

famous lines from pride and prejudice

The Enduring Charm of Famous Lines from Pride and Prejudice

Famous lines from Pride and Prejudice continue to resonate with readers and viewers centuries after Jane Austen's masterpiece was first published. These perfectly crafted sentences, brimming with wit, social commentary, and profound observations on human nature, have cemented their place in literary history. This article delves into the most iconic and memorable phrases from the novel, exploring their context, significance, and the timeless wisdom they impart. We will examine how these quotable moments illuminate character, drive the plot, and offer enduring insights into love, marriage, and societal expectations. Prepare to revisit the sharp dialogues and insightful reflections that make Pride and Prejudice an unparalleled literary treasure.

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The Opening Gambit: "It is a truth universally acknowledged..."

The novel opens with perhaps the most famous line in English literature, setting the stage for the societal preoccupations that will dominate the narrative. "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." This opening statement, delivered with Austen's characteristic irony, immediately establishes the social and economic landscape of Regency England. It

highlights the paramount importance placed on advantageous marriages, particularly for women of modest means.

This sentence is not merely an observation; it is a satirical jab at the prevailing attitudes of the time. The word "truth" is employed sarcastically, as the reality is far more nuanced and often driven by financial desperation rather than genuine universal agreement. The subsequent clauses, revealing the true motives behind this "truth," showcase Austen's masterful ability to convey complex social critique through deceptively simple prose. The enduring power of this line lies in its ability to encapsulate the central conflict of the novel: the intersection of personal desires, societal pressures, and the pursuit of happiness in a world where financial security often dictates social standing.

Elizabeth Bennet's Wit and Wisdom

Elizabeth Bennet is a character defined by her sharp intellect, independent spirit, and her ability to articulate her thoughts with striking clarity and wit. Many of the most beloved and often-quoted lines in *Pride and Prejudice* originate from her dialogues. Her early, spirited interactions with Mr. Darcy are particularly rich in memorable exchanges, showcasing her initial prejudice and his perceived arrogance.

One of Elizabeth's most pivotal lines comes during her heated exchange with Darcy at Hunsford, where she confronts him with her accusations. Her declaration, "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 conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to excite me, and I have to own the justice of this. [...] Had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner... you would have been considered by me as entitled to high consideration," perfectly encapsulates her strong feelings and her justification for her initial dislike. This quote not only highlights her forthrightness but also reveals the deep-seated impressions that Darcy's behaviour had made upon her.

Another iconic exchange involves Elizabeth's response to Darcy's first, ill-fated proposal. Her refusal is a tour de force of justified indignation. She states, "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." This is, of course, Darcy speaking, but Elizabeth's subsequent rejection is equally powerful, revealing her hurt and anger over his perceived mistreatment of Wickham and her sister Jane. Her words, "I am only wishing to be better understood," and her pointed accusations about his character, reveal the depth of her judgment and her unwavering commitment to her principles.

Even her more reflective lines showcase her intelligence. Her contemplation

on the nature of first impressions and the danger of pride is often distilled into sentiments like: "It is not the wilful pride of a woman that makes her refuse to dance, but the fear of his being too proud to ask her," or her admission that her own "pride was hurt." These phrases demonstrate her self-awareness and her ability to dissect her own motivations, a quality that makes her so relatable and enduring.

Mr. Darcy's Evolving Sentiments

Mr. Darcy, initially presented as aloof and proud, undergoes a significant transformation throughout the novel, and his famous lines often mark the turning points in his emotional journey. His pronouncements evolve from displays of class consciousness to heartfelt declarations of love and respect.

Darcy's initial assessment of Elizabeth, famously stated in his initial conversations with Bingley, "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me," is a testament to his superficial judgment and class-bound perspective. This line is so impactful because it sets up the central tension of their relationship and the dramatic irony that he will, in fact, fall deeply in love with her. It showcases the very pride that Elizabeth perceives in him.

His first proposal to Elizabeth is a prime example of his internal conflict between societal expectations and his burgeoning affections. He declares, "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." This speech, while passionate, is still laced with his inherent pride, as he highlights the "degradation" of his connection to her family. The very fact that he acknowledges his struggle and eventual surrender to love makes this a significant moment, even if it is delivered with his characteristic lack of social grace.

Later in the novel, after Elizabeth has understood his true character and his noble actions, Darcy's words take on a different tone. His letter to Elizabeth, explaining his actions regarding Wickham and Jane, is a crucial piece of evidence that begins to dismantle her prejudice. While not a single famous line, the detailed explanation itself serves as a turning point. By the end, his admission of his past faults and his changed perspective are evident in his humble interactions and his renewed pursuit of Elizabeth. His final, sincere declaration of love signifies the complete triumph of genuine affection over societal barriers and personal pride.

The Supporting Cast: Memorable Quotes from Others

While Elizabeth and Darcy dominate the narrative, the supporting characters in *Pride and Prejudice* also contribute significantly to its enduring appeal through their own memorable lines. These quotes often serve to highlight the follies and eccentricities of the society in which they live.

Mr. Bennet, Elizabeth's father, is a master of dry wit and sarcastic commentary. His advice to Elizabeth when she is considering Darcy's proposal, "My dear, Elizabeth, when you are looking for a husband, you must not be too fastidious," is delivered with his typical ironic detachment. More famously, his pronouncements on marriage and society, such as his observation that "For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?" reveal his resigned cynicism about the world around him.

