

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

A 'Modern' Conduct Book?

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Abstract

The overall purpose of this thesis is to compare and contrast Jane Austen's intentions behind the portrayal of two of her male characters, Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham, in *Pride and Prejudice*, with particular emphasis on the consequences of their behaviour for the female characters in the novel.

The conduct of both Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham has great influence on the women in the novel. According to contemporary conduct rules they both behave improperly on several occasions. While Mr. Darcy goes through an internal change as the story develops and becomes a proper gentleman, Mr. Wickham does not change and he is finally revealed to be an imposter.

I will focus on how the male characters not only create an ordinary plot and 'drive' in the novel, but how Austen's portrayal is of greater symbolic importance. While Mr. Wickham displays what is wrong in society, I believe Mr. Darcy's development is symbolic of a greater change Austen wished for in society. She describes women's unfair position in a patriarchal society and how the upper class manipulate social rules to 'keep out' people from the lower classes. She stresses the importance of good morals and conduct in order to restore fairness and equality in society.

In order to understand the moral standards and to perform a critical discussion of morals and conduct rules, I will draw on the literary theory of New Historicism and examine conduct rules from Austen's contemporary society. The main sources for this thesis, besides *Pride and Prejudice*, are James Fordyce's conduct book *Addresses to Young Men*, and *Lord Chesterfield's Advice to His Son, on Men & Manners*.

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Chapter One: Introduction

There are several reasons for choosing Jane Austen and her work *Pride and Prejudice* as a topic for my master's thesis. Firstly, I find it impressive and interesting that the work has survived as a popular novel through centuries of social and political turbulence and is today still a part of the literary canon. Secondly, the themes in the novel speak to me and fascinate me. Every time I read *Pride and Prejudice* I 'discover' something new. I consider the work to be one of the best examples of Austen's brilliance as an author. The fact that I always find something 'new' in her novel motivated me to write a master's thesis on it; although Austen is perhaps one of the most studied female authors, as a student I feel that I can still contribute something to the literary criticism that already exists. Finally, this year, 2013, is the 200th anniversary of the first publication of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813. I find it fitting to celebrate this anniversary by writing a master's thesis on the novel; in addition, the fact that I wish to write a thesis on Austen's work today is yet another proof of her brilliance and that *Pride and Prejudice* is still of current interest and an important literary work for readers today.

Pride and Prejudice is Austen's best-known work. The protagonist in the novel is Miss Elizabeth Bennet, an intelligent and 'headstrong girl' (Austen 232). Naturally, since the novel is written by a woman and the protagonist is female, the novel may be said to illustrate women's position in late 18th-century English society. The period was patriarchal and women were the weaker gender. The novel displays how women experienced the unfairness of society and how men had power over women. Jane Austen herself belonged to the landed gentry or upper middle class and the setting of the novel is believed to be a good description of late 18th and early 19th-century upper middle class society.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of 18th-century English society that restricted women's freedom was the existence of conduct rules. Women were closely watched and judged in social gatherings based on whether or not they behaved properly according to social norms. Bad conduct could mean the downfall of a young woman's reputation and hence of her marriage possibilities. Rules of conduct also applied to men. However, men had a bigger advantage in being the privileged gender and the rules of conduct they followed both directly and indirectly affected women. Some conduct rules were abused by the upper class to restrict the lower classes' entry into the social elite. Marriage beneath one's social rank was

one of the challenges to their position that the upper class tried to prevent, which had an especially large impact on women.

In this master's thesis I will discuss: firstly, the existence of conduct books/rules in Austen's contemporary society and Austen's incorporation of them into *Pride and Prejudice*. Secondly, how the two male characters Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham break conduct rules and how their behaviour affects women. Thirdly, I will discuss what Austen's intention behind the portrayal of the two male characters might be. In my discussion it is necessary to compare the two male characters with other characters in the novel, but the main focus is on the two gentlemen in question. The main sources will be (in addition to *Pride and Prejudice*) conduct books from Austen's contemporary society.

1.1 Theory

This master's thesis will draw on the literary theory of 'New Historicism'. This section will give a short definition of what New Historicism is, and discuss how and why this theory is the most relevant for the analysis of the chosen topic.

A simple definition of the new historicism is that it is a method based on the *parallel* reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period. That is to say, new historicism refuses (at least ostensibly) to 'privilege' the literary text: instead of a literary 'foreground' and a historical 'background' it envisages and practises a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given an equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other (Barry 172).

New Historicism made its mark in the literary world during the 1970s, but it was not until the 1980s that Stephen Greenblatt coined the term 'new historicism'. Greenblatt used contemporary historical documents which overlapped in some way with the subject matter of his study. The historical documents he used were not subordinated as contexts, but were analyzed in their own right; a more fitting word instead of 'contexts' would perhaps be 'co-texts'. The text and the co-text will be seen as expressions of the same historical 'moment' (Barry 173).

It is important to emphasize the fact that New Historicist essays always constitute another remaking, another permutation of the past: as the text under discussion is juxtaposed

with the chosen document, so a new entity is formed. In this sense the objection that the documents selected may not really be 'relevant' to the text is disarmed, for the main aim is not to represent the past as it really was, but to present a new reality by re-situating it (Barry 175). In other words, New Historicists claim that there is no 'objectivity', that we experience the 'world' in language, and that all our representations of the world, our readings of texts and of the past, are informed by our own historical position, by values and politics that are rooted in them (Newton 152).

After New Historicism made its mark in the world of literary theories, Jane Austen's works experienced a revival. New Historicism, as defined above, looks at the historical context of the work and analyzes the ways in which the work has been influenced by circulating ideas typical of the era in question. One started to study ideas that might be apparent in Austen's works that had not yet been 'discovered'. *Pride and Prejudice*, as with Jane Austen's other novels, is layered with themes which unfold themselves in further study. The theory made it especially interesting to study the position of women as presented in the novel and what Jane Austen's intentions behind the different portrayals might have been. Feminist ideas became popular, and to some critics such ideas were evident in Austen's work.

The popularity of the novel made new study possible, and the number of studies of Jane Austen has increased rapidly during the last decades. Female portrayal is a popular theme of many modern studies. However, feminists have often criticized New Historicism for not discussing gender in their analysis of a text. Nonetheless, as Sara Lennox argues,

New Historicism can and needs to talk about the historicity of every text's reception, how every interpretation of a text is constructed through the interests and needs of that reader, her- or himself produced by a multiplicity of social and historical forces. In addition, without concluding that the collapse of universal claims to truth makes it impossible to make any verifiable statements at all about the texts we treat, new historicists, feminists, and I myself finally need a clearer way to indicate our own political standpoint, our partisanship while we are writing our essays, to build the acknowledgement of our 'positionality' into our scholarship, to display self-consciously in our own writing the historicity we also discover in the works we analyze (168).

One can argue that the theory of New Historicism allows one to focus on and investigate exactly what one thinks is interesting. Today, we seem to see how gender issues were clearly

evident in Austen's work, while her contemporary criticism praises her works for their realistic portrayal of everyday life and characters. In other words, her works and especially *Pride and Prejudice* are realistic and gender issues are apparent; however, that was how society functioned and not necessarily social criticism as some critics claim today. Feminist versions of New Historicism allow recovery of women's texts with the selective enhancement of only such historical evidence as may colour the reader's response with presentist concerns. To learn political lessons from the past we need to have it in black and white (Marcus 133).

By using conduct books from Austen's contemporary period, this thesis takes a New Historicist approach to the subject matter of this study. The thesis will explore typical conduct rules for men from Austen's contemporary period, and discuss how the male characters in *Pride and Prejudice* are affected by them, but more importantly how the rules both directly and indirectly affect the female characters in the novel. To use conduct books as a main source in the argumentation to support ones' idea or claim is a New Historicist technique.

1.2 Conduct books

In order to discuss conduct books, a definition is in order: what are conduct books? I will adapt the definition used for courtesy literature in *Jane Austen and Eighteenth-Century Courtesy Books*:

(...) I should apply this term to any work, or significant part of work, which sets forth for the gentleman (or gentlewoman) first, the qualities or criteria, inherent or acquired, which he must possess; second, his formation (including his various interests, exercises, recreations, and amusements) and his educations; and third, his conduct (Fritzer 3).

Conduct books include a set of rules or guidelines on how to behave respectably in public. Everything from how one is supposed to eat at formal dinners to how to dance and how to talk is mentioned in conduct books. Good conduct displayed good manners and one was able to measure to what extent plausible marriage candidates acted properly and what class they most likely belonged to.

Today, conduct books constitute a historical source from the period in which the literary works were published and read. Penelope Joan Fritzer emphasizes that conduct books were topics of everyday discourse of eighteenth-century propriety, and are themselves

expressions of the implicit values of their culture (2). They give us an insight into that period's ideas and values. However, conduct books are not necessarily representative for the general values and ideas in Austen's period. Courtesy books were certainly widespread in their influence, and Jane Austen certainly knew of them (Fritzer 2). However, conduct books experienced a decline in popularity after the new literary genre 'the novel' made its way into the literary world. The novel, with its immensely more complex registration of manners, was able to present contemporary social norms in a more lifelike and engaging way than conduct books could (Gilmour 9). *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel, and it is tempting to say that it represents a modern courtesy book, or at least a new version of the conduct book more fitting for Austen's audience/readers. With this in mind, the study of conduct rules in *Pride and Prejudice* is of current interest, in particular what Austen wanted to portray by incorporating and shedding light on some of the rules. In *Pride and Prejudice* one of the conduct books is referred to in a negative way and we have to remember that not everybody agreed with all of the rules.

Conduct books were popular during the 18th and early 19th centuries, perhaps especially for women, but for men as well. The social hierarchy in England was flexible as the beginning of a growing economy led to a new type of work and new fortunes (Gilmour 5). 'New money' became a phenomenon that included people not from the old aristocracy or the landed gentry. The new social group was accepted into the social circle of society's elite to varying degrees. An old family name still weighed heavily and harvested respect, and no money could ever compensate for the lack of a good family name. The 'nouveaux riches' were granted social access more or less unwillingly, as the upper class needed more money and the new people desperately wanted in.

Marriage is of course another aspect that contributed to this flexibility between the social classes. People married below their social class, or conversely married into the class above them. This flexibility within the upper social sphere resulted in a diversity of customs and conduct at social gatherings and it was easy for the elite to spot and avoid the new, less respectable families. The upper class had long traditions in social etiquette, while the new group lacked this education and did not always know how to act properly in certain social situations.

The 'nouveaux riches' and the other social climbers wanted to blend in and to be accepted by the elite, and strived to follow the strict social rules of conduct carefully watched and maintained by the upper class. Conduct books became increasingly popular, as they

offered guidelines for good behaviour and a way of blending in with the social elite. Conduct books addressed not only expected good conduct, but also what were considered good morals. Conduct books and religion often went hand in hand, since they fulfilled one another; good morals were often equal to Christian morals. Most families consequently owned a Bible and one or several conduct books.

Women were thought to be more easily tempted to break rules of moral or social conduct. The conduct books were to a large extent published for women to give them advice on how to behave, dress, and avoid tempting situations and so on. In *Pride and Prejudice* one of the most well-known conduct books from Austen's contemporary society is referred to on more than one occasion. The most direct reference to the conduct book is when the Bennets' cousin, Mr. Collins, is visiting and reads aloud from James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*, published in 1766. Mr. Collins is one of the characters in the book who is most preoccupied with conduct rules. He is also the most ridiculous character in the novel. This is an example of Austen's ironic style and how she criticizes and 'warns' society that when it comes to conduct rules, not all of them should be strictly followed. Mr. Collins considers conduct books proper entertainment for the women in the Bennet family and Lydia interrupts him. It is ironic that it is Lydia who interrupts him, as she later in the story elopes with Mr. Wickham and is in general the 'wildest' of the Bennet sisters, representing the clearest break with the prevailing conduct code.

