Few readers would question that \textit{Pride and Prejudice} is the most brilliant of Jane Austen's novels. Perhaps it is less neatly turned than \textit{Emma}, to name a work which has recently found increasing favor among critics because of its technical finesse, but \textit{Pride and Prejudice} has a vibrancy and a rich dramatic texture all its own. Especially through the first half of the novel, Jane Austen recreates the quality of our social experience, that sense we often have of the ambiguities inherent in behavior. She accomplishes this partly through engaging us, alongside the vivacious Elizabeth Bennet, in making out a number of characters largely on the basis of what they say and do in public. In addition, she shows us that the motives are themselves mixed which impel Elizabeth to misjudge the novel's hero for so long, to find Darcy insufferably arrogant and nothing more. But the author's major success here is with Darcy, who seems to me a far cry from the two-dimensional Fanny Burneyan figure that he is so often taken to be. For Jane Austen endows him with mixed motives of his own—pride, shyness, a liking for Elizabeth—at the same time that she keeps prompting us to share the prejudiced Elizabeth's flattened interpretation of him. And through the second half of the story, although Elizabeth and Darcy are now coming to terms with each other, Jane Austen refuses to thin the motives of either one. Elizabeth sacrifices none of her wit and charm in making her peace with Darcy's values, and Darcy attains a more amiable manner without giving up the substance of his pride. In thus ripening, as it were, both Elizabeth and Darcy express the theme of \textit{Pride and Prejudice}, which again is grounded in the heroine's progress from blindness to insight, and which again argues that the individual must
mitigate the demands of personal feeling—whether Elizabeth's prejudice or Darcy's pride—and reconcile them with the claims of sense. Yet by ripening within the contours of personality established for them from the start of the novel, the hero and heroine bear witness to Jane Austen's integrity as an artist.

Both the variety of Darcy's character and Jane Austen's virtuosity in representing it are easy enough to overlook on our first reading of Pride and Prejudice, or even on later ones. For one thing, Elizabeth so wins the hearts of us all that we feel no urge to disagree with her, particularly about anyone as stuffy as Darcy appears to be. For another, Jane Austen must keep us pretty much in the dark about him—as she does by screening most of our impressions through Elizabeth—in order to bring off the chief dramatic effect of the story: overwhelming surprise at his first proposal. It is reactions like these, I suspect, that have combined to produce what seems to be the usual opinion of Darcy: that he is a cold man, implacably proud, who unexpectedly shows a new face from the first proposal on, yet remains altogether too unconvincing a character to make a fitting partner for the lively Elizabeth. But to my mind this opinion does no justice to the Darcy whom Jane Austen has created, and the main purpose of my chapter is to revise it. First off, as a kind of reintroduction to the story, I want to indicate how pervasively Jane Austen manipulates our view of Darcy. Next, I shall take up some of the novel's characters in greater detail, paying special attention to Elizabeth in hopes of showing that she readjusts herself at least as radically as Darcy does. Then, in the final section, we must turn to the most brilliant dialogues between Elizabeth and Darcy, where I shall aim at making the vitality of his courtship clear. If through all this I seem less than fair to other figures, particularly Elizabeth, it will be because of trying to make out as strong a case for Darcy as the novel allows.
In *Pride and Prejudice* our point of view is much more subtly managed than in either of the novels we have already examined. *Sense and Sensibility*'s Elinor proved reliable almost without exception. And though we saw the action of *Northanger Abbey* along with Catherine, Henry Tilney was always near at hand to correct any false impressions that might arise. But in *Pride and Prejudice* there is no one on whom we can depend for a true account. Rather, we are for the most part confined to Elizabeth's deeply biased perceptions, and Jane Austen tempts us to accept her heroine's view of Darcy at every turn, though just as consistently leaving the door open to a more favorable interpretation of his behavior.

At his introduction, we do not hear him speak until the "great admiration" he initially stirs has given way to a general "disgust" with his "manners"—that is, until Jane Austen has planted society's judgment, based wholly on appearances, in our minds, and perhaps in Elizabeth's as well. So the real ambiguity of his opening remarks catches us with our guard down. When Bingley urges him to dance, we overlook what may be Darcy's protestation of shyness in "You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner," even though it supplies a clear logic for the mention of Bingley's "sisters" that follows: "Your sisters are engaged, and there is not another woman in the room, whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with" (p. 11). Instead of entertaining the possibility that Darcy's tone reveals the instinctive irritation of a shy person at an aggressive invasion of his privacy, we seize on his whole reply as betraying an absolute contempt engendered by pride. Our listening to this with Elizabeth does not help a bit, for her prejudice is fixed when he goes on in as sharp a tone to reject Bingley's offer of introducing him to her—though it is an open question whether Darcy realizes that she can hear him.
These first glimpses of him, so carefully slanted by Jane Austen, condition us to minimize every hint that he might be less of a monster than Elizabeth supposes. Thus her sister Jane's report—that Darcy 'never speaks much unless among his intimate acquaintance. With them he is remarkably agreeable' (p. 19)—we discount readily enough, even though it echoes the ambiguity of Darcy's first speeches, because it has originated with the disagreeable Caroline Bingley. We refuse to set any store by Elizabeth's profession that she herself is biased, "I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine" (p. 20), because her phrasing sounds witty and open-minded. And by the time Darcy actually invites her to dance, first at the home of the Lucases and later at Netherfield, we have become so acclimatized to her dislike that we are almost as suspicious as she is of his intentions, as content to ignore the most plausible motive behind his requests, and as hopeful as she is that he will be discomfited by her ironic "Mr. Darcy is all politeness" (p. 26) or I do not want to dance a reel at all—and now despise me if you dare" (p. 52).²

Occasionally in these opening chapters Jane Austen lets us escape from Elizabeth's perspective to a more omniscient view of Darcy, but without encouraging us to give up Elizabeth's opinion. When the author describes Darcy's growing attachment, she narrates it in such a way that we are less aware of his affection than of his pride, less struck by his "discovery" of a "beautiful expression" in Elizabeth's eyes than by his finding the discovery "mortifying" (p. 23). Sometimes the rhetoric itself of Jane Austen's comments on Darcy inclines us toward Elizabeth's prejudice while it slyly permits him a richer blend of motives: for example, in stating that Elizabeth "attracted him more than he liked—and Miss Bingley was uncivil to her, and more teasing than usual to himself" (pp. 59–60), Jane Austen buries Darcy's sympathy for Elizabeth in the first half of the antithesis, completing the structure—as she has begun the sentence—with claims relating to his sense of himself. Even when she puts Darcy in action for us during Elizabeth's absence, as in his quarrels with Miss Bingley about Elizabeth's "fine
eyes' (pp. 27, 36), we cannot tell for sure whether he wants to praise Elizabeth or to provoke her rival or to demonstrate haughtily that he is Miss Bingley’s superior by turning down her bids to entangle him in a community of opinion.

