12. Darcy and Mrs. Bennet

One recent critic has claimed that the hero of *Pride and Prejudice* is "implausibly double-natured." He is both a "haughty masculine snob" and a "benevolent feudal squire"; and he is a "product of the female imagination . . . through wish fulfilment. He anticipates . . . the heroes of the Harlequin Romances."[i]

It is true enough that *Pride and Prejudice* anticipates the Harlequin Romances. What happened to Elizabeth and Jane was empirically very unlikely. The novel itself indicates indirectly but very clearly that their most probable fate would have been that which befell the author and her sister Cassandra. It was their natural social destiny to become impoverished old maids; and according to the story it was almost entirely through the agency of Fitzwilliam Darcy that this fate did not come upon them. The coherence of Darcy's character is therefore a matter of grave concern. The object of the present essay is to show that the accusation of "double-nature" is an outrageous libel against him (and more importantly against his creator). We shall here follow the emergence of the truth about Darcy step by step as closely as we can.

The gestation of *Pride and Prejudice* was long and slow. It began as a novel called *First Impressions*, written between October 1796 and August 1797. Jane Austen and her family were happy enough with that version, for Mr. Austen to write to a publisher. But when that publisher declined the manuscript, it was set aside for a long time. What came out eventually, fifteen years later, at the beginning of 1813, had been very carefully revised at least once (perhaps more than once); and, in particular, it had been *condensed*. It was "lop't and crop't" as Jane Austen herself said.[ii] The final application of her blue pencil probably came after *Sense and Sensibility* had been

revised and submitted for publication in 1811. But the title "Pride and Prejudice," at least, had almost certainly been taken over from the conclusion of Fanny Burney's *Cecilia*, by the time that *Eleanor and Marianne* had become *Sense and Sensibility*.[iii] In *Cecilia* the "Pride and Prejudice" are all male, just as the "Sense and Sensibility" in Jane Austen's first published novel are all female. But Miss Austen clearly hoped that her readers would see that in her second story the "Pride and Prejudice" were on *both* sides. The "First Impressions" of her hero and heroine were mutually responsive. Darcy's pride is rooted in a conventional prejudice; and the pride that his conduct arouses in Elizabeth, leads her to adopt an extremely prejudiced reading of his character.

Darcy's prejudice is where everything begins; and the novel itself begins with it. The first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* is probably the most famous of all Jane Austen's witticisms; and I used to think that it was a tiny flaw in her artistry that she began with *Mrs. Bennet's* transports about *Charles Bingley*'s arrival in the neighborhood. But that was a mistake. Mrs. Bennet and Bingley are as transparent as glass. The "truth universally acknowledged" (I, i, 1) is the cardinal article of Mrs. Bennet's faith; for "the business of her life was to get her daughters married" (I, i, 5). But because both parties are so transparent, it was easy for Charles Bingley's intimates not to acknowledge the universal truth with respect to Mrs. Bennet's daughters; and this denial (made universal at the level of all mother's "business") is the key to Darcy's "pride." Darcy is more than twice as rich as Bingley, and he has consciously made up his mind that no mother is going to marry him off to one of her daughters. At his first appearance (in Chapter iii) he lets this be known with a frankness that is so brutal as to be quite improper.[iv] The opening sentence of the novel anticipates Darcy's prejudice.

It is Elizabeth who is the victim of actual impropriety at Darcy's hands. The whole assembly has already discovered him to be "proud." His behavior in declining all introductions certainly shows that. But it is the completely gratuitous comment that he is in "no humour . . . to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men" (I, iii, 12) that fully justifies the common opinion that he is "above his company, and above being pleased" (10). Elizabeth is quite pretty; and even Darcy concedes that she is "tolerable." So the terrible "slight" of which he is himself guilty, is probably intended for her mother, rather than for her. For like Mr. Darcy himself,

Mrs. Bennet is too open for her own good. She makes "the business of her life" only too obvious; and that gives Darcy an excuse to make his contemptuous rejection of all such business equally plain.

It is not certain that Darcy is quite as proud as the general opinion holds him to be. Jane Bennet has it from Miss Bingley that he is only taciturn with strangers; and Mrs. Long had some conversation with him at the ball, which may not have been as grudging as she says it was in response to Mrs. Bennet's prompting (I, v, 19). Both Charlotte Lucas and Elizabeth exhibit an intuitive understanding of Darcy's problem; and Elizabeth confirms for us how pride operates in the story when she says: "I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*" (20).

The Longbourn and Netherfield families are near neighbors; each has invited the other to dinner once a week in the first two weeks. Darcy continues to insist after every meeting that Elizabeth is not really pretty (cf. I, vi, 23; III, iii, 271); the attraction on his side was almost instant, and he resists it as well as he can, because it is socially inappropriate. But he cannot deceive himself for long; and he does not try to deceive others. He has convinced himself that he does not like dancing, though he does it well enough. He sees dancing as a female pleasure, and as part of the marriage market from which he is determined to escape. But certainly he will change his mind about it when he is safely married; he thinks of dancing as *primitive*, mainly because it is emotionally dangerous to him. Elizabeth is very good at it; and she heartily enjoys it. But they understand one another perfectly when she declines his invitation to dance (I, vi, 24-27).

Mrs. Bennet was the daughter of a local attorney named Gardiner. She has an intelligent brother in some branch of London commerce; and a not very intelligent sister married to another local attorney. She herself was probably the silliest member of the family; and we can only understand how Mr. Bennet came to marry her, by supposing that for a short season he was carried away by his feelings. This querulous, self-pitying, "nervous" woman, protected by her stupidity from the clear consciousness of her own appalling unhappiness, must once have been as spontaneously happy and enthusiastic as Lydia, the youngest daughter who is her favorite, because

she can so easily recognize her own younger self. But Mrs. Bennet was never as *fearless* as Lydia; and she was perhaps always a matrimonial schemer. If so, she has paid a terrible price for her one success in the "business" of her life; and so has her husband.[v]

