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Our first impression of *Pride & Prejudice* is the title. Consequently, we, the readers, are biased by these words. They provide us with a potentially superficial reading, in which we only see the characters in terms of pride or prejudice. Since all the characters show pride and prejudice, even the protagonists, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, this shallow reading is unavoidable. My paper will use the heuristic defined by the title to focus my paper as I search for what is beyond our first impressions. In other words, though the terms "pride" and "prejudice" may facilitate our initial, superficial reading of the novel, they can, if we think carefully about them, lead us to a deeper reading. We must first understand the process which leads to Elizabeth's improper pride and prejudices in order to understand our own.

First, I will address how Elizabeth reinforces her prejudices by generalizing from particular characters in her argument with Jane about Charlotte's marriage. Next, I move onto a discussion about laughter and how it is affected by the knowledge of one's self and others' characters. A broadening of the initial terms, pride and prejudice, follows in order that we might be able to examine individual characters more properly. These more precise terms will be necessary in judging the characters of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham. Also, I will explain how Elizabeth's self-knowledge develops with her knowledge of their characters and then comes to understand and love Darcy. Finally, I will discuss how

the reconciliation of Elizabeth and Darcy unites others and reveals the truth of each of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Let me begin by noting possible biases of the terms, "pride" and "prejudice," which a democratic reader may possess. These words evoke images of class distinction or inequality, such as whites in the American South or the nobility of Austen's England. We may be inclined, like Elizabeth, to judge that Mr. Darcy is proud because he is a member of a higher social class, but that prejudice is a misreading of Mr. Darcy's character by Elizabeth. She relies too quickly on general certainties such as those given by society (i.e. class, money, morality, etc.).

The Inconsistency of All Human Characters

This process of relying on generalizations given by society creates what Elizabeth calls the "inconsistencies of all human characters" (Austen chap. XXIV, p. 128). When Jane and Elizabeth discuss Charlotte's decision to marry Mr. Collins, both appeal to social considerations. Jane asks Elizabeth to "consider Mr. Collins' respectability," which is social affectation to appease his benefactor, Lady Catherine, and "Charlotte's prudent, steady character," but this prudence concerns "family" and "fortune," which are socially determined (chap. XXIV, p. 128). Elizabeth refuses to see the selfish concern for money as 'prudent' since "you shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity" (chap. XXIV, p. 128). In this case, Elizabeth is more concerned about preserving the meaning of a word than accepting her friend's decision to marry.

By themselves, neither of their accounts allow for any real inconsistency. For example, what Jane calls, "prudence," Elizabeth calls "selfishness" (chap. XXIV, p. 128). In other words, "Charlotte's marriage… is unaccountable" because "in every [single] view it is unaccountable!" (chap. XXIV, p. 128) Jane's and Elizabeth's independent and one-sided views lead to their generalizing tendencies, which overlook a world in which moral absolutes and practical choices exist together in inevitable conflict. Instead, they defer to moral certainties, which are readily available for the judgment of character. Therefore, each proceeds from a single-minded system of judgment, which is independently inadequate in search for the truth about someone's character.

Elizabeth states that she now knows of "two instances," which confirm her "belief of the inconsistency of all human character, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of either merit or sense" (chap. XXIV, p. 128). The two instances are Charlotte's marriage to Mr. Collins and Bingley's abandonment of Jane, but Elizabeth does not specifically mention the one that truly pains her sister. Of course, Bingley's abandonment concerns Jane, and thus Jane first refers to him as "*that person*" to distance herself by this abstraction (chap. XXIV, p. 129). Then Jane generalizes that "women fancy admiration" (chap. XXIV, p. 129). Elizabeth snidely remarks that "men take care that they should" and completes the generalization of all human—female and male—characters (chap. XXIV, p. 129). However, Elizabeth rightly observes that "Mr. Bingley's … thoughtlessness, want of attention to other people's feelings, and want of resolution" have done wrong or made others unhappy (chap. XXIV, p. 129). She understands Mr. Bingley's conduct better than Jane because she is also a better judge of his sisters' characters and their influence on him.

Elizabeth rebukes Jane's false "position" that Bingley's sisters "can only wish his happiness, and if he is attached to [Jane], no other women can secure it" (chap. XXIV, p. 129). She instead asserts a more inclusive proposition, which comes slightly closer to what appears to be their characters. Elizabeth adds, "[t]hey may wish many things besides his happiness; they may wish his increase of wealth and consequence; they may wish him to marry a girl who has all the importance of money, great connections, and pride" (chap. XXIV, p. 130). Here, Elizabeth emphasizes 'pride' and thus her prejudice against it in all its forms. Elizabeth's account seems closer to the case, given the nature demonstrated by their characters, since Bingley's sisters would find their own social position enhanced by his marriage to someone who was wealthy and well-connected.

