



Neither Sex, Money, nor Power: Why Elizabeth Finally Says “Yes!”

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IT IS A TRUTH UNIVERSALLY ACKNOWLEDGED that popular media articles about Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* must begin with the phrase “It is a truth universally acknowledged.” All too often, however, those features, articles, reviews, and blogs that describe *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen’s *least* typical novel) as the paradigm for *each* of her novels also assert that Elizabeth and Darcy experience an immediate, symmetrical sexual attraction to one another. True, some of these commentators acknowledge that Elizabeth and Darcy express superficial hostility, or that Elizabeth remains unaware of her true feelings for Darcy, but the “love/hate at first sight” theory dominates the popular understanding of *Pride and Prejudice*.¹

Distinguished Austen scholars have also claimed that Elizabeth is in some fashion attracted to Darcy from the beginning of their acquaintance, even if they concede that her erotic interest is repressed, or is expressed as hostility. Juliet McMaster writes, “We see in Elizabeth as in [Shakespeare’s] Beatrice the subsumed attraction that is behind their antagonism—although they always fight with their men, they are always thinking of them” (49). Jocelyn Harris reads *Pride and Prejudice* as Austen’s reworking of Richardson’s *Sir Charles Grandison*, suggesting that “Elizabeth’s early ‘hatred’ of Darcy is a strong emotion akin to love” and that Elizabeth (like Harriet Byron wishing to make Grandison behave in a hateful way so that she would cease to love him) re-reads Darcy’s letter in order to enflame her hatred (106–07). Claudia L. Johnson’s argument that Austen’s novel privileges Elizabeth’s passionate

happiness over cautious, conservative, conduct-book morality implies that Elizabeth's attraction to Darcy is more erotic than prudent (75–78, 80), while Barbara Sherrod calls *Pride and Prejudice* “a classic love story” in part because of Elizabeth's “sexual tension” in Darcy's presence (66–69).

My present close reading of *Pride and Prejudice*, however, finds no textual evidence to support such claims for Elizabeth's early erotic interest in Mr. Darcy. Nor am I alone in reading the novel this way: other critics have observed that Elizabeth's sexual tension in Darcy's presence appears only *after* she decides rationally that Darcy is admirable and therefore loveable. Barbara Hardy, for example, argues that in *Pride and Prejudice*, “Love grows from gratitude, esteem and proximity” (48–49). David M. Shapard reiterates this view in *The Annotated Pride and Prejudice*, identifying Charlotte's belief (that love begins with gratitude and vanity) with Austen's own views (37 n.8, 507 n. 56) and glossing Elizabeth's recognition that she respects and esteems Darcy with the observation: “This passage, in detailing the step by step development of Elizabeth's feelings towards Darcy, reveals how precise Jane Austen is in presenting the emotional evolution of the heroine” (485 n. 29). Deborah Kaplan refutes some feminist interpretations that dismiss Elizabeth's initial opposition to Darcy as mere defensive “bluster” meant to resist Darcy's powerful attractions and patriarchal control (190), while John Wiltshire suggests that Elizabeth attributes to Darcy some of her own hostile feelings: a projection, he argues, driven not by love but, rather, by resentment (105).

As these critics recognize, *Pride and Prejudice* is not a narrative about a heroine who learns that she has long loved the hero. Jane Austen knew how to construct such a story, as she demonstrates in *Emma*: Emma Woodhouse loves Mr. Knightley long before her knowledge of her feelings darts through her with the speed of an arrow, and canny readers delight in spotting the clues.² Throughout the novel, Emma reveals her love in her unconscious, heightened physical awareness of Mr. Knightley, culminating in the moment during the ball at the Crown when she admires his “tall, firm, upright figure” among the stooped, elderly men (*Emma* 352). *Pride and Prejudice*, however, offers no such clues.

While Austen, as Leo Rockas has shown,³ carefully delineates Darcy's early and growing attraction to Elizabeth, Elizabeth remains not only unaware of, but also largely unaffected by, his quite public admiration of her. She clearly experiences an immediate, visceral sexual interest in Wickham, and later she entertains warm, potentially romantic feelings for Colonel Fitzwilliam, but throughout most of the novel, Elizabeth is aware of Darcy only as an annoying

distraction from these favorites. Even worse, she sometimes views him, like Mr. Collins, as an object of derision. In so far as he provokes stronger emotions in her, those feelings are resentment that his actions have made Wickham ineligible as a suitor, curiosity over his baffling behavior, irritation that he should be so much less entertaining than his cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam, and anger that his interference has injured her beloved sister. Resentment, curiosity, irritation, and anger are powerful emotions, but they are not the same thing as the heightened, even obsessive awareness of another's physical presence that usually indicates sexual attraction. While Darcy experiences such awareness of Elizabeth, she does not reciprocate until late in the novel.