Most of the time, however, Jane Austen forces us to look on with Elizabeth at what is happening, which means that Darcy is inevitably distorted. If Elizabeth notices, for instance, “how frequently Mr. Darcy’s eyes were fixed on her,” she immediately transforms the fact into a fancy that “there was a something about her more wrong and reprehensible, according to his ideas of right, than in any other person present” (p. 51). Indeed we often hardly realize that what seems an objective account of Darcy’s behavior by a detached author has really been filtered through Elizabeth’s perceptions. When Mr. Collins leaves her to pay his respects to Lady Catherine’s nephew, addressing himself to Darcy twice, we are told:

—It vexed her to see him expose himself to such a man. Mr. Darcy was eyeing him with unrestrained wonder, and when at last Mr. Collins allowed him time to speak, replied with an air of distant civility. Mr. Darcy’s contempt seemed abundantly increasing with the length of his second speech, and at the end of it he only made him a slight bow, and moved another way. (p. 98)

The terms that color Darcy here—“wonder,” “distant civility,” and “contempt”—belong to Elizabeth, so to speak, and are perhaps heightened because she is “vexed” to start with.

By maneuvers like these, Jane Austen obscures Darcy’s real nature through half of Pride and Prejudice. And, while we can no longer doubt his love for Elizabeth after the first proposal scene, the author tries to prevent us from settling his character decisively until the conclusion of the story. Thus, the housekeeper at Pemberley may commend him warmly, but Jane Austen undercuts the tribute by mentioning Mrs. Reynolds’ “pride or attachment in talking of her master” (p. 248). When Darcy himself turns up, Elizabeth keeps protesting about the amazing “alteration in his manner” (p. 252), although by this
time we may well suspect that much of the alteration is in Eliza­
beth herself, who has been surrendering her prejudice against
him. Even the favorable testimony of the Gardiners, who have
given us for the first time in the novel a relatively unbiased re-
action to Darcy (p. 257), is invalidated somewhat by their wish
to see Elizabeth marry him (p. 264). Only at the end of Pride
and Prejudice does Jane Austen permit Darcy to reveal his char-
acter completely and explicitly, although by restricting us still to
her heroine's point of view in the closing chapters, she teases us
about his feelings a good deal less than she does Elizabeth.

In detailing some of the tricks by which Jane Austen controls
our perspective on Darcy, I am not implying that he is really
without pride. Rather, I want to suggest how constantly in the
interest of the novel's dramatic effect she highlights his pride,
making him appear something of a humor character by keeping
his other qualities hidden in shadow. But the very limitations of
our point of view here should caution us to cling fast to the
dialogues as our surest source of truth, about Darcy, Elizabeth,
or anyone else. In them we can discover a three-dimensional
Darcy, as I shall try to show more fully in the last section of this
chapter. In the meantime, we must look closely at some of
Elizabeth's verbal encounters, mainly to find out how she
changes in the course of the novel, but partly to get a sense of
some other figures as well, who display their own varieties of
pride and prejudice.

Our best general guide to Elizabeth's development, and for
that matter to Darcy's, is the insight she offers us late in the
novel: "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, infor-
mation, and knowledge of the world, she must have received
benefit of greater importance" (p. 312). For the passage makes clear that Darcy changes in manner, not in essentials, and it implies that Elizabeth has been biased by her emotions. Yet she has always believed that she speaks cool sense, a sense which she thinks she can rely on because it owes so little to conventional opinion. Thus convinced that her mind is unclouded by prejudice of any sort, she invariably trusts herself to her immediate perceptions. And she is constantly exercising them to decide on some particular case, sure that her judgment will do fuller justice to its merits than any other. Of course, this assurance and unconventionality combine with the very real sense that she has to make almost everything she says sparkle with wit—though unfortunately I must ignore her wit from now on to make another point. For her speeches also reveal something that Elizabeth is quite unaware of: the fact that warm feeling rather than cool sense informs many of her decisions, and not only those concerning Darcy.

Early in the novel, for instance, when the relationship between Bingley and Jane Bennet engages the attention of most of the characters, Elizabeth has a set-to with her friend Charlotte Lucas about Jane's placid behavior to her suitor (pp. 21–23). The prudent Charlotte takes the position that Jane risks losing Bingley unless she shows her feelings more openly. Charlotte builds her case largely on hardheaded generalizations, though she sounds a more compassionate note in the first sentence that follows: "We can all begin freely—a slight preference is natural enough; but there are very few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten, a woman had better shew more affection than she feels."

But Elizabeth brushes aside such reasoning to cite her own experience of the situation at hand: "If I can perceive her regard for him, he must be a simpleton indeed not to discover it too."

She seems confident of uttering nothing but plain sense here, yet 'simpleton' marks her typical intensity, and obviously the whole reply is inspired by sympathy for her sister. When Charlotte counters by observing rationally enough that Bingley cannot "know Jane's disposition as you do," Elizabeth refuses
to retreat. Instead, she leaps to a generalization—"But if a woman is partial to a man, and does not endeavour to conceal it, he must find it out"—in order to confirm what she has said before, but surely this new claim stems at least as much from Elizabeth’s private concern for Jane as it does from impartial reason. The exchange goes on in this vein, Elizabeth becoming so impatient with the prudence of her opponent that she finally breaks out in open sarcasm. This moves Charlotte to restate her position in generalizations that set out as severe version of marriage as ever, though they do not inhibit her own sympathy for Jane:

“Well I wish Jane success with all my heart; and if she were married to him to-morrow, I should think she had as good a chance of happiness, as if she were to be studying his character for a twelve-month. Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar before-hand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life.”

“You make me laugh, Charlotte; but it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself.”

Again Elizabeth scoffs at Charlotte for being unreasonable, closing the argument with the splendid assertion that she knows Charlotte better than Charlotte knows herself. But the facts of the novel scoff at Elizabeth: one of Darcy’s major reasons for intervening between Bingley and Jane is that she does not seem strongly attached; and Charlotte does adhere to her principles in marrying Mr. Collins. This is not by any means to say that we should approve of Charlotte’s act or that she speaks more truly than Elizabeth in the passage under discussion. But it is to say that Elizabeth frequently misjudges, failing to recognize that her reasoning is biased by feelings, here her affection for Jane and her disdain for Charlotte’s prudence.