Upon Elizabeth's first meeting of the Bingley women, the narrator relates that her "judgment" of the sisters is "too unassailed by any attention to herself" (chap. IV, p. 12; c.f. "I never till this moment knew myself" foreshadowed). Unlike Jane, who sees an optimistic world of "universal good will," Elizabeth cynically sees more and more disappointment (chap. XXIV, p. 128). Both of them are well-intentioned and neither is 'thoughtless,' yet each has an opposing worldview. Jane projects her good will onto the world, and Elizabeth fails to read her good judgment elsewhere in it (or in Mr. Darcy).

In another way, Jane sees only actions "designedly done" as having moral weight; whereas, Elizabeth believes that "without scheming to do wrong, or to make others unhappy, there may be error, and there may be misery" (chap. XXIV, p. 129). In other words, Jane can forgive all done as long as it is well-intentioned, but Elizabeth sees error (including in judgment) as unforgivable. The inconsistency of human characters causes Elizabeth pain since she expects everyone to live up to moral standards regardless of

one's intention. Furthermore, she does not excuse Bingley's "thoughtlessness, want of attention to other people's feelings, and want of resolution" when he does not meet her moral standard of independence as a result of the influence exerted on him by his sisters or Mr. Darcy (chap. XXIV, p. 129).

To expect this level of independence from everyone inevitably causes disappointment and prejudices against good characters, like Mr. Bingley. Such is the case for Mr. Bennet, who fails to prevent Lydia's elopement with Mr. Wickham and to provide an adequate dowry for all his daughters, but I will address this later. Furthermore, Jane, knowing only her good will, cannot understand the bad will of Bingley's sisters; she is prejudiced in a different way. Although Elizabeth's understanding of the world may be more accurate, she does not yet know herself.

Elizabeth's cynical evaluation of the Bingleys stems from a general knowledge of selfishness and hypocrisy, which are her reasons for the inconsistency of all human characters. However, Elizabeth finds an exception to this general rule with Jane: "Affectation of candour is common enough;--one meets with it everywhere. But to be candid without ostentation or design—to take the good of everybody's character and make it still better and say nothing of the bad—belongs to you alone" (chap. IV, p. 12). While Jane protests that by reading the Bingleys cynically, "you make everybody acting unnaturally and wrong," Elizabeth sees nothing unnatural in selfishness or weakness (chap. XXIV, p. 130). Elizabeth's disappointment in Bingley comes from one of her valued moral standards: her belief in independence. Just as she rejects Colonel Fitzwilliam's generalizing contention that "a younger son… must be enured to self-denial and dependence," she cannot "for a moment suppose that [Caroline Bingley's] wishes,

however openly or artfully spoken, could influence a young man so totally independent of every one" (chap. XXXIII, p. 173; chap. XXI, p. 115).

The Colonel and Elizabeth are both wrong in particular cases. Like Mrs. Bennet, the Colonel would undoubtedly lose his argument with the young Lucas, who would "keep a pack of foxhounds, and drink a bottle of wine every day" (chap. V, p. 17; c.f. IX: silence as a triumph). On the other hand, Elizabeth (like her father) is mistaken when she expects independence from everyone; some persons, especially Lydia and Georgiana, require more guidance. In fact, Mrs. Bennet, a mother of not much 'sense,' corrects her husband, who thinks his "two youngest daughters uncommonly foolish," that he "must not expect such girls to have the sense of their father and mother" (chap. VII, p. 26). However, the narrator relates that "Lydia was a stout, well-grown girl of fifteen, with a fine complexion and good-humoured countenance; a favorite with her mother, whose affection had brought her into public at an early age" (chap. IX, p. 41). In other words, Lydia's foolishness can be seen at every public event, and the irresponsibility of her parents is also exposed.

This case highlights Jane Austen's two-sided use of the various exposés; each character that is exposed also justifies or nullifies the discernment of that exposed individual's character by another individual. Furthermore, we learn that Mrs. Bennet's affection and Mr. Bennet's decision to let Lydia go to Brighton is not justified. On the other hand, Elizabeth's concern for Lydia and her family is justified. We come to agree with Elizabeth that Lydia will become "a flirt in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation... –Vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrolled" and disagree with Mr. Bennet that "she is luckily too poor to be an object of prey to anybody" and "will be of

less importance, even as a common flirt, than she has been here" (chap. XLI, p. 218). Elizabeth does, however, have privileged knowledge from Mr. Darcy's letter.