Conduct books were not only meant for women, books were also published to give men advice on how to behave properly. Compared to James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*, no conduct book for men stands out particularly or is mentioned in Jane Austen's other works. However, most of the conduct books intended for men discuss similar aspects of what was considered proper behaviour. This text will draw on two conduct books from Austen's contemporary society and focus on various conduct rules discussed in these books.

James Fordyce's *Addresses to Young Men*, was published in 1777. Unlike his conduct book for women, this was published in Austen's lifetime. James Fordyce was a preacher who specialized in giving sermons on morality and conduct to young gentlemen and women (Fordyce, ODNB). Later he collected some of his sermons and published them as conduct books that gave advice to men and women on how to behave properly. Austen uses Fordyce's book as a reference in *Pride and Prejudice*, albeit with a negative connotation; one could claim that some of the rules discussed in the conduct books for men still had a stronghold in Austen's contemporary society. Austen criticized Fordyce's conduct book for girls as too old-

fashioned; although she does not explicitly refer to his conduct book for men, it is reasonable to suppose she thought that that was also too rigid.

In Jane Austen's period, religion and Christianity had a vast influence on society. Jane Austen's own father was a rector and she was familiar with Christian values and morals. Religion is not openly discussed in her novels; they are however pervaded by Christian values and especially morals. It is therefore of interest to look at what James Fordyce believed were important Christian values, since they must represent ideas that were current in Austen's society. Austen's use of Fordyce's conduct book indicates that whether Austen approved of it or not, it captured something typical of 18th- and 19th-century society.

Lord Chesterfield wrote several letters to his son with advice on conduct and proper behaviour. After his death, these letters were compiled and published. *Lord Chesterfield's Advice to His Son, on Men & Manners* was published in 1774, and several editions appeared during the 18th century and onward (Stanhope, ODNB). What is interesting about Lord Chesterfield's book is that it was not intended to be published as a book, but rather as personal advice given to his son in the form of letters; thus it might be said to give the reader an insight behind the scenes of the strict conduct rules in the Georgian age (Gilmour 18). It certainly draws a contrast between the strict rules of conduct discussed in the letters and the actual language of the letters. The language of the letters demonstrates 'the low opinion of human nature, the cynical attitude to women, the cold, calculating approach to human relations' (Gilmour 17). Thus, it is tempting to say that this conduct book must contain some of the general ideas concerning proper behaviour for men during Jane Austen's period.

The two conduct books are different and contribute to diverse insights into 'popular' conduct rules. Fordyce's conduct book, like Chesterfield's letters, discusses personal characteristics and qualities. However, Fordyce's book is more general and resembles a sermon. Like his conduct book for girls, *Sermons to Young Women*, Fordyce's book for men is written in the style of a public sermon. Chesterfield's letters are more personal and detailed. These two conduct books complement each other. Fordyce gives an insight into what was thought of as fitting conduct for all men, evidence of what must have been more or less accepted by society; Chesterfield gives an insight into what one man thought was necessary advice for his son.

In the discussion, the text will focus on how these two conduct books present the six aspects of Pride, Prejudice, Class, Lying/Truthfulness, Vanity and Moral Character. Jane Austen's novel is titled *Pride and Prejudice*, and we understand that these two aspects

represent two major themes in the novel. Due to the setting of the novel, within the upper and the upper middle class, it is safe to assume that one other major theme is class and class difference. Truthfulness and vanity are typical qualities discussed in conduct books and moral character represents the overarching goal. These features are present in most of Austen's works and may represent aspects of society that Austen considered in need of improvement. Her novel was intended to shed light on the unfair position of women in society and consequently improve it.

Chapter Two: The Perfect Gentleman: Mr. Darcy

Jane Austen's male characters are diverse. Some are comical, mean, weak and even difficult to make out. Others are intelligent and strong-minded, like her female protagonists. In some of her novels, as in the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, the lead male character is rich and belongs, financially and culturally, to a class above that of the female protagonist. Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy has become a legend and the definition of a gentleman. Mr. Darcy was raised in true aristocratic style. He is versed in the arts of culture, conversation, and good conduct in general, a part of the upbringing of children from the upper class. He is described as handsome, fine and tall, and he overall gives the air of being a noble gentleman (Austen 7). He is courageous, calm, intellectual and intelligent. In addition to these good traits, he is the owner of Pemberley and has an astonishing income of ten thousand a year.

Despite his many good qualities, the readers' first impression of Mr. Darcy is not at all positive. The good people of Meryton first perceive him as proud and rude. Although he is considered proud, the reader is still captivated by his character. One may wonder whether or not pride, prejudice and class make Mr. Darcy even more unreachable and attractive or if readers tend to forget or overlook these factors. The bad qualities are nevertheless vital to the story's development as Mr. Darcy is not humbled until Elizabeth rejects his marriage proposal. After the refusal, however, Mr. Darcy overcomes his pride and Elizabeth her prejudice and they can finally accept each other and fall in love. In line with the characters' inner struggle that results in the change in their personalities, the reader starts to like Mr. Darcy. He is flawed, which makes him human, as well as lovable and easy to relate to.

This chapter will analyze examples from *Pride and Prejudice* where Mr. Darcy breaks traditional social conduct rules in order to be with Elizabeth Bennet. The analysis will focus on the conduct rules of pride, prejudice and class; it is the breaking of these rules that enables him to follow his dream and marry for love. As well as examining his social liberation due to the breaking of social rules, the text will take a closer look at how men and conduct rules affected not only Elizabeth, but also women in general. The text will argue that Jane Austen, through her portrayal of Mr. Darcy, is able to shed light on conduct rules she thought were too strict and restrictive - to a certain extent for men, but more especially for women. The social conduct rules for women were stricter; however, through male characters Jane Austen was able to show how social rules for men also indirectly affected women. Through the portrayal

of Mr. Darcy, Jane Austen is able to criticize the existing social rules and offer an alternative with a happy outcome for both men and - perhaps especially - women. Jane Austen's character Mr. Darcy doesn't only serve as an example of how men should act from a female point of view; through the novel's great success, she was able to create the ideal man whom men have subsequently striven to imitate. At the same time, one may question whether or not she made it more socially acceptable to break social rules which were too old-fashioned and discriminatory.

2.1 Pride

James Fordyce does not address pride in a separate paragraph or chapter. In the chapter 'On the Beauty of Humility', Fordyce stresses the importance of the quality of humility. Humility is the opposite of pride, thus the chapter indirectly addresses pride.

Sooner or later too they [young men] may be convinced by experience, that pride, whatever show she may make, or whatever deception she may practise, for a while, is secretly conscious of as much imbecility as insolence, and seldom fails at last to incur a mixture of contempt, dislike and indignation (Fordyce 239).

Lord Chesterfield addresses pride in the chapter called 'Dignity of Manners'.

Dignity of manners is not only as different from pride, as true courage is from blustering, or true wit from joking, but it is absolutely inconsistent with it; for nothing villifies and degrades more than pride. The pretensions of the proud man are oftener treated with sneer and contempt, than with indignation; as we offer ridiculously to a tradesman who asks ridiculously too much for his goods, but we do not haggle with one who only asks a just and reasonable price (Chesterfield 83).

This section will analyse three occasions where Mr. Darcy clearly breaks the conduct rules concerning pride and discuss what effect this had on Elizabeth and on women in general. The first example is from the ball at Netherfield, when Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth meet for the first time. The next examples are from Elizabeth's visit to Netherfield after the ball. This is the second time Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth meet and from her very arrival there is a notion of Mr.

Darcy's interest in Elizabeth. The third and final example is during Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley. This is the first time Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth meet after her rejection of him.

When Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy first meet, they are at the ball in Netherfield. Mr. Darcy is the biggest attraction at the ball. However, in accordance with Lord Chesterfield's warning, people start to dislike Mr. Darcy:

(...) 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; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend (Austen 8).

Pride was a bad quality and Mr. Darcy breaks the conduct rule when he behaves with pride and offends the other guests at the ball. By some, he is excused because of his fortune: they claim he has the right to be proud and snobbish. Miss Lucas claims that Mr. Darcy's pride does not offend her too much, because, as she asserts, there is an excuse for it. 'One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, every thing in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a right to be proud' (Austen 14). If one takes Charlotte Lucas' opinion into consideration, one could argue that pride was more or less socially acceptable, if one could afford it. It may be safe to assume that it was probably an established way of thinking among the various classes and a tolerance reserved for the elite.

Even though Miss Lucas can come to terms with and even accept Mr. Darcy's pride, Elizabeth cannot. She says she would not have cared so much if her own pride had not been insulted (Austen 14). At the ball Mr. Darcy refuses to dance with Elizabeth after his friend Mr. Bingley's long persistence. In his reply to his friend where he refuses to dance with her, in a manner not entirely polite, Elizabeth is accidentally within earshot. Elizabeth's pride is insulted and she dislikes him from that very moment. 'Darcy's early attitude toward dancing and his superior aversion to it attest to his unwarranted pride, and his attitude toward dancing changes as his pride takes less precedence' (Fritzer 37). Later, at another ball, Darcy invites Elizabeth to dance; most likely this marks a turning point in Darcy's personality. Lord Chesterfield mentions 'pride' as a characteristic that is dangerous and easily gained. It is interesting that Mr. Darcy's pride does not affect him more socially or in the upper social sphere, since it is mentioned by Lord Chesterfield as one of the 'cardinal' sins. Again, Miss

Lucas' argument is validated, as with money one can buy almost anything, even social acceptance.

After the ball, there is another incident that reflects Mr. Darcy's pride. Elizabeth's sister Jane is invited to Netherfield by Mr. Bingley and the rest of the Bingley party. Jane falls sick and has to spend some nights at Netherfield to recover. Elizabeth becomes worried and decides to walk to Netherfield on foot, without a chaperone or ride. This was unorthodox and against the social norms concerning proper conduct for women. When she arrives at Netherfield, she is dirty and her cheeks are flushed from the exercise.

(...) Manly exercises are never graceful; that in them a tone and figure, as well as an air and deportment, of the masculine kind, are always forbidding; and that men of sensibility desire in every woman soft features, and a flowing voice, a form not robust, and a demeanour delicate and gentle. (Fordyce, *Sermons* (VIII) 225).

Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst are shocked at this improper and unladylike behaviour. After Elizabeth leaves the room to visit her sick sister, Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst gossip about Elizabeth's shocking appearances and they ask Mr. Darcy what he thought of her conduct. When Mr. Darcy first saw Elizabeth he was 'divided between admiration of the brilliancy which the exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the occasion's justifying her coming so far alone' (Austen 23). Miss Bingley teases Mr. Darcy's previous admiration for Elizabeth's fine eyes and asks whether or not his admiration has altered after Elizabeth's 'wild' behaviour today. Mr. Darcy replies 'not at all, they were brightened by the exercise' (Austen 25).

Even though Mr. Darcy thought the walk an improper act himself, one clearly sees the beginning of his internal struggle. He admires Elizabeth whilst recognising her improper behaviour; however, he is rebellious and does not want to dignify Miss Bingley's insolent comment about Elizabeth. Miss Bingley is jealous of Elizabeth and the admiration Mr. Darcy feels towards her; however, Miss Bingley's reaction also portrays the strict social norms that women had to follow in order to keep their reputation, and Elizabeth's appearances and actions were clearly thought of as improper behaviour. Mr. Darcy knows this too, but being a man he is freer to ignore the rules. Elizabeth, Mrs. Hurst and Miss. Bingley, however, cannot, and Elizabeth's improper behaviour does not pass without a comment between the two other ladies. This is an example of men's advantage in Austen's contemporary society. Though

Elizabeth clearly acts improperly, Mr. Darcy is free to ignore it and he also makes his sentiments known in public, which must have felt unfair to the other ladies as they clearly pointed out what they had been strictly taught to follow. Mr. Darcy would not have to face any critique for his sentiments as he is a man of a large fortune and he clearly could choose to ignore some social norms when he did not find them in accord with his personal wants. This reflects the flexibility of social norms: they are always changing, compared to the written conduct rules, and Austen emphasizes the importance of common sense or good morals and how they were more important than the written rules in order to reshape society into a more modern and equal value system.