The same motives and the same sort of misjudgment crop
up when Elizabeth talks over with Jane the apparently permanent removal of Bingley to London, for which he has offered no explanation, and the engagement of Charlotte to Mr. Collins (pp. 134–37). Jane, of course, cannot bear to think badly of anyone, and she never speaks without revealing how completely her benevolent feelings determine her decisions. Indeed, a remark she makes at one point, “Let me take it in the best light, in the light in which it may be understood” (p. 137), might well serve as her motto. But refined as Jane’s feelings are, her thoroughgoing dependence on them is a form of prejudice as settled as Charlotte’s prudence. And Elizabeth is as eager to expose the one extreme as the other, still assured that her own sense is immune to any such error. So when Jane excuses Bingley much too charitably, blaming herself instead for having wrongly imagined that he liked her, Elizabeth first praises her sister as “angelic,” but then proclaims her own superior wisdom in a rhetoric that assigns Jane to one camp and herself to another:

"Do not be afraid of my running into any excess, of my encroaching on your privilege of universal good will. There are few people whom I really love, and still fewer of whom I think well. The more I see of the world, the more am I dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistency of all human characters, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of either merit or sense. I have met with two instances lately; one I will not mention; the other is Charlotte’s marriage. It is unaccountable! in every view it is unaccountable!"

By distinguishing so dispassionately between the “few” whom she can “really love” and “still fewer of whom” she can “think well,” Elizabeth presumably guards herself against Jane’s emotional “excess.” But the generalization about “inconsistency” actually arises from her dissatisfaction with “the world,” and her “two instances” bear this out. Of Bingley she will say nothing at the moment out of affection for Jane, but Charlotte is another matter. Although Elizabeth protests, by “unaccountable’
and "in every view," that her own verdict is purely rational, the repetition of phrase betrays her pique. And in fact the verdict is conditioned by her dislike for Mr. Collins and by her irritation with Charlotte—whom we saw accounting for herself in detail—for proving Elizabeth's earlier assessment of how her friend would behave quite incorrect. Perhaps it is mildly ironic that Jane should put her finger on the element endangering Elizabeth's judgment, begging her sister not to "give way to such feelings as these." In any event, Jane goes on typically enough to interpret the whole affair too generously:

"Consider Mr. Collins's respectability, and Charlotte's prudent, steady character. Remember that she is one of a large family; that as to fortune, it is a most eligible match; and be ready to believe, for every body's sake, that she may feel something like regard and esteem for our cousin."

This is too much for Elizabeth, who belabors first Charlotte, then Mr. Collins, and concludes with a powerful array of conceptual terms to rebuke Jane for being irresponsible:

"You shall not defend her, though it is Charlotte Lucas. You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger, security for happiness."

Again the effect of the rhetoric is to play off Jane's singularity against her own reliance on "principle and integrity," and certainly Jane deserves the rebuke. But the fundamental irony turns against Elizabeth once more. She is too irked by Jane's attitude and too positive of her own integrity to realize that her fixed prejudice against Darcy lays her open to the same charge time and again through the first half of the novel at least, most obviously in her decisions about Darcy himself and in her misjudgment of Wickham.

About the first of her suitors, however, Elizabeth has no illusions. Only Mrs. Bennet could, and perhaps Lady Catherine
de Bourgh, for Mr. Collins never deviates from absurdity. Certainly his overly formal rhetoric, constant polysyllables, and especially those notorious ripe metaphors are laughable enough, but we must look behind these traits to get at the essential absurdity of Mr. Collins' verbal manner. On one level he uses language quite consciously: we remember him telling Mr. Bennet about working out "little elegant compliments" in his spare moments. Yet Mr. Collins remains completely unaware that, by the time he has strung his phrases together, they develop an inflated tone which is at best ridiculously disproportionate to whatever he wants to say—and at the worst contradicts his claims. In his classic proposal to Elizabeth, for instance, he spins out a highly formal announcement about being in the grip of overpowering emotions: "And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection" (p. 106). Diverting as this sort of verbal idiocy may be, the equivalent contradiction at the core of Mr. Collins' nature—humility become pride—makes him sometimes inane and sometimes frightening. If he tries for sense, he comes closer to nonsense: "I consider the clerical office as equal in point of dignity with the highest rank in the kingdom—provided that a proper humility of behaviour is at the same time maintained" (p. 97). And when he vents his feelings, as on learning of Lydia Bennet's elopement, the result is a ghastly parody of a clergyman's sympathy, his "comfort" for Mr. Bennet consisting in encouraging him to disown his daughter. But everything he says and does reflects his irresponsibility so clearly that Elizabeth never stands in danger of misreading him.

The case is rather different with Wickham, who also courts Elizabeth's favor. Her antagonism toward Darcy predisposes her to find "truth" in the "looks" of his enemy (p. 86), and she unhesitatingly accepts Wickham's story about being cut off from his rightful inheritance by a jealous Darcy. What does not register with Elizabeth until much later, after Darcy has told her the truth of the whole business, is that Wickham's verbal manner reveals a contradiction of its own. It is one more subtle than anything Mr. Collins can show, but just as firm a clue to
irresponsibility. This false note is struck during Wickham’s first conversation with Elizabeth. While he pretends to honor the demands of propriety in holding himself back, he in fact converts decorum into a backdrop to set off his own particular and unrestrained dislike for Darcy: “I have no right to give my opinion. 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” (p. 77). Wickham exploits these two roles throughout the scene. As soon as he knows that Elizabeth shares his dislike, he really opens up against Darcy, playing to the hilt the part of a man whose feelings are too strong to be kept back—indeed describing himself at one point as a person of “warm, unguarded temper” (p. 80). Along with these outbursts, sometimes almost in the same breath, Wickham makes a series of appeals to the generalizations of propriety, such as “I cannot pretend to be sorry that he or that any man should not be estimated beyond their deserts” (p. 78), or “A man of honour could not have doubted the intention, but Mr. Darcy chose to doubt it” (p. 79). But Wickham’s emotional exhibitionism is simply incongruent with his professions of decorum, a fact which Elizabeth can formulate only when she has learned to think better of Darcy (p. 207). Until then, blinded by her prejudice, she is completely taken in by Wickham’s artful inversions of his own appearance and reality, and of Darcy’s.