Before reading the letter from Darcy, Elizabeth has not yet realized the difficulty of knowing one's self (and others) enough to claim independence. Before her self-revelation, Elizabeth believes that wealthy men ought to be beyond influence and is certain that even poor women, like Charlotte and herself, can claim independence. Because Elizabeth's premature reading of the world includes behavior inconsistent with "truth[s] universally acknowledged," we seem to think it less rigid than Jane's predictable world of naturalness and rightness, on which depends Jane's happiness (chap. I, p. 1). However, in its seeming inclusiveness, Elizabeth's perspective cannot forgive 'the inconsistency of all human characters' because it is seen as erroneous. Inconsistent behavior in Elizabeth's logical world must then be explained by "[t]houghtlessness, want of attention to other people's feelings, and want of resolution" so that it is no longer perplexing (chap. XXIV, p. 129).

At the end of the novel, Elizabeth retains a logical worldview, even after her self-discovery. When Jane reminds her of her former dislike of Darcy she responds, "*[t]hat* is all to be forgot" (chap. LIX, p. 353). The lightness of her tone does not disguise her desire to find harmony between her past and present self. Elizabeth then tries seriously to convince Jane of the 'truth' of her love for Mr. Darcy, but Jane enthusiastically says, "forgive the question—are you quite certain that you can be happy with him?" (chap. LIX, p. 353). Here, Jane tells Elizabeth to 'forgive the question' because Jane knows that her own happiness depends on certainty or naturalness and rightness, which is why

Elizabeth's past 'dislike' of Mr. Darcy must be 'forgot.'[1] However, Elizabeth's previous lack of self-knowledge is not so easily forgotten: "Till this moment I never knew myself" (chap. XXXVI, p. 196). Thus, Jane complements Elizabeth's understanding by juxtaposing her previous certainty of Darcy's improper pride with her current certainty of his "noble and just" character (chap. LX, p. 360). In other words, Jane's and Elizabeth's worldviews evolve with each other's knowledge and understanding through their mutual respect.

I find it necessary to acknowledge and discuss the difference of character between Jane and Elizabeth because it is in this difference that Elizabeth can 'forgive' Jane's question. Elizabeth writes of their difference in character to her maternal aunt, Mrs. Gardiner, "I am happier even than Jane; she only smiles, I laugh" (chap. LX, p. 362). In fact, Elizabeth will never forget her feelings for Mr. Darcy because she can laugh at her past self. In other words, she may retain her knowledge of those events and move onto new uncharted grounds, such as those found in the woods of Pemberley.

Learning to Laugh

The two characters whom I initially found most appealing were the lovers of the absurd—Mr. Bennet and Elizabeth, and they love the absurd because they can laugh at it. They do not conceal absurdities, but acknowledge them. Mr. Collins, the most absurd character that artlessly and foolishly follows convention, provides them with the most laughs. Their laughter is profound because it provides insight into the meaning of the rules and rituals of society. These rules and rituals require true feeling for true meaning,

[1] Jane provides her own conditions for happiness in the negative when she says to Elizabeth that "you make everybody acting unnaturally and wrong, and me most unhappy" (chap. XXIV, p. 130).

and Mr. Collins lacks such feeling. He does not ask Elizabeth to dance out of affection for her, but out of the vanity for a wife; he desires a trophy wife for others, especially Lady Catherine, to appreciate. He actually prefers the more superficially beautiful Jane, but does not want the challenge of Mr. Bingley: "I take this opportunity of soliciting yours, Miss Elizabeth, for the first two dances especially,—a preference which I trust my cousin Jane will attribute to the right cause, and not to any disrespect for her" (chap. XVII, p. 83). On the other hand, Darcy "might" have asked Elizabeth to dance if he "had felt less" for her, which he reveals after their reconciliation (chap. LX, p. 360).

By the end of the novel, after Elizabeth acknowledges herself as Mr. Darcy's beloved, an epistemological divide has developed between Mr. Bennet and his favorite daughter. He finds the strangeness of Lady Catherine's denouncement of Mr. Darcy's anticipated proposal as laughable because he thinks Elizabeth and Darcy dislike each other. On the other hand, she cannot laugh because she is shocked to find Darcy still interested.

