

An analysis of the new set of first impressions of the character of elizabeth in ...

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In short, Elizabeth acquires what could be called a new set of first impressions, more informed, but almost as emotionally frivolous as her original. During the events of the third volume, Elizabeth's younger sister, Lydia, elopes with Mr. Wickham, resulting in a state of crisis in the Bennet family, as the possibility of Wickham not marrying Lydia could ruin her status in society. Throughout the entire affair, Darcy does what he can to assist the Bennet's in locating Lydia, yet when she finds out Darcy was at Lydia's wedding, she immediately jumps to the worst possible conclusion, thinking that the possibilities " that placed him in the noblest light seemed the most improbable" (Austen)[304], despite the fact that both Wickham and Darcy had established that they hated each other multiple times over the course of the book, and it takes a letter from Mrs. Gardiner extensively outlining Darcy's entire involvement in ensuring that the wedding went smoothly to make her put aside her doubts.

Certainly, we see levels of improvement throughout the course of the book, such as her finally piecing it together that Ms. Bingley has been running interference between Mr. Bingley and Jane, but those moments are far and few between. Perhaps the greatest joke in this book is the fact that Elizabeth, despite her pretensions of being a rational creature, is almost as changeable as her mother. Some would argue that this interpretation completely degrades Elizabeth and removes her from her context as a proto-feminist in a society that is structured against her, but never do we get a single feminist expression from Elizabeth throughout the book, no concept of rebelliousness against the system. Indeed, she is quite horrified to think that her sister could run off with such a man of low fortune and poor morals, yet

instead of separating Lydia from Wickham, the third arc of the book revolves around ensuring that they marry. Indeed, this is a book where at the end of the novel, all three sisters that were being courted have happily married, and there is no indication that they will be anything less than happy with the state of their marriage. This is far from being any sort of argument against the fundamentals of English society, rather a slight mockery of how complex the trappings of its society are.

Recalling the beginning of her hostilities with Darcy, Elizabeth realizes that she had chosen to commence hostilities with Darcy solely because it had offered her an opportunity to make herself appear intelligent and witty in front of an audience. The entire conflict of this book ultimately begins with Darcy making a social gaffe and receiving Elizabeth's opprobrium for that act, and then English society begins to push the whole affair out of proportion simply because nothing else is known about Darcy's character aside from the fact that he is rich and eligible. Upon viewing Darcy's initial actions, their impression of him is expanded beyond all reason solely because it meshes with their impression of how someone in the English upper class is supposed to act. Wickham is able to con the entire village into believing his story because their first impressions of him, despite being such a small window into his character, justify their own stereotypes of the higher upper class and allows them to feel superior.

Ultimately the subject and message of this satire is perhaps not the characters within the novel, but the way society forces them to act, defining their entire relations through minute interactions with each other. A

compliment or insult at a ball, the quality of one's manner- these first impressions are what define people in a society, not the quality of their mind or soul, and this, perhaps, is the bridge between the characters of this society and the readers in 19th century England. However, Austen does not stop there. Austen writes almost solely from the perspective of Elizabeth because she is trying to manipulate the reader's first impressions through Elizabeth's character. The reader is supposed to distrust Darcy, to believe the worst of his friends, to still doubt him all the way to the very end, because Austen wants to point out how despite knowing that first impressions can be deceiving, we still put endless faith in them.