Mr. Bennet is one of the minor gentry. He has a landed estate, and an income of two thousand pounds a year. But the estate is entailed; and because Mrs. Bennet produced five daughters in seven years before her fertility mysteriously failed, it must pass into the possession of Mr. Collins when Mr. Bennet dies. Jane Austen's treatment of the entail problem is not quite satisfactory. She tells us later (III, viii, 308) that the Bennets began with the feeling that economy was not necessary because father and son together would be able to break the entail. That turned out to be impossible because they had no son. So for ten years, at least, this husband who "loves independence," and cares fairly deeply for at least two of his five daughters, ought to have been "laying aside an annual sum" (not just wishing that he *had* done so). Most of the Bennet income has been wasted by Mrs. Bennet on "improvements," and on the maintenance of a lavish style of living; and Mr. Bennet loves his library, which is an expensive hobby. But when Jane says "How is half such a sum [£10,000] to be repaid" (for the supposed settlement with Wickham by Mr. Gardiner — III, vii, 304) she ought to be reflecting her own knowledge that the family savings do not yet amount to five thousand pounds. Mr. Bennet is a "philosopher" who has abdicated from life, after making a terrible mistake in his only important practical decision. We can understand his leaving Mrs. Bennet, who "took him in," to go to hell ("just as she *deserves*," he might perhaps reflect maliciously); we can even understand his "philosophic" indifference to the fate of his "three very silly" daughters (who are surrogates for Mrs. Bennet). But indifference to the fate of Jane and Elizabeth (who have certainly both been "his" daughters since Elizabeth was about ten) is simply not credible.[vi]

For us, however, Mr. Bennet's character is a side issue. Jane goes to Netherfield for dinner, and catches a cold in the showers. Elizabeth walks three miles or more to be with Jane, and Darcy begins to admire her affectionate nature, as well as her appearance. We learn, incidentally, that he is almost as interested in his library as Mr. Bennet. In his mind, "extensive reading" is a necessary female accomplishment — but we need not take his polite acceptance of Caroline Bingley's list of

other womanly perfections very seriously.[vii] Darcy enjoys his fairly serious moral disputes with Elizabeth. But that sort of disagreement disturbs Charles Bingley; and Elizabeth takes note that Darcy does not like to be made fun of when he is being serious (I, x, 51).

The fact that Darcy is interested in her rapidly becomes apparent to Elizabeth, who decides — or, more probably, would prefer to believe — that he disapproves of her in some way (I, x, 51). She knows that nothing can come of it, if he *is* attracted to her; and she is glad to have a reason for disliking him — though it is just as doubtful that she *does* dislike him, as that she really believes he disapproves of her. Darcy is well aware of why she is slightly hostile; when he asks her if she would like to be dancing a reel (52) he is deliberately touching the sore place. Implicitly he is apologizing for the original slight. But now they have changed sides, for it is Elizabeth who implies that dancing a reel is not quite civilized. She is trying to point out, indirectly, that they must *not* be attracted to each other; and that message (which is as much for herself as for him) gets home, although the attraction is only increased. If we can assume (as I think we should) that she and Mrs. Hurst do overhear Miss Bingley teasing Darcy next day, then her rationalization about Darcy's disapproval is exploded for her almost at once.[viii] How far Elizabeth is attracted to Darcy it is useless to inquire, because she does not know herself. What she knows is precisely that nothing can come of it, and that she must concentrate her mind on her rational grounds for disliking him.

Caroline reminds Charles Bingley that Darcy does not like dancing (I, xi, 55); and Darcy says nothing at this point. But he goes to the ball when it happens, and not to bed, as Charles allows that he may. He does pay attention when Caroline invites Elizabeth to leave her book and walk round the room. This results in the discovery that Darcy is not to be laughed at. Elizabeth protests at that, but we remember that she refrained from laughing when Bingley made fun of him; and the dispute about laughable faults ends with joking and smiles.[ix] By the end of the Netherfield visit Darcy is quite deeply in love with Elizabeth; and she certainly likes him a lot better than she will admit to herself.

Now comes the Collins episode, which we can very largely ignore. It provides an example of how the marriage market works at its "rational" extreme. Both Elizabeth and Charlotte know exactly what they are doing; and each of them acts prudently. Elizabeth takes Charlotte's "prudence" to be a blindly material self-interest for which she will pay dearly in the end (II, i, 136); but she gradually discovers that this is a mistake. Charlotte is seven years older; and it is objectively clear that she must choose between marrying a pompous conventional windbag, and being an old maid. Mr. Collins tells Elizabeth that she is facing the same decision (I, xix, 108). But even if this highly rational prophecy had proved true, Elizabeth's experience at Hunsford shows that her decision was the only possible one for her, just as it teaches her that Charlotte made a sensible decision for herself.[x]

The arrival of George Wickham, and the departure of the Bingleys following the ball, are sandwiched into the visit of Mr. Collins. Wickham arrives just a month after Darcy (I, xvi, 77). Thus, when Elizabeth tells Darcy later "I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed upon to marry" (II, xi, 193), she is revealing two important facts. First, she *did* think about the possibility of Darcy making her an offer; and secondly, it was meeting Wickham that sealed her decision that Darcy was not a possible husband.[xi] She *prefers* Wickham (indeed she begins to fall in love with him); and Wickham's story shows that Darcy is morally even more objectionable than the general opinion of him holds.

Wickham is a perfect paradigm of the confidence man. He charms everyone; and the story that he tells to his chosen inner circle sticks to the facts as far as possible. In general, we should accept the version that Darcy will later give Elizabeth as the objective truth. But there is one point in Wickham's recital that is worthy of credence. He attributes their childhood hostility to *jealousy* (II, xvi, 80). There is no doubt that the boy Darcy recognized the boy Wickham as a plausible rogue from the first (II, xii, 200). But this would have made him very jealous of his father's regard for the steward's son. We can fairly say that Wickham has been Darcy's bad angel. Darcy's self-protective determination not to be "taken in" has its origin in seeing his father "taken in." Probably he was

sometimes asked, "Why can't you be more like George?" and the schoolboy code did not allow him to reveal what George was really like.[xii]

Darcy comes to the ball, and Wickham does not (though he was invited). Elizabeth is in high dudgeon about this; so her consenting to dance with Darcy merely illustrates how difficult it was for a young lady to avoid dancing when invited, unless she could plead a prior commitment.[xiii] This patriarchal aspect of the ballroom was helpful to the novelist. Elizabeth is able to mention Wickham to Darcy; and Darcy can say (discreetly) what he has thought since childhood. Caroline Bingley tells Elizabeth what the Bingleys believe about Wickham, and gets exactly the response that she is angling for, to take back to Darcy. Bingley is on the verge of proposing to Jane (but he has a business engagement in London). Mrs. Bennet — and Sir William Lucas — let Darcy know that the engagement is generally expected; at the same time she strongly reinforces his consciousness of how undesirable the connection would be.

