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Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and the Relevance of Community, Private and Public Spaces in Forming Connections

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Alpendorada, 2 de Setembro 2024

Karin Soares de Sousa

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Resumo

Esta tese analisa a relevância da comunidade na formação de ligações em *Pride and Prejudice* de Jane Austen. A comunidade de Meryton desempenha um papel significativo na formação das percepções das personagens relativamente à natureza de cada uma, particularmente no caso de Elizabeth Bennet e Fitzwilliam Darcy. As opiniões e os julgamentos colectivos da comunidade transmitidos a Elizabeth influenciam a sua percepção negativa inicial de Darcy, impedindo uma ligação imediata entre os dois. A influência da comunidade é ainda reforçada pelo papel das famílias, nomeadamente dos pais, nos cortejos das filhas, uma vez que os pais são responsáveis por assegurar o seu futuro. A obra termina com vários casamentos, evidenciando a capacidade das personagens para ultrapassar a influência da sua comunidade. Esta tese utiliza o cenário, nomeadamente a justaposição entre espaços públicos e privados, como quadro teórico para analisar a formação da consciência das personagens e, em última análise, a sua capacidade de estabelecer relações de sucesso. Os espaços públicos são utilizados para organizar encontros sociais, em particular bailes, que são cruciais para as personagens se relacionarem pela primeira vez. No entanto, é apenas na privacidade do espaço doméstico que as personagens são capazes de demonstrar o seu verdadeiro "eu". Pemberley torna-se um aspeto central na formação da relação de Elizabeth e Darcy. Este cenário permite que os heróis expressem o seu lado mais vulnerável. Desta forma, Elizabeth em uma nova percepção de Darcy sem a influência da comunidade e apaixona-se por ele. Pemberley torna-se o lar de uma nova comunidade que acolhe todos os membros da comunidade de Elizabeth e Darcy.

Palavras-chave: *Pride and Prejudice*, Comunidade, Cenário, Ligações

Abstract

This thesis examines the relevance of community in the formation of connections in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The Meryton community plays a significant role in shaping the characters' perceptions regarding each other's nature, particularly in the case of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy. The collective opinions and judgments of the community passed on to Elizabeth impact her initial negative perception of Darcy preventing an instant connection between the two. The influence of community is further reinforced by the role of the families, particularly the parents in their daughters' courtships since they are responsible for securing their future. The narrative concludes with several marriages, highlighting the characters' ability to overcome the influence of their community. This thesis uses setting, specifically the juxtaposition between public and private spaces, as a theoretical framework to analyse the characters' formation of awareness and ultimately, their ability to establish successful relationships. Public spaces are used to organise social gatherings, particularly assemblies, which are crucial for the characters to initially connect for the first time. However, it is only in the privacy of the domestic space that the characters are able to demonstrate their true selves. Pemberley becomes a central aspect in the formation of Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship. This setting enables the heroes to express their most vulnerable selves. Thus, Elizabeth perceives Darcy without the influence of the community and falls in love with him. Pemberley becomes the home of a new community which welcomes all members of Elizabeth and Darcy's community.

Key-words: *Pride and Prejudice*, Community, Setting, Connections

Introduction

Jane Austen's novels are renowned for their plots of matchmaking and marriage, as David M. Shapard describes in his introduction to *The Annotated Pride and Prejudice* "each work follows a group of unmarried young men and women who are gathered in the same area and who experience various attractions, rivalries, and misunderstandings before eventually being matched" (XXV). *Pride and Prejudice* is no exception to this description as the reader follows the love story of the heroes, Elizabeth Bennet, and Fitzwilliam Darcy along with several other courtships that result in marriages. However, although marriage might seem to be the central theme of the novel, scholars such as William Deresiewicz argue that the community is "the novel's true point of departure" (503). *Pride and Prejudice* is not solely a love story but rather a narrative that explores the dynamics of community through the formation of connections between families and friends. All characters are interconnected to some extent whether through marriage, friendships, or blood relations. For example, Elizabeth and her sister Jane marry Darcy and Bingley who are best friends; Charlotte, Elizabeth's best friend marries Mr Collins who is also Elizabeth's cousin connecting the two friends as family and Lydia marries Mr Wickham making the latter and his life-long enemy Darcy, brothers-in-law.