In the narrative that Austen has constructed, Elizabeth's eventual change of heart results from neither sex, money, nor power, but rather from a long process of revision and self-examination. Of course, sex, money, and power are all powerful marriage motives for which *Pride and Prejudice* offers sufficient *exempla*. The marriages of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Jane and Bingley, and Lydia and Wickham are clearly the consequence of strong sexual attraction, happily accompanied by compatibility and respect in the case of the Bingleys. Charlotte Lucas's marriage to Mr. Collins is motivated by money and power: she will gain both a comfortable income and the power of an independent establishment. Elizabeth's love for Darcy, however, evolves not through instant erotic attraction, like Jane's love for Bingley, nor as a calculating desire for wealth and power, like Charlotte's choice of Mr. Collins, but, rather, through careful reflection.

Reviewing with neither pride nor prejudice some of the novel's very familiar scenes, I hope to demonstrate that Elizabeth feels no *sexual* attraction to Darcy (or, for that matter, no lust for the money and power that Pemberley would provide) until very near the end of the novel. For the first half of the novel, she merely *rationalizes* her feelings. Only toward the end of the novel does she *rationaly* assess her chance of happiness with Darcy. As Pat Rogers notes in the Cambridge edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, "the stock antithesis of reason and feeling occurs in numerous texts in this period" (475 n. 14). Austen had dramatized this Enlightenment antithesis more thoroughly in *Sense and Sensibility*, when Marianne defends her visit to Allenham by invoking her feelings: "if there had been any real impropriety in what I did, I should have been sensible of it at the time, for we always know when are acting wrong, and with such a conviction I could have had no pleasure." Eventually, however, Marianne concedes that Elinor's rational judgment might be a better guide than her own good feelings: "Perhaps, Elinor, it *was* rather ill-judged in me

to go to Allenham . . .” (80). *Pride and Prejudice* also dramatizes two ways of falling in love, not by contrasting the romances of two sisters but by contrasting one heroine’s sequential romances. Elizabeth’s own enlightenment comes from the shock of Darcy’s letter, a shock that sets her on the path to love by triggering her subsequent revision and reflection.⁴

No hint of the shocks to come occurs in the opening of *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen introduces Mr. Darcy as an idea before we meet him as a man: he is, after all, one of those single men in possession of a good fortune who must be in want of a wife, and in the first two chapters, before we realize that Elizabeth will be the heroine of the novel, she is apparently as willing as any of the Meryton belles to be fallen in love with. When Darcy first appears at the Meryton assembly (in Chapter 3), he seems to be a version of Frances Burney’s Lord Orville: the rich, handsome, well-born, well-bred gentleman in *Evelina* with whom the beautiful, virtuous, but socially vulnerable heroine falls in love after meeting him in a public place.⁵ *Evelina* describes Lord Orville, her first partner at her first ball, as a

gentleman, who seemed about six-and-twenty years old, gayly, but not foppishly, dressed, and indeed extremely handsome, with an air of mixed politeness and gallantry. . . . His conversation was sensible and spirited; his air and address were open and noble; his manners gentle, attentive, and infinitely engaging; his person is all elegance, and his countenance, the most animated and expressive I have ever seen. (Burney 23–24)

Before the evening is over, she concludes “that the rank of Lord Orville was his least recommendation, his understanding and his manners being far more distinguished” (26). Unfortunately, the embarrassed, tongue-tied *Evelina* makes less of an impression upon Lord Orville. When another admirer declares *Evelina* to be “the most beautiful creature, . . . an angel!” the best that he can reply is “Yes, a pretty, modest-looking girl” (28). His behavior, however, remains chivalrous, and as he comes to know *Evelina* better, his admiration turns to honorable love. He is, after all, a single man in possession of a fortune.

Mr. Darcy at first raises readerly expectations that he will prove to be another Lord Orville: “Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year” (10). Halfway through the next sentence, however, the narrator reverses this first impression of Darcy as a potential hero:

The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the

ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased. . . . (10)

Darcy is thus almost immediately recast not as the noble gentleman who will educate and rescue the heroine but as a tall, upright, bad-mannered, rich young man with “a noble mien” whose manners please no one.

At this point in the novel, readers still have no sense that Elizabeth is destined to be the heroine with whom this rich young man may—or may not—fall in love. Since all of “the ladies” begin by admiring Mr. Darcy’s handsome appearance and end by finding that he has “a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance” (10–11), we must assume that Elizabeth is one of those ladies whose fickle judgment the narrator is satirizing. Just a few lines on, however, the narrative focuses more precisely upon Elizabeth, and there it will remain until the end of the novel. She takes center stage as heroine at the moment when Darcy renders his famous snub (59).