All the encounters in which we have seen Elizabeth involved so far, however, seem like minor engagements when compared to her running battle with Darcy himself. In their clashes, she remains supremely confident of her perceptions as an individual. While Darcy does not undervalue his opinions either, he does go to work in a different fashion. No less interested than Elizabeth in arriving at the merits of the particular case, he starts out, at least, with generalizations, often those of society. And along the way he appears more careful than she to ally himself with objective reason. Certainly he sounds as self-assured in making his judgments as she does, though whether because of a peevish sense of superiority—as Elizabeth feels—or a proper pride is harder to determine. Their characteristic tones and methods are
illustrated in various dialogues: the argument about Bingley's impetuosity (pp. 48–50), for example, or about Darcy's pride (pp. 57–58). But the scene in which ladies' accomplishments come up for discussion has some special advantages for our purposes. It will show us a little of two other characters, Bingley and his sister Caroline. More important, it will introduce us to the word that lies at the heart of the novel's meaning, performance, a concept we will be much concerned with in the final section of this chapter. For the present, though, we need only be aware that the sense of performance extends from a mere display of skill to a deed expressive of one's whole being, and that at the start of the conversation before us the word is equated with "accomplished," the alternate term thus acquiring exactly the same range of meaning and, in fact, taking the place of "performance" throughout this scene (pp. 38–40).

The words are put in play by Caroline Bingley, who sets out as usual to bind herself and Darcy together in an exclusive community of opinion, this time by rhapsodizing about his sister's "accomplished performance" on the piano:

"Such a countenance, such manners! and so extremely accomplished for her age! Her performance on the piano-forte is exquisite."

"It is amazing to me," said Bingley, "how young ladies can have patience to be so very accomplished, as they all are."

"All young ladies accomplished! My dear Charles, what do you mean?"

"Yes, all of them, I think. They all paint tables, cover screens and net purses. I scarcely know any one who cannot do all this, and I am sure I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished."

Clearly Caroline means the words in a narrow sense only, to denote the skills of the aristocratic, so she becomes angry when her brother devalues such pursuits by allowing all "young ladies" to be "so very accomplished." Bingley himself speaks with that indiscriminating generosity which is so typical of him and which makes him the perfect partner for Jane. His generalizations flow
straight from his feelings, but he praises the whole class of "young ladies" for trivial achievements.

As we might expect, Darcy seizes the opportunity to be discriminating about "accomplishments," yet we should beware of identifying his motives with Caroline's:

"Your list of the common extent of accomplishments has too much truth. The word is applied to many a woman who deserves it no otherwise than by netting a purse, or covering a skreen. But I am very far from agreeing with you in your estimation of ladies in general. I cannot boast of knowing more than half a dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished."

He begins with Bingley's generalization and proceeds to test it in the light of his own observation. Maybe it would be risky to decide at the moment whether his distinction between "common extent" and "really accomplished" is inspired by a snobbish commitment like Caroline's to the superficial sense of the word or by a rational grasp of its whole meaning. But certainly when he replies to Elizabeth's "you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an accomplished woman" with "Yes; I do comprehend a great deal in it," he accents the weight of the "accomplishments," though perhaps a chance remains that he is being merely haughty. His next remark, however, removes even this ambiguity. After Caroline has reeled off a host of refinements like "drawing," "the modern languages," and "a certain air and manner of walking" which the truly accomplished woman commands, thus hoping to deny the name to Elizabeth and all except the elegant, Darcy comments, "All this she must possess and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading." His generalization insists on a fuller sense of "accomplished," the "more substantial" integrating refined behavior with the reason that comes from "reading." Yet Darcy's words strike a more personal note as well, for a little earlier Caroline has nastily characterized Elizabeth as "a great reader"; so this becomes a compliment to
Elizabeth by offering her an entree into the select category that Caroline has been jealously hugging to herself.

But the only voice Elizabeth listens to is her antipathy toward Darcy, and characteristically, it compels her to translate his claim into an extreme:

"I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing any."

"Are you so severe upon your own sex, as to doubt the possibility of all this?"

"I never saw such a woman. I never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe, united."

Again Darcy assigns the richest meaning to "accomplished," and on one level his answer seems strictly rational. But it pays another compliment to the "sex" of which Elizabeth is a member. Furthermore, he echoes here one of her earlier attacks on him, "You are severe on us" (p. 24); thus Darcy may also be attempting to clear himself while hinting gently that she is the biased one. How much of this Elizabeth takes in we cannot tell; we can only be sure that she rejects both him and his sense of "accomplished" to assert the priority of her own experience. The dialogue has shown, however, that Darcy sets as high a value on personal experience in making judgments; that he seems, in addition, rather more scrupulous than Elizabeth about observing the place of reason in generalizations, either his own or those of others; finally, that he manages all this without slighting his particular feeling for her.

Darcy's feeling reaches its peak, of course, when he disregards Elizabeth's inferior social status and his low opinion of her family to propose to her, and Elizabeth's animosity comes to a boil at the same point. What she actually objects to, although she denies it to him (p. 192), is the mode of his proposal, to which she reverts again and again (pp. 193, 212, 224). And indeed the mode is all that Darcy ever really apologizes for (p. 367), having learned from Elizabeth's rebuff, not that he must change his convictions, but that he must modify the confidence and stiffness of his manner if he is to please. His letter explaining his dealings
with Bingley and Wickham teaches Elizabeth, in her turn, how "wretchedly blind" her prejudice has made her to him and to herself. In fact, as she comes to see Darcy more clearly in the second half of the story, she even takes over from time to time something like his verbal method in presenting her judgments, though she remains quite capable of being witty. As for his opinion of her family, Elizabeth may resent it while he speaks, but she has censured them freely before the proposal (p. 101), and does so on several occasions later on, one of which we will glance at after a moment.