During Elizabeth's time at Netherfield she has to spend some time with the other guests of the house, including Mr. Darcy. It is the first time Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy have a conversation. This is of interest, because Elizabeth is under the impression that Mr. Darcy does not like her, while it is during Elizabeth's stay at Netherfield that Mr. Darcy in fact changes his impression of Elizabeth and starts to admire her. At one point, Mr. Darcy suggests that the ladies should play some music. While Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst are playing and singing Mr. Darcy reflects that '(...) *he* had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her. He really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger' (Austen 35, my emphasis). Even though Mr. Darcy admires Elizabeth for her intellect and personality, he does not consider his feelings for her a real threat. He admires his own position too much to give it up in order to be with Elizabeth. In other words, his pride does not allow him to consider the possibility of marrying below his station.

Later, during Elizabeth's stay, Miss Bingley invites Elizabeth for a stroll around the room. Miss Bingley's intentions are to draw Mr. Darcy's attention, and she lures Elizabeth to join her as she believes this will secure Darcy's attention. They start to converse, and Miss Bingley points out that Darcy is flawless and that it is impossible to tease him. Mr. Darcy explains that he is given more credit than he deserves and the conversation develops into an intellectual talk mostly between Elizabeth and Darcy. The conversation is an example of how Elizabeth and Darcy challenge each other and how their personalities are quite similar. In the conversation they discuss the personal qualities of pride and vanity. Mr. Darcy claims: 'Yes, vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride-where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good regulation' (Austen 39). Elizabeth smiles at this remark, as she believes Mr. Darcy to be proud and that he must consequently believe himself to have a superiority of

mind that can control pride to be so little affected by this. He continues to say that he is not flawless and points out that 'my good opinion once lost is lost for ever' (Austen 40).

Elizabeth agrees that it is indeed a flaw in one's character and points out that his defect is a propensity to hate everybody. Mr. Darcy then replies with a smile that Elizabeth's flaw is to wilfully misunderstand them (Austen 40).

Austen cleverly makes the characters point out each other's flaw and how they perceive one another. Mr. Darcy is proud and Elizabeth is prejudiced, and they both need to learn humility. The flaws are clearly something they have inherited through birth, and in order to change, they need to focus on themselves as individuals. Readers most likely realize that Elizabeth and Darcy share similar traits and would be a good match; however, Austen wanted the characters to free themselves from their position in society in order to recognize one another as individuals and a suitable match.

Later, at a ball at Netherfield, Mr. Darcy meets Mr. Collins. Mr. Collins, mentioned earlier, is perhaps one of Austen's most comical characters. He is Mr. Bennet's cousin, and as his only male heir is therefore entitled to the Bennets' estate. Mr. Darcy is familiar with proper conduct and it is clear in the end that his 'deep' morals are righteous; however, as this thesis points out, some of his behaviour needed change (Fritzer 4). When Mr. Darcy and Mr. Collins meet for the first time, it is both painful and comical, as the differences between them are evident.

(...) Mr. Darcy was eyeing him with unrestrained wonder, and when at last Mr. Collins allowed him to speak, replied with an air of distant civility. Mr. Collins, however, was not discouraged from speaking again, and Mr. Darcy's contempt seemed abundantly increased with the length of his second speech, and at the end of it he only made him a slight bow, and moved another way (Austen 67).

Mr. Darcy acts proudly and is not very pleasant to Mr. Collins; Mr. Collins, however, is pleased with the conversation. Lord Chesterfield argues that one should not show contempt to people below one's rank and Mr. Darcy is clearly showing contempt (60-61). However, Mr. Collins is not socially intelligent and does not notice Mr. Darcy's unseemly behaviour.

(...) moral life, in an Austen novel, is identified with emotional intelligence; and it is precisely through failure of intelligence- the wit to know his own limitations- that Mr.

Collins appears as a moral monstrosity (Ghent 304).

The comparison between Mr. Darcy and Mr. Collins is interesting and necessary, because Mr. Collins does not have the correct deep morals, even though he strictly follows conduct rules. He follows conduct rules or advice blindly and without being critical or using common sense. This is evident in all his actions, but perhaps most prominently when he suggests the Bennet family should disown Lydia after she elopes with Wickham. Mr. Darcy helps the Bennet family because he too has experienced a Wickham 'accident' with his sister Georgiana. When help is most needed, Mr. Darcy comes to the rescue following his instincts, while Mr. Collins - who is part of the Bennet family - distances himself from them.

There are some important differences between these two characters. Even though Mr. Darcy may act proudly, he has good morals and social intelligence; Mr. Collins, however, has neither. Social intelligence might be referred to as common sense and the importance of sense in Austen's work is not to be taken lightly. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen stresses the importance of good common sense and this is also evident in *Pride and Prejudice*, especially through Mr. Collins' lack of common sense.

At the end of the novel, during a conversation between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, they both apologize for their improper behaviour. Mr. Darcy especially apologizes for his pride and excuses himself, claiming he was brought up that way. 'I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. As a child I was taught what was *right*, but not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit' (Austen 241). Mr. Darcy's pride is in many ways improper; he was taught what was proper, but as a child he was pampered and forgot the meaning of proper pride. After Elizabeth's refusal, Mr. Darcy

(...) produces the self-insight which he displays in this passage, the remarkable change in manners which Elizabeth observes at Pemberley, and a transcendence of his former prejudices in his determination to ally himself with Elizabeth despite the increased undesirability of her family (Paris 136)

At the end he also remembers what he was taught, and he is proud, but now properly proud. Proper pride is necessary as Mr. Darcy is a respected landlord who recognizes - with some apprehension - that in that period of 'collapsing standards, (...) the norms by which men have

lived for generations are in danger of neglect or destruction' (Duckworth 313). Formerly, Mr. Darcy has used his pride against people, being rude and above his company. After his change, however, he is able to use his pride so that it benefits other people. Compared to Mr. Bennet's lack of parental guidance and pride, Mr. Darcy as Elizabeth's husband creates order and balance for Elizabeth that she never had at home. Mr. Darcy's pride makes him perhaps a bit stiff; however, compared to how Elizabeth is raised one must believe that it will be an improvement (Paris 101).

It is interesting to read how Austen makes Mr. Darcy break a conduct rule that is not beneficial to women and especially not to Elizabeth. In another way one could argue that Mr. Darcy's pride is one of the driving forces in the plot. Without his pride or Elizabeth's prejudice they would never have been able to find each other. Even though it might seem that these qualities drive them apart, it is these same qualities that bring them together. The way they react and challenge one another is a new experience for both of them. They are intellectual equals and as soon as they recognize this in each other they fall in love. Jane Austen probably did not think that conduct rules concerning pride were out of date; their breach, however, is one of the reasons why Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy fall for each other. Austen did not make Mr. Darcy break that particular rule because it indirectly affected women unfairly. It is tempting to suppose that if the characters had not been Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, it would not have been one of the driving forces of the plot. However, in this case, both Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy meet as individuals with a personality that contains flaws. Individualism was important to Austen: in order to respect one another, one had to be able to see each other as individuals and not as a person belonging to a particular social class or gender.

2.2 Prejudice

On 'Prejudices' Lord Chesterfield writes:

Never adopt the notions of any books you may read, or of any company you may keep, without examining whether they are just or not, as you will otherwise be liable to be hurried away by prejudices, instead of being guided by reason; and quietly cherish error, instead of seeking for truth. Use and assert your own reason; reflect, examine and analyse every thing, in order to form a sound and mature judgment (106).

James Fordyce does not address prejudice in a separate paragraph; however, he claims that '(...) your internal fight is dimmed by prejudice, or distracted by folly: you perceive not the living forms of truth and virtue, which have been admired by the wise, the pious, and the manly, in all ages' (200). There is no doubt that he considers prejudice a bad quality.

This section will discuss some general notions of Mr. Darcy's conduct where prejudiced behaviour is evident; in addition, two examples will illustrate Mr. Darcy's flaw of prejudice and how it is present in his behaviour. The first example is from Elizabeth's stay at Netherfield, when Mrs. Bennet's improper behaviour at her visit at Netherfield makes Mr. Darcy prejudiced, not only by misjudging Elizabeth and the rest of her family, but in extending the contempt and prejudice he feels towards her to the rest of the town. The other example is Mr. Darcy's proposal to Elizabeth. His proposal speech is so insulting and full of prejudice that Elizabeth turns him down.

When one examines Mr. Darcy's behaviour with Lord Chesterfield's advice in mind, one can argue that he is not only influenced by pride and class, but also prejudices. Although it is Elizabeth who is the more prejudiced of the two characters, Mr. Darcy also displays this fault. It is tempting to suppose that he generally thinks the people of Meryton are less intelligent, and judges a whole village based on his own generalizations and prejudices. The humoristic style of Austen is evident in the description of both Mr. Bingley's and Mr. Darcy's perception of the ball. Mr. Bingley had never met more pleasant people or prettier girls in his whole life and thought the assembly wonderful. Mr. Darcy, however, experienced a collection of people without beauty or fashion and felt no interest (Austen 12). Mr. Darcy seems determined not to like Meryton or the people inhabiting the town. Mr. Darcy breaks Lord Chesterfield's advice: due to his prejudice, he is determined not to like the people of Meryton.

Mr. Darcy is also prejudiced when he judges Elizabeth based on her family's behaviour. He sees how Mrs. Bennet, in her desperate hunt for suitable husbands for her daughters, is negligent of her daughters' feelings and boasts of Jane's dancing with Mr. Bingley. Lydia is acting improperly, running around chasing soldiers and flirting with them. What Mr. Darcy sees of Elizabeth's family at social gatherings confirms his own prejudices towards townspeople and especially towards the women in the Bennet family. Before Mr. Darcy has talked to Elizabeth alone, he draws a picture of her based on the rest of her family's behaviour. James Fordyce argues that one should be careful of 'the blindness of prejudice'

(24). Mr. Darcy breaks this conduct rule and displays his own already established prejudices in watching the tragic show of the Bennet family.

When Elizabeth stays at Netherfield, her mother Mrs. Bennet comes to visit. In a conversation with Mr. Darcy, she humiliates Elizabeth by being ignorant and rude. Mr. Darcy is only making conversation, but Mrs. Bennet believes he is insulting the people of Meryton and corrects him rudely. Elizabeth is ashamed and retires to Jane's room after Mrs. Bennet's departure. Mr. Darcy is left with Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley, who gossip about Elizabeth's family. It is tempting to guess that Mr. Darcy agreed with some of the insults the two ladies directed at the Bennet family; however, he would not join in their censure of Elizabeth (Austen 32). On the one hand, it is quite obvious that Mr. Darcy holds Elizabeth in high esteem and recognizes her superiority compared to the rest of the family members. On the other hand, due to his prejudice, he is not willing to ignore her family and confess his love, because of the shame it would bring to his family.

It is interesting to discuss Mr. Darcy's reasons for his proposal to Elizabeth. Since they had not talked properly, it is tempting to say that he must have taken little interest in Elizabeth's feelings on the matter. He feels an intellectual and physical attraction towards her; however, he must have drawn a conclusion from his prejudices concerning women. Most likely he understands that he is a good 'catch' and believes that Elizabeth is aware of this and would probably have dreamed of such an opportunity. This affects Elizabeth directly as she is hurt and insulted. Mr. Darcy's speech, however, is a good example of some of the patriarchal ideas typical in Austen's period. If one takes a step back, one is able to look at the values represented in Mr. Darcy's speech and how they most likely represent the values of most men belonging to the upper class of gentlemen in late 18th- and early 19th-century English society. Love in its truest meaning had lost its value and was subordinate to the actual gain one was able to get through marriage: money. If a man belonged to the upper class and had a great income, he could easily choose between the fairest women. There were relatively few wealthy men compared to the number of women, and as a result there was competition among women to 'catch' the man before another woman was able to lure him into marriage. Some men took advantage of this situation and flirted with women just for fun. In Mr. Darcy's case this is not the case. However, the points he makes in his speech are degrading to women and Austen makes Elizabeth turn him down, to put emphasis on the unfair and advantageous position men had in society.