Thus, this study aims to analyse the relevance of community in forming connections in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The sense of community and interconnection among the characters also introduces a lot of meddling and gossiping to the plot of marriage (Deresiewicz 503). Considering this interconnection, it is natural for them to have opinions on every matter that happens within the Meryton community, often passing secrets and thoughts among themselves. Consequently, as the scholar Deresiewicz states, the relationships between the characters and their views of each other are heavily influenced by others' opinions and advice. Alistair Duckworth further supports Deresiewicz's argument by stating the key concepts of perspectivism and relativism and shows how these shape Elizabeth's connection to other characters. Although these concepts are shown in the example of Elizabeth, they can be linked to every character since it proves that a person's opinion of another is not subjective, as it may change according to different perspectives. One of the novel's main plots is Elizabeth and Darcy's love story and how the two begin as antagonists and end up as lovers. This beginning as antagonists is due to Elizabeth's first impressions of Mr Darcy which are passed to her

through her family and friends' own first impressions of him. Therefore, although Elizabeth is presented and perceived by several critics as an individualist who goes against her community's norms, it becomes evident that her community's thoughts, talks and opinions do greatly affect her own (Deresiewicz 502). This does not string away Elizabeth's core as a free individual. However, it shows that as the plot of the novel goes on, she must break free from this influence which can be seen in the evolution of Elizabeth's perception of Darcy. Deresiewicz follows Elizabeth's negative opinion of Darcy from community to family to individual. Indeed, Austen presents the first judgement of Darcy as "a collective consciousness" (Deresiewicz 507) which defines Darcy's character. There is a "collective understanding" (Deresiewicz 511) on the matter and this shaping of such a collective understanding shows that the community gives Elizabeth a framework to use as a tool for responding to her sense of reality. Similar to Duckworth, Susan Morgan also touches upon the subject of Elizabeth being misled by appearances due to her emotional and moral detachment from her view of the world. Consequently, the forming of connections between the characters correlates with the formation of consciousness and awareness, specifically of Elizabeth. Morgan argues that Elizabeth's personal freedom comes from her decision to not get herself involved in the matters of society. However, Elizabeth's formation of awareness is only achieved once she achieves emotional maturity (Morgan; Monaghan). Consequently, scholars seem to agree that *Pride and Prejudice* ends with Elizabeth and Darcy forming a new community, welcoming the three central classes in the novel: nobility, gentry and trade, through this newly achieved consciousness (Deresiewicz, Duckworth).

In order to understand how Elizabeth is able to break free from the cognitive constraints of her community, this study will be using the analysis of setting, more specifically the juxtaposition between public and private spaces as a framework. Francis Hart describes the relevance of Jane Austen's use of public and private spaces to depict interactions between the characters, and thus show the evolution of their connections. Indeed, when analysing how the community has a great impact on the formation of relationships and connections, it becomes evident that public spaces play an important role in the matter. Adams and Monaghan emphasise how social gatherings such as assemblies are the main social settings to form connections, demonstrated by the example of Jane and Mr Bingley. Jane makes significant developments in her relationship with Bingley while dancing and talking at these social events. On the other hand, private domestic spaces allow the reader to witness more

intimate interactions between the characters since in these spaces, although specific social rules still apply, they may also be ignored to an extent (Hart; Raines). An example of a private space is Netherfield. However, though Netherfield can be seen as a private space it is still a quite crowded domestic scene. Several scholars use the Netherfield episode to analyse Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship and its evolution depending on their setting (Hart; Deresiewicz; Monaghan). Thus, even though the reader does not receive a more intimate one-on-one perspective on the heroes' relationship, it still allows the reader to contrast their relationship with a more intimate group of people and observe how they handle social gatherings as opposed to their interactions in more public spaces such as assemblies.

