

From contempt to love: elizabeth and darcy's evolution

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The need to reconsider first impressions runs throughout Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Both Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy judge one another harshly based on first impressions, while Elizabeth also forms judgments of Mr. Wickham and Miss Darcy. Throughout the novel, as Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy see each other and others in a new light, more accurate opinions based upon fact and understanding replace their first opinions based upon impressions, rumors, and prejudices. Because they allow their ideas to evolve throughout the novel, they open themselves up to the possibility and reality of love. Mr. Darcy's initial contempt of Elizabeth is evident when he forms an immediate impression of Elizabeth the first time he sees her at a ball. He says, "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me" (Austen 7). Mr. Bingley suggests that Darcy take Elizabeth as a dance partner, but Darcy declines on the grounds that she lacks beauty. He also says that he does not want to stoop so low as to dance with a girl all of the other men at the ball reject. After that, he persists in criticizing her and will not allow himself to see her as pretty. However, his attitude toward her changes fairly rapidly. By chapter six, he finds that instead of looking for fault in her, her manners please him and he notices her expressive eyes, intelligence, and nice figure. To his own surprise, he "wish[es] to know more of her" (15). Thus, the evolution begins. Elizabeth also starts out with a negative first impression of Mr. Darcy, but it takes her a little longer to change her mind. She judges Mr. Darcy to be too proud not long after he arrives at the dance, but when she overhears his reasons for not asking her to dance, she "remain[s] with no very cordial feelings toward him" (7). Following the dance, Mrs. Bennet comments on Darcy's pride and rudeness,

to which Elizabeth replies that she “ may safely promise...never to dance with him” (12), clearly demonstrating her initial disdain. Even after Mr. Darcy begins to warm up to Elizabeth, she tells Mr. Wickham that she finds Darcy to be “ very disagreeable” (53). Upon hearing Mr. Wickham’s woeful tale, in which Mr. Darcy is the villain, she further judges Mr. Darcy’s character as despicable. When Mr. Darcy pays a visit to the Collins’ abode during Elizabeth’s stay at Charlotte’s new home, Charlotte observes that without Elizabeth’s presence, “ Mr. Darcy would never have come so soon to wait upon me” (116). This observation attests to Darcy’s growing affection for Elizabeth. Later, Elizabeth attends Rosings, the home of Lady Catherine, with Charlotte and Mr. Collins. Mr. Darcy visits Rosings at the same time and engages in a very civil, at times even playful, conversation with Elizabeth regarding the misfortunes of prejudice. He reveals that he regrets having made such hasty judgment of Elizabeth. His feelings of fondness for Elizabeth continue to grow until he can no longer repress them, and he calls on her at Charlotte’s to tell her, “ How ardently I admire and love you” and to ask for her hand in marriage (129). Unfortunately, though he has come to love her, he still sees her as below him because of her financial and social situation. He makes no effort to hide his feelings of superiority from Elizabeth, causing her to turn him down. During her frequent encounters with Mr. Darcy at Rosings, Elizabeth begins to see a more civil side of him, and during her playful conversation with him, he admits that he regrets his hasty judgment of her. However, she still does not view him as a good man due to her misconceptions about his treatment of Wickham. Darcy’s arrogant marriage proposal infuriates her. She tells him that she cannot express

gratitude for the offer because, she says, “ I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it unwillingly” (129). She recognizes that he still sees her as beneath him and that he views this prejudice as something merely to deal with rather than to expel. After his rejection by Elizabeth, Darcy writes her a letter in which he assures her that he will not reiterate his marriage proposal, but writes to amend her misconceptions of the situation with Wickham, because Wickham has told Elizabeth that Mr. Darcy has cheated Wickham out of money left him by Mr. Darcy’s father. During Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley with her Aunt and Uncle Gardiner, they explore Darcy’s beautiful estate. When Darcy arrives unexpectedly, Elizabeth is embarrassed, but he treats her with the sincerest kindness, care, and concern. He realizes that though her aunt and uncle are not of a high social position, they have perfect manners and he likes them much more than he likes Elizabeth’s mother, Mrs. Bennet. He invites the three of them back to Pemberley and insists that Elizabeth meet his sister whom he cares about very much and to whom he has been a father-figure, demonstrating how very much he wants Elizabeth to be a part of his life. When Elizabeth receives Darcy’s letter, she at first wants to disregard it, “ protesting...that she would never look in it again” (139). Then she recalls Wickham’s behavior when he told her of all of Mr. Darcy’s misdeeds. The realization hits her for the first time that Wickham’s words had been inappropriate and that he had had “ no scruples in sinking Mr. Darcy’s character” (140). As much as she wants to believe the best about Wickham and the worst about Darcy, she can no longer deny that Wickham is clearly in the wrong and Darcy must be telling the truth. Upon meeting Wickham

again, she sees “ in the very gentleness which had first delighted her, an affectation and a sameness to disgust and weary” (157). Elizabeth now sees the error in her first impression of Wickham. Visiting Pemberley proves itself the real turning point for Elizabeth. A beautiful and natural landscape surrounds Darcy’s home. His elegant furnishings demonstrate exquisite, but not ostentatious, taste. His housekeeper has nothing but wonderful things to say about him and confirms Darcy’s version of Wickham’s story. As Elizabeth stands in his home, she thinks, “ Of this place... I might have been mistress” (164). Darcy’s unexpected arrival surprises and embarrasses Elizabeth, but he treats her kindly, which left her “ amazed at the alteration in his manner since they last parted” (168). When she and her aunt and uncle dine with Darcy, she meets his sister and likes her very much, regardless of her preconception of Miss Darcy’s exceeding pride. When Elizabeth finds out that her sister, Lydia, has run off with Wickham, Darcy immediately sets out to find them, and when he does find them, he uses his own financial means to settle a marriage between them. He keeps it a secret, but Lydia lets it slip to Elizabeth. When Bingley comes back to visit Jane, he brings Darcy with him, giving Darcy and Elizabeth ample time alone together. During a walk, Darcy proposes again, but this time he has evolved into a person who can do so without any prejudices against Elizabeth’s social and financial standing. Hearing of Mr. Darcy’s concern and generosity in her sister’s scandal cements her new view of him as a very good man. By the time he comes back to visit her with Bingley and proposes, now free of his former prejudices, she has grown to love him and accepts his offer. Because Elizabeth and Darcy allow their impressions of one another to continually

change throughout the novel as more truths are revealed to them, they fall in love. If both of them had clung to that first judgment of the other, Elizabeth and Darcy would never have seen in each other the person they were meant to love for the rest of their lives. However, their evolution from contempt to love does not happen all at once. Rather, bit by bit, as their encounters reveal more, they let go of their prejudices because to hold onto them would be to lie to themselves and to each other. Both characters must step back from the first judgments they made and rejudge one another based on the new information and understanding they have acquired.