In the following chapter, the narrator confides to readers: “Between [Bingley] and Darcy there was a very steady friendship, in spite of a *great opposition of character*.—*Bingley was endeared to Darcy by the easiness, openness, and ductility of his temper*, though no disposition could offer a greater contrast to his own, and though with his own he never appeared dissatisfied” (17, my emphasis). In Bingley, therefore, Darcy finds easiness and openness, qualities that he lacks but values in his companion, as well as that useful “ductility.” Here, then, are the narrator’s first clues that the qualities which attract Darcy to Bingley—openness and easiness to complement his own reserved, formal nature—will soon draw him to those same qualities (minus the ductility, of course) in Elizabeth.

And indeed, upon their third meeting, Darcy revises his first impressions of Elizabeth. During their first two encounters, Darcy had publicly catalogued Elizabeth’s physical imperfections and criticized her vulgar party manners, but despite the “mortification” of having to acknowledge himself wrong, he is honest enough to do so. He now responds favorably to the intelligent expression of her eyes, the grace of her movements, and the liveliness of her manners (25–26). The “easy playfulness” of her manners is particularly appealing to Darcy, who, as we know, enjoys that quality in Bingley. He is attracted, in other words, not to her mere physical appearance as a sexual object but to the qualities expressed by that appearance, especially her animation. Darcy

thus shows himself capable of revising his first impressions of Elizabeth and of seeing beneath surface attractions to inner character, even if he misreads the “mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner” that prevents her rudeness from offending him (56–57).

Elizabeth, however, remains “perfectly unaware” of this admiration: “to her he was only the man who made himself agreeable no where, and who had not thought her handsome enough to dance with” (26). As Darcy’s admiration increases during her Netherfield stay, Elizabeth remains fixed in her negative first impression, unaware of his alteration. “Jealous” Miss Bingley clearly sees that Darcy is “bewitched” by Elizabeth (57); Elizabeth, however, is merely puzzled by his obvious attentions. Surely a woman with an erotic interest in a man would be quick to interpret such marked attention as admiration, as Harriet Smith does of Mr. Knightley. Elizabeth, however, “hardly knew how to suppose that she could be an object of admiration to so great a man; and yet that he should look at her because he disliked her, was still more strange” (56). Like Fanny Price, unable to believe that Henry Crawford is paying her court because she is impervious to his considerable sexual charm, Elizabeth dismisses any idea that Mr. Darcy might admire her.

Austen further dramatizes Elizabeth’s indifference when Mrs. Hurst rudely abandons her in the shrubbery to join Miss Bingley and Mr. Darcy on the path that “just admitted three.” Darcy gallantly proposes that they change paths in order to accommodate Elizabeth. In a similar circumstance, when Captain Wentworth arranges for Anne Elliot to ride with the Crofts, Anne infers a lingering vestige of love. Elizabeth, however, far from responding to Mr. Darcy’s gallantry, is simply glad of an excuse to get away from them all: “Elizabeth who had not the least inclination to remain with them, . . . ran gaily off, rejoicing” that she would soon be leaving Netherfield (58). She runs, moreover, “gaily,” not in the perturbation of spirits with which Anne Elliot mounts the Crofts’ gig but, rather, as Rockas describes her, as “a spirit . . . clearly free of any attempt at flirtation” (198). She is a woman happy to escape tedious company, not a woman confused by her feelings.

Even more significantly, Elizabeth laughs at Mr. Darcy. When Darcy distinguishes between vanity and pride (63), ironically echoing Mary Bennet’s earlier comic pomposity (21), “Elizabeth turned away to hide a smile” (63).⁶ She laughs at Darcy behind his back, just as she laughs at Mr. Collins. Devoid of erotic interest in either of these men, she finds them both objects of derision and contempt. To Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy remains literally “unthinkable” as a potential mate. Later, at Rosings, Elizabeth is well aware of Colonel Fitzwilliam’s

admiration because she likes him, but at Netherfield, puzzled by Darcy's gallantry, Elizabeth "could only imagine . . . that she drew his notice because there was a something about her more wrong and reprehensible, according to his ideas of right, than in any other person present. The supposition did not pain her. She liked him too little to care for his approbation" (56). At Meryton and Netherfield, then, Elizabeth remains sexually and emotionally unaware of Mr. Darcy except as an unpleasant person who has obstructed her relationship with Wickham.

Mr. Wickham, on the other hand, clearly arouses her erotic interest. Just as Darcy first catches the attention of every woman at the Meryton Ball, so too Mr. Wickham enters the novel as the focus of every young woman's attention. When the Bennet sisters walk to Meryton with their cousin Mr. Collins, the attention of every lady was soon caught by a young man, whom they had never seen before, of most gentlemanlike appearance, walking with an officer on the other side of the way. . . . All were struck with the stranger's air, all wondered who he could be . . . ; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address. (80–81)

In contrast to Darcy's first appearance, however, this potential hero displays no snootiness to injure his popularity, and since once again the narrator does not differentiate at first between the general reaction of "every lady" and the specific reaction of Elizabeth, presumably Elizabeth participates in the general admiration of Mr. Wickham's air and conversation. She alone, however, notices the look that passes between Wickham and Darcy—perhaps because she is watching Mr. Wickham so attentively.