Concerning the heroine's liberation from the cognitive constraints of her community, this becomes most evident when Elizabeth finds herself in complete privacy. It is in their bedroom that Elizabeth and Jane are able to share their true feelings about their suitors far away from everyone else's judgement and opinions (Mullan 35). Yet, as Deresiewicz states, Elizabeth's true maturing and cultivation of her feelings for Darcy are seen when she is physically outside of her community, outside Meryton and Longbourn, stuck with her own thoughts.

Scholars tend to agree that the most important setting in the development of Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship is Pemberley (McCann; Monaghan, Duckworth). Pemberley enables Elizabeth to broaden her perception of Darcy which leads her to develop a genuine affection for him. Every individual possesses several social selves depending on their setting and the group of people they interact with (Hart 310). Elizabeth's perspective of Darcy completely changes once she takes a tour of the estate, meets Mrs Reynolds and hears her tale of Darcy's true character, described as "the best master" who treats his servants fairly. Moreover, once the two lovers meet at Pemberley, Darcy's demeanour completely changes demonstrating that Darcy's setting is also a "condition of his being" (McCann 72). In a way, Pemberley enables the characters to be themselves without pride or prejudice truly. What is interesting to see is that even though Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy improves when she does some introspection by herself, most of the information she is given about him which also enables this introspection still comes through other characters, such as Mrs Reynold's recounting of Darcy's character or Mrs Gardiner's explanation of Darcy's involvement in Wickham and Lydia's wedding. Even though Elizabeth and Darcy do not interact frequently in large public settings, their impressions of one another are still mostly shaped by what other

people share about them. Thus, the importance of the community in the formation of connections becomes evident as on the one hand, Elizabeth is fed this negative view of Darcy's character by her community yet on the other hand, it is also through this sharing of opinions that she learns about Darcy's true character.

This thesis then aims to examine the significance of community in the establishment of relationships in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The novel's plots of forming romantic connections are moved through the information received on both ends from the people around them. Hence, the reception of information passed on from character to character impacts the formation of consciousness and awareness of several characters, specifically the heroine's, regarding their ability to form connections. This is supported by the fact that Elizabeth is exposed to an initial negative view of Darcy by her social circle. However, it is also through this exchange of opinions and viewpoints that she discovers Darcy's true character. *Pride and Prejudice* has a third-person narrator; however, the story mostly adopts Elizabeth's point of view. As a result, the reader learns more about her opinions and thoughts compared to any other character. While this thesis does explore other characters and their connections besides Elizabeth's, its primary emphasis remains on Elizabeth and her evolution. As mentioned before, setting, more specifically the juxtaposition between private and public spaces, will be used as a theoretical framework to further explore this exchange of information among the community and its influence on the formation of connections.

In order to better analyse the proposed statement this thesis has been divided into two chapters with each chapter being divided into three subchapters. The first chapter focuses on the aspect of community and its importance in the novel. The first subchapter looks at the novel's heroine Elizabeth Bennet and the influence of the community on her character, specifically the evolution of her perception of Darcy. The second subchapter analyses the influence of family members on courting and eventually relationships as family plays a significant role in the formation of connections. Meanwhile, the third subchapter looks at the evolution of Elizabeth's forming of awareness through her intellectual growth, while also exploring how the heroes' marriage is able to form a new improved community. The second chapter centres on the setting of the novel, specifically on public vs private spaces. After a brief outlook on what defines public and private spaces, the first subchapter uses episodes of public spaces such as assemblies to analyse the interactions between characters and their ability to form connections as well as the specific episode of the gathering of the Bennet

sisters, the Bingleys, and Darcy at Netherfield as a juxtaposition to the former. The second subchapter focuses on private spaces, specifically Elizabeth's since the narrator permits the reader to have a look at Elizabeth's private thoughts and see her physically outside of the Meryton community. The final subchapter centres on Darcy's home estate, Pemberley, as one of the most important settings in the development of Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship.