2.3 Class

In the chapter 'Company', Lord Chesterfield discusses what is considered good and bad company. Lord Chesterfield claims that good company consists '(...) chiefly of people of considerable birth, rank, and character' (12). In other words, good company can be understood as upper and upper-middle class. On the one hand, he comments on how you should respect and not show indignation to people belonging to a lower class than yourself (Chesterfield 11). On the other hand, he still argues that the company of people beneath you should not be too much sought after. He continues giving examples of 'low company'. He says that many people of low birth and breeding have been unfairly introduced into the inner circles and consequently it is important to recognize the imposters (Chesterfield 12). It is interesting and tempting to discuss whether or not matrimony is one of the unfair accesses into a higher class Lord Chesterfield discusses. If that is the case, one could argue that, although Christian morals were important, they were in some cases ignored when dealing with class distinctions. Most likely the upper class was not willing to let marriage between the upper and lower classes be socially accepted, and conduct books informed their readers of the dangers of marrying beneath one's own class.

James Fordyce addresses class or social rank in his chapter concerning 'Friendship'. Though Fordyce writes about male friendship, most of what he says can be transferred to relationships between men and women. He claims that some people that belong to the upper class can be arrogant and callous. They can use you, but when they have no further use of you, they will 'throw you off' (Fordyce 142). That someone belongs to a higher class than you does not imply that they are better than you. On the contrary, they are used to being pampered and entertained, which has led to them being arrogant and less tolerant towards their inferiors.

Class is different from pride and prejudice as this is not a personal quality, but more a background which colours Mr. Darcy's perception of society and limits his personal freedom. Even though Mr. Darcy struggles with his pride and prejudice, it is the difference of social rank that becomes the most difficult challenge. In the end, when he overcomes this he is at last able to be with Elizabeth. This section will examine three instances in the novel where class plays an important role. The first example is Mr. Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth. It is an example of his inner struggle between his individuality and his position inherited through birth. The second example will take a closer look at Mr. Darcy's social background and family in order to understand his improper conduct. The third and final example is Mr.

Darcy's second proposal. This example is in line with his internal change and symbolizes his development into the perfect gentleman.

In his first proposal to Elizabeth, she turns him down, because Mr. Darcy has been the cause of her sister Jane's unhappiness. Elizabeth still believes Wickham to be the innocent and Darcy to be the brute; his address to her is proud and rude. Mr. Darcy's proposal is evidence of his inner struggle between his individuality and his pride inherited through birth. 'In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you' (Austen 125). Unconcerned with Elizabeth's feelings and pride, he insults her and her family before making the proposal. He does not consider that Elizabeth might find it hurtful to listen to how he has tried in vain to fight the feelings of love towards her because she and her family are not good enough for him. At last he finds himself defeated and reluctantly proposes to her. Elizabeth explains her feelings to him and how he has hurt her. Mr. Darcy cannot understand this reaction; he expected a humbled and overjoyed girl from a lower class who found all of her financial wishes fulfilled. He is shocked and his pride hurt by Elizabeth's refusal. '(...) Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?' (Austen 127). In accordance with upper class conduct rules, Mr. Darcy's reply is acceptable. He is indeed marrying financially beneath himself and risks his good reputation and good will among the richer and more powerful part of his family. Elizabeth's reply is interesting: she points out that whatever regret she might have felt about her refusal of him is now gone because he did not act in a more gentlemanly manner (Austen 127). It is a good example of Austen's wit and ironic style that she makes Elizabeth use the same rules of conduct to lecture Mr. Darcy that Mr. Darcy had felt it necessary to break in order to be with her.

This brings us to an ethical dilemma concerning conduct books; they are open to interpretation and people belonging to different classes used the same conduct rules to argue their point of view. Again it springs to mind that Austen was not against social rules, but claimed some were stricter than others and needed a change. Fordyce writes in his conduct book:

When was there a period, since this country became civilized, in which the nobleness of love was so little known as at the present, in which the passion itself was so much a stranger among the upper ranks of life, in which marriage was so avowedly a matter of

traffic through almost every class of society, or the feelings of the heart so seldom consulted by either sex? (100).

This is an example of how the upper class had manipulated the common morals of everyday life into something that had to do with class and money. Marriage was not based on love, but rather on what would make good family connections and how much money would be added to the family fortune. One of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* who represents these typical ideas is Mr. Darcy's aristocratic aunt Lady Catherine de Bourgh. In order to discuss Mr. Darcy's improper behaviour, it is necessary to emphasize his family and his upbringing. Lady Catherine de Bourgh is Darcy's aunt and also the family member that Darcy is most likely to have inherited his pride from. Catherine de Bourgh belongs to the upper class, the aristocracy, and is a woman. Today one would expect that she might feel some sort of empathy or compassion towards Elizabeth, as they belong to the same gender. However, as is the case in most of Austen's works, strong women from the upper class are in fact the strongest upholders of the unfair conduct rules which are perhaps most strict on women. There are several reasons why Austen chose to present women in this negative light; it is tempting to suppose that one reason can be that they did not want their position challenged by other women. Catherine de Bourgh has a daughter that she wants Mr. Darcy to marry. It was typical for the upper class and aristocracy to marry within the family. That way they strengthened their power, position and fortune. Catherine de Bourgh is most likely protecting her family and her daughter's interest, and considers Elizabeth a threat. Another reason could be that showing powerful women's harsh treatment of other women was a way to create a reaction in the reader and force them to feel the emotions that powerful women lacked, such as compassion and empathy. Female readers would perhaps recognize these feelings immediately, but men would presumably also react to the cruel treatment displayed by Catherine de Bourgh. This way, the message Austen wanted to portray would potentially have a stronger effect and a larger impact on its reader by manipulating them to sympathize with the characters and recognize the unfairness of the society they lived in. When Catherine de Bourgh visits Longbourn in a final attempt to persuade Elizabeth not to marry her nephew Mr. Darcy, she uses some of the same arguments Mr. Darcy used in his first proposal to Elizabeth. He explained that he was marrying beneath him and had to sacrifice his good name and honour by doing so. Catherine de Bourgh similarly tries to frighten Elizabeth out of the engagement by claiming that Elizabeth has no sense thinking she can marry Mr. Darcy and

bring dishonour to the Darcy family name. Catherine de Bourgh believes Elizabeth has lured Mr. Darcy into a marriage because of the money. 'The upstart pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or future. (...) If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere, in which you have been brought up' (Austen 232). Elizabeth replies that she is in fact a gentleman's daughter and would indeed not quit her sphere as she already belongs to the same sphere as Mr. Darcy. This is true, and consequently Mr. Darcy does not marry beneath him. However, as Catherine points out, it is not her social rank that necessarily makes her an undesirable connection, but her mother and that side of the family. Her mother was not a gentleman's daughter, so Elizabeth's father has similarly, but not completely, done what Darcy wants to do. Mrs. Bennet's brother is a merchant and lives in Cheapside in London. Cheapside was a neighborhood in London's commercial district. To live near one's place of business rather than in more fashionable precincts was considered improper. Mrs. Bennet's brother was in business, which was considered to be socially inferior to living off one's land as Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley do, leading to the Bennet family being considered as having low connections (Austen 25).

In addition, Mrs. Bennet is hysterical in her search for a suitable - meaning rich - husband for her girls, and thus contributes to their already established bad reputation among the upper class. It is, however, interesting, considering Catherine de Bourgh's strong objections towards Mrs. Bennet's side of the family, how well Mr. Darcy gets along with the Gardiners. When Elizabeth introduces Mr. Darcy to the Gardiners

(...) she stole a sly look at him, to see how he bore it; and was not without the expectation of his decamping as fast as he could from such disgraceful companions. That he was *surprised* by the connexion was evident; he sustained it however with fortitude, and so far from going away, turned back with them, and entered into conversation with Mr. Gardiner. Elizabeth could not but be pleased, could not but triumph. It was consoling, that he should know that she had some relations for whom there was no need to blush (Austen 165).

This scene occurs after Elizabeth's refusal of Mr. Darcy, and most likely Mr. Darcy has realized that there are more important things in life than social rank and annual income. He has clearly distanced himself from the aristocratic part of his family and their beliefs and seems content with his new-found independence.

However, it is perhaps necessary to raise the question of how Mr. Bingley came by his wealth. The only evidence of how he has made his fortune is when the Bennet family discusses his arrival to Meryton and Netherfield. 'Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England' (Austen 3). The north of England was an industrial area, and Mr. Bingley would likely have made his fortune from trade or similar occupations which would characterize him as 'new money'. It is interesting that the Bennet family is strictly speaking living off their land, in line with the social or aristocratic norms concerning honourable ways of income. However, they are not thought of as good connections since Mrs. Bennet's side of the family, the Gardiners, is connected to trade and the merchant class. Mr. Bingley too is connected to the merchant class, but it is important to point out that, contrary to the Gardiners, Mr. Bingley is respected and accepted by Mr. Darcy. The difference between Mr. Bingley and the Gardiners is that Mr. Bingley now lives off his income undoubtedly made through trade and commerce, while the Gardiners still work and does not live off their income. To work and talk about money was considered improper and low.

Mr. Bingley would most likely not have been willingly accepted by the aristocratic upper class, since all money made through work, meaning not inherited, was considered 'new money'. Mr. Darcy is clearly friends with Mr. Bingley, even though he considers the Gardiners low connection, when they and Mr. Bingley belong to the same social class and work. Compared, then, to the strict system of social norms important to the aristocratic upper class, Mr. Darcy's friendship with Mr. Bingley is a quite rebellious act, considering how unpopular this would be among his more powerful connections within the aristocratic class. This friendship existed before Mr. Darcy met Elizabeth which resulted in his internal change. This liberal attitude is not consistent with the readers' first impression of him. That Austen made these characteristics apparent in Mr. Darcy's personality points out from the very beginning some social norms Austen felt were too old-fashioned and outdated. However, Austen also portrays how limitations and liberties varied concerning what gender one belonged too. Mr. Darcy takes some liberties when it comes to his choice in friends that most likely would have been improper and impossible for women. Mr. Darcy chooses to ignore Mr. Bingley's less socially accepted way of making his fortune because he likes Mr. Bingley. However, he is not willing to accept the Gardiners before his change, until after he actually meets them and realizes they are good people. Austen made both Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy liberal and modern characters who rely more on their sense than on social norms or written conduct rules. Society was changing and a new elite of traders and merchants was growing.

This is another aspect Austen wanted to point out, the necessity of accepting this new social class. Both Bingley and the Gardiners are good people who are easy to relate to; this was perhaps part of Austen's intention behind the novel, to make it more socially acceptable to break conduct rules that needed change in order to keep up with the ever-changing society. Making Mr. Darcy friends first with Bingley, then with the Gardiners, was a part of Austen's plan. It had to be Mr. Darcy that made it socially acceptable to be friends with people who previously would have been considered a low connection. He is from the upper class, smart, handsome and rich. A character people would idolize and strive to imitate.

Mr. Darcy changes after Elizabeth's speech and her refusal of his proposal. Elizabeth pointed out all his errors, and conversely he pointed out hers; however, after defending himself against the false accusations made against him in the case of Wickham, he must have had an eye-opener. He has not stopped thinking of Elizabeth and probably recognizes himself in some of the accusations. He recognizes that he has been acting proudly and unjustly towards her and her family. He has judged her on the basis of socially constructed conduct rules that have been coloured by the upper class' unwillingness to let people from other, more uncertain families 'in'. Mr. Darcy breaks conduct rules in order to be with Elizabeth.