From the point of view of outward social position (which is important to Darcy) Jane is quite good enough to marry Bingley (II, xii, 198). Even the moral objections to her family are less serious in Charles' case — since Charles himself will never mind them. But it would be disastrous for Charles Bingley to marry Elizabeth's sister, because both the social and the moral objections to Darcy's marrying into the same family are so overwhelming. Darcy must get Bingley away from Netherfield quickly, because he must get away from there himself, and stay away. It is Darcy's increasing passion for Elizabeth that is at the root of all of poor Jane's misfortunes. Caroline Bingley's motives are simply a matter of her social ambitions. Darcy avails himself of her support as cynically as he would manipulate anyone else in the marriage market. But her arguments have little influence in any case. It is Darcy's authoritative (and quite sincere) assurance that Jane does not really *love* him that is decisive for Bingley (198-9). Charles is convinced (and in general rightly) that Darcy is much wiser than he.

Mrs. Gardiner, who now arrives to give Elizabeth good advice about Wickham, and to carry Jane off to London, is the most sensible mature woman whom we meet; and she is happily married.

Like Mr. Bennet (II, i, 137-8) she thinks Jane must forget Bingley (II, ii, 140-1). But her offer to take Jane to London is prompted by the willingness to give Bingley every chance. Everyone *says* that nothing is to be expected, but they are all willing to be hopeful. Elizabeth's response to the advice about Wickham unmistakably indicates that she intends to accept him if he offers. The engagement would certainly have been a long one, but she is no Anne Elliott.[xiv]

Jane's visit to London drives Darcy to shifts of concealment of which he is very properly ashamed. On the other side, Wickham's pursuit of Miss King begins to reveal his true colors. Elizabeth is genuinely disappointed (II, iv, 154). Her enthusiasm for "rocks and mountains" over men is an aspect of that; it shows how well she understands the use of distractions in her situation (poor Jane, we may notice, is *brooding*).

Hunsford itself is a very effective distraction. Lady Catherine is admirably positive in her attitude to life (not least in her feminist condemnation of entails). Also she takes care to be well informed about many details of life that most noble ladies would leave entirely to the servants. But her general good sense readily gives way to her enjoyment of flattery — else she could never have given the "living" of Hunsford to Mr. Collins.[xv] She must be deeply unhappy to have a hypochondriac daughter of about twenty-five, who is afraid to speak, and almost afraid to go out of the house. Mr. Collins helps her to avoid recognizing the degree to which she is herself to blame for this.[xvi] Lady Catherine is an instinctive bully; and from the first Elizabeth delights in evading her curiosity (which goes rather beyond the limits of true propriety). But she does confess to being "not one and twenty" (II, vi, 166).

When Darcy arrives, it is hardly likely that he is expecting to find Elizabeth in his domestic circle again. He comes at once to see her, but he is plainly in conflict with himself, because he cannot talk to her. It is his noble cousin, Colonel Fitzwilliam, who is charming. After his first visit Darcy manages to keep away for a week (though he is surely at least as bored as his cousin). When they meet at Rosings he must be bitterly tormented, as he watches the Colonel flirting so agreeably with Elizabeth. He also has to recognize that titled female relations can behave almost as improperly

as lawyers' daughters. But he lets Elizabeth make fun of his own unforgotten impropriety with a good grace. Elizabeth, for her part, is noticeably interested in his supposed engagement to Anne De Bourgh.[xvii]

Colonel Fitzwilliam comes to the Parsonage often, simply out of boredom. Darcy comes also, but he does not seem to enjoy it. Once he comes alone, when Elizabeth is herself alone. Charlotte suspects he may be in love; and probably she understands the truth — that he is indeed in love, but he desperately wishes he was not. Sometimes he is lost in a daydream, and once he speaks as if Elizabeth will sometime be a guest at Rosings (II, ix, 179; x, 182). The moment when his dream will take control of his will is rapidly approaching. His fantasy is that Elizabeth is a Cinderella princess, who must be rescued from her "stepmother" and the "ugly sisters."[xviii] (This gives us a vivid image of how Mrs. Bennet figures in his thoughts.)

Colonel Fitzwilliam explains his own position in the marriage market to Elizabeth, and reveals the truth about Darcy's intervention to save Bingley from an "imprudent" marriage. At this point (II, x, 183) they have been talking of Darcy's control of Fitzwilliam's movements (and we learn that Darcy has already delayed his departure once). Elizabeth now sees Darcy as a carbon copy of his aunt; it is the thought of Darcy "triumphing" about his control of Bingley[xix] (like Lady Catherine finding places for Mrs. Jenkinson's nieces — II, vi, 165) that makes her suddenly tongue-tied, and only able to speak of "indifferent matters" (II, x, 186). In assessing Darcy's view of Bingley's "imprudence," she thinks first of uncle Philips and uncle Gardiner, but will not allow that the behavior of her own mother and sisters was important. Her desire to put the worst possible construction on Darcy's motives is a strong indication that there are feelings of her own that she does not want to recognize. She goes home to have a "headach," which must in some measure be diplomatic, because she does not lie down, but sits by herself reading over Jane's letters from London — II, xi, 188. (She does that a lot — compare II, x, 182).