1. Community

The primary focus of this first chapter of the thesis will be on the Meryton community and its influence on the several characters and their relationships, with particular emphasis on the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet. Although *Pride and Prejudice* is characterised, and rightfully so, as a love story between Elizabeth and Darcy, the novel also proves to be the story of a community and the several interactions and interconnections amongst its members. Consequently, the novel's plot seems to proceed by "means of conversation" as Austen repeatedly describes "groups or pairs of characters" talking to one another (Spacks 15). The novel begins at the Bennet's home, relating conversations between Mr and Mrs Bennet. However, the focus is not on them but rather on the community and the occurrences in Meryton. The reader learns about the arrival of a certain Mr Bingley which is information Mrs Bennet has received from Mrs Long. Mrs Bennet then urges her husband to go see Mr Bingley as she knows that Sir William and Lady Lucas have intention to go as well (*P&P* 2-4).¹ Thus, it becomes clear that the Meryton community is used to gossip and exchanging information since everybody knows about everything that is happening at Meryton. Therefore, Patricia Meyer Spacks argues rightfully that "love, marriage and money" are trivial themes of the novel, but "absorbing gossip supply sufficient preoccupations for most of the novel's characters" (10).

The first chapter of the novel can be seen as the introduction of one of its main characters; however, in this case, this character is a community (Deresiewicz 502). Though Elizabeth is the heroine of the novel, she is only "introduced" as such in the sixth chapter where Austen depicts more of the character's wits and opinions, especially regarding marriage. Moreover, the reader also witnesses the first indirect encounter between Elizabeth and Mr Darcy. Thus, the first episodes of *Pride and Prejudice* focus mainly on "the story of a community: of communal expectations, communal conventions, communal activities" (Deresiewicz 503). In the first chapters, Austen describes the worries of a mother, Mrs Bennet, to marry her daughters and how consequently, the Bennet family navigates this mother's pressures by trying to form connections.

¹ *P&P* refers to *The Annotated Pride and Prejudice*, edited by David M. Shapard.

The Meryton community is described as a small and stable social circle in which all its members know each other. In addition to this, the community also involves the existence of “‘multiplex’ social relationships” as described by Deresiewicz (515). This means that the characters are interconnected in several ways. For example, Charlotte Lucas is presented as Elizabeth’s best friend, and she is the daughter of Lady Lucas who is also Elizabeth’s mother’s friend, but she also marries Mr Collins who is Elizabeth’s cousin making them friends but also related through Charlotte’s marriage. These interconnections allow the characters to comment and interfere in every matter that becomes known within the community. Deresiewicz describes it as “a saturated social environment, an environment in which no space exists that is not social” (514). A character will always come across a familiar face when wandering around the community, everything that is said becomes information of interest because all parties mentioned know one another and this information will then be spread throughout the social circle. Thus, the Meryton community's interconnectedness leads to gossiping and meddling and as the characters share opinions and secrets, they affect their relationships and views of each other.

Deresiewicz states that the novel is structured as such to suggest that the “plot emerges from the threshing of communal mechanisms more than from the movements of individual will” (516). This becomes evident in chapter 18 during the Netherfield ball. Up until this chapter, the relationship between Jane and Mr Bingley seems to go pleasantly well with the speculation that the two should soon become engaged. This is supported by Sir William’s interaction with Elizabeth and Darcy after seeing their dance as he suggests that the two will be dancing together more often, as “a certain desirable event [...] shall take place” referring to Jane and Bingley’s possible engagement. Upon hearing this, Darcy seems struck by this allusion, and he looks at the pair with a “serious expression (*P&P* 182). The reader later on learns that this is because Darcy comes to realise the “dangers” of his friend marrying into the Bennet family. He considers them to be of a lower status and believes it to be his responsibility to interfere in Jane and Bingley’s relationship in order to prevent it from evolving further. Thus, Sir William’s simple comment sets off a series of events, that change the course of Jane and Bingley’s relationship as well as Elizabeth and Darcy’s. However, Sir William’s comment is only able to influence the change of course because of the significant interconnectivity among the members of the Meryton community.

