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Freedom and Authority

26 October 2005

Falling in Love with Pemberley, Falling in Love with Darcy:

Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

Although Elizabeth Bennet initially rejects Mr. Darcy's offer of marriage, she begins to warm to the idea as she tours Darcy's wondrous estate, Pemberley, in Jane Austen's classic novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Upon witnessing the "natural beauty" of the place, Elizabeth feels that "to be mistress at Pemberley might be something!" (181). Superficially, it may seem that material wealth draws her to Darcy, yet Austen uses the estate metaphorically to characterize Darcy. As Elizabeth visits Pemberley with her uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, she begins to fall in love with Darcy not for material reasons, but for the insights she gains on his good character. Austen's description of Pemberley mirrors Elizabeth's increasing opinion of Darcy, as Pemberley comes to represent Darcy himself.

Significantly, Austen prefaces the visit to Pemberley with conversation between Elizabeth and the Gardiners, who wish to vacation together. The Gardiners suggest visiting Pemberley, much to Elizabeth's chagrin, since the thought of seeing Darcy again after rejecting his marriage proposal makes her "distressed" (180). Responding to Elizabeth's excuse that she has seen too many "great houses," Mrs. Gardiner declares, "If it were merely a fine house richly furnished, I should not care about it myself; but the grounds are delightful" (180). Similarly,

Darcy is not merely a fine, aristocratic individual, but a delightful person when known extensively and deeply. Austen further sets up her metaphorical description of the Darcy residence by explicitly stating in the narration, “It is not the object of this work to give a description of Derbyshire, not of any of the remarkable places through which their route thither lay” (179). Launching into a description of Pemberley shortly thereafter thus carries implied significance, beyond needless, flowery words. Austen hints at the metaphorical dimension of Pemberley, effectively priming her readers for the description.

Moreover, the very situation adds power to the visit to Pemberley—not coincidentally, it is the Gardiners who accompany Elizabeth. Although they are minor characters, they have no small role in the scheme of the novel. On the contrary, Austen closes *Pride and Prejudice* expressing the Gardiners close relationship with Darcy and Elizabeth. Indeed, Darcy and Elizabeth are “ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing her to Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them” (292). Just before journeying to Pemberley, Austen clarifies the Gardiners’ “suitableness as companions; a suitableness which comprehended health and temper to bear inconveniences—cheerfulness to enhance every pleasure—and affection and intelligence” (179). Hence Austen specifically chose the Gardiners to be with Elizabeth at this momentous time in her life, as she visits Pemberley and begins to fall in love with Darcy. The reunion of Elizabeth and her aunt and uncle further helps readers expect a significant occasion, since between them “there subsisted a very particular regard” (105).

Beyond giving rise to the occasion of visiting Pemberley due to Mrs. Gardiner’s former local connections, the presence of the Gardiners serves to illuminate an important aspect of Darcy’s good character. Based on her prejudice, Elizabeth initially assumes that if she had become mistress of Pemberley, “my uncle and aunt would have been lost to me: I should not

have been allowed to invite them” because of their lower class in relation to Darcy (182). Mr. Gardiner is a businessman “who lived by trade” (105), while Darcy belongs to the landed aristocracy. Mr. Gardiner, though, is “gentlemanlike,” “well bred,” and “agreeable,” like a member of Darcy’s class should be (105). Elizabeth expects Darcy to shun her family, since he had discouraged Bingley from seeing Jane, but at Pemberley Elizabeth learns how very welcoming and friendly Darcy can be. After their tour of Pemberley, Elizabeth and the Gardiners come upon Darcy himself, who surprises her by engaging in conversation with Mr. Gardiner after being introduced. Symbolically, it is not just Darcy himself who welcomes them, but his whole estate: “she heard Mr. Darcy invite him, with the greatest civility, to fish there as often as he chose” (189). Even before that, Pemberley had received them warmly for a tour of the house. The welcoming nature of Pemberley, particularly toward the Gardiners, illuminates Darcy’s virtue of generosity, which Elizabeth had never before acknowledged.

Like Darcy’s large estate that “contained great variety of ground,” the character of Darcy himself holds many facets, only one of which is a generous and welcoming nature (181). Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley challenges her assumptions of Darcy and allows her to learn more about this man, with whom she falls in love. Literally, but also metaphorically, as Elizabeth approaches the Pemberley house, she sees and admires “every remarkable spot and point of view” (181). She and the Gardiners “gradually ascend” to the “top of a considerable eminence” (181). Elizabeth indeed sees Darcy from a different point of view at Pemberley, particularly through the high opinion of his servants, like Mrs. Reynolds. Just as the party ascends a hill to reach Pemberley, so Elizabeth’s opinion of Darcy gradually improves. Elizabeth confesses this to Jane when she reveals her engagement to Darcy: “It [the feeling of love] has been coming on so gradually that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing

his beautiful grounds at Pemberley” (280). Her love gradually rises as she elevates Darcy in her mind, just as the Pemberley house stands “well on rising ground” (181).