The great moment of Darcy's declaration is thus brilliantly prepared for. The whole conflict of his feelings bursts out of him. He has only enough sympathetic discretion to conceal his utter loathing for the extended family circle that he will be entering — the Longbourn to which his

princess, with her "stepmother" and her "ugly sisters," has never properly belonged (II, ix, 179). He lays all the emphasis on the objectionable social connections involved. What he did not hesitate to make known in the ballroom initially, is what he manages to keep hidden now; and his struggling, hard-won chivalry has the effect of confirming exactly the prejudiced assessment of his character that Elizabeth has arrived at in order to keep her own feelings at bay. She thinks of herself as having a "deeply rooted dislike" for him (II, xi, 189). This is the feeling that she has repeatedly expressed to her family and friends (especially to Charlotte). For the short period when she was half in love with Wickham, the dislike was quite real (i.e. *settled*). But whenever she has been in company with Darcy she has *enjoyed* talking to him, and she has felt more interest in his silences than is natural in a case of genuine dislike. (It is true that her talk has frequently been *malicious*, but that has been the result of a *conflict* of feelings, not of "rooted dislike." Darcy has rightly understood that she was *teasing* him, not being covertly rude. That was always an important element in her fascination — cf. III, xviii, 380.) Even now, when she is bitterly resentful from the very beginning, she feels sorry at first about "the pain he was to receive" (II, xi, 189). By the time he has finished, however, and his confidence of a favorable reception has become quite apparent, she is furiously angry. All of the violent emotion covered by her "headach" now comes pouring out in its turn: "had they [my feelings] even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man, who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister?" That she can put the position this way even when she feels, quite rightly, horribly insulted on her own account, shows that it is the truth of her situation as she feels it. She *has* been attracted, but just as she understood that "it would never do" for him, when she saw (at Netherfield) that he liked her, so now she knows (for far sounder reasons) that "it would never do" for her — no matter how much she might like him.

She offers her complaint on behalf of Wickham as an objective proof of Darcy's bad moral character. Even if his claim that he has been kinder to Bingley than to himself were valid (which Elizabeth does not grant even in her coolest moments),[xx] his supposed treatment of Wickham is morally disgraceful. In her own mind, Elizabeth believes that "my own feelings decided against you" (II, xi, 190) about a month after she met Darcy (193) — i.e., when Wickham told her his sad

story. She tells Darcy now — quite truthfully — that "You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it" (192-3); and she adds that the form of his actual offer has only spared her "the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner." At the moment he does not quite believe her; but these are the sentences that he remembers (III, xvi, 367-8).

Darcy goes home to write out his self-justification. About Jane he can only say that he did not think she was really in love — and we must remember that Charlotte, who knew what Jane felt, thought that she did not show it (I, vi, 21-2). Darcy admits that it was disgraceful to conceal Jane's presence in London from Bingley. But poor Bingley is still in love, and Darcy could not allow him to be "taken in" — "*drawn* in," as Lady Catherine puts it in the idiom of that earlier day (III, xiv, 354). About Wickham Darcy has only to tell the truth; but he goes beyond what is strictly necessary, and reveals how Wickham very nearly succeeded in seducing his sister Georgiana.[xxi] (This shows how bitterly jealous he is of Elizabeth's personal attraction to Wickham.)

Elizabeth's conversion begins, of course, with the Wickham story. She now begins to see that Wickham's words and actions never were consistent, that he spread his story abroad as soon as it was safe from contradiction, that his pursuit of Miss King *was* disgracefully mercenary — here she has only to admit thoughtfully what she has *felt* all along — and so on. "Vanity, not love has been my folly," she says (II, xiii, 208). But she did feel quite strongly attracted to Wickham. So when she adds, "Till this moment, I never knew myself" she is admitting that she has been attracted to both of them, and that it is now Wickham whom she finds repellent.

At this point, therefore, her feelings are on Darcy's side; she admits to herself that his view of Jane is reasonable, though mistaken, and that his comments about her mother and sisters are perfectly just (II, xiii, 208-9).[xxii] Poor Jane's prospects have actually been ruined by her too-busy mother. Elizabeth now wants to be with Jane. Darcy has naturally taken himself off, and she is eager to get away too. She is sorry for Darcy now, but she thinks that she never wants to see him again, because she feels so ashamed. Since Darcy was quite mistaken about Jane's feelings,

Elizabeth must still be very bitter on that score; but that remains implicit. It is the moral objections to her family that fill her mind. She is even ashamed of her father, for not checking Kitty and Lydia (213).

Even in London, Elizabeth keeps her own counsel. Only when they are back at Longbourn, does she tell Jane everything (except about herself and Bingley — II, xvii, 227). Almost at once their joint decision that nothing should be said about Wickham in public is tested, because Lydia is invited to go to Brighton. Elizabeth's intervention with her father fails (II, xviii, 230-1) — as it was bound to.[xxiii] Her parting with Wickham only reveals that she now thinks well of Darcy's character (234).

Elizabeth has, to the full, the faith of the Enlightenment in education. Her father is more of a sceptic. Jane Austen calls him ironically a "true philosopher" (II, xix, 236). She was probably more skeptical than her heroine about moral education; but she certainly agrees with Elizabeth that one ought to do all that one can. We may well be doubtful whether a better moral environment would have saved Lydia, but Mrs. Bennet, Mary and Kitty could all have been made happier, and more useful, members of society than they were, through Mr. Bennet's influence.[xxiv] A "true philosopher" should have exerted himself to create a better environment. Mr Bennet's retreat into the posture of an amused observer argues a vengefully resentful attitude towards his wife (and the children who are like her).

Life is now rather dull; and the news from London is disappointing. Elizabeth and the Gardiners will be spending most of their holiday in Derbyshire. When they reach Mrs. Gardiner's old home at Lambton, they are less than five miles from Pemberley. Elizabeth wants to see it, but must not appear to be seeking out Darcy. When they learn that he will be arriving tomorrow (III, i, 246-7) she is very pleased. Her visit will be a signal to him, but she has been saved from the impropriety of visiting while he is there. (She would have had to tell Mrs. Gardiner the truth to avoid that.)

As it happens, Darcy arrives early, and by himself. By then Elizabeth has already admitted to herself first that it would be wonderful to be mistress of Pemberley (III, i, 245, 246), and then — after listening to the housekeeper — that the master of Pemberley would be a good husband for her. It is a "sentiment of gratitude" (251) that she acknowledges; but this is not the "gratitude" that women were supposed to feel and express even when they could not accept a man's proposal. She tells Jane later, joking, that she fell in love with Darcy when she saw Pemberley (III, xvii, 373). Sir Walter Scott thought this was truer than Elizabeth realized — and he was not wrong. But it was while she was looking at Darcy's picture and thinking of Mrs. Reynolds' testimonial that she finally admitted to herself that she was properly in love with the original. There was still the problem of Darcy's attitude to the Gardiners (III, i, 246). But that is soon to be resolved. The problem of his ruining Jane's happiness is more serious. But if Darcy, newly arrived, were to ask Elizabeth at once to reconsider, she would probably say "yes."