The events that lead to Mr. Darcy's second proposal to Elizabeth are many. When they meet after his first proposal they have both had time to think through the events that took place. Elizabeth, for her part, has realized that she has been misled by Wickham, and that she has treated Mr. Darcy wrongly. She is embarrassed at how she had prided herself on being able to perceive and judge people justly. After she realizes that she has completely misinterpreted the situation and followed her prejudices in trusting Wickham instead of Mr. Darcy, she is humbled. The fact that Mr. Darcy helped her family, leading to Mr. Wickham and Lydia's marriage, is the last piece that convinces Elizabeth of Mr. Darcy's true character. Mr. Darcy, for his part, having been humbled by Elizabeth's reply to his first proposal, has realized and recognized the truth in her accusations and is ashamed by his improper behaviour. In addition, when Lydia elopes with Mr. Wickham, it is tempting to suggest that he must have recognized the similarity of the situation to his own sister's incident with Wickham. Although Georgiana is from another social rank than Lydia, they are both victims of Wickham's bad behaviour. He also feels partly responsible for the situation, as he has kept the tragic incident a secret in order to preserve the family's good reputation and honour. When he finally meets the Gardiners he also realizes the unjust prejudice he has shown towards the lower connections of the Bennet family. Despite their social rank, the Gardiners

are the most intellectual members of the Bennet family with the exception of Elizabeth. After Catherine de Bourgh's visit he too is ashamed of his family and realizes that good morals are not automatically linked to social rank or fortune. All in all, Mr. Darcy too is humbled and when he and Elizabeth finally meet and he proposes for the second time and is accepted, they both excuse their improper behaviour.

Mr. Darcy exemplifies how these conduct rules discriminate against people from lower social groups and how women especially were badly affected. Women were more vulnerable than men; they needed a man in order to survive financially as they were not allowed to work or entitled to entailment (as is the case in *Pride and Prejudice*). At a social gathering a woman had to behave impeccably in order to draw a man's attention and charm him. She would have to be familiar with the conduct rules in order not to make any mistakes. In Elizabeth's case she does behave properly in most cases; however, she is intellectual and will not be subdued and made unable to defend herself in unfair situations.

Elizabeth is physically modest: she does not chase men, as do her younger sisters (she leaves it up to Miss Bingley to parade about the drawing room for Darcy's edification); she is polite and well-behaved but she has too good an opinion of her own judgment and wit (Fritzer 83).

For a woman to speak her mind was considered 'wild' and improper. In addition, the bad reputation of the Bennets does not help Elizabeth or her sisters as they suffer from the prejudices of the elite, such as Mr. Darcy, Miss. Bingley and Catherine de Bourgh. The prejudices constructed by social conduct rules are what Mr. Darcy charges Elizabeth with in his proposal to her. Elizabeth is clearly the victim of how the upper class would abuse the conduct rules and judge people.

Austen is able to shed light on the unfair balance of power between a man and a woman by making Elizabeth refuse Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth is intelligent and refuses to be treated as an object. Jane Austen emphasizes the importance of individuality and free will. In Elizabeth's refusal speech to Darcy, Austen points out the inequality between men and women and the power of the upper class. Mr. Darcy, as discussed above, changes throughout the novel, but not before Elizabeth has pointed out his flaws and how ungentlemanly he has behaved towards her and her family. After this realization, Mr. Darcy is humbled and understands how he has treated Elizabeth unjustly.

The internal change in Mr. Darcy's personality is the change Austen wanted in society. By making Mr. Darcy break the social rules and marry beneath him, she is able to point out how conduct rules are a socially constructed phenomenon misused by the upper class and perhaps especially by men. She is therefore able to shed light on women's unfair position and offer an alternative path. The focus on individuality and personality should have greater importance than social class and rank. Mr. Darcy does marry Elizabeth and in so doing he breaks the social conduct rules that Austen thought were too strict and unfair towards women.

The conduct rules Mr. Darcy breaks are not at first glance beneficial to women. He breaks the conduct rule concerning pride, but Mr. Darcy's pride does not directly affect women or women's position in society. That he is proud and Elizabeth confronts him with it is beneficial to Elizabeth, as she humbles him and makes him a better person. However, women too suffer from pride, as Elizabeth displays. Mr. Darcy also breaks the conduct rule concerning prejudice. Again, prejudice is only a personal flaw and sometimes people are prejudiced. In this context, both pride and prejudice are flaws connected to class, perhaps more so than they are a reflection of the characters' real moral character. It is not before both Elizabeth and - more importantly - Mr. Darcy have freed themselves from their social class, by gaining self-knowledge and self-reflexivity, that they find each other and let go of their pride and prejudice. Mr. Darcy does not ride in as a white knight in shining armour, liberating women from the patriarchal chains of society. This was not Austen's intention. To the readers, that would have been too strong a message and would not have turned the novel into the popular work it was and still is.

In line with the romantic genre's characterizations, Austen focused on the different individuals and their feelings and how they interact with each other. Communication is important in Austen's novels, especially the interaction between individuals and society. Jane Austen wanted to shed light on women and improve their conditions. She was able, through the character of Mr. Darcy, to put emphasis on what she perhaps thought was the most important aspect of unfairness in the English upper- and middle-class society. The biggest obstacle Mr. Darcy is faced with is his rank and social position in society versus Elizabeth's lower position. Evidently, Austen puts emphasis on how the upper class manipulates the social conduct rules in order to withhold their powerful position at the top of the social hierarchy.

Even though the two protagonists are strong individuals, it is necessary to emphasize

that Austen did not intend to make the two break out of society. Jane Austen thought individualism important in the sense that people needed to distance themselves from the negative ‘fences’ that society created, such as class, rank and fortune. She demonstrates through the characters of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy how class should not have an influence on how people perceive one another. Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy judge one another due to the prejudice created by society in terms of class differences. However, after they both realize that their first impressions of each other are mistaken, they fall in love and marry. When they marry, they become a part of society, but they choose to be a part of it on their own terms. The unity they create by their marriage is an example of how Austen was able to criticize the rules of conduct concerning class. Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy’s marriage shows how Austen wanted society to be. They become a part of society and create an ideal of the perfect marriage based on respect for individuality and personality, rather than class, rank and fortune (Ghent 303).

Chapter Three: The Wicked: Mr. Wickham

In this chapter I will analyse the conduct of Mr. Wickham and discuss how his lack of good conduct affects the female characters in the novel. While Mr. Darcy represents the honourable and decent male character, Wickham represents the opposite: a man with no honour and without good intentions. While analyzing Mr. Darcy, *Pride, Prejudice and Class* were apparent conduct rules to study. These are not obvious qualities in Mr. Wickham's behaviour. He has little to be proud of and has no 'taste' for proper pride, although vanity is clearly present in Mr. Wickham's personality. We may observe prejudice in Wickham's conception of Darcy and his good fortune. However, when it comes to Wickham, the crucial attributes to be considered are lies and lack of truthfulness. It is also of interest to analyse a personal quality and conduct above class, which applies equally to both Darcy and Wickham: moral character. As the two characters represent opposites, it is necessary to extend the range of conduct rules to be discussed; I will therefore look into Lying, Vanity and Moral Character.

Mr. Darcy's character as the perfect gentleman, as already pointed out, has survived centuries, and he is still perceived as such today. Mr. Wickham's character, however, is perhaps not as memorable as Mr. Darcy, but he too has survived many centuries and today his name still brings forth an unpleasant reminder of how men can and sometimes do take advantage of women through their unfair position in society. His name, ironically enough, gives his personality away. Mr. Wickham is in many respects wicked, or at least many of his actions are wicked. In the beginning of the novel everybody falls for Mr. Wickham's charm, readers included; one can argue whether or not his name is intended to function as a foreshadowing of the coming events and his true character.

Mr. Wickham is first introduced when he arrives in Meryton in the company of the regiment already stationed in town. Mr. Wickham is described as a young man of gentlemanlike appearance who caught the attention of every lady (Austen 49). 'His appearance was greatly in his favour; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address' (Austen 49). Compared to the reader's first impression of Mr. Darcy, Mr. Wickham is quite the opposite. In addition to his physical appearance, which is greatly in his favour, his conduct is pleasing and he is altogether perceived as a charming man.

In contrast to the analysis of Mr. Darcy, this analysis will focus on how some men took advantage of women's subordinate role in society to gain personal and especially economic status. Through Mr. Wickham's character, Jane Austen is able to warn society, and particularly women, of the dangers of their vulnerable position in a patriarchal society, with emphasis on men's power, and their unfair social position. Much as Austen created Mr. Darcy as a fitting ideal for men to strive after, Mr. Wickham represents what men should pay attention to and how women could recognize imposters and be careful.

3.1 Lying

Lord Chesterfield has a separate paragraph where he discusses lying as a flaw of character. 'Nothing is more criminal, mean or ridiculous, than lying. It is the production either of malice, cowardice, or vanity: but it generally misses of its aim in every one of these views; for lies are always detected sooner or later' (Chesterfield 79). Lying was naturally considered improper behaviour and a reflection of a general lack of character. Towards the end of the section concerning lying, Chesterfield claims that 'nothing but truth can carry us through the world, with either our conscience or our honour unwounded. It is not only our duty, but our interest; as a proof of which, it may be observed, that the greatest fools are the greatest liars' (81). From Chesterfield's point of view, lying is one of the cardinal sins. Not only do you mislead other people, but you fool them (for a short period of time) into thinking better of you and put other people to shame undeservedly.

James Fordyce does not have a separate chapter on lying; he is, however, a preacher, and lying is a sin according to Christian values. One of the Ten Commandments is 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour' (Exod. 20:16). This commandment has been interpreted more broadly to mean that in general one should not lie. One of the most frequently used words in Fordyce's book is truth. Lying is the opposite of truth and it is therefore interesting to study what Fordyce says about the importance of truth. 'I conceive, gentlemen, that to preserve and cherish the sense of truth, integrity and glory, which we have found interwoven with the human mind, is the main design of moral culture' (Fordyce 31). James Fordyce believes truth to be one of the most important moral ideals that the human mind should strive to live after.

There are many instances where Wickham breaches the conduct rule concerning truthfulness. The best example is perhaps at the Philips' house when he first becomes

acquainted with Elizabeth. When Mr. Wickham first arrived in town there was an awkward moment between him and Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth noticed the tension and is eager to know what happened between them that could have led to such an unpleasant meeting. It is important to emphasize that by this point Elizabeth is already set against Mr. Darcy, as he so ungallantly refused to dance with her and hurt her pride and feelings. In other words, she is, even before talking to Mr. Wickham, convinced that the unpleasantness between the two men must be due to Mr. Darcy's unattractive personality. However, Elizabeth is afraid to mention the scene, as she does not know Mr. Wickham and it is a personal matter between the two gentlemen. To pry in other people's personal business is not considered proper behaviour (Chesterfield 25). To her surprise, Mr. Wickham broaches the subject himself. He understands that Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are acquainted and is interested to find out how well they know each other. Elizabeth answers politely that she knows him better than she would like to and that the whole town generally finds him proud (Austen 53). After establishing the general opinion of Mr. Darcy, Mr. Wickham reveals his own version of his acquaintance with Mr. Darcy. Mr. Wickham is a smooth talker and in the dialogues Austen uses different rhetorical techniques to emphasize Mr. Wickham's sly personality.

I have no right to give *my* opinion, as to his being agreeable or otherwise. I am not qualified to form one. I have known him too long and too well to be a fair judge. It is impossible for *me* to be impartial. But I believe your opinion of him would in general astonish- and perhaps you would not express it quite so strongly anywhere else. –Here you are in your own family (Austen 53).