When Elizabeth meets Wickham at her aunt's party the following evening, it is clear that he has been in her thoughts ever since they met:

Elizabeth felt that she had neither been seeing him before, nor thinking of him since, with the smallest degree of unreasonable admiration. The officers . . . were in general a very creditable, gentlemanlike set, and the best of them were of the present party; but Mr. Wickham was as far beyond them all in person, countenance, air, and walk as *they* were superior to . . . broad-faced stuffy uncle Philips. . . . (85, my underscoring)

This anti-Darcy paragon now singles her out for admiration:

Elizabeth was the happy woman by whom he finally seated himself; and the agreeable manner in which he immediately fell into conversation, though it was only on its being a wet night, and on

the probability of a rainy season, made her feel that the commonest, dullest, most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting by the skill of the speaker. (85)

Here, for the first time in the novel, Austen portrays Elizabeth as a woman who is ready to fall in love. Little wonder that Elizabeth accepts Wickham's cover story so uncritically. He exudes sexual glamor. Even his social chit-chat about the weather appears fascinating: "Whatever he said, was said well; and whatever he did, done gracefully. Elizabeth went away with her head full of him" (94). Elizabeth is as bewitched by Wickham as Darcy is by her.

Elizabeth's attraction to Wickham shifts her feelings about Darcy from indifference to resentment. She blames Darcy for Wickham's absence from the Netherfield ball: it is Darcy's fault that she can neither dance with nor marry Wickham. While dancing with one of Wickham's brother officers, she enjoys "the refreshment of talking of Wickham, and hearing that he was universally liked" (101). Even as Darcy now publicly proclaims his attraction to Elizabeth by dancing with her, Elizabeth's dislike for him grows on Wickham's behalf. She is so preoccupied with thoughts of the absent Wickham that she cannot hear the words of her partner. Darcy, smiling, attempts to engage her in a conversation about books (we already know that he admires her lively intelligence and her taste for reading), but she responds:

"No—I cannot talk of books in a ball-room; my head is always full of something else."

"The *present* always occupies you in such scenes—does it?" said he, with a look of doubt.

"Yes, always," she replied, without knowing what she said, for her thoughts had wandered far from the subject. (104–05, my underscoring)

When the dance ends, she is grateful that he no longer attempts to speak to her (105). Distracted by thoughts of Wickham and his grievances, Elizabeth sees Darcy, if at all, as a mere irritant or obstacle.⁷

When Elizabeth meets Wickham again the following day, her feelings for him intensify. He pays her special attention and walks her home to Longbourn, where Elizabeth introduces him to her parents. He quickly becomes a family intimate—so much so that when the Gardiners arrive, Mrs. Gardiner, observing "their preference of each other," feels obliged to warn Elizabeth of "the imprudence of encouraging such an attachment" (162). Elizabeth accepts the advice, lamenting its necessity—"But he is, beyond all comparison, the most agreeable man I ever saw" (163)—and cannot promise to resist her feelings

for Wickham—only that she will not rush into any commitment with him (164). Even when Wickham begins to court Miss King, Elizabeth forbears criticizing him (169, 173–74). She assures her aunt, “At present I am not in love with Mr. Wickham; no, I certainly am not” (163), but in contrast to her feelings for Darcy, she is infatuated and physically responsive, her head filled with thoughts of him while her eyes scan rooms searching for him, annoyed when Darcy blocks the view. By the time Elizabeth visits the Gardiners in London en route to Hunsford, however, she tells her aunt, “I have a very poor opinion of young men who live in Derbyshire; . . . I am sick of them all” (174). She is ready to move on.

At Hunsford, once again, all “the ladies” are attracted to a new man: Darcy’s cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam now replaces Wickham as the attractive man who gets in the way of Elizabeth’s ability to see Darcy: “Colonel Fitzwilliam . . . was about thirty, not handsome, but in person and address most truly the gentleman. . . . [He] entered into conversation directly with the readiness and ease of a well-bred man, and talked very pleasantly” (192). His “manners were very much admired at the parsonage, and the ladies all felt that he must add considerably to the pleasure of their engagements at Rosings” (193). Unlike both Darcy and Wickham, Colonel Fitzwilliam is “not handsome,” but, like Wickham, he has engaging manners. Elizabeth’s taste in men is clearly improving, for she is now attracted to a man with good breeding, good conversation, and good manners even though he lacks dashing good looks. In fact, she acknowledges that he “might have the best informed mind” compared to Wickham (202).⁸