It is not very surprising that Elizabeth should feel a bit uncomfortable about all her immediate family except Jane, whom Darcy also exempts from his reproaches. Mrs. Bennet, to name first the most blatantly indecorous of the group, stands condemned every time she opens her mouth. Her fairly frequent metaphors, intensively particular terms, and abrupt rhythms show that she can never subdue her emotions—the source of her generalizations as well—and cannot therefore respond appropriately to the situations confronting her:

"My dear, dear Lydia! This is delightful indeed!—She will be married!—I shall see her again!—She will be married at sixteen!—My good, kind brother!—I knew how it would be—I knew he would manage every thing. How I long to see her! and to see dear Wickham too! But the clothes, the wedding clothes! I will write to my sister Gardiner about them directly." (p. 306)

In the flow of her feelings, she treats Lydia, marriage "at sixteen," the aid of Mr. Gardiner, Wickham, and the "wedding clothes" as of equal importance. And obviously Mrs. Bennet is so possessed by her ruling passion, to get her daughters married as soon as possible, that she has no qualms at all about the circumstances of Lydia's elopement. Naturally Lydia herself has none. She shares, in fact, much of her mother's nature and most of her verbal traits, the only difference being that Lydia's tone usually sounds more unconcerned, rather as if she has not yet experienced the strain in satisfying her desires that Mrs. Bennet feels so often.
Although the wit of Mr. Bennet's conversation makes him a good deal more bearable than his wife or Lydia, his conduct really comes no nearer decorum than theirs. The emotional detachment which he cultivates so assiduously proves as crippling as their emotional involvement. Indeed he responds to life as predictably as they do, for whatever the situation, he encounters it with a joke—and pretty much the same joke at that. The essence of his wit lies in that literalistic manner by means of which he converts whatever is said to him and whatever happens into absurdity—thus indulging his superior wisdom. The trick is amusing enough when he plays it on the silly Mrs. Bennet, as in referring to her "poor nerves" as "my old friends" (p. 5). But he seems heartless, even imperceptive, when he talks to Elizabeth of Jane's separation from Bingley in the same fashion:

your sister is crossed in love I find. I congratulate her. Next to being married, a girl likes to be crossed in love a little now and then. It is something to think of, and gives her a sort of distinction among her companions" (pp. 137–38). In the last analysis, Mr. Bennet's mode has the same effect as his wife's, prohibiting him from distinguishing between the trivial and the significant. It is peculiarly appropriate that his one attempt in the novel to express straight sense and straight feeling—when he dissuades Elizabeth from marrying Darcy (p. 376)—should coincide with Mr. Bennet's complete mistaking of his daughter, the person he has depended on knowing best.

The mind of Elizabeth, needless to say, is more flexible than her father's. She possesses altogether finer capacities than any of her family, and she has always behaved with a keener awareness of herself in relation to other people. Once Darcy's letter has cleared her insight, she does not hesitate to judge herself firmly. In the passage that follows, for instance, Elizabeth founds her generalizations in reason alone, and—in another reversal of her earlier ways with language—she levels the generalizations straight at her prejudice rather than considering herself an exceptional case beyond their reach:

"And yet I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to him, without any reason. It is such a spur to one's
genius, such an opening for wit to have a dislike of that kind. One may be continually abusive without saying anything just; but one cannot be always laughing at a man without now and then stumbling on something witty." (pp. 225-26)

Here she may be remembering Darcy’s previous warning, which she spurned at the time, about how easy it is for “a person whose first object in life is a joke” to render “ridiculous” the “wisest and the best of men” (p. 57).

But she adopts his verbal manner itself when she, alone among the Bennets, opposes Lydia’s trip to Brighton and tries to persuade her father—who thinks Elizabeth selfishly hoping to preserve her own credit with her suitors—of its impropriety:

“It is not of peculiar, but of general evils, which I am now complaining. Our importance, our respectability in the world, must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia’s character. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her character will be fixed. A flirt in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person; and from the ignorance and emptiness of her mind, wholly unable to ward off any portion of that universal contempt which her rage for admiration will excite.” (p. 231)

First Elizabeth differentiates carefully between the “peculiar” and the “general”; then she sets out the moral generalization that covers the case; last of all, she measures Lydia in the light of steadfast concepts. Method, vocabulary, the decision itself—all might be Darcy’s.

It seems especially fitting, though, that Elizabeth should use a method approaching his—integrated with her own wit—to gain her brilliant triumph over his aunt when that lady forbids her to think of marrying Darcy. Lady Catherine de Bourgh represents the extreme of pride; we might say that her motives really are what Elizabeth has imagined her nephew’s to be during the first part of the story. Obsessed with her rank, Lady Catherine cannot distinguish between her own whims and general principles.
This equation dominates her speeches, perhaps never more unpleasantly than when she berates Elizabeth for not giving way to her own project of uniting Darcy with her daughter: “Are you lost to every feeling of propriety and delicacy? Have you not heard me say, that from his earliest hours he was destined for his cousin?” (p. 355). But Elizabeth puts Lady Catherine to rout by discriminating between wishes, facts, and moral obligations:

“If there is no other objection to my marrying your nephew, I shall certainly not be kept from it, by knowing that his mother and aunt wished him to marry Miss De Bourgh. You both did as much as you could, in planning the marriage. Its completion depended on others. If Mr. Darcy is neither by honour nor inclination confined to his cousin, why is not he to make another choice? And if I am that choice, why may not I accept him?” (p. 355)

Her controlled reasoning, here and throughout the dialogue, lays bare the bias of her opponent’s arguments in reducing them to nonsense. And of course Elizabeth’s victory in the scene, once Lady Catherine has reported their discussion to Darcy, brings on his second, successful proposal.

As a result of failing the first time, however, Darcy has forsaken his domineering manner for a mildness typified by his invitation to Elizabeth when they next meet, at Pemberley:

“There is also one other person in the party who more particularly wishes to be known to you,—Will you allow me, or do I ask too much, to introduce my sister to your acquaintance during your stay at Lambton?” (p. 256)

Indeed “Mr. Darcy is all politeness,” almost excessively so in refusing to presume on Elizabeth in any way and in reserving all wishes to his sister and himself. Yet in spite of his more subdued tone, Darcy’s habit of differentiating remains unaltered, as is evident in one of his last talks with Elizabeth:

“Your retrospections must be so totally void of reproach, that the contentment arising from them, is not of philosophy, but what is
much better, of ignorance. But with me, it is not so. Painful recollections will intrude, which cannot, which ought not to be repelled. 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 I was not taught to correct my temper. I was spoilt by my parents, who almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to wish at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased.”

(p. 369)

While he compliments Elizabeth by elevating “ignorance” above “philosophy” and then proceeds to judge himself harshly, Darcy’s speech still bristles with discriminations: between “cannot” and “ought not,” “practice” and “principle,” “to think” and “to wish,” “hard” and “advantageous,” appearance and reality. If the passage shows that Darcy has come to see himself in a new light much as Elizabeth did, it also declares that his fundamental beliefs have not altered.