In his speech Mr. Wickham sounds humble and he carefully chooses his words to make it sound like he is the victim and that Mr. Darcy benefits from some unfair popularity. Mr. Wickham is also able to lure Elizabeth into telling him the general perception of Mr. Darcy, before he continues to tell lies. After ascertaining the opinion of Mr. Darcy and how much Elizabeth and the town know of him and his past, Mr. Wickham tells Elizabeth his connection to Mr. Darcy and how he is a victim of Mr. Darcy's pride and cruelty. The reader does not know that the whole story is untrue; it seems believable and fits with the reader's and Elizabeth's perception of Mr. Darcy.

In short, Mr. Wickham was the son of old Mr. Darcy's steward and he grew up with Mr. Darcy. The old Mr. Darcy decided to provide for and finance a profession in the Church

for Wickham. However, both the late Mr. Darcy and Wickham's own father died before these plans were executed. Without any supervision or guidance Mr. Wickham developed a taste for an immoral lifestyle and gambled away all his money. Mr. Darcy cut his ties to Wickham. Mr. Wickham, for his part, felt this an unfair insult and started making plans. He intended to marry Mr. Darcy's sister Georgiana in order to get a piece of the Darcy fortune. Mr. Darcy received news of the elopement and surprised the two before they had the chance to marry. Mr. Darcy had not seen Mr. Wickham since the incident and Darcy had told no one except some few close relatives as witnesses.

The story Mr. Wickham tells Elizabeth is the opposite of the truth. He lies and tells Elizabeth that Mr. Darcy was jealous of his father's favouritism towards Wickham, and that after the late Mr. Darcy died, Mr. Darcy was not willing to finance Wickham's education or profession in the Church, forcing an unwilling Mr. Wickham to choose a military life in order to provide for himself. Lord Chesterfield claims that to tell a private scandal should never be done willingly. Even though it may gratify one's pride at the moment of telling, it will later result in people drawing disadvantageous conclusions about one for telling a personal story. 'In scandal, as in robbery, the receiver is always thought as bad as the thief' (Chesterfield 25). It is interesting that Elizabeth does not dare to ask Wickham about the connection between Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham, because she considers it a private affair. However, she does not reflect on the fact that Mr. Wickham has no scruples in telling the private scandal. Mr. Darcy, on his side, does not tell Elizabeth the truth before he is forced to defend himself from the false accusations. This reflects Mr. Darcy's true character and Mr. Wickham's lack of character. Wickham willingly tells Elizabeth of a private scandal, which in addition is a lie.

Not only is Mr. Wickham lying to Elizabeth, he is also destroying Mr. Darcy's reputation and publicly humiliating him. When he tells Elizabeth the story, he always uses sentences or words which make him sound humble. Lord Chesterfield says:

If a man uses strong oaths or protestations, to make you believe a thing, which is of itself so likely and probable that the bare saying of it would be sufficient, depend upon it, he lies, and is highly interested in making you believe it; or else he would not take so much pains (72).

Mr. Wickham has already established the general notion of the public's opinion of Mr. Darcy; he still goes to great lengths to convince Elizabeth of his story. Since his looks are so

charming, and since Elizabeth is already prejudiced against Mr. Darcy, she is willing to believe Mr. Wickham's story. It confirms her already established view of Darcy, and Mr. Wickham flatters her vanity by affirming her thoughts about Mr. Darcy. Mr. Wickham, for his part, is able to play the heroic victim and thus gains trust and sympathy.

Elizabeth is later told the truth, and she realizes that she has been blinded by prejudice; when she thinks of Mr. Wickham's story and actions that night, she believes she would have been more critical if it had not been for her prejudice.

She saw the indelicacy of putting himself forward as he had done, and the inconsistency of his professions with his conduct. She remembered that he had boasted of having no fear of seeing Mr. Darcy- that Mr. Darcy might leave the country, but that *he* should stand his ground; yet he had avoided the Netherfield ball the very next week. She remembered also, that till the Netherfield family had quitted the country, he had told his story to no one but herself; but that after their removal, it had been every where discussed; that he had then had no reserves, no scruples in sinking Mr. Darcy's character, though he had assured her that respect for the father, would always prevent his exposing the son (Austen 136)

After the Netherfield party leaves Meryton, Mr. Wickham is not afraid and goes to great lengths to convince the rest of the town, or at least the people of some importance, of his story. With Lord Chesterfield's warning in mind, we see that Mr. Wickham troubles himself in order to convince others of his character by retelling the lie. Finally, Elizabeth understands and recognizes his desperate lie and realizes that she should have been able to read his character earlier.

Austen often creates contrasted characters in her novels, and in *Pride and Prejudice* perhaps the most obvious ones are the characters of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham. It is interesting to note how Mr. Darcy is described and his ungentlemanly presentation at the beginning of the novel. The previous chapter discussed how Mr. Darcy changes throughout the story and finally becomes a gentleman. There is progress in his development and he changes for the better. It is tempting to say that Mr. Darcy had many good morals 'inside', earlier referred to as deep morals, but he is not able to act on them or be polite to people he does not know or who have no importance to him. After he changes, he is able to extend these deep morals and make them present in his very conduct and behaviour. Mr. Wickham,

however, is the complete opposite of Mr. Darcy. Mr. Wickham is, from the very first glimpse of him, well-liked by Meryton, but more interestingly, by Elizabeth. He acts like a gentleman and is all flattery and charm and his good looks work in his favour. In contrast to Mr. Darcy, Mr. Wickham does not develop or make any progress. His deep morals are not there, they do not exist and he is only liked in the beginning because he lies and deceives others. He breaks the conduct rule concerning truth/lying, and as Lord Chesterfield predicted, Mr. Wickham's lies generally miss their aim: lies are always detected sooner or later (79).

There is perhaps a connection between Mr. Darcy's flaw, Prejudice, and Mr. Wickham's flaw, Lying. Mr. Darcy's prejudice affects people from a lower rank than his own. He thinks less of people of lower status and generalizes a whole social group based on his prejudices. Mr. Wickham feels he has been insulted and unfairly treated by Mr. Darcy, who belongs to the upper class; one could claim that his dislike towards Mr. Darcy has developed and now extends to the whole upper class. Mr. Wickham's dislike of Mr. Darcy has developed into prejudice towards a whole social class that he feels he has been mistreated and insulted by. It appears that his obsession with rank and fortune has been interwoven into his moral character, one way of coping with this prejudice being lying. In order not to show his dislike and jealousy, he puts on a show and tells lies in order to improve his social reputation and indirectly blacken people from a higher rank, especially Mr. Darcy.

3.2 Vanity

On Vanity Lord Chesterfield writes:

Be extremely on your guard against vanity, the common failing of inexperienced youth; but particularly against that kind of vanity that dubs a man a coxcomb; a character which, once acquired, is more indelible than that of the priesthood. It is not to be imagined by how many different ways vanity defeats its own purposes (116).

As with his advice against lying, Chesterfield stresses that with vanity, you will gain nothing. It will only defeat its own purpose, namely harm one's reputation.

James Fordyce discusses the aspect of vanity in his chapter concerning friendship. He claims that vanity is not the most dangerous flaw of character, but that one who is vain often has other flaws as well. In his chapter concerning friendship, he discusses whether or not a

person can trust another person if the other man is vain. Being vain means that one is shallow and obsessed with oneself. He writes:

Should it be asked, by the way, whether a person in whom vanity predominates is capable of true friendship; the question, I think, may be easily decided. It is evident, he loves himself too well to love any others very warmly, except as they may by some means add to some importance in his own eyes, or in those of the spectators; and, if at any time he should apprehend his kindness to interfere with that importance, we may readily guess which will be renounced (Fordyce 113)

Fordyce suggests that a vain man would not help another in need, unless the person they helped was of sufficient importance and could add to their popularity and wealth. To be vain, at least in this context, is to be selfish and concerned with rank and fortune.

Today, vanity is often thought of as an obsession with one's looks, but in this context the emphasis is on social status, which was perhaps more important than appearances. In many ways, vanity is closely linked to rank, fortune and class, as discussed in the previous chapter. In the case of Wickham one could also discuss class; it is his desperate pursuit of an unrealistic goal that is interesting. He wants to be rich and to be a part of the upper class and therefore it is of importance to discuss vanity, as vanity is a result of Mr. Wickham's obsession with money.

Mr. Wickham, as already mentioned, was a son of the late Mr. Darcy's steward; however, when Mr. Wickham explains the connection between himself and the Darcy family to Elizabeth, he says that the late Mr. Darcy was his godfather (Austen 54). Mr. Wickham does not explicitly pretend to be from another social class than he really is, but he leaves out the fact that he is the son of a steward and only says he is connected to the Darceys. The Darcy family is a wealthy and powerful one, and if the late Mr. Darcy was his godfather, Mr. Wickham improves his rank and reputation by knowing them. In addition, Mr. Wickham claims that he was close to the late Mr. Darcy, who he has already described as a fine and honourable man. As a result, he indirectly boasts of himself, since he claims to have been greatly esteemed by a powerful and well-liked man.

After the late Mr. Darcy's death and that of Wickham's own father, Wickham no longer had any guidance except from Mr. Darcy, who soon became a competitor for friends and connections. It is tempting to suppose that since Wickham did not have the same

responsibility during his adolescence as Mr. Darcy, he did not feel the need to impress anybody or have anybody to answer to. Mr. Darcy had a lot of responsibility, as he became the man of the family after his father's death and had more powerful family connections to answer to. Growing up within the upper class with an advantageous position in society, Mr. Wickham must have developed a taste for the prosperous and easy life. The Church must have seemed unattractive in Wickham's eyes and he probably wanted something better. He had no money with which to maintain such a lifestyle and soon became dependent on Mr. Darcy's good will and money. After wasting many opportunities, he was cut off, destitute and in debt. A sensible man would have realized that he did not belong to the upper class and now was the time to settle down and find a respectable profession. However, due to his vanity, Mr. Wickham felt that he deserved better and was jealous and resentful towards Mr. Darcy.

Mr. Wickham clearly breaks the conduct rules concerning vanity, and it is interesting to discuss how these rules affected women, both in the novel and in general. Mr. Wickham is not able to make the money he needs in order to live the life he wants and he therefore has to make the money in other ways. As discussed earlier, marriage was one way of climbing the social ladder. Both women and men married for money and social rank. It is difficult to decide on Mr. Wickham's motive for eloping with and intending to marry Mr. Darcy's sister, Georgiana. One motive could be anger and an attempt at revenge; another could be Georgiana's fortune. Most likely, it is both. If he had managed to conclude the marriage, Mr. Wickham would have been able to support the lifestyle that he wanted and, at the same time, anger Mr. Darcy. Mr. Wickham's vanity affects Georgiana in the way that he misleads her into believing he is in love with her, when he actually just wants her money and rank. His vanity enables him to deceive a young girl, a deception that would eventually have led to her misfortune.

It is of interest to examine Austen's famous opening lines in *Pride and Prejudice*: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife' (Austen 3). These lines are famous because they encapsulate Austen's ironical style: the statement is the complete opposite of the truth. When it comes to Wickham the tables have turned; just as women are in a desperate position, needing to find a rich man, so too is Wickham, wanting to marry a woman with a big fortune. Nancy Armstrong claims that with these lines Austen '(...) situates herself as a writer with knowledge of sexual relations and the intention, however ironic, of demonstrating the truth of the sexual contract' (42). Jane Austen's opening lines are also ironic in the sense that they point out the unfair

position for the upper class, where men could pick and choose among women. When it comes to Wickham, this is of interest, since he is a man who has chosen to put himself in a woman's position due to his vanity and want of money. Although Mr. Wickham has chosen this situation for himself, unlike women who were forced to find a man in order to survive financially, he still provides evidence how the upper class created desperate measures, in order to keep out unwanted social climbers. '(...) *Pride and Prejudice* evokes a vision of society as governed by the values of the marketplace. Human relations, and especially the marriage relation, are threatened by an excessive emphasis upon money and status' (Paris 104). If society had not been so strongly influenced by class and rank, it is tempting to suggest that Mr. Wickham would not have been so vain, or so obsessed with rank and fortune. If Mr. Wickham had not been so driven to marry in order to get a fortune, perhaps he would not have broken so many conduct rules and taken advantage of women. Like all humans, we are influenced by our environment; Mr. Wickham's personality is a result of the patriarchal society ruled by the upper and upper-middle classes.