Colonel Fitzwilliam thus replaces Wickham as the man who admires Elizabeth but can’t afford to marry her. Unlike Darcy, Fitzwilliam calls several times at the parsonage during the following week. When the parties meet at Rosings on Easter, “Colonel Fitzwilliam seemed really glad to see them; any thing was a welcome relief to him at Rosings; and Mrs. Collins’s pretty friend had moreover caught his fancy very much” (193). His conversation about music, books, and travel (not, as with Wickham, restricted to the weather and his grievances) so engages her “that Elizabeth had never been half so well entertained in that room before” while Darcy, incapable of small talk, looks on, ignored by Elizabeth (193–94). When Darcy joins them at the piano, his remarks to Elizabeth verge on sweetness; in response to Elizabeth’s sharp rebuke about practice, he smiles and compliments her: “You are perfectly right. You have employed your time much better. No one admitted to the privilege of hearing you, can think any thing wanting. We neither of us perform

to strangers” (197). Far from welcoming this gallantry, however, Elizabeth thinks with satisfaction of his destined marriage to sour Miss De Bourgh. Observant Charlotte suspects Darcy’s real feelings, but Elizabeth convinces her otherwise (202–03). Elizabeth misses obvious clues: Darcy repeatedly chooses to walk in her “favourite haunt” and alludes to her leaving Longbourn and staying at Rosings (204, 201); Colonel Fitzwilliam laughs at Darcy for his uncharacteristic “stupidity” in the ladies’ company (203) and reveals that Darcy has put off their departure more than once (205). Elizabeth, also showing unusual stupidity, cannot read this situation accurately because she has so thoroughly categorized Mr. Darcy as a non-suitor.

She remains puzzled, however, by Colonel Fitzwilliam’s cousin: “It was plain to them all that Colonel Fitzwilliam came because he had pleasure in their society. . . . But why Mr. Darcy came so often to the Parsonage, it was more difficult to understand” (202). Unable to imagine Darcy in erotic terms as a potential suitor, she can only interpret his puzzling remarks about her staying at Rosings on future visits to Kent as a reference to her possible marriage to Colonel Fitzwilliam, who *does* attract her as a potential suitor: “Could he have Colonel Fitzwilliam in his thoughts? She supposed, if he meant any thing, he must mean an allusion to what might arise in that quarter” (204). Colonel Fitzwilliam, for his part, cautions Elizabeth: “Younger sons cannot marry where they like.” “‘Is this,’ thought Elizabeth, ‘meant for me?’” (205–06).

Readers, like Charlotte Collins, may recognize Darcy’s courtship behavior in these chapters, but Elizabeth believes that the romance is all about Fitzwilliam and herself. After learning from Colonel Fitzwilliam of Darcy’s role in separating Bingley from Jane, she anticipates relief at seeing the last of Darcy but well-regulated regret at parting from Colonel Fitzwilliam: “Colonel Fitzwilliam had made it clear that he had no intentions at all, and agreeable as he was, she did not mean to be unhappy about him” (210). Significantly, when Darcy rings the parsonage bell to make his first marriage offer, her spirits are fluttered by thoughts of Colonel Fitzwilliam, not Mr. Darcy (210–11).

Darcy’s proposal and subsequent letter begin Elizabeth’s long process of revision. In accepting Darcy’s version of events as truth, she recognizes that her romantic attraction to Wickham had overcome her critical judgment. She also acknowledges that her valorization of Wickham was influenced by her own attraction to him without further substance or evidence: “His countenance, voice, and manner, had established him at once in the possession of every virtue” (228). Freed from the influence of Wickham’s personal charms, Elizabeth recognizes that she has also constructed an entirely false character

for Darcy. Now she believes him to be a man of honor and principle, even admitting that his inferences about Jane's feelings for Bingley, although wrong, were in some measure justified. When she returns to the parsonage to learn that she has missed a last visit from the cousins, and that Colonel Fitzwilliam had waited over an hour in hope of seeing her, "Elizabeth could just but *affect* concern in missing him; she really rejoiced at it. Colonel Fitzwilliam was no longer an object. She could think only of her letter" (232, my underscoring).

Only at this point in the novel, with Wickham's glamor utterly dispelled and Colonel Fitzwilliam no longer an object, can Elizabeth observe Darcy's true character.⁹ From her growing appreciation of his honor, his principles, his generosity, his kindness, and his deep affections, her esteem for him develops slowly into love—not the immediate, erotic attraction she had felt for Wickham, nor the romantic interest she experienced with Colonel Fitzwilliam, but rather something much closer to "the calm tenderness of friendship, the confidence of respect" that Mary Wollstonecraft had advocated in place of ephemeral romantic love as a solid, enduring basis for companionate marriage (64–65). Wollstonecraft describes how passion ideally subsides into partnership based on friendship and respect. This process is reversed for Elizabeth: as she gradually comes to respect Darcy, she also begins to consider him as a possible friend, even a possible partner, until, eventually, she begins to feel passion for him.