The influence of the community on Elizabeth becomes most evident in her relationship with Darcy, as the sharing of information prompts her to construct a perception of Darcy based on the opinions of others. However, an important aspect of this interconnectivity among the characters and its influence on the different relationships, including Elizabeth and Darcy's, is the influence of family. As mentioned, the novel opens with Mrs Bennet and a mother's pressure to have her daughters married and secured for. This already implies the strong involvement of the parents when it comes to courting and eventually marriage. Marriage was seen, specifically for women, as a way to secure their future as their husbands were obliged to take care of them financially. Thus, Mrs Bennet shows a significant interest in marrying her daughters off to suitors who are wealthy or at the very least financially stable and from a higher social status. Meanwhile, Lady Catherine, Darcy's aunt, sees herself as responsible for preventing the marriage between Darcy and Elizabeth as this would mean that Darcy would no longer marry her own daughter and by marrying a Bennet "pollute" the Darcy name and the Pemberley estate. Thus, *Pride and Prejudice* involves three generations: past, present and future and shows the connection between the parental generation and the present generation.

Nevertheless, the novel has a happy ending with several marriages taking place, most importantly Elizabeth and Darcy's and Jane and Bingley's. This is possible through the characters' formation of awareness and consciousness, achieved through the help and influence of other characters or by their ability to break free from social conventions. Elizabeth's involvement with her community and her ability to separate herself from the cognitive constraints of her community, allow her to create a new community alongside Darcy.

1.1 The Influence of the Community on Elizabeth Bennet

While Elizabeth Bennet is quite clearly the heroine of Austen's story, the novel's initial chapters do not focus on her character. The first few chapters of the novel introduce the reader to the community of Meryton and those arriving newly to it. The community transmits information amongst its members which is gathered through observation and circulated through gossip as they are "constantly assessing one another" (Spacks 13). This transmission of information is then essential for the characterisation of events and individuals. Elizabeth, as a member of

this community, is at the receiving end of this information, which subsequently influences her own opinions and thoughts. This is apparent in her perception of Darcy and how it is shaped by what she hears and learns from others. Thus, as Duckworth discusses in his chapter on "The Reconstitution of society", relativism and perspectivism become central to understanding Elizabeth's relationship to her characters. Duckworth understands by relativity that a person's opinion of another is relative since this opinion is mostly based on the perspectives of other people. Therefore, relativity becomes linked to perspectivism. The latter is defined by the fact that if someone looks at an individual from another perspective, his or her opinion of that same individual might change. Spacks further supports Duckworth's arguments, since she states that "lazy or casual judgments" made by the community influence everyone (13). One of the most important episodes to understand the dynamics of Meryton's social circle is the assembly where Mr Bingley, his sisters and Darcy make their first appearance. Deresiewicz describes the community in this episode as stepping "forward, through a kind of disembodied collective consciousness, to engage in acts of observation and judgment that set the course of the rest of the narrative" (503-504). This idea of a "collective consciousness" is essential in the analysis of Elizabeth's thought process and the evolution of her feelings towards Darcy. Perhaps the one character who has the biggest influence on Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy is, indeed, Mr Wickham. The latter is someone Elizabeth is introduced to recently since he decides to join the militia stationed at Meryton and yet, she trusts his recounting of Darcy's character because he seems to be the only reliable source to know Darcy since childhood. As Elizabeth gets to know and befriends another character, Colonel Fitzwilliam, who is a reliable source to discover more about Darcy, the sharing of information once more has negative consequences on Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship.