The "alteration in his manner since they last parted" (III, i, 252) is partly a function of Elizabeth's interpretation (unless she is only thinking of him when he was deeply hurt, and quite justifiably angry). He is not now "sedate"; but he was not always "sedate" before; and he is even more *shocked* at this moment than she is.

After this meeting Elizabeth is properly aware that she is in love with Darcy. Her only problem now will be "Is he still in love with me?" Mrs. Gardiner becomes sure of that quite quickly (III, ii, 262), and if her niece felt able to confide in her, the story would have reached a more rapid climax. Darcy returns, is introduced, and asks leave to introduce his sister the next day.

It turns out that Georgiana only has the reputation of being "proud" because she is *shy*.[xxv] She is a big girl, and will be taller than Elizabeth when she is twenty. (Darcy himself is quite tall — I, x, 50.) When Bingley arrives, we are given a clear indication that he is still in love with Jane, because he remembers the exact date of the ball.

There *is* a difference in Darcy's general demeanor. Until this time, he has almost always had his guard up. Probably he has always been more relaxed at home; but the presence of someone like Miss Bingley might sometimes have produced a defensive reaction even at Netherfield. Now at last he has no need of his defenses. No one can "draw him in." The child whom Mrs. Reynolds called "the sweetest tempered, most generous-hearted boy in the world" (III, i, 249) can come out into the open without fear. Miss Bingley's jealousy now provokes a frank avowal of his admiration for Elizabeth (III, iii, 271); and we should remember that he was just as open at Netherfield in the early days (I, vi, 27; viii, 36).

But now comes the terrible story of Lydia's elopement. Darcy comes in before Elizabeth has proper control of herself; and because of the confidence that he had reposed in her about Georgiana, it is only natural for her to tell him the truth (III, iv, 277). This imposes a very serious ordeal upon him. Elizabeth can only think of the social disgrace; she supposes that Wickham has ruined any prospect of a marriage between her and Darcy. But Darcy never thinks of that at all. For him, the conflict that makes him silent and thoughtful (III, xvi, 278; xvi, 370) is about having to bargain with a man whom he paid off originally with satisfaction, and has more recently dismissed with angry rhetoric of the "Never darken my doors again" variety (Wickham never *does* darken his doors). The most admirable (and revealing) aspect of Darcy's policy when he does catch up with the eloping couple, is his attempt to persuade Lydia to leave Wickham, and return to her family (III, x, 322). This shows that moral considerations are far more important for him than social ones. Elizabeth and Jane certainly agreed with him on this point (III, vii, 303-4); it is not quite certain what Mr. Bennet (or Mrs. Gardiner) really thinks, but Mrs. Bennet would certainly have been appalled. (Of course, Darcy's promised "assistance" would probably have availed to save Lydia from irreparable social "ruin.")[xxvi]

At the moment when Lydia's elopement is revealed, Jane Austen compares Elizabeth's newly discovered love for Darcy with her "partiality" for Wickham. She speaks of "gratitude and esteem" as "good foundations of affection" (III, iv, 279). Elizabeth has always been conscious that Darcy was attracted to her, and that for social reasons he did not want to admit it. She herself was

attracted to him, and for those same social reasons she knew she must overcome this. She was glad, therefore, to have *moral* grounds for disapproving of him. When those moral grounds were overthrown, and she was obliged to "esteem" him, the gratified amazement with which she was bound to regard his offer coalesced with sexual attraction[xxvii] to produce "affection"; and at the same time the sexual "partiality," of which she was fully conscious in Wickham's case, lost its moral foundation. Hence her unacknowledged jealousy of Miss King flowed over into moral disapproval and justified contempt. Jane Austen calls the new attachment "less interesting"; but we have only to look at Mr. and Mrs. Bennet to recognize how ironic that adjective is.

Darcy impresses on Lydia the absolute need for secrecy about his part in the marriage. He is very uncertain how Elizabeth regards him; and he does not want her to accept his second proposal out of "gratitude" (in the ordinary sense). But Lydia cannot help herself — and it is certain, in any case, that the story would have come out on the next occasion that Elizabeth and her aunt Gardiner were together.[xxviii] So in the end Darcy has to trust to Elizabeth's natural honesty; but his first proposal and her response have given them each good grounds to believe that the other will not deliberately pretend to any feelings that they do not actually have.

From the moment she reads her aunt's letter (III, x, 326), Elizabeth must know that Darcy intends to propose again. But she keeps pretending to herself that she is uncertain; and this produces a constraint in her manners which gives Darcy reason to be more legitimately insecure about *her* feelings (III, xviii, 381). Darcy himself is guilty of some slight self-deception in the matter of his observation of Jane's feelings (III, xvi, 371) — for he is now watching Jane with the certainty that Elizabeth is scrupulously honest about such things. (It is true, also, that Jane's emotions are now more visible than they were the year before. Jane Austen is careful to let us know this — III, xvii, 377-8.)

The matter of Bingley's proposal is neatly handled. Elizabeth is, of course, just as eager as her mother, to give Bingley his chance. But she cannot be as indecorous about it as Mrs. Bennet. So she takes care to remove herself *early*, when the second opportunity occurs. She knows very well

what Mrs. Bennet will do (III, xiii, 346); her "infinite surprise" at what happens, is only feigned — the adjective gives that away.

Lady Catherine's intervention sends Darcy the signal that he needs (III, xvi, 367). We have to assume that Charlotte gave some hint to the Lucases about Darcy's interest in Elizabeth at Hunsdon. Lady Lucas now reciprocates with an interpretation of what she has observed at Longbourn or Netherfield — for Darcy's feelings must be more readable than Elizabeth allows herself to see.[xxix] Thus the word reaches Lady Catherine; and the rest is plain to view. Elizabeth is not as uncertain as she pretends to be; but when Mr. Collins writes to her father she does not dare to take the risk of telling him what the real situation is (III, xvi, 362-3). (Fear of Mr. Bennet's jokes is more important than maidenly propriety here; for it would be quite *proper* to confess the truth to her father.)