This scenario is similar to the revelation of Charlotte's acceptance of Mr. Collins' proposal. Once again, Elizabeth and Mr. Bennet have different responses. In the earlier case, Mr. Bennet is "gratified… to discover that Charlotte Lucas, whom he had used to think tolerably sensible, was as foolish as his wife, and more foolish than his daughter!" (chap. XXIII, p. 122) Perhaps, he has become cynical from his poor marriage with Mrs. Bennet, but his callous cynicism culminates later when he tells Elizabeth, "[f]or what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbors, and laugh at them in our turn?" (chap. LVII, p. 344)

By this time in the novel, Mr. Bennet's character stands fully exposed before us, and only does Mr. Darcy's character remain concealed, silent, and mysterious. Even Elizabeth finds it "so strange," when his intention to propose again is revealed (chap. LVII, p. 344). Each time Darcy speaks or makes known his intentions or emotions, Elizabeth learns something about him and herself. As the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* is driven by revelations and exposés, so is Elizabeth's self-discovery. In other words, Elizabeth is exposed to previously unknown aspects of her character. By the end of the novel, Elizabeth has come to know herself in relation to Darcy, but Darcy's mysterious and noble character has "yet to learn to be laughed at" (chap. LVIII, p. 351). Mr. Darcy's inability to be laughed at may make him seem improperly proud, but we must remember "he has a *right* to be proud" (chap. V, p. 16).

Proper Pride & Justified Judgment

At this point, I find it appropriate to make the distinction between proper pride and improper pride. When Elizabeth clearly sees Darcy's character, she remarks that "he has no improper pride," implicitly maintaining that he does have a proper type of pride (chap. LIX, p. 356). Her worldview now includes a distinction that incorporates her past prejudice of Darcy's pride with her new, unbiased knowledge of his truly noble character. We now also have before us another distinction, one between prejudice and justified judgment.

On the one hand, a pre-judice is a judgment made before one is knowledgeable of the particulars; rather, it comes from a generalization. In Elizabeth's case, she assumed Darcy's pride came from him belonging to the English aristocracy and not from any

particular deeds of his. As a related example, Lady Catherine may be called improperly proud because she has done nothing truly noble. On the other hand, a judgment of a character becomes justified by the eventual and complementary knowledge of that individual's character. For example, a character may be justifiably called noble if he is known to act nobly. However, if others are concealed from the knowledge of his noble actions, then a justified judgment cannot properly be made. This situation comes to pass in judging Darcy's character as he does not initially reveal his own noble actions regarding Mr. Wickham. In the opposite case, when a fact conflicts with one's preconceived judgment, the situation is laughable, and one's judgment is questioned.

Elizabeth's character differs from Darcy's because she can find profound humor in her past, absurd hatred of him. Her father might share this laugh if Mr. Bennet knew and felt what she did. On the other hand, Darcy only finds regret in his past actions such as his concealment of Jane's time in London and that of Wickham's elopement with Georgiana, but he nobly takes responsibility for them after his re-judgment of Jane's affection for Bingley and his own acknowledged, "mistaken pride" in concealing his "private actions" and "Wickham's worthlessness" (chap. LII, p. 302). Darcy's profound emotion makes him reserved and makes it difficult for him to act openly. The great weight Darcy's feeling for Elizabeth puts on him is acknowledged by the end of the novel: "A man who had felt less, might" have talked to Elizabeth more openly (chap. LX, p. 360). Mr. Wickham jumps to mind as such a man who 'felt less.'

It is through Elizabeth that Darcy has learned how to criticize himself after her rejection of his first and not-so-gentlemanly proposal. By being able to be self-critical, Darcy is a step closer to laughing at himself, and by being Elizabeth's husband he will

surely learn to laugh at himself. Darcy acknowledges the quality that he admires most in Elizabeth as "liveliness," which is precisely what will soften him enough to find his character laughable (chap. LX, p. 359). Mrs. Gardiner in a letter to Elizabeth points out that Mr. Darcy "wants nothing but a little more liveliness, and *that*, if he marry *prudently*, his wife may teach him" (chap. LII, p. 306). In fact, the narrator also agrees on this point and adds what Darcy will bring to the marriage: "[B]y her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved; and from his judgement, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance" (chap. L, p. 293). These comments suggest Mr. Darcy's justified judgment and knowledge of Mr. Wickham's character, which when revealed to Elizabeth will make necessary a revision in her worldview including her knowledge and judgment of herself.

Mr. Darcy & Mr. Wickham

Elizabeth's self-knowledge develops with her knowledge of the competing narratives of Darcy and Wickham. *Pride and Prejudice* explicitly relates the exclusivity of each of their stories. Jane's world of naturalness and rightness is also incompatible with George Wickham's wickedness, and thus "most earnestly did she labour to prove the probability of error, and seek to clear the one without involving the other" (chap. XL, p. 211). Also, Jane retains the language of logic, such as 'probability' and 'error.' Elizabeth responds to Jane's lame reconciliation with a deferral to choice: "You never will be able to make them both good for anything. Take your choice, but you must be satisfied with only one" (chap. XL, p. 211). The choice seems free and only dependent on one's impression of each of their characters. However, once their characters are exposed, the choice is decidedly in favor of Darcy, whose account forces concessions in

Wickham's account. Perhaps, clues for an accurate judgment in this case are in what constitutes good taste.