Even though *Pride and Prejudice* focuses clearly on Elizabeth and Darcy's love story, the introduction of Darcy in the novel is not described through Elizabeth's eyes but rather through "a collective consciousness" (Deresiewicz 503) of those present at the assembly:

His brother-in-law, Mr. Hurst, merely looked the gentleman; but his friend Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley,

and 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. (*P&P* 16-17)

In this description of Darcy, there are several phrases that indicate that the perception of the hero's character is a "set of cognitive processes" by the community such as "the report which was in general", "the gentleman pronounced him" or "the ladies declared". These observations indicate that the opinion of Darcy is generic and held by the entire community. In addition, these phrases also support Duckworth's concept of perspectivism since the opinion of Darcy is based on the observations made by the people at the assembly. Although Darcy is first described as being "fine", "tall", "handsome" and "noble" which are all particularly positive traits, by the second half of the evening "the tide of his popularity" had turned as Mr Darcy was "discovered to be proud" (*P&P* 16-17). However, as Deresiewicz argues the formation of this opinion of Darcy's character was due to the informal circulation of the latter which is "the focus of communal life": "Even dancing seems a mere pretext; what matters is what is assumed, learned, known, believed, communicated" (504-505). Every little thing is observed and watched by the community in order to assimilate and deduce what is going on between the different characters for this information then to be spread on through the whole social circle. Elizabeth Rands in her article "Gossip, Girl: The Power of Rumor in *Pride and Prejudice*" would simply describe this circulation of information in *Pride and Prejudice* as "gossip". Gossip gives the reader clues "into the characters, their backgrounds, their flaws, their states of mind, or information about the collective community" (Rands par. 8). Therefore, by the end of the assembly, there was no room for mixed opinions as the opinion of Darcy was hardened and set: "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" (*P&P* 18).

This collective consciousness of Darcy's character is important to understand Elizabeth's perspective of the latter and how she comes to form her own judgement of his pride. It becomes clear that this judgement is "handed to her by her community" with the course from "community to family to individual" (Deresiewicz 507). When Elizabeth first

encounters or rather hears a conversation between Darcy and Bingley about her, Darcy refuses to be introduced to Elizabeth since she is described by him as “tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt [him]” (*P&P* 19). Nevertheless, she is not much affected by his rudeness: “Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feelings towards him. She told the story however with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous” (*P&P* 19). However, the next morning the Miss Lucases and Miss Bennets meet to talk about the occurrences of the night before and this is described as an absolute necessity by Austen (*P&P* 32). As Deresiewicz argues although the absolute necessity of this evening may exhibit “a rainbow edge of irony”, it still demonstrates that this is an important matter for the ladies and that this exchange of information is much more than a “mere exercise of sociability” (511). It is only after hearing her family and friends’ more serious and condemning perception of Darcy’s behaviour towards Elizabeth that she is influenced to also see and condemn the occurrence between the two as a more significant offence than she initially thought. While Elizabeth initially talks about the occurrence to her friends “with great spirit” and considers it “ridiculous”, the next morning she describes herself “mortified” (*P&P* 34) by Darcy’s behaviour. This change of opinion shows that the meeting between the Miss Lucases and the Miss Bennets does have a big impact on Elizabeth’s view of Darcy: “while Elizabeth herself sends the story of Darcy’s snub out into the community, she gets her opinion and feeling about it handed back to her” (Deresiewicz 508). Consequently, Elizabeth’s acceptance of her “community’s verdict” on Darcy’s character “gets the novel’s plot underway” further proving Deresiewicz’s argument that *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on the story of a community (Spacks 13).