IV

The verbal traits of all the characters whom we have been reviewing, then, reveal how they form their judgments and how they behave. Bringing the two together, we can go on to say that the theme of Pride and Prejudice concerns judging from behavior and behaving with judgment. These crucial issues are caught together in the word performance—whose meaning, as I suggested earlier, ranges from a show, an exhibition, to a total act, a deed integrated with one’s entire nature. For the term amounts to more than a convenient ambiguity which allows Jane Austen to contrast Elizabeth and Darcy by associating her with the thinner sense and him with the deeper one. The word refers to behavior itself: a person can be known only by the qualities of his
performance, whichever kind it may be, and in either sort of performance one mediates between society and oneself. The concept stands, in all its variety, at the very center of the novel's meaning, and it takes its life from the most brilliant dialogues between Elizabeth and Darcy. To these we must turn at last, searching out in them a Darcy who is less disagreeable and more emotional than we usually imagine.

The first conversation between them sets the tone of their relationship and introduces us to the pivotal concept (p. 24). After a moment we shall see Elizabeth interpreting it in a limited sense, but her immediate behavior makes the same point. For, urged on by Charlotte Lucas, she is provoked by the presence of Darcy to put on an exhibitionistic performance for him:

"Did not you think, Mr. Darcy, that I expressed myself uncommonly well just now, when I was teasing Colonel Forster to give us a ball at Meryton?"

"With great energy;—but it is a subject which always makes a lady energetic."

She proclaims that she is unconventional by "uncommonly well" and that she is feminine by "teazing." Darcy's "great energy" acknowledges her uniqueness, but he then backs off to a generalization, either to avoid the impropriety of noticing her too personally or to pronounce sternly on the frivolity of ladies. Elizabeth reacts only to the second possibility and accuses him of being stuffy: "You are severe on us." Although her "us" may seem at first a decorous retreat to the anonymity of a class, it really flaunts the opposition of all her sex to Darcy.

Her antagonism swells when Charlotte, a little concerned for Darcy, teases her in turn about the actual performance that is to follow. Elizabeth may pretend to take account of propriety in calling Charlotte "strange," yet she directs attention to her own "vanity" in the act of denying that it has "taken a musical turn":

"You are a very strange creature by way of a friend!—always wanting me to play and sing before any body and every body!—If my vanity had taken a musical turn, you would have been in-
valuable, but as it is, I would really rather not sit down before
those who must be in the habit of hearing the very best per­
formers. . . Very well; if it must be so, it must.” And gravely
glancing at Mr. Darcy, “There is a fine old saying, which every
body here is of course familiar with—’Keep your breath to cool
your porridge,’—and I shall keep mine to swell my song.”

Indeed she puts her individuality on parade all through the
speech, closing with her most striking flourish at Darcy. Not con­
tent with having sneered at him obliquely by “any body and
every body,” Elizabeth becomes downright specific in her final
saucy maxim—and whets its edge by the generalization that sepa­
rates him from “every body here,” from her circle of acquain­tance. She is speaking ironically, of course, when she includes
herself among the “performers” who entertain the idle rich with
their skills. Nevertheless, Elizabeth clearly understands by per­
formance nothing more than the kind of conscious self-display
in which she has just been indulging.

We observed earlier in this chapter how Darcy identifies him­
selves with the fuller sense of the concept in discussing ladies’ ac­
complishments, and we saw that he does so without disregarding
his own feelings for Elizabeth. In the dialogues that follow, we
shall find him taking more and more delighted notice of her.
When they meet at the Netherfield ball (pp. 91–94), for in­
stance, Darcy surprises her into dancing with him, a high com­
pliment if we recall his earlier comments on the pastime, but

suddenly fancying that it would be the greater punishment to
her partner to oblige him to talk , made some slight ob­
servation on the dance. He replied, and was again silent. After
a pause of some minutes she addressed him a second time with
“It is your turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy.—I talked
about the dance, and you ought to make some kind of remark on
the size of the room, or the number of couples.”

She taunts him with another show of willfulness, weighing the
silence that she reads as offensive pride against her own propri­
ety, which she ironically pretends to, in conversing. Though she
is off on another performance, Darcy yields to her with perfect politeness:

He smiled, and assured her that whatever she wished him to say should be said.

"Very well.—That reply will do for the present.—Perhaps by and bye I may observe that private balls are much pleasanter than public ones.—But now we may be silent."

"Do you talk by rule then, while you are dancing?"

When she parodies decorum to make his stubbornness clear, he tries to cut through her exhibition to her real self, asking that they overthrow the "rule" of convention and be emotionally direct with each other.

Predictably, Elizabeth desires only to put Darcy in his place. Her first generalizations carefully set up the barrier of impersonal propriety again:

"Sometimes. One must speak a little, you know. It would look odd to be entirely silent for half an hour together, and yet for the advantage of some, conversation ought to be so arranged as that they may have the trouble of saying as little as possible."

And her final generalization keeps Darcy apart from her by assigning them different standards, at the same time that it scarcely masks her disdain for him. Yet he responds with a more personal appeal, one that brushes aside the barrier of decorum to get at their private emotions:

"Are you consulting your own feelings in the present case, or do you imagine that you are gratifying mine?"

"Both," replied Elizabeth archly; "for I have always seen a great similarity in the turn of our minds.—We are each of an un-social, taciturn disposition, unwilling to speak, unless we expect to say something that will amaze the whole room, and be handed down to posterity with all the eclat of a proverb."

But Elizabeth turns down his plea. She can spell out his arrogance if she condemns herself as well, though obviously she means her words to sound absurd when applied to herself.
Darcy rejects her typical move to the extreme in order to pursue the truth. But the compliment with which he begins and the warning in his last sentence that she is liable to error make no impression on her:

"This is no very striking resemblance of your own character, I am sure," said he. "How near it may be to mine, I cannot pretend to say.—You think it a faithful portrait undoubtedly."
"I must not decide on my own performance."

Elizabeth uses the term in its narrow sense only, carrying on the figure that "portrait" implies to announce her propriety once more. Yet the total meaning of the word measures her behavior to Darcy with sharp irony, for she is unaware that the role she keeps playing is itself a decision—or that this continuing performance expresses the opposition of her whole nature to Darcy rather than controlled reason, as she supposes. And she remains oblivious through the rest of the scene, blithely acting out what she thinks of him while ignoring what he reveals of himself. When she presses him about Wickham, for example, she fails to realize that her advice is better suited to herself: "It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion, to be secure of judging properly at first." Finally, Darcy resurrects "performance" to hint at her folly: I could wish, Miss Bennet, that you were not to sketch my character at the present moment, as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no credit on either." Nevertheless, he hopes to bring her nearer him by combining their senses of the word. The "performance" he mentions is surely a sketch, but to reproduce reality demands clear insight, which in turn depends on the artist's responsible, unbiased behavior. So, when Elizabeth insists on indulging her skill rather than judging the reality, Darcy shows his anger:

"But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity."
"I would by no means suspend any pleasure of yours," he coldly replied.
The word "pleasure" goes only with a light accomplishment. Since Elizabeth has blocked every advance toward mutual understanding and a community of feeling, Darcy ends their talk by handing her one-sided interpretation of the term back to her.