Darcy's second proposal is interesting, because of his curious use of the words "generous" and "trifle" (III, xvi, 366). He knows very well that Elizabeth will not *trifle* with his feelings; his appeal to her "generosity" is actually a claim upon her *honesty*; she must *not* "generously" accept him out of "gratitude," for that would be to "trifle" with him. (He had wanted to get this moment over, *before* Elizabeth learned the truth about the settlement of Lydia's marriage. So her expression of thanks comes just in time to give the words that were probably in his mind already, an almost inverted sense.[xxx]

The one-sidedness of Darcy's self-appraisal at this point must be properly appreciated. He is not really ashamed of his "pride," but he admits that there is a bad side to it. Implicitly his mother, Lady Catherine's sister Lady Anne, is blamed for it, because he emphasizes that his father was "all that was benevolent and amiable" (III, xvi, 369).[xxxi] Darcy's maternal inheritance began to dominate his development when he was eight, because his father was taken in by Wickham. Darcy has been using the consciousness of his social position as a defense against betrayal by his own feelings ever since then. He was furiously angry with himself when he proposed to Elizabeth the first time, because he was convinced that she would certainly accept him — and hence he would be "taken in,"

in his turn. What actually happened was essential to their future happiness, because it taught him that there was an honest woman in the world. He will always be a bit like Lady Catherine at times, in his relations with his male equals. Remember Bingley's joke about Darcy at home on Sunday mornings (I, x, 50-1) — and compare what Mr. Bennet says now (III, xvii, 376).

His sister's fear of him might lead the reader to question this diagnosis. For it is the author who tells us that Darcy "had always inspired in herself [Georgiana] a respect which almost overcame her affection" (III, xix, 388). But in spite of the "always" this is only valid as a description of Georgiana's feelings at sixteen, emerging finally from the schoolroom, with an ardent desire to live up to the responsibilities of a new role that terrifies her. It was loving trust, rather than fearful respect, that led the fifteen-year-old to confess her infatuation with Wickham; and we have only to consider how ready Bingley is to make fun of Darcy, to see that what Georgiana "began to comprehend by Elizabeth's instructions" is ironically intended: "a woman may take liberties with her husband, which a brother will not always allow in a sister more than ten years younger" (III, xix, 388). When she is twenty Georgiana will be poking fun at Darcy's Lady Catherine moments as freely as Elizabeth herself.

Jane Austen liked to laugh at Darcy (rather admiringly) herself. There is a passage in one of her letters which shows how precisely (and lovingly) she visualized her characters. On a visit to London she went to three portrait exhibitions; and she wrote to her sister Cassandra (and to Fanny Knight) that she had found "a small portrait of Mrs. Bingley, excessively like her. I went [to the Exhibition in Spring Gardens] in hopes of seeing one of her Sister, but there was no Mrs. Darcy . . . [Mrs. Bingley] is dressed in a white gown, with green ornaments, which convinces me of what I had always supposed, that green was a favorite color with her. I dare say Mrs. D. will be in yellow." But that evening after she had been both to the "Great Exhibition" and to the collection of Sir Joshua Reynolds she reported "I am disappointed because there was nothing like Mrs. D. at either. I can only imagine that Mr. D. prizes any Picture of her too much to like it should be exposed to the public eye. I can imagine he wd have that sort of feeling — that mixture of Love, Pride and Delicacy."[xxxii]

One of Elizabeth's first tasks will be to make Darcy laugh at his own righteous wrath against Lady Catherine. He must do that, if he is to do what is proper, and invite his aunt to Pemberley. When that visit is repaid, and Elizabeth finds herself at Rosings (as Darcy foresaw — II, x, 182) she will finally concede that Charlotte, at the Parsonage with her baby, was *truly* wise to marry Mr. Collins (see II, ix, 178). Mrs. Bennet will never be wise; and Lydia is bound to be unhappy. But there can *be* wisdom in the marriage-market nonetheless.

The novel, which began with Mrs. Bennet and Bingley, ends with the Gardiners; and just as the opening was an indirect reflection on Mr. Darcy's determination to escape the "truth" of the marriage-market, so the closure is an indirect reflection on the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. Darcy's policy of avoidance was the only path by which he could escape from Mr. Bennet's fate, and achieve that of Mrs. Bennet's brother. With Elizabeth he was never in danger of being taken in. There is a marvelous example of "poetic justice" in the fact that Wickham, who caused all the mischief in Darcy's mind and heart to begin with, is the one who teaches Elizabeth how to bring her mind and heart into harmony. For Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner (we can safely assume) the harmony of heart and mind was always perfect.

It is, perhaps, only in a Harlequin Romance that everything could work out quite perfectly for a portionless girl, who is so straightforwardly honest. But Elizabeth will indeed be happy because Fitzwilliam Darcy is as consistent and reliable as a human being can be. There is no shadow of a "double nature" in him. The "wish fulfilment" — which can hardly be denied — is guided and controlled by an acute understanding of how a "good character" is formed and molded.

Notes

i. A.G. Sulloway, 1989, 206. (Compare Angus Wilson: "Lizzie is so real and Darcy so unreal that we cannot take the compromise seriously" — B.C. Southam, ed., 1975, 198.)

ii. *Letters*, 29, i, 1813.

iii. The *Memoir* states that *Sense and Sensibility* was begun "in its present form" immediately after the completion of *First Impressions*.

iv. Of course, it is not only predatory mothers that Darcy has to fear. There are daughters who are conscious matrimonial predators on their own account. Mrs. Bennet was probably one such in her time; and Caroline Bingley is one in the story. But, as between Darcy and Elizabeth, it is Mrs. Bennet who is the source of prejudice. (Also Darcy certainly intends to marry in his own good time, and by his own "rational" choice; the socio-economic ambitions of the predators are an important factor in the making of what he regards as a "rational" choice. He means to marry someone who is his social "equal"; but also an intellectual partner whom he likes, and who likes him — not Anne De Bourgh certainly, although she is socially eligible.)