However, one must mention that the conversation between the ladies did contain different opinions over the significance of Darcy’s pride, yet in the end, there is a “collective understanding” (Deresiewicz 511) on the matter. Jane tries to somewhat apologize for Darcy’s behaviour by giving Mr Bingley’s view of his friend that he rarely speaks unless he is with his close friends. However, Mrs Bennet does not want to believe any of it as she heard some gossip that he did not speak to Mrs Long because he had heard that she came to the ball in a hack chaise instead of a carriage. (*P&P* 34) Once more, this passage demonstrates the importance given to the exchange of information among the community by the characters. Even though Jane relates information given by a reliable source who actually knows Darcy and is friends with him, Mrs Bennet does not give any merit to Mr Bingley’s opinion. Since Darcy’s

character has been decided by those present at the assembly and this decision is that he is proud, Mrs Bennet firmly sticks to this opinion as well and trusts only the relating of her community. Even though this is not mentioned, one may suppose that Mrs Bennet's firm negative opinion of Mr Darcy is due to her own pride was hurt when he offended her own daughter by refusing to be introduced to her. On the other hand, Charlotte Lucas gives a different perspective on the subject of pride, as she says:

his pride does not offend me so much as pride often does, because 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. (*P&P* 36)

Charlotte acknowledges Darcy's pride; however, she is not offended by it nor is she surprised considering Darcy's wealth. In fact, she even says that he has every right to be proud as any other man with Darcy's condition would also think highly of himself. Elizabeth's sister Mary shares a somewhat similar opinion to Charlotte's as she mentions that pride "is a common failing" and that "very few [...] do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other" (*P&P* 36). Thus, again another character acknowledges Darcy's pride, but she comments on how this is something that most people also have. As Deresiewicz argues, "the characters disagree, now that they come to think of it, over the significance of Darcy's pride. Yet if we examine the structure of the conversation more closely, we discover, not a series of flat contradictions [...] but the gradual shaping of a collective understanding" (511). And this collective understanding is that, indeed, Mr Darcy is a proud man. Hence, although values may vary within the group, in this case between the Miss Lucases and the Miss Bennets, what does not change is how those same values shape how the characters perceive events (Deresiewicz 512). When relating this passage to Elizabeth's relationship to her community and how it influences her own perspective it becomes clear that the latter gives Elizabeth a framework to use as a tool for responding to "her sense of reality" (Deresiewicz 513). Although throughout the novel Elizabeth mostly stands out by adopting an attitude of irony towards her community, this shows that in order to mock, she must also be a part of this group. Consequently, she is also responsible for prompting these judgments.

The analysis above has centred on the influence of the Meryton community on Elizabeth Bennet. Nevertheless, other significant characters are newly introduced to the neighbourhood and have an impact on Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy. Perhaps the one character with the biggest, more specifically the most negative impact on the latter is George Wickham. Rands uses the example of Mr Wickham's "salacious rumours" about Darcy to demonstrate that gossip can have negative outcomes since these rumours keep Elizabeth and Darcy apart "for longer than they might have been otherwise" (par. 12). Mr Wickham arrives at Meryton as a militia officer and becomes a character of interest due to his interconnected past with Darcy. In his introduction to the annotated edition of *Pride and Prejudice* used in the analysis of this thesis, David Shapard argues that Elizabeth becomes receptive to Wickham's "slandorous accusations" against Darcy because her lack of connection with Darcy means that she does not have any other means of obtaining information to confirm the accuracy of Wickham's allegations (xxix). However, there is also another aspect to Wickham's character that makes Elizabeth susceptible to his opinion and that is his charm as Austen describes:

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. The introduction was followed up on his side by a happy readiness of conversation—a readiness at the same time perfectly correct and unassuming. (*P&P* 138)

As Sandra Morgan argues in her article "Intelligence in *Pride and Prejudice*" this description "tells us nothing of Mr Wickham's qualities or nature, but only of his looks and manners" (58). All that Elizabeth notices is his appearance and manners. Duckworth talks about perspectivism in relation to how Elizabeth perceives Darcy. However, as the novel evolves, and the reader learns more about Wickham it becomes clear that the way Austen presents Wickham, and the way Elizabeth perceives him are two very distinct characterisations and one understands "the falseness of Elizabeth's vision" (Morgan 58). Duckworth states that Elizabeth is misled by appearance several times, "incapable of distinguishing appearance from reality" (119) and this is evident in the case of her experience with Wickham.