There is another instance when Mr. Wickham clearly breaks the conduct rules concerning vanity. Mr. Wickham has made Elizabeth his target of interest and the people of Meryton believe Mr. Wickham and Elizabeth favour one another. However, after the wealthy Miss King inherits a large amount of money, Mr. Wickham gives her all the attention formerly given to Elizabeth. At first, Elizabeth respects Mr. Wickham's choice; she knows he must marry someone rich, as he is poor, and she believes him to be in love with her. However, after Mr. Darcy reveals the truth about Mr. Wickham, she realizes she has once again been blind to the truth and that Mr. Wickham's vanity and lust for money stops at nothing.

His attentions to Miss King were now the consequence of views solely and hatefully mercenary; and the mediocrity of her fortune proved no longer the moderation of his wishes, but his eagerness to grasp at any thing. His behaviour to herself could now have had no tolerable motive; he had either been deceived with regard to her fortune, or had been gratifying his vanity by encouraging the preference which she believed she had most incautiously shewn (Austen 136).

One can wonder whether or not it is in fact his vanity that drives him to such desperate measures in attaining his goal: a fortune. However, as pointed out earlier, Mr. Wickham does not develop as a character. Compared to Mr. Darcy, who changes for the better, Mr. Wickham

becomes if anything an even more wicked person than before. A proof of this moral decline, and perhaps the best example of his last desperate attempt to do something bad, is when he elopes with Lydia.

Lydia, compared to his other failed conquests, is not rich. Mr. Wickham's motive for eloping with Lydia is difficult to grasp. Elizabeth does not understand what he wants with her, as she believes he knows that her family cannot offer much money. The family hopes that he intends to marry her, but it turns out that he does not. Mr. Darcy comes to the rescue and forces or bribes Wickham into marrying Lydia, costing Mr. Darcy some money. With vanity in mind, it is tempting to say that Mr. Wickham got what he deserved in marrying Lydia. His pursuit of a fortune and women ended with marriage to a girl with little money and a wild temper, and no increase in social status. Again, Lord Chesterfield's words spring to mind: 'it is not to be imagined by how many different ways vanity defeats its own purposes' (116).

Vanity is perhaps not one of the conduct rules Austen was most concerned about. However, to marry for money was not something new and many, perhaps especially women, had been led to believe that their suitors were in love, when they actually just married for money. To deceive people in order to get money and rank was perhaps something Jane Austen thought needed change. She made Wickham break the conduct rules concerning vanity in order to expose men who took advantage of the patriarchal hierarchy and of women. Austen punishes him in the end, with a marriage that was everything Wickham and his vanity feared, a marriage bound to be a disaster.

Vanity and pride are two sides of the same coin, though Pride is more honourable than Vanity. Pride can be a more selfless feeling than vanity. In the case of Mr. Darcy, he starts out by being proud for selfish reasons such as rank and fortune. After his change his pride is more correct. He has always prided himself on being a respectable landowner, and rightly so, as Elizabeth realizes. However, after Mr. Darcy is humbled, this unselfish pride is extended to his personality and behaviour.

Vanity, on the other hand, is to be selfish and conceited. Mr. Wickham is vain and prides himself on ungrounded accomplishments. He sees himself as being unfairly treated, a victim, and takes pride in his good looks and charm. Both the characters' flaws directly affect the women in the novel. However, Mr. Darcy's pride is changed into something good that creates balance and order, while Mr. Wickham's vanity is revealed as being improper and unjustified.

It is arguable that Jane Austen wanted to point out how the upper class and society became increasingly preoccupied with class, rank and fortune and how this is even more desperately displayed by the social climbers. Mr. Wickham is exactly that, a social climber. He is familiar with the luxury of belonging to the upper class and attempts to regain what he has had a taste of and lost. Perhaps Wickham is sort of a cautionary tale, fitting in perfectly with Austen's moralistic novel, of how the upper class needs to set a good example and not be preoccupied with fame and fortune. Vanity is transferred to people who cannot afford it and Wickham in his pursuit takes advantage of women.

3.3 Moral Character

Lord Chesterfield believes that:

There is nothing so delicate as a man's moral character, and nothing which it is his interest so much to preserve pure. Should he be suspected of injustice, malignity, perfidy, lying, &c- all the parts and knowledge in the world will never procure him esteem, friendship or respect (Chesterfield 91).

With the discussion of the other aspects in mind, it is safe to assume that Mr. Wickham is not a good moral character. Because of his lack of moral character, in the end he is left without the esteem, friendship and respect that he so desperately wants.

James Fordyce claims that many young men lack moral character from an early age. He says that although this is discovered at an early age, it is difficult to set right since bad moral character seems to be interwoven in their 'frame'. No skill or care will help, and the only thing that will have an effect is the hope that Jesus Christ will 'create them anew' (25-26). James Fordyce does not have a good explanation why some people are born more evil than others; being a preacher, he puts his faith in Jesus Christ and believes that eventually people may change for the better.

In this section I will discuss moral character. This is rather different from the other two aspects. The previous ones have been more specific; however, in the discussion of moral character this thesis will look at other examples from *Pride and Prejudice* that weaken Mr. Wickham's overall moral character. In the discussion of the two previous aspects, the examples of Mr. Wickham's improper behaviour and breach of the conduct rules have had

more impact on women and the plot of the novel. The examples used in this discussion reflect how Mr. Wickham's bad personality goes further than already discussed, and are important in establishing his real character.

Moral character is closely connected to conduct rules and proper behaviour. Conduct rules serve, among other things, to give advice on how to improve one's moral character. There is a difference between moral character and conduct rules, however: the rules are something you can choose to follow or not, whereas moral character concerns your deep values. You can, as Wickham exemplifies, act and be perceived as a gentleman, even though you may not actually be one. Whether your behaviour is indeed morally correct depends on your true moral character. Although Mr. Darcy is not so gentlemanly in the beginning, his moral character is good, or at least he is willing to change in order to be good. Moral character is something that reflects who you really are on a psychological level, while acting properly without actually meaning it reflects, at best, that you are a good actor and have a bad moral character. This section will look at some general behaviour that, in addition to the other aspects or rules that have already been discussed, exemplifies Mr. Wickham's true moral character.

One example that contributes to Mr. Wickham's already established character is his gambling debt. To the other characters, it is not made known before the end of the novel that his debt is due to his gambling misfortunes. This is yet another addition to his bad personality. The first glimpse of Mr. Wickham's greed and lack of moral character comes after he spent the money he received from Mr. Darcy, after the late Mr. Darcy died. The money was supposed to be spent to finance his profession in the Church; Mr. Wickham, however, convinces Mr. Darcy that he wants to study law. Mr. Wickham runs away with the money and after a while comes back to Mr. Darcy and asks for more money. He says that law did not suit him and that he wants to try something new and needs money to start again. Mr. Darcy believes that he has gambled away all his money and refuses to give him any more. This is the first time we hear of Mr. Wickham's inconsistent behaviour.

Later, after Mr. Wickham and Lydia's elopement is known, Mr. Wickham's debt also comes to light. The Bennet family receives a letter from Mr. Gardiner in which he describes what he has learned of Mr. Wickham's character from his officer, Colonel Forster. The letter says that he is in debt and left the regiment due to unpaid gaming debts. Jane is shocked and cries out: 'A gamester!' (Austen 193).

Card-playing was considered improper activity by some moralists. However, in most of Austen's novels the characters play cards. Austen was perhaps moderate compared to others in her period, although interestingly enough most of her characters that play cards are not the heroes or heroines (Fritzer 25). In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, Mr. Collins agrees to play cards, even though he is bad at it and loses some money. Lydia loves to play cards; she is the most improper female character. Austen may have thought that card playing was acceptable, but warned her readers of how to be cautious through the examples set by the less popular characters. In addition, Austen made Mr. Wickham the biggest card player of them all, so in some sense she must have considered card-playing to be dangerous if one was not careful. It is interesting that the only time in the novel Mr. Wickham is invited to play a card game at the Philips', he refuses the invitation and instead joins Elizabeth in conversation. This is perhaps one of Austen's ironic twists and again another example of how Mr. Wickham is pretending to be something he is not. He acts like a gentleman, but his true character is actually the opposite of what his manners reflect. Compared to Wickham, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy often read instead of playing games, an individual activity that was considered proper.

It is not only Mr. Wickham's card-playing debt that reflects his bad moral character; as discussed earlier, he is also obsessed with money and has set his mind to marry so he can keep up his expensive lifestyle. Lord Chesterfield claims that: 'A fool squanders away, without credit or advantage to himself, more than a man of sense spends with both' (30). Mr. Wickham is surely a fool, as he has debt in many places and uses more money than he has.

All Meryton seemed striving to blacken the man, who, but three months before, had been almost an angel of light. He was declared to be in debt to every tradesman in the place, and his intrigues, all honoured with the title of seduction, had been extended into every tradesman's family. Every body declared that he was the wickedest young man in the world; and every body began to find out, that they had always distrusted the appearance of his goodness (Austen 191).

It is of course quite humorous that the whole town has been fooled by Mr. Wickham's charms and appearances. Now, however, after the truth is known, everybody professes that they knew he was not to be trusted.

Another example of Mr. Wickham's lack of moral character is his intentions in eloping with Lydia. Most of the characters hope that his intention is love and they will marry.

However, after Mr. Darcy finds them in their hiding-place in London and talks to Mr. Wickham, it turns out that his intentions are dubious. 'Wickham still cherished the hope of more effectually making his fortune by marriage, in some other country' (Austen 210). Mr. Wickham has no scruples in ruining Lydia and the rest of the Bennet family's reputation and future. Mr. Wickham has been corrupted by greed, vanity and egotism and his moral character is ruined. James Fordyce's contention that some people's moral character is ruined at a young age applies to Mr Wickham. He does not learn from his mistakes and allows his wrongdoings to afflict innocent people.

Finally, Mr. Darcy bribes Mr. Wickham into marrying Lydia, and Mr. Darcy promises to pay off Mr. Wickham's debt. If Mr. Darcy had not come to the rescue, the future of Lydia and the Bennet family would have been a gloomy one. However, Mr. Wickham agrees to marry Lydia, and she, ignorant (one must believe) of his true character, is happy. This serves as yet another example of Mr. Wickham's lack of morals, as he should have come to his senses and married her for honour. However, this final and desperate attempt results in Mr. Wickham undeservingly walking away with his debt paid off and his honour intact, barring a few important people who know his true character. Tara Ghoshal Wallace asks: 'who can doubt that Wickham, though banished to the north, will resurrect the narrative that makes him out a victim of Darcy's pride and envy?' (382). Even though Mr. Wickham has been humiliated and the truth of his character is known, he will most likely keep on playing the victim and telling lies for his new friends in the north. Once again, James Fordyce's warning concerning moral character brings forth an unpleasant truth, that some people do not develop or progress, but are corrupted by bad moral character that will most likely never change.