Good taste is like that demonstrated by Darcy at Pemberley and contrasted with the superficial and gaudy taste of Lady Catherine and Collins at Rosings Park. Mr. Collins reveals his poor taste "by his enumeration of the windows in the front of [Lady Catherine's] house, and his relation of what the glazing altogether had originally cost Sir Lewis de Bough" (chap. XXIX, p. 152). He also exposes Lady Catherine's vanity when he states that "the chimney-piece alone had cost eight hundred pounds" and she feels "all the force of the compliment" (chap. XVI, p. 70). Both Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine's appreciation of the cost of things reveals their vanity and bad taste in social concerns. Where they stand in the case of Darcy v. Wickham may be misleading since they appreciate the "mere stateliness of money and rank" (chap. XXIX, p. 153).

In the beginning of the novel, both sides for Mr. Wickham and Mr. Darcy are equally prejudiced, and Jane correctly says "one does not know what to think;" although, she can think "with certainty" only out of concern for her favored, Mr. Bingley, who "would have much to suffer when the affair became public" (chap. XVII, p. 81). Furthermore, Elizabeth may be wrong about Mr. Wickham but not without reason since Mr. Darcy is colored in a prejudiced and "disgraceful light" (chap. XVII, p. 81). Mr. Wickham provides "names, fact, everything mentioned without ceremony," which Elizabeth believes since "there was truth in his looks" (chap. XVII, p. 81). In other words, Wickham "had given a very rational account," which confirms Elizabeth's improper pride in her logic and discernment by "mutual satisfaction," and for Elizabeth

as much as for Jane "it was not in her nature to question the veracity of a young man of such amiable appearance as Wickham" (chap. XVI, p. 79; chap. XVII, p. 80).

Elizabeth's superficial attraction to Wickham complements her profound dislike of Darcy's apparent indifference to her 'looks,' which he calls merely "tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*" (chap. III, p. 9). Elizabeth's dislike is profound because it also reveals Darcy's initial improper pride in his taste and prejudice against Elizabeth. However, Elizabeth's main error in judging both Wickham's and Darcy's characters comes from her lack of awareness, since she is guilty of the same credulity that she ascribes to Bingley: "Mr. Bingley's defense of his friend was a very able one, I dare say; but since he is unacquainted with several parts of the story, and has learnt the rest from that friend himself, I shall venture to still think of both gentlemen as I did before" (chap. XVIII, p. 91). In other words, Elizabeth's failure to read their characters is based upon her prejudices of them and her poor taste for the superficiality of Mr. Wickham's 'looks' and her own vanity.

Like Elizabeth, we are unable to properly read Darcy's character until we read his letter. However, before we actually read Darcy's Letter, Caroline Bingley has already provided us with various descriptions of his writing and 'stile.' Like Bingley's writing, we are only given superficial descriptions at first. Like us, Elizabeth is not yet ready to read their hands or their characters. Furthermore, neither is Caroline authentically capable of such a reading; she is corrected by Darcy: "You are mistaken. I write rather slowly" (chap. X, p. 43). When we finally read Darcy's Letter, we are not inadequately prepared to find that Wickham is a playboy and Darcy a true gentleman, but Elizabeth at first is not ready for Darcy's sincere and troubled affection for her. Admittedly, we have

been spared Elizabeth's prejudice because we have not been mortified by Darcy's pride, unlike Elizabeth, who states, "I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*" (chap. V, p. 17). Thus, we have the advantage to read through Wickham's superficial flattery and hope Elizabeth meets us in each of our judgments of the two men's characters.

More 'Pride' & 'Prejudice'

The novel forces us, through the process of reading, to confront our own pride and prejudices and also determine those of the characters portrayed. We see these forces at work halfway through the book when Elizabeth receives the letter from Mr. Darcy. This scene will help us understand how Austen understands reading, which may help us better read *Pride & Prejudice*. Before reading the letter for the first time, Elizabeth still sees Mr. Darcy in terms of pride and prejudice. In other words, she sees him through the lens of her prejudice, which makes her at this point see him as improperly proud. For example, even during her first reading, Elizabeth "with a strong prejudice against everything he might say" begins to read his account of events (chap. XXXVI, p. 192). Elizabeth still sees Darcy in relatively the same terms until Darcy comes to account for Mr. Wickham.

