

In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the hero's romantic feelings do not change, but the heroine's more complex romantic feelings shift radically. The ways in which Austen highlights these swerves, in turn, defines the novel's core business as an intensely close examination of Elizabeth Bennett's emotional and romantic maturation.

Fitzwilliam Darcy's passionate feelings for Elizabeth are consistent throughout the novel. When they meet, he is almost instantly attracted to her liveliness, and although she is always trying to affront him, there is rather a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which makes it difficult for her to affront anybody, and Darcy has never been so bewitched by any woman as he is by her. But because of his worries about her social inferiority, he begins to feel the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention. Nonetheless, he soon proposes, telling her about how ardently he admires and loves her while simultaneously admitting that he still does not rejoice at the inferiority of her connections. After she rejects this ungentlemanlike proposal, he goes about exhibiting his worth to her—to obtain her forgiveness, to lessen her ill-opinion, and to let her see that her reproofs have been attended to—because he still secretly hopes to woo her. He eventually proves to her that he's not too proud and worthy of her love and that by her has been properly humbled. So Darcy's romantic feelings for Elizabeth never change; what's shifted is that his feelings for her have become more important to him than his concerns about the differences in their social statuses.

The changes in Elizabeth's romantic feelings are more striking. Her first take on Darcy is definitively negative: from the first moment of her acquaintance with Darcy, his manners impress her with the fullest belief of his arrogance, his conceit, and his selfish disdain of the feelings of others. In fact, she does not know him a month before she feels that he would be the last man in the world whom she could ever be prevailed upon to marry. The information in the letter Darcy gives to Elizabeth after his failed proposal, though, illustrates how she has misread him, and Elizabeth grows absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickham can she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd—and until this moment, she feels that she has never known herself. When she visits Pemberley later on and encounters a newly complaisant Darcy, she has a change of heart. She certainly does not hate him now, but above all, above respect and esteem, there is a motive within her of good will which cannot be overlooked. It is gratitude. Gratitude, not merely for having once loved her, but for loving her still well enough, to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of her manner in rejecting him, and all the unjust accusations accompanying her rejection. With these thoughts in mind, she begins now to comprehend that he is exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would answer all her wishes. It would be a union to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might be softened, his manners improved, and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she would receive benefit of greater importance. Her mind fully changed on the subject of Darcy at novel's end, she decides to use her power over him, which her fancy tells her she still possesses, to bring on the renewal of his addresses.

Elizabeth is a worthy Austenian heroine because she grows into her social powers and successfully negotiates what the period's predominant social values deemed a genteel woman's main business in life: marrying well. (It was a truth universally acknowledged then, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.) And, correspondingly, it is Austen's business, in *Pride and Prejudice*, to analyze and reinforce how those women should feel and act in order to find a suitable husband. That's why the history of Elizabeth's romantic longings and stratagems, more than Darcy's, takes center stage—and why Austen is so witheringly acute in examining the minutiae of her heroine's

Plagiarizing *Pride and Prejudice*

thoughts. Both Elizabeth and Austen's assessment of her, in other words, become fascinating objects. It's almost as if this artful and thorough examination—not to mention Austen's stylized, knotty prose—is so psychologically complex and creates such a hermetically sealed, intimate, emotional world that it obviates the need for further characterological analysis, and this supposition implies, in turn, why it's almost plausible that plagiarizing Austen's prose might just lead to what at first looks like a passably incisive essay about *Pride and Prejudice*.