So far Jane Austen has used *performance* as something like a gauge for behavior, letting her characters define the range of the concept in their speeches. Throughout the scene at Rosings (pp. 174–76), she anchors the word in Elizabeth's actual playing of the piano. Now the speakers can keep up an appearance of decorum by pretending to talk of the literal situation, while in fact they treat it metaphorically, thus betraying their most intense emotions. It is the artistic device that we have observed Jane Austen working with in the earlier novels, and we will see it again in the novels to come, but she never manages the device more beautifully, with more moving effect, than she does here.

The conversation opens when Elizabeth accosts Darcy "at the first convenient pause" in her playing; as always, she assumes that he intends to be contemptuous:

"You mean to frighten me, Mr. Darcy, by coming in all this state to hear me? But I will not be alarmed though your sister *does* play so well. There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises with every attempt to intimidate me."

Elizabeth's "hear me" and "play so well" maintain decorum, for they seem to speak only of piano-playing. Yet her final, fully emotional generalizations leave no doubt that she is challenging him personally. Although Darcy answers with conspicuous politeness, he also distinguishes—characteristically enough—between the real and the professed:

"I shall not say that you are mistaken," he replied, "because you could not really believe me to entertain any design of alarming you; and I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance long enough to know, that you find great enjoyment in occasionally professing opinions which in fact are not your own."
Literally he is accusing Elizabeth of her usual self-willed performance, warning or begging her to recognize the truth about himself.

Elizabeth may appear to joke at this as a false sketch, ironically accepting what Darcy has said while she circumspectly addresses herself to Colonel Fitzwilliam. But she bitterly resents the thrust as another proof of Darcy's nastiness:

Elizabeth laughed heartily at this picture of herself, and said to Colonel Fitzwilliam, "Your cousin will give you a very pretty notion of me, and teach you not to believe a word I say. I am particularly unlucky in meeting with a person so well able to expose my real character, in a part of the world, where I had hoped to pass myself off with some degree of credit. Indeed, Mr. Darcy, it is very ungenerous in you to mention all that you knew to my disadvantage in Hertfordshire—and, give me leave to say, very impolitic too—for it is provoking me to retaliate, and such things may come out, as will shock your relations to hear."

The phrase "pass myself off" reflects Elizabeth's view of what Darcy tried to do at Netherfield. And she couples "ungenerous" with the threat of laying bare his disagreeable past to attack him more directly. Her "impolitic" is just right, for it implies that she has more sense than Darcy, and it does so without weakening the emotional power of her assault. Yet he remains utterly polite, and something more: "'I am not afraid of you,' said he, smilingly." Darcy is "not afraid," either because he feels so confident of his integrity that he assumes it must win out over Elizabeth's willful misinterpretations or because he trusts in the ultimate integrity of her sense and feeling. In either case he puts himself completely in her hands, a real measure of his affection for her.

When Colonel Fitzwilliam invites her to go on, Elizabeth strikes a tone of parody that thinly disguises her indictment of Darcy:

"You shall hear then—but prepare yourself for something very dreadful. The first time of my ever seeing him in Hertfordshire, you must know, was at a ball—and at this ball, what do you
think he did? He danced only four dances! I am sorry to pain you—but so it was. He danced only four dances, though gentlemen were scarce; and, to my certain knowledge, more than one young lady was sitting down in want of a partner. Mr. Darcy, you cannot deny the fact."

Such phrases as "to my certain knowledge" and "the fact" allege that Darcy was haughty in refusing to dance with her, though Elizabeth still protects her own feelings by generalizing about "more than one young lady." This deed is the foundation of her prejudice, the reality that she is positive Darcy "cannot deny." But he does. At least he redefines what Elizabeth has always taken to be pride as shyness: "I had not at that time the honour of knowing any lady in the assembly beyond my own party." In effect he is saying, "You have interpreted my performance wrongly—as a mere exhibition—because you ignore my total character."

Elizabeth refuses his explanation, polishing him off with a clearly absurd generalization, and then she turns to his friend:

"True; and nobody can ever be introduced in a ball room. Well, Colonel Fitzwilliam, what do I play next? My fingers wait your orders."

"Perhaps," said Darcy, "I should have judged better, had I sought an introduction, but I am ill qualified to recommend myself to strangers."

Yet Darcy insists on his shyness, even admitting that feeling may have swayed his judgment. So, though Elizabeth keeps her tone light by speaking to Colonel Fitzwilliam, she attacks with even more authority, counting on her impersonal phrasing to provide an air of sense that will decide finally against Darcy:

"Shall we ask your cousin the reason of this?" said Elizabeth, still addressing Colonel Fitzwilliam. "Shall we ask him why a man of sense and education, and who has lived in the world, is ill qualified to recommend himself to strangers?"

"I certainly have not the talent which some people possess,"
said Darcy, "of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns, as I often see done."

But the hostility of Elizabeth still lurks in the bias of her rhetorical question. And Darcy, because he remains unsatisfied that her formula takes account of his real nature, refers to his shyness for the third time, again declaring that he cannot put on a skilled performance, that he must enact his convictions.

Elizabeth finally resorts to her literal performance on the piano in order to carry the day. She uses it metaphorically so that her thrust may seem decorously oblique, yet she aims her words straight at Darcy's stubbornness:

"My fingers do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women's do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault—because I would not take the trouble of practising. It is not that I do not believe my fingers as capable as any other woman's of superior execution."

At the same time, of course, this is one of Elizabeth's typical self-displays. But there is a further point: since Elizabeth creates the metaphor consciously, making the social situation into a vehicle for illustration, she must still be thinking of performance in its flattest sense.

This allegiance on her part fills Darcy's reply with reverberations:

Darcy smiled and said, "You are perfectly right. You have employed your time much better. No one admitted to the privilege of hearing you, can think any thing wanting. We neither of us perform to strangers."