At the Collinses' house, Darcy condescends to Elizabeth in his first proposal, reinforcing her initial judgment of his pride. Even if Mr. Darcy had "behaved in a more gentleman-like manner," Elizabeth would have undoubtedly refused him since neither has overcome and acknowledged his/her improper pride or prejudices (chap. XXXIV, p. 182). When Elizabeth reads Darcy's account of Wickham, she can begin to properly

judge both of them. Darcy presents a new way to see Wickham, which is backed by "more than one witness of undoubted veracity" (chap. XXXV, p. 188). Darcy's proper pride allows him to stubbornly maintain his view of Wickham as wicked. This incidence of self-assured pride forces Elizabeth to re-judge Wickham's character. Darcy's justified pride overcomes Elizabeth's prejudice in favor of Wickham because it allows him to stubbornly cling to the truth he knows about Wickham's character. We shall later discuss explicitly how this form of pride, as opposed to vanity, can lead to the truth about someone's character.

On the other hand, Elizabeth's misjudgment of Wickham, which had enforced her prejudice against Darcy, forces her to reject Darcy's proud proposal. In turn, her prejudiced rejection humbles him into relating to her this new knowledge of Wickham; thus, Elizabeth's prejudice, of which she was so proud, humbles Darcy. Elizabeth admits to her misleading pride in her own judgment of Darcy after re-reading Darcy's letter, stating, "I… have prided myself on my discernment!" (chap. XXXVI, p. 196). Just like Elizabeth, the reader's judgment by this point has been altered. We see that Elizabeth's judgment, to which we had granted so much trust, is fallible, just like our own. Furthermore, we see that Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham were not how we first judged them to be. Our trust in our judgments is shaken by her misjudgments, which we, the readers, had come to trust. Now, we must question of what we are proud, maybe our judgment. Perhaps, what Austen is trying to teach us by Elizabeth's example, is how accurately to make judgments, or rather how they ever become justified if even the discerning Ms. Elizabeth Bennet is able to grossly misread characters and at first, Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy's letter.

The title of Austen's novel is a challenge to this problem of reading, or of judging and knowing certainly, since it misleads us into thinking of characters only in these terms. This problem of reading is especially difficult for modern readers, who are already far removed from the romanticized eighteenth century England. This is analogous to Elizabeth's detachment from the aristocracy of England, the class to which Mr. Darcy belongs. Reading is a problem, whether reading a contemporary novel, or reading people from an unfamiliar stratum of society. Lady Catherine, for example, belongs to this "proud" class, which further complicates the reading of Mr. Darcy, who is in fact nothing like Lady Catherine. How their forms of pride differ is especially important in what follows. What is sought is an aristocracy of character, not an aristocracy given by society.

Mr. Collins and Mr. Wickham have more in common with Lady Catherine than does her nephew, Mr. Darcy. What they share is vanity of character, as opposed to proper pride. The first impression of vanity appears to be the same as that of pride. "Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us," observes Mary, who piques "herself upon the solidity of her reflections" (chap. V, p. 17).

Now, let's apply Mary's observation to particular cases, granting that her assessment is not complete. Darcy's pride is the result of his good character. Essentially, his pride is self-respect. On the other hand, Mr. Collins' vanity is the result of his good fortune and subservience to Lady Catherine. Essentially, his vanity is self-conceit, that is, pride in something artificial. Similarly, Mr. Wickham is able to appear confident since

he is vain. He does not feel remorse for eloping with Lydia, although it is immoral, since he receives a gift of money, which will pay for his debts. Money is a great symbol of vanity since it has little value in itself, but extreme societal value, that is, value mainly as a result of others.

However, Mr. Wickham and Mr. Collins are not simply embodiments of vanity. After a second reading of their characters, they become more complex. Even vanity, it turns out, is not all that it appears to be. The fact that Mr. Wickham does not feel remorse for that of which he must be aware, and even after everyone realizes how despicable he is, seems to imply that he does not care for his appearance in society. This is not the case for Mr. Collins, who would never act like him. Mr. Wickham's actions—gambling, leaving debts unpaid, eloping with sixteen-year-old girls—are socially reprehensible. Mr. Collins makes both these points clear in his letter to Mr. Bennet: "I am truly rejoiced that my cousin Lydia's sad business is so well hushed up, and am only concerned that their living together before the marriage took place, should be so generally known" since he only cares about how he appears to others (chap. LVII, p. 343). However, since Mr. Collins acknowledges condescension, or his place in society, he cannot act like Mr. Wickham. On the other hand, Mr. Wickham can act as immorally as he wants since he does not care how he appears to society. That which makes Mr. Wickham universally abhorred are his repulsive actions. On the other hand, that which vindicates Mr. Darcy are his noble actions. Actions appear to be necessary for properly judging a character.