By the time Elizabeth arrives at Pemberley, she knows that Darcy is a good man, she respects his understanding and principles, and she feels "that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" (271), but she still does not like Darcy, nor does she feel any personal attraction to him. Mrs. Reynolds's astonishing claim that her master is sweet-tempered and good-hearted (275–76) prepares Elizabeth, when she and Darcy meet by accident, for his unexpectedly civil behavior. But although she is overwhelmed by emotion, that emotion is not love; rather, it is embarrassment and shame at being found at Pemberley: "She was overpowered by shame and vexation. Her coming there was the most unfortunate, the most ill-judged thing in the world! How strange must it appear to him! In what a disgraceful light might it not strike so vain a man!" (279). "So vain a man!" Elizabeth may respect Darcy, but she does not like him.

Only after his marked civility to her aunt and uncle, his perfectly polite and unassuming manners, and his offers of hospitality, does Darcy begin to fill Elizabeth's thoughts as once Wickham and Fitzwilliam had done. When she hears Darcy invite her uncle to fish the Pemberley waters, "Elizabeth said nothing, but it gratified her exceedingly; the compliment must be all for herself"

(282). Indeed, although “not comfortable,” she “was flattered and pleased” that Darcy wishes her to meet his sister, “a compliment of the highest kind” (284). Elizabeth is no longer interested in visiting her aunt’s old friends; “she could do nothing but think, and think with wonder, of Mr. Darcy’s civility, and above all, of his wishing her to be acquainted with his sister” (286).

Furthermore, just as Colonel Fitzwilliam had once fluttered her spirits, now Darcy does. When Darcy brings Georgiana and Bingley to call on them the following morning, “the perturbation of Elizabeth’s feelings was every moment increasing. She was quite amazed at her own discomposure” and her uncharacteristic anxiety to make a good impression on Miss Darcy (287). Mr. Darcy’s complaisant manners astonish her (290). The Gardiners, carefully observing Elizabeth and Darcy, derive “the full conviction that one of them at least knew what it was to love. Of the lady’s sensations they remained a little in doubt” (289). The narrator adds: “Elizabeth, on her side, had much to do.” She, too, is in doubt of her own sensations, busily observing and judging the behavior of Bingley, Georgiana, and of course Darcy. “Never, even in the company of his dear friends at Netherfield, or his dignified relations at Rosings, had she seen him so desirous to please, so free from self-consequence, or unbending reserve as now” (290). She rightly attributes his astonishing change in behavior to his enduring love for her; in return, Elizabeth now adds gratitude to the respect that she already feels for Darcy. This, I believe, is the crucial moment when she begins to feel something like tenderness and an erotic attraction for Darcy, to respond to him as a man and as a potential mate.¹⁰

Nevertheless, she does not yet love him. Significantly, Elizabeth lies awake two hours that night trying to puzzle out her feelings for Darcy: “She certainly did not hate him. No; hatred had vanished long ago,” to be replaced by respect and esteem.

But above all, above respect and esteem, there was a motive within her of good will which could not be overlooked. It was gratitude.—Gratitude, not merely for having once loved her, but for loving her still well enough, to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of her manner in rejecting him. . . . Such a change in a man of so much pride, excited not only astonishment but gratitude—for to love, ardent love, it must be attributed; and as such its impression on her was of a sort to be encouraged, as by no means unpleasing, though it could not be exactly defined. She respected, she esteemed, she was grateful to him, she felt a real interest in his welfare; and she only wanted to know how far she wished that welfare to depend upon herself. . . . (292–93)

She respected, she esteemed, she was grateful—but Elizabeth is not yet certain whether she could *love* Darcy, whether she could allow herself to be emotionally vulnerable to his character and physically vulnerable to his person. Had Elizabeth's feelings for Darcy been driven by a visceral, erotic attraction, she would not have had to lie awake two hours at this point wondering whether she wanted him to renew his proposals. Catherine Morland, Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, Emma Woodhouse, and Anne Elliot have no need to parse their feelings about the men they wish to marry. In contrast, Elizabeth, who already knows that Mr. Darcy is good, reliable, rich, and in love with her, still doubts whether *she* could love *him*. Gratitude is a powerful agent, but it takes time to do its work.

For contemporary readers, moreover, Elizabeth's respect, gratitude, and esteem for Mr. Darcy were not an inevitable prelude to love. In Maria Edgeworth's 1801 novel *Belinda*, one of the three novels praised by the narrator of *Northanger Abbey* as a "work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed" (31), the principled but portionless eponymous heroine receives a proposal from Mr. Vincent: he is very handsome, very clever, very rich, and very kind. In short, he would be a perfect match were Belinda not already half in love with another man. Unable to return Mr. Vincent's love, Belinda rejects his proposal but permits him to remain at the house where they are both visiting on condition that he not actively court her. The narrator tells us, wryly, "it is certain that the gentleman gained so much . . . that, in the course of some weeks, he got the lady as far as 'gratitude and esteem'" (248). "Gratitude and esteem" were code words for "I like you and respect you, but I don't (yet) love you." Eventually Belinda marries her first love rather than the highly eligible Mr. Vincent. The fact that Mr. Darcy has gotten *his* lady as far as "gratitude and esteem" does not guarantee that she will say yes.