v. Among her daughters it is probably Kitty whom Mrs. Bennet most resembled as a girl. But unlike Kitty she was not then overshadowed by a fearlessly self-assertive younger sister. Kitty illustrates for us already how her mother became what she now is.

vi. It is clear that his first three daughters regard their father as an ideal of rational manhood — though Elizabeth does reflect that his behavior to Mrs. Bennet is not what it should be (II,

xix, 236-7). But actually he is the most interesting of several studies of father-failure with respect to daughters in Jane Austen's work — compare Sir Thomas Bertram, Mr. Woodhouse and finally Sir Walter Elliott. Only the last — who is *Mrs*. Bennet herself in trousers — could reach the pitch of indolent inattention ascribed to Mr. Bennet on *PP* 308. The Mr. Bennet of those three paragraphs has survived from *First Impressions* (or even escaped from *Volume the First*) without the necessary reflective revision.

vii. Elizabeth is deficient in drawing (I, vi, 164) and probably in "the modern languages" (i.e. French and Italian?). In music and singing her performance level is respectable but not outstanding. It is no wonder that she rejects Miss Bingley's sketch of proper female accomplishment as an impossible paragon.

viii. Even if Elizabeth does not hear that conversation, the general behavior of Caroline is enough to teach her that she is only rationalizing, when she pretends that Darcy *must* dislike her. When she runs off "gaily" (I, x, 53) she is partly enjoying the idea that he is in some torment; and she is *avoiding* any conscious admission that she is unhappy herself. (She must, at least, be sorry that the connection is so clearly impossible. Jane Austen understood the bitterness of this situation very well, from her own experience at Elizabeth's age.)

ix. Darcy's inability to forget "follies and vices" (I, xi, 58) glances at Mrs. Bennet — whom he will forgive, and learn to smile at, quickly enough. The claim that "my good opinion, once lost is lost for ever" may refer to his *lifelong* experience of Wickham (whom *we* are bound to think of). But Elizabeth will admit eventually that that is "wise and good" (57). Each of them tells the truth as well as they can — and what they say is only *half* true.

x. Mr. Bennet's verdict deserves comment: "Charlotte Lucas . . . was as foolish as his wife and

more foolish than his daughter" (I, xxiii, 127). He is in a good position to estimate the consequences for a "tolerably sensible" person who marries a fool. But we might argue that he is blind to the different situations of a *man*, who acts impulsively, and a *woman* who acts with her eyes open, and her life-policy decided. Jane Austen certainly means us to think about this. The right interpretation, however, is that Mr. Bennet means to support Elizabeth's own decision as right *for herself*. He knows that Charlotte is indeed "tolerably sensible"; and he will not be surprised by what Elizabeth reports when she returns from Hunsdon.

xi. That Darcy is "very disagreeable" (I, xvi, 77) is what Elizabeth has been telling herself. She is using common opinion as a defense against daydreams. She did not find him "disagreeable" during her four days at Netherfield.

xii. On the other hand, Wickham's account of his own father is not to be trusted. The elder Wickham did not give up his successful practice as an attorney in order to become the steward of Pemberley (I, xvi, 81). He had an extravagant wife; so he took a steady salary for her to spend, while Mr. Darcy paid for his son's education (II, xii, 199-200).

xiii. Since Elizabeth had already been caught by Mr. Collins (I, xvii, 87) we might think that she ought to have had an excuse ready against a second unwelcome invitation. But what excuse could she offer? Only a "full card" (to use the language of more formal occasions in a somewhat later time) would have been socially acceptable, unless she was prepared to tell Darcy in plain terms that she did not *want* to dance with him. To do that (and at Netherfield) would have been more outrageous than Darcy's original "slight."

xiv. Mr. Bennet is not Sir Walter Elliott either; and Elizabeth would have had a mother on her

side. Mrs. Gardiner herself would also have supported her, once she committed herself. (It is interesting to wonder where Lady Russell would have stood if Anne had not taken her advice. But alas, there would have been no story to speculate about!)

xv. Darcy's delightfully ambiguous reply to Mr. Collins (I, xviii, 98) anticipates our discovery of this.

xvi. Lady Catherine later lays great stress on the fact that Darcy and Anne were betrothed by their mothers in the cradle (III, xiv, 354-5). What Anne thinks and feels about that passes my imagination. What Darcy thinks is quite easy to imagine. (The contrast in what the children have become is a terrifying commentary on the relative situations of the two sexes — even if poor Anne was as shy as Fanny Price to begin with.)

xvii. This curiosity would be quite normal in someone like Charlotte (say). But Elizabeth knows that Caroline Bingley is jealous of Darcy's interest in *her* personally. Her playfully hostile reaction to his coming over to listen to her music is an admission that she likes him in spite of herself. Whenever Darcy can relax, they both enjoy their Beatrice and Benedick relation. Elizabeth remarks on this later (III, xviii, 380).

xviii. The curious moment when Darcy says "*You* cannot always have been at Longbourn" (II, ix, 179) seems to be part of a waking dream in which Elizabeth, like Cinderella, has been magically transported out of her family-life (and away from Meryton, Mrs. Phillips, the officers, etc.) and settled in a great house like Rosings or Pemberley (compare Elizabeth's own reflections at III, xviii, 384). Darcy (like her creator and myself) always calls her *Elizabeth* (III, xvi, 369; xviii, 382). *Lizzy* is her *Longbourn* name. Bingley uses it at once (III, xvii, 374); but he will soon learn to be more decorous. Even Jane when only thirty

miles from Pemberley will probably modulate gradually away from the habit of childhood. (Wickham never ventures upon this familiarity in our hearing. Conscious of Elizabeth's polite hostility, he calls her "my dear sister" twice in their one recorded conversation after his marriage — III, x, 327-8.)

xix. Darcy "congratulated himself on having lately saved a friend" says Fitzwilliam (185). This becomes "his shameful boast" (188) in Elizabeth's thoughts. But any such indulgence in "smoking room gossip" (as a later age would call it) is rather out of character for Darcy — though the "no names, no pack drill" discretion is typical. That he was driven to talk of such a thing, is another sign of his real motive — to keep *himself* away from Elizabeth — and of the conflict of feelings that it involves.