With our new judgments of these characters from our updated knowledge, we may briefly turn our attention back to Mary, whose observation might be mistaken as

insight. We know she prides herself on her knowledge and "extracts" made from "great books" (chap. II, p. 5). Furthermore, the narrator in the last chapter of the book relates Mary's insecurity "by comparisons between her sisters' beauty and her own" (chap. LXI, p. 365). Mary had attempted to conceal her relative ugliness by hiding from it in 'great books.' Her character has been exposed by our application of her shallow observation, in other words, by her lack of "deep reflection," which Mr. Bennet points out sarcastically in accordance with his character (chap. II, p. 5). Let us, now, return to our attempt to properly judging the characters of the protagonists.

Sketching Characters

Darcy's revealed actions help Elizabeth paint a proper picture of him. She could not accurately depict Darcy at the Netherfield ball. "I have always seen a great similarity in the turn of our minds.—We are each of an unsocial, taciturn disposition," says Elizabeth sarcastically (chap. XVIII, p. 86). Darcy recognizes the truth that her statement has "no very striking resemblance of [her] own character" (Vol. XVIII, p. 87). He further adds, "[h]ow near it may be to mine, I cannot pretend to say.—You think it a faithful portrait undoubtedly" (chap. XVIII, p. 87). Later in their conversation, Elizabeth reveals that by making an "illustration" of Darcy's character, she is in fact trying "to be secure of judging properly at first" lest she "be blinded by prejudice" (chap. XVIII, p. 88). Darcy, however, warns her "not to sketch [his] character at the present moment" (chap. XVIII, p. 89). Elizabeth replies: "But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity" (chap. XVIII, p. 89). At her first attempt to illustrate Darcy's character, she realizes that she does "not get on at all" since she "hears different accounts of [him]"

(chap. XVIII, p. 89). To properly paint Darcy's character, Elizabeth will have to see past her prejudice against his pride and in favor of her own.

Not till Pemberley does Elizabeth see a true portrait of Darcy. Elizabeth does not go to Pemberley without prejudice; she requires the persuasion of her aunt, Mrs. Gardner, who does not share this prejudice against "great houses" (chap. XLII, p. 227). However, soon after her arrival, Elizabeth perceives Pemberley to be a place, unlike other great houses, "where natural beauty has been so little counteracted by an awkward taste" (chap. XLIII, p. 228). She even goes so far as to imagine herself as "mistress of Pemberley" and that to be this is "something" real (chap. XLIII, p. 228). She begins to paint a new picture, despite her former prejudices, in which Pemberley is "without any artificial appearance," or vanity, but a home of which to be proud (chap. XLIII, p 228).

The taste that the grounds display is further reinforced by Pemberley's interior. Elizabeth sees, "with admiration of [Darcy's] taste, that it is neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less splendor, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Rosings" (chap. XLIII, p. 229). Even, the tenants and servants of Pemberley give Mr. Darcy a good name, and Mrs. Reynolds puts him in an "amiable light" for Elizabeth to see his character better (chap. XLIII, p. 232).

A Portrait of Love

With this new light, Elizabeth sees an actual portrait of Darcy and feels "certainly at this moment… a more gentle sensation towards the original, than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance" (chap. XLIII, p. 233). In this portrait, Darcy is no longer an object of Elizabeth's prejudice. He becomes the subject of her actions by

"fix[ing] his eyes upon herself" (chap. XLIII, p. 233). As art can, the portrait obliterates the distinction between subject and object since Elizabeth sees herself through Darcy's eyes, that is, the object becomes the subject and vice-versa. In this mutual penetration of subject and object, Elizabeth sees "his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever [risen] before" (chap. XLIII, p. 234). In this moment, her new perspective is his perspective.

This painting, by opening a way to Darcy's character, enables Elizabeth to have 'gratitude' for Darcy's 'regard' of her. After developing an appreciation for his taste, she can retrospectively acknowledge both his desire and his respect for her. In this way, she has a new appreciation for herself since she approves of his taste, which approves of her. From this new understanding of Darcy's character, he becomes a mirror of her own character. Since Elizabeth can now see herself through Darcy's eyes, she has new knowledge of herself. This experience is like a mirror, in which one sees oneself as another might. In other words, Elizabeth's re-reading of Darcy enables her to better judge herself and acknowledge her prejudices.

Jane Austen seems to be suggesting that to judge oneself is just as difficult as judging others, at least in the case of the protagonists. Elizabeth comes to this realization after re-reading Darcy's letter. As she was prejudiced against him, she also misjudged herself: "Till this moment, I never knew myself" (chap. XXXVI, p. 196). Elizabeth blames "vanity" for her folly since she had "prided [herself] on [her] discernment" (chap. XXXVI, p. 196). Therefore, vanity for Elizabeth is pride in false appearances. Elizabeth now recognizes that she actually had pride in only the false appearance of something, that

is, the false appearance of her own discernment to herself. For this reason, she never truly knew herself.