He expresses his deepest attachment to her in these sentences. The first refuses to dispute her judgment of him, which is to say that Darcy cheerfully sacrifices the real motives he has been explaining. His second sentence must be sheer feeling, for it con-
transcends the logic both of Elizabeth's metaphor and of what Darcy himself has said earlier: after all, he praises his sister at the beginning of the scene because she “practises very constantly,” and Elizabeth has just reproached herself for not practicing more often. Darcy can only mean that her behavior toward him, no matter how prejudiced, is more valuable than her piano-playing. In the third sentence he reverts to the metaphor by “hearing you,” which plainly stands for “being with you,” but only to keep his extravagant generalization about her charm within the bounds of propriety. Yet his last sentence crowns the others. Perhaps, as a gallant gesture, he is straining to use “perform” in Elizabeth’s narrow sense—straining fearfully, if he really wants this meaning, for she is indeed playing to “strangers.” But actually, I think, Darcy is calling here on his deeper sense of the word while uttering his most impassioned plea for intimacy, a plea all the more fervent in that it quite irrationally disregards—as a paraphrase shows—the blindness which has marked Elizabeth all along: “We reserve our fullest selves, perfectly understood by both of us, for each other.” It is his final, almost desperate attempt before the first proposal to come to terms with her.

But that proposal soon follows, and the letter revealing Darcy to Elizabeth. With both of them now making the necessary personal adjustments and becoming surer of one another’s behavior, the play with performance disappears from the novel. By the last pages of Pride and Prejudice, the earlier tense misunderstandings between them have given way to an exchange like the following, begun by Elizabeth, which ends with them cozily enjoying a joke that takes their true motives for granted:

“Why, especially, when you called, did you look as if you did not care about me?”

“Because you were grave and silent, and gave me no encouragement.”

“But I was embarrassed.”

“And so was I.”

“You might have talked to me more when you came to dinner.”

“A man who had felt less, might.”

“How unlucky that you should have a reasonable answer to give, and that I should be so reasonable as to admit it!” (p. 381)
In spite of its lower tension, this bit of dialogue measures how far the characters have traveled since the start of the story. Darcy still defends himself by pointing to his shyness, but he can reckon the liabilities of his behavior. And Elizabeth, though she still puts on something of a show in ironically suggesting that she is disappointed in reason, nevertheless declares the reasonableness of them both. Certainly the lighter tone of the passage should not beguile us into imagining that Darcy has renounced his sense of status, of prudence, of reason, of decorum—those conventional social values which have prompted so many of his previous actions. Indeed, Elizabeth herself comes to endorse these values, as I tried to suggest before, comes to approve the foundations of Darcy's performance. What he has found out—and it is important enough—is that one's total performance may be unacceptable unless it is softened by a gracious display. And Elizabeth has discovered that her own behavior has been lacking in integrity—that the sort of performance in which she has so often acted out her judgment of Darcy has been grounded in a prejudice that distorts reason. The concept, which Jane Austen brings so vividly to life in dialogue, epitomizes the theme of the novel.

1. Mary Lascelles speaks for many critics when she objects to this incident, contending that the Darcy it presents is "inconsistent" with the one "described and developed in the rest of the book" (Jane Austen, p. 22). But I think she misses the full psychology behind Darcy's remarks and the artistry of Jane Austen, who sets up here a hero antipathetic to Elizabeth without completely sacrificing his character in the process. Darcy's letter to Elizabeth after his first proposal has also been called in question by Miss Lascelles—and other critics—on much the same grounds: she feels it "not quite plausible" that "so much, and such, information would be volunteered by a proud and reserved man—unless under pressure from his author" (p. 162). But Darcy says himself in it that "my character required it to be written and read" (p. 196), that he will tell Elizabeth what he has done because an "explanation is due to myself" (p. 197). Indeed the letter seems to me almost the only unequivocal instance in the novel of the pride usually attributed to Darcy.
2. Reuben Brower has analyzed these dialogues magnificently in his essay on *Pride and Prejudice* in *The Fields of Light* (New York, 1951), pp. 164–81. His chapter contains the most exciting exposition of Jane Austen's methods that I know, and he is the only critic who has done justice to her portrait of Darcy. Brower shows how Darcy's offers to dance convey a variety of motives, ranging from insufferable pride to serious interest in Elizabeth.

3. By pointing out Charlotte's capacity to feel, which also shows up in other parts of *Pride and Prejudice*, I am hoping to suggest only that Jane Austen makes her a somewhat fuller character than we ordinarily imagine, influenced as we are by the hard attitude toward marriage that Charlotte preaches and then puts in practice by accepting Mr. Collins: "it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want" (pp. 122–23). Perhaps it is worth noting, however, that such undeniably sympathetic characters as Mrs. Gardiner and Colonel Fitzwilliam advance a prudent view of marriage themselves (pp. 144, 183).

4. Dorothy Van Ghent makes out the most persuasive case for taking the verbal manner of Mr. Collins as an index to his character, noting at one point that "The elaborate language in which Mr. Collins gets himself fairly stuck is a mimesis of an action of the soul, the soul that becomes self dishonest through failure to know itself, and that overrates itself at the expense of the social context, just as it overrates verbalism at the expense of meaning" (*The English Novel*, p. 106).

5. Although Mudrick acknowledges the pressures of society in *Pride and Prejudice*, the general tendencies of his commentary on the novel seem to me misleading. He divides its characters into the simple and the complex, arguing that this is the "first decision" Elizabeth makes about any person and that the decision "is not moral but psychological" (*Jane Austen*, p. 95). The simple personalities, he maintains, are beneath "moral judgment" (p. 123). The "complex individual" is marked by his capacity for "choice" and by his "freedom": a freedom which makes him at bottom "isolated" from his society; a choice which Elizabeth, at least, must exercise by settling on a husband who is "undefeated by his social role" (pp. 124–25). In all this Mudrick seriously underrates, so I think, both Elizabeth's responsiveness to the values of society and the influence of conventional morality in the novel. Dorothy Van Ghent takes a stand somewhat like Mudrick's in treating *Pride and Prejudice* as organized about a clash between the "feelings" of the individual and the "utility interests" of society (*The English Novel*, p. 102). She finds the latter embodied in Jane Austen's "materialistic" vocabulary and offers a number of wonderfully perceptive stylistic analyses. Yet I am not quite sure whether she means to suggest ultimately that Jane Austen was really reacting against such language and its implications, though tied down by history to the words and meanings "inherited from her culture" (p. 109), or that
the author accepted her society and its language. The critic's closing judgment of what goes on in the novel itself is completely unequivocal, however, and I feel that it lies nearer to my own view than to Mudrick's: "The final fought-for recognitions of value are recognitions of the unity of experience—a unity between the common culture and the individual development" (p. 111).