Nevertheless, when Elizabeth visits Pemberley the following day, her attention is focused on Darcy, absent or present, as once it was focused on Wickham. When Darcy enters the room, Elizabeth is conscious that all eyes are watching them. As she struggles to know—and to perform—her own feelings, her heightened awareness of his presence is surely an indication that she is at last responding to him both emotionally and physically. The news of Lydia's elopement, making her fear that all possibility of marriage to Darcy is now lost, helps clarify her feelings. Only now does she begin to feel that she could, indeed, love him as a husband: "never had she so honestly felt that she *could* have loved him, as now, when all love must be vain" (306, my emphasis). While in suspense about Lydia's fate, Elizabeth "began now to comprehend that

he was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, *would* most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, *would* have answered all her wishes” (344, my emphasis). Jane Austen has drawn the trajectory of Elizabeth’s feelings with precision: first respect, then esteem, then gratitude, and only later (“when all love must be vain”) and only in the conditional tense and the subjunctive mood, love.

We know how this story ends—eventually, like a knight of old, Darcy will win fair Elizabeth’s favor through staunch faithfulness and *beau gestes*—but not before the narrator takes a moment to lecture us:

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Elizabeth’s change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty. But if otherwise, if regard springing from such sources is unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often described as arising on a first interview with its object, and even before two words have been exchanged, nothing can be said in her defence, except that she had given somewhat of a trial to the latter method, in her partiality for Wickham, and that its ill-success might perhaps authorise her to seek the other less interesting mode of attachment. (308)

Far from darting through her with the speed of an arrow, then, Elizabeth’s realization that she *could* love Darcy is the result of prolonged, deliberate reflection.

The first clear sign of that love occurs when Elizabeth learns what Darcy has done for her family at the expense of his own: “For herself she was humbled; but she was proud of him” (361). Proud of him! Clearly she feels a sense of ownership. When Darcy reappears at Longbourn, she experiences “an interest, if not quite so tender, at least as reasonable and just, as what Jane felt for Bingley” (370). Now she anticipates his entrance as physically as she once anticipated Wickham’s: “The colour which had been driven from her face, returned for half a minute with an additional glow, and a smile of delight added lustre to her eyes, as she thought for that space of time, that his affection and wishes must still be unshaken. But she would not be secure” (370).

Because Darcy displays “[m]ore thoughtfulness, and less anxiety to please than when they last met,” Elizabeth is not confident that he will propose again: “She was disappointed, and angry with herself for being so” (371). Since Darcy comes “only to be silent, grave, and indifferent,” she is convinced that Lydia’s disgrace has dashed her hopes, and she vows to “think no more about him” (375). When the gentlemen return a few days later for dinner, Elizabeth watches Bingley, not Darcy, and is “triumphant” when Bingley sits beside Jane

(376). Frustrated that she and Darcy have had no contact during dinner, she waits anxiously for the gentlemen to join the ladies in the drawing-room: “If he does not come to me, *then,*’ said she, ‘I shall give him up for ever” (377). When the gentlemen do come, Elizabeth is trapped at the coffee table, surrounded by other women: “She followed him with her eyes, envied every one to whom he spoke, had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee; and then was enraged against herself for being so silly!” (377–78). Elizabeth is not “being so silly”: she is falling in love, intensely aware of her beloved and wishing to be near him.

Lady Catherine, ironically, is the catalyst who ends this impasse by provoking Elizabeth to declare her willingness to marry Darcy. Yet Elizabeth is still doubtful of Darcy’s ability to withstand his aunt’s arguments against their match, fearing lest his family pride and dignity trump his love for her: “If he had been wavering before, as to what he should do, which had often seemed likely, the advice and intreaty of so near a relation might settle every doubt. . . . In that case he would return no more” (400). She resolves: “If he is satisfied with only regretting me, when he might have obtained my affections and hand, I shall soon cease to regret him at all” (400). She is still ready to go either way: she is physically drawn to him and rationally prepared to love him, but should he fail to propose, she will forget about him, much as she had disciplined her feelings about Wickham and Colonel Fitzwilliam.