xx. In his cooler reflections Darcy does not maintain this excessive claim (II, xii, 198). Giving it up forces him to reveal his real objection to the Longbourn connection. For her part, Elizabeth had herself conceded (at Netherfield) that for Darcy himself the Longbourn connection was socially inappropriate.

xxi. Colonel Fitzwilliam was an executor of Darcy's father's will. So he knew "every particular" of Wickham's claim to the family living (II, xii, 203). That would have been enough. Thus, Darcy's revelation of Georgiana's story is a free gift of family confidence to Elizabeth; and she grasps that point. That is why she feels she must not reveal it even in the most general terms. (But if she can tell Jane, why can she not tell her father? Because she would have to tell *him* how she came to know the story, too.)

xxii. Elizabeth's thoughts focus on "the circumstances to which he particularly alluded, as having passed at the Netherfield ball" (II, xiii, 209). But Darcy only mentions the ball in connection

with his observation of Bingley and Jane (II, xii, 197-8). Mrs. Bennet and Mary behaved improperly at the ball (and we can take Kitty and Lydia for granted, since they hardly know what propriety is). But Mr. Bennet behaved with *perfect* propriety there — though only because Jane and Elizabeth pushed him into doing his fatherly duty. Darcy's observation of Mr. Bennet's occasional impropriety has to have occurred at one or more of the Netherfield-Longbourn dinner-evenings. (Imagine: "Of course, Lizzy, being only tolerable, you sometimes have problems getting partners." *That* would not strike Darcy as quite proper! But it was more probably joking at the expense of Mrs. Bennet and the "three very silly sisters" — II, xviii, 232 — that upset him.) Elizabeth does not avoid the conscious admission that her father is at fault. But the faults she recognizes are sins of omission, not of commission (II, xiv, 213; xix, 231).

xxiii. Mr. Bennet's arguments are quite sensible, and his decision would certainly not have been affected by the revelation that Wickham was a seducer. (His guess that Elizabeth has lost a suitor, is not serious. Darcy is the only possibility — and his reaction later — III, xvii, 376 — shows that he has no suspicion there.)

xxiv. In Jane Austen's own vision, Kitty herself was saved as a result of the story. She was "satisfactorily married to a clergyman near Pemberley" (*Memoir*, 1871, 148). Pemberley could do nothing for Mary who "obtained nothing higher than one of her uncle Philips' clerks" (*ibid*.). But Mary is the one who was more obviously fitted to marry a clergyman, if her father had taken a proper interest in her; and Mrs. Bennet might perhaps have become a little more discreet if discretion had been actively encouraged and valued.

xxv. We might add that she is overprotected. No doubt she was always *rather* shy; but did she have the reputation of being "proud" when she was fourteen? Since she is really quite *humble* that seems very unlikely. Her adventure with Wickham frightened her, even more

than it frightened her guardians. She is now avoiding all risk. So the general opinion is probably, "She used to be a nice girl, but nowadays she is *very* standoffish." Jane Austen certainly had Georgiana worked out quite thoroughly. It is true that she declined to write Georgiana's letter to Elizabeth (see III, xviii, 383) for Fanny Knight (*Letters*, 80, p. 312 — 24 May 1813) after Fanny sent her Elizabeth's first letter to Georgiana. JA responded — to CEA — I am very much obliged to Fanny for her letter; it made me laugh heartily; but I cannot pretend to answer it. Even had I more time, I should not feel at all sure of the sort of letter that Miss D would write." Dr. Chapman was mistaken in taking this answer literally ("She knew Darcy's sister sufficiently well for her purpose, but had not studied her enough for this" — 1948, 124). JA could easily have covered the "four sides of paper" that "were sufficient to contain her [Georgiana's] delight" — and she would have done *exactly* that. But it was Fanny who was twenty, with aspirations to be a novelist. *She* would certainly have understood that Georgiana at sixteen was within the compass of her own experience, and that she must write the four sides herself as a useful exercise. (*That* is what her aunt meant.)

xxvi. Lydia would not in any case have been "secluded from the world in some distant farmhouse" (III, viii, 309), like Maria Rushworth in *Mansfield Park*. I cannot tell what her chances of a respectably equal marriage would have been. As we have already granted, *Pride and Prejudice* is not much concerned about empirical probability; but with the Pemberley connection and her natural liveliness, Lydia would surely have done as well as Kitty.

xxvii. My chief warrant for speaking of *sexual* attraction is the fact that *dancing* is such a prominent (though ambivalent) topic and activity in the early relations of Darcy and Elizabeth. There is no doubt what this symbolizes in Jane Austen's mind. That *Darcy* is sexually attracted is unmistakable; and Elizabeth would not *tease* him if she did not feel reciprocally attracted — there would be no pleasure in it for her.

xxviii. Mrs. Gardiner's restraint in not questioning Elizabeth about Darcy is a model of adult delicacy. But it is coming to the breaking point at III, iv, 281; and Elizabeth herself would want to know everything that had happened in London.

xxix. The reader knows more than Elizabeth, and can do better justice to the good sense of Lady Lucas (III, xv, 360). Not even Aunt Philips would invent this rumor in the way that Elizabeth supposes — because of Darcy's reputation and Elizabeth's supposed aversion.

xxx. The conflict of honesty and love is evident in Darcy's concession: "Much as I respect them [your family], I believe." The "I believe" is inserted precisely because he does *not* believe this. He respects Jane, and he is willing to believe that he may come to respect Mr. Bennet — but not Mrs. Bennet and her younger daughters.

xxxi. I cannot agree with R.W. Chapman's claim that Jane Austen "defies the probabilities of heredity" (1948, 184). Like everyone else in her age, she gives priority to environment. But she shows a very serious interest in nature and its inheritance. Darcy, Wickham, and the Bennet girls can all be accounted for, in terms of a sensible assessment of their parentage — only Jane, perhaps, is something of a genetic accident.

xxxii. *Letters*, 1952, ; 1998, . Darcy may eventually follow Sir Thomas Bertram into Parliament. But both of them will always be resolutely determined to preserve the privacy of their family life; and Jane Austen probably knew that green was the color of *hope* in Christian iconography. (This passage in the same letter shows vividly why we should not take Jane Austen's claim that she did not know how Georgiana would write to Elizabeth seriously.)