Jane Austen allowed us to trust Elizabeth's discernment, and in order to correct this error of vanity and misjudgment, we now must continue to follow the path set by the author. Like Elizabeth, we have been affected by the artist's artwork. In this way, the portrait of Darcy and even his letter affect Elizabeth. However, in the case of the portrait, this is especially explicit. Instead of seeing Darcy as an object, Elizabeth now sees him as a real other being that acts with her; he has become a genuine subject for her. The portrait of Darcy has "[a]t last… arrested her" (chap. XLIII, p. 233). His smile becomes a living symbol that now warmly affects her as he would like it to do. The impression of his smile is no longer subjected to her scorn; rather, it is the object of her gratitude for his good taste and approval. By Elizabeth's gratitude, she is allowed to receive Darcy's 'regard.'

As Austen words this scene, it is not exactly clear which of the two 'fixes' the one's eyes on the other. In order for Elizabeth to fix Darcy's eyes on herself, she must fix her eyes on him. In other words, if Elizabeth allows herself to observe, then she puts herself in the position of the observed, the object. At this moment, she is simultaneously the subject of the action and the subject who is acting. This mutual penetration of subject and object destroys all apparent distinctions. There emerges proper pride without prejudice, a condition thoughtfully derived from the impressions that objects make on their subject.

Darcy's letter also helps to facilitate a harmony between him and Elizabeth. She realizes only from the letter that she did not even know herself since she had been blinded by "vanity, not love" (chap. XXXVI, p. 196). Elizabeth had been deceived by her first, false impression; whereas now love reveals the truth. By his letter she can come to know herself. When Elizabeth is re-reading the letter, she is not only re-judging Darcy, but herself, too.

Now, in the case of the portrait, the look Elizabeth reads and the look she returns is the same look. They share this moment only by complete cooperation, or mutual respect. Darcy acts only because Elizabeth acts, in the sense that she must see him in order for him to see her. Furthermore, since neither is the sole actor, there is a perfect coincidence of their actions. For example, if one looked away, then the other must too look away. At this moment when subject and object are mutually intertwined, since the subject sees the object as he sees her, there is only love and a complete, united worldview.

Darcy and Elizabeth's love provides the path for an aristocracy based on character and thus the marriage of Jane and Bingley, who are of a tender and gentle nature. With Darcy and Elizabeth reconciled and their improper pride and prejudice overcome, a world without the one-sided view based on society shared by Lady Catherine and Mr. Collins is also overcome. Additionally, the reckless and socially alienating world of Lydia and Mr. Wickham is incorporated by Mr. Darcy's love for Elizabeth.

To me, the couple's most important accomplishment is the reconciliation of the genuine good-hearted and easy-going characters of Jane and Bingley, whose "tempers are

by no means unlike" (chap. LV, p. 328). Darcy's and Elizabeth's compatible tastes and shared love of good characters became evident as their dearest friends become happily married. Darcy manipulated Bingley through his concealment of Jane's time in London, but Darcy in accordance with his noble character unselfishly admits this to Bingley as "absurd and impertinent" (chap. LVIII, p. 350). Furthermore, by this knowledge provided by Darcy, Bingley comes to recognize Jane's and his love for one another independently of his sisters. The nobility and unselfishness demonstrated by Darcy and Elizabeth on their walk "beyond [Elizabeth's] own knowledge" allows for Jane Austen's ideal of an incorporative and dynamic marriage, not simply a union of two individuals but of all worthy characters (chap. LIX, p. 352).

The marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy stands above all other unions, except that of the Gardiners, because it brings together others as well. Elizabeth and Darcy acknowledge the Gardiners as "the persons who, by bringing [Elizabeth] into Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them" (chap. LXI, p. 368). Without Darcy's approval, Bingley would have never been able to marry Jane, and Darcy comes to approve by means of his love for Elizabeth. Furthermore, Wickham and Lydia are made innocuous because they have been locked together in the marriage established by Mr. Darcy. By being married, Wickham cannot easily elope with young girls, and Lydia cannot ruin her family's reputation with such an elopement. Wickham and Lydia may by their excessive expenses endanger themselves, but no one else. In fact, when Lydia requests "three or four hundred a-year," Elizabeth refuses out of respect for Darcy and "endeavour[s] in her answer to put an end to every entreaty and expectation of the kind" (chap. LXI, p. 366). Ultimately, the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy has the power to humble Lady Catherine

enough “to wait on them at Pemberley, in spite of that pollution which its woods had received” (chap. LXI, p. 367). The “reconciliation” of aunt and nephew prevailed “by Elizabeth’s persuasion” (chap. LXI, p. 367). The harmony struck by Elizabeth and Darcy is concordant with the world in which they live.

Works Cited

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