The examples used in the discussion affect women, as Mr. Wickham's lack of moral character makes him take advantage of women in order to reach his goals. As mentioned already, moral character is a more abstract aspect than the conduct rules discussed above. However, the discussion concerning moral character, and the examples given, prove Mr. Wickham's lack of moral character is important. In addition to his lie concerning the story of what really happened between himself, Georgiana and Mr. Darcy, his behaviour throughout the novel is undetected by other characters due to his good appearance and charm. That he is a gambler is important, in order to understand that there are more factors that contribute to his generally bad behaviour and lack of morals. His actions, and gambling, affect the female characters in the novel in that he professes to be something he is not. He does not play cards when he is invited to in public, although he is in fact a gambler.

Austen's intentions behind the character Mr. Wickham were that he should function as a warning not just to men, but perhaps especially to women. On first impressions Mr. Wickham seems to be perfect, but after getting to really know him, his true character is quite the opposite. Interestingly enough, Austen's initial title for *Pride and Prejudice* was 'First Impressions'. This applies to Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth and how their first impressions of each other are wrong, which changes once they get to know each other and finally fall in love. However, it also applies to Mr. Wickham. The first impression of him is very good; however, it turns out that he is the villain. Austen's intentions must have been to warn society and especially women. Mr. Wickham is a wolf in sheep's clothing, and Austen made Mr. Wickham seemingly perfect in order to show how easy it was for men to live immoral lives and take advantage of women, and how little women could defend themselves against such 'crimes'. The Bennet family is completely reliant on Mr. Darcy's rescue. It is interesting to see how little Mr. Wickham's behaviour affects him, compared to how much it could ruin the family in question. It is tempting to imagine a different ending in order to see what would have happened if Mr. Darcy had not decided to do the right thing. What would have been Mr. Wickham's punishment? In a patriarchal society such as the one in question, Mr. Wickham could quite possibly have got away with his actions without any real damage. However, Lydia and the Bennet family would have been barred from and shunned by society.

In the previous analysis, the discussion of Mr. Darcy's flaw concerning class and class distinctions was important. He has difficulties in distancing himself from his social class and the rules connected with it, in order to be with Elizabeth. Due to his internal change, and to his good moral character, he is able to change and becomes more independent and free from socially constructed rules concerning rank, class and fortune.

Mr. Wickham is also given the opportunity to change when he is confronted with his true character and the ethical decision concerning his elopement with Lydia. Even though he marries her in the end, which might seem the morally correct thing to do, he does not do it voluntarily. In a sense he blackmails the Bennet family or Mr. Darcy and is therefore bribed into marrying her, in order to save the face and honour of the Bennet family. Mr. Wickham is desperately preoccupied with rank, fortune and class, and due to his non-existent moral character he does not change when given the chance.

Moral character and class are connected in the sense that the hero and heroine are able to distance themselves from socially-constructed rules and class by self-reflexivity and good moral character, while the villain, Mr. Wickham, is not. To the very last, he holds on to the

desperate hope of increasing his social rank by fortune and consequently improving his class, and again proves his lack of any decency and moral character.

Austen most likely wanted to put emphasis on the importance of individualism. On first impressions, most people are able to pretend and act properly according to conduct rules. However, one is not capable of judging a person before one properly knows their true character, which takes time and patience. It is tempting to suggest that *Pride and Prejudice* is a more fitting title, as first impressions are often made on the basis of prejudice and, in this context, pride as well. Although Mr. Wickham, on first impressions, acts properly according to conduct rules and the moralists' advice, when the characters get to know his real moral character they realize how improper he really is and how he has misled the whole town.

Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham are two different characters and have different flaws. Either way, they both belong to the same society and one can clearly see how the characters are influenced by each other and how this affects the other characters in the novel. Both Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham's flaws clearly have an impact on the women in this story, and this is evidence of how men and their actions (as the privileged gender) both directly and indirectly affected women.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

In this thesis I have analysed Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* in the light of how the two male characters Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham break several conduct rules and how this affects women. In addition, I have discussed what Austen's intentions behind the portrayal of these characters might have been. In order to examine their behaviour I have used conduct rules from James Fordyce's conduct book *Addresses to Young Men* and Lord Chesterfield's *Advice to His Son, on Men & Manners* that provide a realistic image of contemporary conduct rules typical of Austen's period.

The theory I have used in my discussion is New Historicism. The two conduct books are from Austen's contemporary period and by using rules discussed in these books I have applied the theory to my study of the two male characters and investigated whether or not their behaviour is in accordance with contemporary conduct rules. The examination of the men's behaviour and contemporary conduct rules is interesting and necessary, but it also functions as a tool that leads us to the main focus of this thesis: how their behaviour affected women, and Austen's intentions behind the portrayal. To study a female author from a period dominated by men and to focus on how she portrays male characters and their effect on women can be seen as a feminist version of New Historicism.

Due to the restraints of this thesis the extent to which the theory has been able to be applied has been a challenge. However, the use of conduct books from Austen's contemporary society in my discussion is a New Historicist method and approach to the subject matter in question. In addition, the theory enabled me to choose a topic that interests me and is debated in our society and examine whether or not these issues were evident in Austen's work. This is an example of how the theory has guided me through this thesis and I believe that this approach would not have been possible without New Historicist theory.

The examination of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* clearly shows that she read and internalized many of the rules discussed in the conduct books by Fordyce and Chesterfield. Even though she did not agree with all of them and felt some needed to be changed, as some were quite discriminatory towards women, she most likely believed that they were important.

Pride and Prejudice contains a deep moral current, and some critics claim that it is in many ways a 'modern' conduct book, in which Austen gives clear examples of what she thought was proper and improper conduct. However, the aim of this thesis was not to discuss the presence of morality in her work, although this is important, but to examine how the

breaking of conduct rules by two male characters affected women and what Austen's intentions behind this portrayal might have been.

I have established that Mr. Darcy is a true gentleman. This is perhaps not a surprise; however, after a careful study of Mr. Darcy's character, he - quite surprisingly - acts improperly and breaks several conduct rules. The conduct rules he most evidently breaks, and which are most important in this thesis, are those concerning Pride, Prejudice and Class. The first impression of him is negative and for a long time this is justified by his proud and ungentlemanly behaviour. However, as the story develops, so does Mr. Darcy; his popularity changes and finally he is perceived as the perfect gentleman we all know and love him for.

Mr. Wickham, on the other hand, is perceived at first as the perfect gentleman and is well-liked by all the inhabitants in Meryton. However, as Mr. Darcy increases his popularity, so Mr. Wickham loses much of his. At last he is recognized as an imposter. The progress of choosing what rules to focus on in the analysis of Mr. Wickham's behaviour was rather difficult, as he breaks so many. Nonetheless, I have discussed the conduct rules of Lying, Vanity and Moral Character. These aspects were perhaps the most obvious ones and those that affected the female characters the most. Driven by vanity, he lies and brings dishonour on the female characters; his conduct, despite his pleasant features, reveals a character without any morals, in contrast to Mr. Darcy's true character. Mr. Wickham, as his name may indicate, is revealed to be a wicked imposter.

My analysis shows that both characters evidently break several contemporary rules of conduct. Despite this similarity, the fate of these characters is different and so are Austen's intentions behind the portrayal of these gentlemen. Not only are they different in order to have a plot and 'drive' in her novel, but in this thesis I understood their function to have a more important, symbolic significance.

One of the most important differences between the two characters is the internal change Mr. Darcy goes through, which Mr. Wickham does not. They both behave improperly, even though Mr. Wickham hides it for a long time, and the rules Mr. Wickham breaks are clearly more serious than the ones Mr. Darcy breaks. I believe Jane Austen's intentions behind these two characters were to demonstrate more clearly this change and why only one of them was able to develop.

The internal change Mr. Darcy goes through enables him to find his individual morality, different from the upper class discriminatory values with which he was raised. Mr. Darcy is humbled, and after some self-reflection he is able to take a step back and realize the

difference between *his* values and morals and what upper-class society considered values and morals. Earlier you clearly see how Mr. Darcy is influenced by the discriminatory attitudes of the upper class towards the lower, how these values are reflected in conduct and are evident in Mr. Darcy's bad behaviour. However, he changes and his personal deep values become evident in his actions.

Mr. Wickham does not change. He is clearly influenced by the unethical and discriminatory values that flourished in society. Even though he does not belong to the upper class that was the strictest upholder of these social rules, they have corrupted the system and extended these values to people not belonging to the upper class. He is not able to distance himself from society and still cherishes the dream of being able to climb the social ladder. To do so, he takes advantage of people and especially women in order to get what he wants.

Pride and Prejudice, and Mr. Darcy's (and Elizabeth's) struggle are both examples of what Austen saw as society's struggle against corrupted morals and values. She emphasizes the necessity of society, but also points out the importance of individual morality. To change society, she appeals to the reader's empathy and morality. As an individual, you can contribute to the change by following proper conduct and deep morals, instead of the social rules manipulated by the upper class of hierarchy and rank. Jane Austen makes Mr. Darcy the perfect gentleman; she also makes it clear to the reader that it is not easy to become a good person without making any sacrifices. The change in Mr. Darcy leads to the marriage between him and Elizabeth. This change and union symbolizes the change Austen wanted in society. A society based on respect, good morals and common sense, opposed to a patriarchal class dominated hierarchy that existed.

Mr. Wickham lies and is vain and shallow, and represents what Austen felt was wrong in society. In the beginning of the novel the characters seem blind to Mr. Wickham's true character, as his behaviour is convenient and easy to like. Wickham does not develop and this symbolizes Austen's fear of society's lack of willingness to change. The too-strict rules and the patriarchal society are in many ways similar to Wickham's personality. Change is often thought of as something scary and difficult, so the old ways are often more convenient and easy. By clearly portraying Mr. Wickham as the villain in the end, Austen stresses the importance of the change needed in society.

The challenges Mr. Darcy must overcome in order to change are typical of the patriarchal English society. With Darcy's change and with Wickham's behaviour, Austen displays how men could easily take advantage of women. She also points out how unfairly

women were treated as the subordinate gender, and how what was a minor crime or breach of a conduct rule for a man could mean the ruin of a young girl and her family's fate. I believe Austen had another intention, to point out how the upper class manipulated these conduct rules into a defense system to keep out unwanted social climbers. Unfortunately, this made it difficult for men and women from different classes to marry, as money, class and rank meant more than love.

The upper class' manipulation did not only affect women in making them feel less worthy and stigmatized by both men and women belonging to the upper class. It also created difficult conditions for people who wanted in. Difficult conditions sometimes resulted in desperate means in order to gain passage, and Mr. Wickham is a perfect example of this.

Much as Mr. Darcy's character functions as an ideal for men to strive after, and also a more symbolic change Austen wanted to see in society, Mr. Wickham functions as a warning. His character is a warning for men where it is painfully pointed out that they have an advantageous position and have to be responsible and use this power to do something good, such as improve the lot of women. To women, he serves as an example of how freely men could disregard conduct rules and fool women.

Through the two male characters in question, Austen is able to point out the conduct rules/behaviour she felt were too old-fashioned and discriminatory. However, she also stresses the importance of their existence, as people through her novel could learn what was right and what was wrong - not only through the behaviour of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham, but through the conduct of the other characters as well. She displays her intentions by making it more acceptable to break some conduct rules. She illustrates the unfair position of the upper class and how they and especially men could manipulate these rules in order to take advantage of the less fortunate. She made it of current interest to revise some rules and emphasized that one has to follow one's moral character and use it as a compass in difficult situations, such as Mr. Darcy does, rather than blindly following the rules.

Further study of the other male characters, with a more detailed analysis to compare their behaviour and how they affect women in the novel would be of interest, but has not been possible because of restrictions concerning the scope and time of this thesis. I believe Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham are the most obvious male characters to discuss, but Austen's characters all contribute to the complexity of the novel and their personalities reflect her contemporary society. Another angle of interest would be to extend the use of contemporary conduct books with a New Historicist approach to the subject matter, which would enable a

thorough and interesting study. It will be exciting to see if her anniversary will inspire new interest and contribute to an even more extensive collection of literary criticism on Jane Austen.

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