Mrs. Bennet, with her singular focus on marrying off her daughters, provides endless moments of comedic relief. Her constant exclamations, such as her hysterical outbursts regarding Lydia's elopement, "Oh! my dear, dear Mr. Bennet, how can you treat me so disrespectfully!" highlight her flightiness and her limited understanding of the gravity of situations. Her relentless pursuit of advantageous marriages for her daughters often leads to unintentionally humorous pronouncements, reflecting the societal obsession with matrimony.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh, the epitome of aristocratic arrogance, delivers some of the novel's most comically imperious lines. Her confrontation with Elizabeth is a classic example. Her demand, "What is your opinion of him?" (referring to Darcy) and her subsequent outrage at Elizabeth's independent responses, such as "I am resolved that I will be properly obeyed," showcase her overbearing nature and her shock at anyone daring to defy her will. Her pronouncements are a direct contrast to Elizabeth's more reasoned and spirited dialogue.

Mr. Collins, with his obsequious flattery and pompous pronouncements, is another source of unforgettable quotes. His declaration, "I am not a romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's large family, I feel that it is the greatest happiness imaginable, when I find a wife who will be perfectly amiable, and perfectly indifferent to me," perfectly encapsulates his shallow understanding of love and marriage. His pronouncements about his patroness, Lady Catherine, and his elaborate proposals further cement his character as a figure of ridicule.

Themes Embodied in Iconic Phrases

The famous lines from *Pride and Prejudice* are not merely witty remarks; they are vehicles for exploring the novel's central themes. These include the nature of pride, the perils of prejudice, the importance of understanding, the societal pressures surrounding marriage, and the journey towards true affection.

The theme of pride is evident in Darcy's initial demeanor and Elizabeth's fierce independence. Darcy's pronouncement, "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me," is a clear manifestation of his pride in his social standing and his initial judgment. Conversely, Elizabeth's pride in her own judgment and her quickness to take offense contribute to her prejudice. Her later realization that "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a handsome man must be in want of a wife" is a satirical take on the social machinations driven by wealth and status, but her personal journey involves shedding her own pride in her initial assessments.

Prejudice, as the title suggests, is a dominant theme. Elizabeth's immediate dislike of Darcy, fueled by Wickham's lies and Darcy's own off-putting manners, exemplifies this. Her declaration, "I shall not pretend to be surprised by your avowal, or to be sorry for my own," in response to Darcy's first proposal, shows how deeply ingrained her prejudice has become. Darcy, too, must overcome his prejudice against Elizabeth's social standing and her family.

The journey towards understanding is central to the development of Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship. Their famous lines, particularly those exchanged during their heated arguments and later during Darcy's explanatory letter and subsequent conversations, illustrate the gradual dismantling of misconceptions. Elizabeth's admission that she had "failed to see his character" and her recognition that her own "pride was hurt" mark significant steps towards a deeper understanding of both Darcy and herself.

The societal pressures surrounding marriage are consistently highlighted through various characters and their dialogue. Mrs. Bennet's incessant anxieties about her daughters' marital prospects, Mr. Collins's pragmatic and self-serving proposal, and the general discussions about fortunes and settlements all underscore the transactional nature of marriage in Regency society. These societal forces are often the backdrop against which the more personal journeys of love and mutual respect unfold.

The Legacy of *Pride and Prejudice*'s Famous Lines

The enduring popularity of *Pride and Prejudice* is, in no small part, due to the brilliance of its dialogue and the memorable nature of its famous lines. These quotations have transcended the pages of the novel, becoming ingrained in popular culture and frequently referenced in literature, film, and everyday conversation.

The witty repartee between Elizabeth and Darcy continues to be studied and admired for its insight into character development and romantic tension. The iconic opening line, in particular, has become a cultural touchstone, instantly recognizable even to those who have never read the book. It serves as a concise introduction to the novel's thematic concerns and Austen's sharp satirical voice.

Furthermore, the characters' voices are so distinct and their pronouncements so sharp that they remain vivid and alive in the reader's imagination. The universal themes of love, class, and personal growth, articulated through these memorable phrases, ensure that *Pride and Prejudice* continues to captivate new generations of readers. The ability of these lines to provoke thought, elicit laughter, and inspire reflection is a testament to Jane Austen's unparalleled skill as a writer and her profound understanding of human nature.

FAQ

Q: What is the most famous opening line of *Pride and Prejudice*?

A: The most famous opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* is: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

Q: Which character speaks the line "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me"?

A: Mr. Darcy speaks the line "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me" about Elizabeth Bennet in an early conversation with Mr. Bingley.

Q: What does Elizabeth Bennet say when refusing Mr. Darcy's first proposal?

A: When refusing Mr. Darcy's first proposal, Elizabeth Bennet states, "In such cases as this, when the interference of friends has been, unfortunately, so unsuccessful, I should not be surprised if the gentleman himself were to be less earnest in his suit than he might otherwise have been." She also lists her reasons for rejecting him, including his perceived arrogance, his

role in separating Jane and Bingley, and his mistreatment of Wickham.

Q: What is Mr. Bennet's most iconic witty remark?

A: One of Mr. Bennet's most iconic witty remarks is: "For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?"

Q: How do famous lines from Pride and Prejudice reflect the theme of pride?

A: Famous lines reflect the theme of pride by showcasing the arrogance of characters like Darcy in his initial dismissal of Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's pride in her own judgment and quickness to take offense. The journey of the characters involves overcoming their personal pride.

Q: Are there famous lines from Pride and Prejudice that highlight the importance of understanding?

A: Yes, many lines emphasize the journey towards understanding. Elizabeth's eventual realization that she had "failed to see his character" and her admission that her own "pride was hurt" are key moments of self-understanding and understanding of Darcy.

Q: What famous line illustrates the societal pressure regarding marriage in Pride and Prejudice?

A: The opening line, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife," immediately establishes the societal pressure and financial considerations that heavily influence marriage decisions.

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