Happily, such discipline is not necessary. Darcy soon offers his heart and hand, and Elizabeth gives “him to understand, that her sentiments had undergone so material a change . . . as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure, his present assurances” (406). Darcy then explains with words that “made his affection every moment more valuable” that his hesitation was on account of his doubt about her feelings for him (407). He has loved her ardently and faithfully, freeing Elizabeth to express her own love. That evening she tells Jane, “He still loves me, and we are engaged.” When Jane protests, “Oh, Lizzy! it cannot be. I know how much you dislike him,” Elizabeth responds, “You know nothing of the matter. . . . Perhaps I did not always love him so well as I do now. But in such cases as these, a good memory is unpardonable” (414). On the following morning, after Darcy formally requests her hand, Elizabeth must reassure her doubtful father, with tears in her eyes, “I love him” (417). And she does.

NOTES

1. See, for example, the opening sentence of Roger Ebert's 11 November 2005 review of Joe Wright's 2005 film, *Pride & Prejudice*: "It is a truth universally acknowledged by novelists that before two people can fall in love with each other, they must first seem determined to make the wrong marriage with someone else. It goes without saying that Lizzie fell in love with young Darcy . . . the moment she saw him, but her pride has been wounded." In a review of the same film on *The Daily Mail's* webpage, Katie Hampson describes Elizabeth and Darcy as two people symmetrically unaware that they love one another: "For those of you who have never read Jane Austen's satirical comedy of manners or watched one of the screen adaptations, the story centres on the spirited Elizabeth Bennet and the stiff upper-lipped Fitzwilliam Darcy who are forced to examine their hearts as well as their misconceptions about each other before they realise they are in love." Robert Morrison, writing in the *Queen's Alumni Review*, describes the "fairy tale" nature of Austen's happy endings in which "love conquers all, as Austen's (invariably pretty and intelligent) heroine marries Austen's (invariably handsome and wealthy) hero" (60), conveniently ignoring such un-rich heroes as Edward, Edmund, and even Mr. Knightley. (Donwell Abbey is no Pemberley.) A typical blog claims: "Elizabeth is in love from the outset because she shows all signs of the eros love towards Darcy. She is continuously curious of him, stimulated and provoked. She cannot stop herself from looking at him, listening to his conversations, wondering what he thinks about her, and speaking to him whenever there is an opening" ("Elizabeth's Love for Darcy"). Even *Wikipedia's* article for Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* implies that Elizabeth and Darcy have long been in love with one another without realizing it: "The course of Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship is ultimately decided when Darcy overcomes his pride, and Elizabeth overcomes her prejudice, leading to them both surrendering to the love they have for each other."

2. As Juliet McMaster observes, "It is one of the great pleasures of reading the novels—much more fun than combing for clues in a detective novel" (19).

3. Rockas reads many of the same passages I examine here, tracing how Darcy's deepening attraction to Elizabeth culminates in the scene by the piano at Rosings when, Rockas claims, Darcy's love for Elizabeth finally overcomes his resistance (200).

4. Many readers (myself included), so familiar with this novel, will initially resist the idea that Elizabeth does *not* experience an immediate emotional connection to Darcy. This novel about rereading and revision challenges its readers as well as its characters to reflect and to revise their understanding of events.

5. See Frank Bradbrook's discussion of how this "heroic ideal" of the gentleman evolves from Sir Charles Grandison through Lord Orville to Mr. Darcy: "Jane Austen, realistically and shrewdly, deflates the glamorous heroic ideal, though she restores it later in the novel, and it reappears in the description of Mr. Knightley at the ball at the Crown" (96–98).

6. In glossing this passage, Pat Rogers, citing Hugh Blair and Hester Chapone, observes that "this distinction was sometimes drawn in similar terms by moralists and theologians" (470 n. 12). See also Fiona Stafford's note on the passage in the Oxford World's Classics edition: "Bradbrook notes the gendered distinction between vanity, which is associated with women, and pride, which is regarded as a male trait, in Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), letter iv" (314 n. 14).

7. Deborah Kaplan argues that Elizabeth "attacks Mr. Darcy on Mr. Wickham's behalf . . . because she has been attracted to Mr. Wickham and believes that, in arbitrarily controlling the fates of other men, Mr. Darcy controls those of women, too." In effect, Darcy's alleged robbery of Wickham denies Wickham the opportunity to marry Elizabeth. Only later does Elizabeth learn that Darcy has also "controlled" Jane's fate with Bingley (Kaplan 188–89). Elizabeth's animosity at this point is surely authentic, not a disguised erotic attraction.

8. Later Elizabeth compares Fitzwilliam favorably to Wickham: "Elizabeth was reminded by her own satisfaction in being with him, as well as by his evident admiration of her, of her former

favourite George Wickham; . . . though, in comparing them, she saw there was *less captivating softness* in Colonel Fitzwilliam's manners" (202, my emphasis).

9. See Stuart Tave's eloquent account of how Elizabeth learns to distinguish between a merely "agreeable" and a truly "amiable" man (116 ff).

10. In *Northanger Abbey*, the narrator reverses this formula, so that it is the hero rather than the heroine whose love evolves from gratitude: Henry Tilney's "affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge" (252–53).

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