities and is an instantly recognizable clue about who we're about to encounter when a mysterious carriage arrives or some other intriguing event takes place. All of the music in the film has a unique feel to it that works well in relation to the mood of the story and characters. I especially love the song that is played during Elizabeth's and Mr. Darcy's one and only dance. It's both cordial and confrontational. I couldn't have thought of a better song to complement what is happening in that scene.

By far the best thing about this film is Colin Firth's interpretation of Mr. Darcy. His cold, calculating demeanour during the first half is a little jarring at first. But as you get to know his true personality and discover all the internal conflicts going on inside his mind, you realize how serious his struggle has been. Suddenly his hardened expression is revealed as a mask, and the performance is shown to be nuanced and extremely deep.



I love all the looks he gives Elizabeth. At first, Elizabeth believes he is looking for flaws in her. But at the end of the 3rd Part, he reveals that he has been fighting his feelings, and he is unable to control his love for her. She is shocked by this revelation, and so is the audience. We've heard over and over that he must think Elizabeth is repulsive. Plus, he intervened to break off Elizabeth's older sister's relationship with his friend and ruined the life of one of Elizabeth's soldier friends. All of these things are true to some degree, but there's a lot of the story that Elizabeth doesn't know about Mr. Darcy that has yet to be revealed...

Once she rejects him, he could have easily reacted by writing her off as a lost cause and going back to his small-minded, egocentric ways. But instead, the next time we see him he is dramatically different. His whole countenance has changed for the better. He is kind and earnest in his efforts to put others at ease. He smiles warmly when he sees Elizabeth helping his sister. And he is so much more pleasant to be around. Elizabeth can't believe that all of this could be because of her. But it is.

In the end Mr. Darcy even pays Wickham's debts and bribes him to marry Elizabeth's youngest sister after Wickham absconded with her under the false pretense of eloping. If Mr. Darcy had taken revenge on Wickham, he would have shown that he had learned nothing from his experiences with Elizabeth. But the fact that he does everything he can to improve his station in life at the end, is a testament to how much he loves Elizabeth. At that point, he has almost no hope of marrying her because he thinks she still hates him. But he makes it possible for her to have a chance of marrying well by restoring honour to her family name anyway. He is not motivated by pride alone anymore. And he is willing to have a brother-in-law he despises if it means marrying the woman he loves. Now *that* is true love +++