

Principles of Literary Study

andrewgoldstone.com/pls26

Professor Andrew Goldstone (andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu)
Office hours: Thursdays 11:45–12:45 in MU 040A or by appt.

April 13, 2026. Austen (5).

review: scenery

- ▶ boring description is full of interest
- ▶ Pemberley stands for Darcy
 - ▶ wealth, but in good taste
 - ▶ unity of “nature” and discreet artifice
 - ▶ good work! by employees who remain invisible
- ▶ Elizabeth falls in love
 - ▶ with wealth, but tastefully
 - ▶ disinterested middle-class tourism turns into triumphant interest
 - ▶ Austen’s irony about Elizabeth’s self-knowledge
 - ▶ ...which is closed, half-seriously, at the end
- ▶ the “shades of Pemberley”: caste vs. class
 - ▶ caste: rigidly inherited, ritually hierarchical
 - ▶ class: dynamically assigned, economically hierarchical

closure: who wins?

- ▶ Who secures the largest gains (material, psychological, symbolic)?
- ▶ What *strategy* (conscious or not) is best?

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Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs. Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters. (287)

EN(perceptible)!

I wish I could say, for the sake of her family, that the accomplishment of her earnest desire in the establishment of so many of her children, produced so happy an effect as to make her a sensible, amiable, well-informed woman for the rest of her life. (287)

fabula layer it would be nice for Lizzy if Mrs. Bennet could be improved

sjuzet layer but it wouldn't be so funny for readers, and you wouldn't believe it anyway

text layer "I" (narrator) pretend to care about my characters, but after all I am entertaining *you* with a story

metalepsis crossing of narrative levels ("breaking the fourth wall")

and the winner is...Darcy?

‘Dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled.’ (275)

and the winner is...Elizabeth, if she's careful

She was humbled, she was grieved; she repented, though she hardly knew of what.... She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance. (231)

Elizabeth longed to observe that Mr. Bingley had been a most delightful friend; so easily guided that his worth was invaluable; but she checked herself. She remembered that he had yet to learn to be laughed at, and it was rather too early to begin. (277)

Johnson's view

But throughout the course of the novel those [conservative] myths become so transformed that they are made to accommodate what could otherwise be seen as subversive impulses and values, and in the process they themselves become the vehicles of incisive social criticism. (Johnson, 75)

- ▶ How does she support this?

Elizabeth effortlessly concurs with Charlotte's opinion that Darcy "has a _right" to be proud," but she believes that she has a right to pride as well: "I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*" (PP 20). readers who contend that *Pride and Prejudice* is a didactic novel consistent with the orthodox morality expounded in sermons and conduct books typically observe here that Elizabeth is guilty of the "sin" of pride...Yet *Pride and Prejudice* invites us not to chide Elizabeth with threadbare morality about original sin, but on the contrary, if not actually to flatter people's pride as Wickham and Collins do, then at least to honor it. (Johnson, 83)

Not without a touch of self-mockery which seems to imply an awareness that she is the heroine of an extraordinary novel, Elizabeth **boasts that** the marriage of Darcy and herself can “teach the admiring multitude what connubial felicity really was” (PP 312). At least one reason why she is right is that unlike Charlotte’s marriage to Collins, her marriage, as well as Jane’s, promises “rational happiness” as well as “worldly prosperity” (Johnson, 90).

- ▶ Side remark: does Elizabeth actually “boast”? Does it make a difference?

more on character(-effect)

- ▶ Elizabeth Bennet is seen from inside *and* from all around
- ▶ character is a matter of social being (reputation, standing)
- ▶ character is a matter of inner process (feelings, judgments, intentions)

[To Mr. Collins:] 'Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart.' (83)

defining “character”

- ▶ any of the simple elements of a written language (I.3.a)
- ▶ a particular person's style of handwriting (I.4.b)
- ▶ the sum of the moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual or a people (II.9.a)
- ▶ recognized official rank or position (II.11)
- ▶ a description, delineation, or detailed report of a person's qualities (II.12.a)
- ▶ reputation, general estimation of qualities (II.13)
- ▶ a person portrayed in a work of fiction (II.14)

OED 3rd ed., s.v. “character, n.,” [oed.com](https://www.oed.com).

which meaning?

His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and every body hoped that he would never come there again. (9)

‘The effort which the formation, and the perusal of this letter must occasion, should have been spared, had not my character required it to be written and read.’ (147)

next

- ▶ begin Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*; bring the physical book
- ▶ bring back Austen
- ▶ read Woloch, 56–58, 62–82, if you didn't