While Elizabeth’s opinion of Darcy does indeed improve upon seeing his property, it is never separable from Darcy himself. Austen discourages that interpretation even in the diction of the description, choosing words that often imply personification, like “eminence,” “handsome,” and “standing” (181). In dialogue soon thereafter, Elizabeth and Mrs. Reynolds, the housekeeper, use the word “handsome” in reference to Darcy three times (183). The building has character to it, as it represents Darcy. Elizabeth and the Gardiners also respond to Pemberley in a personable way, “warm in their admiration,” more than a typical reaction to a mere building. Elizabeth reacts in a similar way to a portrait of Darcy himself, as his smile elicits a “deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth” (185). The concept of warmth itself implies something beyond a cold, hard, stone building. Feelings for Darcy himself arise in Elizabeth as she tours Pemberley.

Interestingly, Austen draws out the duality of nature and artificiality through her description of the Pemberley property. Elizabeth admires the stream, which is “without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal nor falsely adorned” (181). Whether or not anything has been altered about this stream, it seems to be natural—so much so that it is indistinguishable, similar to the manners and good breeding of people. Whether Darcy’s manners are attributable to a natural propensity to be good-natured or whether he gains them all from society, he takes pride in seeming natural and without pretense. Mr. Gardiner observes an attractive genuineness in Darcy, saying that Darcy’s behavior “was more than civil; it was really attentive; and there was no necessity for such attention” (191). Somehow, the artificial and the natural can hardly coexist separately—the artificial must be in place for the natural to seem

natural, paradoxically. For example, Bingley teases Darcy for not writing naturally: “he does not write with ease. He studies too much for words of four syllables” (35). These carefully chosen words and drawn-out ideas may not be as natural and free-flowing as Bingley would suggest, but they effectively convey Darcy’s natural meaning, whereas Bingley’s letters “sometimes convey no ideas at all,” by Bingley’s own admission (34). As Elizabeth approaches Pemberley, she thinks of Darcy and likely of their last correspondence, which significantly is a letter from Darcy explaining himself and his motives. While Darcy is civil, he is not “falsely adorned.” Metaphorically, Elizabeth notices in Pemberley a lack of pretense and the presence of a pleasant, good-natured spirit.

Similarly, the furniture and décor inside Pemberley represent Darcy’s character, which attracts Elizabeth all the more. She evaluates the appearance of Pemberley primarily by looking for insights that she can glean about Darcy himself. Looking at the rooms, Elizabeth feels a certain “admiration of his taste, that it was neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less splendor, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Rosings” (182). She begins to lose her prejudice and gain affection for him. When she tells her father of her engagement, she says, “Indeed he has no improper pride. He is perfectly amiable. You do not know what he really is” (282). Visiting Pemberley is approaching the person of Darcy from a different point of view, a perspective that profoundly influences one’s perception of Darcy. His home, the place where he grows up and the estate that he now owns and manages, where presumably he is the most comfortable, provides beautiful insight into the depth of the owner. Elizabeth admires Darcy’s attention to detail and devotion to family tradition in his choice of furnishings for Pemberley, neither too excessive nor too miniscule. Her impressions of Pemberley help her evaluate

Darcy's pride in moderation—to distinguish between the rightful “dignity in his countenance” (191) and “improper pride” (282).

Furthermore, interaction with Darcy's trusted servants, specifically Mrs. Reynolds, gives Elizabeth a new perspective on the character of Darcy. Mrs. Reynolds' praise of Darcy seems credible, since she has “known him ever since he was four years old” (183). She extols how “good-natured” Darcy has been throughout his whole life and claims “he was always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted boy in the world” (184). As one who knows Darcy well, Mrs. Reynolds' high opinion forces Elizabeth to question the very foundation of her prejudice against the man. She wonders, “Can this be Mr. Darcy!” (184). As she takes note of the details of Pemberley and interacts with its housekeeper, Elizabeth learns in amazement of Darcy's depth of character. Indeed, “Mrs. Reynolds could interest her on no other point. She related the subject of the pictures, the dimensions of the rooms, and the price of the furniture, in vain” (184). The material beauty of Pemberley does not captivate her; instead, it is her gradual discovery of Darcy's true nature that attracts her.

In her description of Darcy's estate, Austen personifies Pemberley in order to emphasize the noble reasons for Elizabeth's changing opinion. Pemberley warmly receives Elizabeth along with the Gardiners, symbolizing Darcy's generosity and acceptance of those in a lower class. Though gorgeous, the estate lacks false adornment and pretense, demonstrating Darcy's own lack of “improper pride” (282). Elizabeth tours Pemberley while interpreting all its qualities in light of Darcy's character. Metaphorically, Darcy's estate characterizes him. As Elizabeth becomes acquainted with Pemberley, she gets to know the true Darcy better and without prejudice. She begins to fall in love on the basis of his good character, which she explores at Pemberley.

Works Cited

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. New York: Bantam Books, 1981.

I have upheld the CC honor code on this assignment. _____