A Significant Incident in "Pride and Prejudice"
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man might be lynched for jumping a prospector's claim. But in the Paris of Henry James, the murderers of Henri-Urbain de Bellegarde who have driven Madame de Cintré into utter solitude remain in undisturbed tranquillity. And this is done only to give the reader the scene of a charred little paper in the fireplace—the conclusion predestined for the story by a wilful blindness to character or by an imperfect sense of literary art.

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A SIGNIFICANT INCIDENT IN "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE"

A common criticism of *Pride and Prejudice* is based on the inconsistency of Darcy's character. Even Sylvia Townsend Warner in her sympathetic and perceptive British Council Essay *Jane Austen* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1951) holds that Darcy is split "into two halves: the unamiable Darcy of the opening, the amiable Darcy of the close." It is the purpose of this note to show that Darcy acts consistently and with adequate motives.

His ungraciousness when he proposes to Elizabeth is, of course, beyond question. It should be noted that this is not due simply to the difference in their social positions, since it is the normal thing in Jane Austen's novels for the hero to be considerably richer and better-connected than the heroine. Darcy, however, is exceptionally and insufferably conscious of his condescension in paying his addresses to Elizabeth. Yet this, like the rest of his behaviour, is not left without its explanation in the novel.

After Elizabeth has rejected his proposal he writes to her explaining and justifying his treatment of Wickham (Vol. II, ch. xii; chapter xxxv in modern editions). In his letter he reveals to her that during the previous summer he had prevented his sister Georgiana, then fifteen years old, from eloping with Wickham. "Mr. Wickham's chief object," Darcy comments, "was undoubtedly my sister's fortune." The effect on Darcy of this incident is apparent throughout the action.

Since Bingley was to take possession of Netherfield by Michaelmas (ch. i), and presumably did so, it follows that at the time of the ball in the assembly room (ch. iii) Georgiana's indiscretion was at most a few months old. Thus when Darcy comes to Netherfield he is not

surprisingly still proud of having preserved the honor of the family, sensitive to any sign of fortune-hunting, and very much on his guard against people of a lower social order. Accordingly when he is offered an introduction to Elizabeth Bennet he says coldly " 'She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*.' " This remark reflects accurately his consciousness of his position and of his responsibilities.

It may be remarked in passing that our knowledge of Georgiana's threatened elopement and of Darcy's consequent wariness makes it easier to understand his officious protection of Bingley from Jane Bennet. Further, if it is remembered that Darcy has recently prevented his sister from an imprudent match, it is not hard to account for his ungracious language when he proposes to Elizabeth. "His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit" (Vol. II, ch. xi). His pride throughout this chapter may be set down in part to chagrin at his own susceptibility when he had thought himself immune from temptation, in part to the painful knowledge that he had formed and was indulging precisely the kind of attachment from which he had rescued Georgiana.

After Elizabeth has rejected him and thus shown that his fortune is not her chief object, Darcy behaves agreeably to her at Pemberley. She is surprised by this, but surprised more by his energy and generosity when Lydia elopes with Wickham. His conduct at this point springs not from a sudden arbitrary change of character but from his knowledge that but for a happy accident his own sister would have been Wickham's companion. Thus, far from being in a position to condemn Lydia's conduct, he is singularly well placed to feel for Elizabeth in her humiliation and distress.

Finally it should be observed that it is not until Elizabeth has received Darcy's letter that she begins to feel sympathetically towards him and to regret her previous harsh opinions. The reader's estimation of the hero, as so often in Jane Austen, is controlled by the judgment of the heroine, through whose eyes the whole action is seen. Thus we share Elizabeth Bennet's new understanding of Darcy's motives and find ourselves with a new and altogether more favorable

opinion of him. It is however, quite inaccurate to ascribe this to a sudden change in Darcy's character; the cause is rather the sudden removal of Elizabeth's prejudice.

The incident of Georgiana Darcy, then, casually introduced though it is, serves to make the whole of Darcy's conduct in the novel more credible, and thus more sympathetic. It demonstrates once again how Jane Austen's unfailing concern for detail reinforces the structure of her novels.

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VISICK'S "THE GENESIS OF 'WUTHERING HEIGHTS' "

Mary Visick's *The Genesis of "Wuthering Heights"* (Oxford University Press: $2.00) is the first book to make proper use of the rich ore from Fannie E. Ratchford's devoted mining of Brontë juvenalia. Resisting the theory that Emily Brontë's later and better poems were the words of "Gondal's Queen," Mrs. Visick shows that they sprang not so much from the childhood Gondal as from a later, adult dream-world which contained the material for *Wuthering Heights*. Thus she shifts the focus from constructing an unlikely epic out of the extant poems to relating their essential characters and themes to the novel. Whether or not A. G. A. and Rosina were different persons is now unimportant, "since if they were indeed two their personalities coalesced in the figure of Catherine Earnshaw."

Mrs. Visick postulates the existence among Emily Brontë's destroyed prose MSS of certain chronicles (ca. 1844–1845) relating not only to the later generation of Gondalians but, more important, to "the chief characters of *Wuthering Heights*." This theory suggests that Heathcliff, Catherine, *et al.* existed in separate histories, which—and here I extend Mrs. Visick's point—possibly were based on the career of estate-usurping Jack Sharp, heard at Law Hill in 1837 or 1838, on "The Bridegroom of Barma," read in Blackwood's in 1840, and on Hoffman's "The Entail," read while in Brussels in 1842.[1] Mrs. Visick's postulation would suggest that Catherine Earnshaw's diary, perused by Lockwood before his frightful dreams, actually

[1] See Leicester Bradner, "The Growth of *Wuthering Heights*," *PMLA*, XLVIII (1933), 129–146.