In chapter 16, Elizabeth and Wickham have a conversation in which he captivates her and strengthens her views of Darcy:

“Oh! no—it is not for me to be driven away by Mr. Darcy. If he wishes to avoid seeing me, he must go. We are not on friendly terms, and it always gives me pain to meet him, but I have no reason for avoiding him but what I might proclaim to all the world; a sense of very great ill usage, and most painful regrets at his being what he is. His father, Miss Bennet, the late Mr. Darcy, was one of the best men that ever breathed, and the truest friend I ever had; and I can never be in company with this Mr. Darcy without being grieved to the soul by a thousand tender recollections. His behaviour to myself has been scandalous; but I verily believe I could forgive him any thing and every thing, rather than his disappointing the hopes and disgracing the memory of his father.” (*P&P* 152)

This passage demonstrates the dramatisation and inaccuracy of Wickham’s recounting of his quarrel with Darcy. Morgan argues that Wickham is “neither subtle or ingenious” and the mask he creates is “tellingly unoriginal” as “one need only notice the silliness of the sad tale he recites to Elizabeth, in its style as well as its sentiments” (60). The extravagance of his recounting is seen in phrases such as “what I might proclaim to all the world” and “being grieved to the soul by a thousand tender recollections”. Indeed, he mentions that “it is not for [him] to be driven away by Mr. Darcy” (*P&P* 152); however, while Darcy does appear at the ball at Netherfield, Wickham decides not to on the pretence of having some business to attend to in town. Yet, it becomes clear that Wickham is simply trying to avoid Darcy. Considering that Elizabeth already had a negative opinion of Darcy after their first meeting, it is no surprise that Wickham’s position on Darcy’s character only reinforces her own. As Deresiewicz states, “two identical positions are not likely to force each other to change” (521). He continues by arguing that although the communal environment produces a familiarity that “makes searching judgement possible” it also “creates an intimacy that makes it undesirable” and thus, Elizabeth is less inclined to doubt Wickham’s opinions as he becomes more integrated into her social circle (522). Furthermore, Rands argues that Elizabeth’s curiosity about Wickham’s “salacious rumour” concerning Darcy reveals a “character flaw” in the heroine (par. 12). Elizabeth yearns to hear Wickham’s gossip about Darcy as “she was very willing to hear him, though what she chiefly wished to hear she could not hope to be told, the history of his acquaintance with Mr. Darcy” (*P&P* 150). Although Elizabeth is aware that she should avoid

gossip, she indulges in Wickham's rumours, showing "discretion" as well as her tendency to "rashly judge people" (Rands par. 12).

Moreover, in a conversation with her sister Jane, Elizabeth chooses to believe Wickham and she explains the reason to be that "there was truth in his looks" (*P&P* 188). As she tells Jane about what Wickham had told her, she keeps on thinking about his attractive appearance and how Wickham was "handsomer than ever as he expressed them" (*P&P* 156). Jane, however, tries to be more objective and questions what Wickham has told Elizabeth as she says:

my dearest Lizzy, do but consider in what a disgraceful light it places Mr. Darcy, to be treating his father's favorite in such a manner, —one, whom his father had promised to provide for.—It is impossible. No man of common humanity, no man who had any value for his character, could be capable of it. (*P&P* 188)

One must also mention that Jane has heard Mr Bingley's opinion of his friend, Darcy and she cannot believe that Mr Bingley could be so deceived in him. Although Jane tries to reason with Elizabeth and suggests the possibility of Elizabeth's incorrect view of Darcy, the latter still "refuses to be persuaded that Wickham's view is just another perspective on Darcy's character" (Duckworth 120). At the Netherfield ball, although Darcy is not directly responsible for Wickham's absence "every feeling of displeasure against the former was so sharpened by immediate disappointment, that [Elizabeth] could hardly reply with tolerable civility to the polite inquiries which he directly afterwards approached to make" (*P&P* 176). Consequently, Elizabeth and Darcy dance together and conduct a conversation in which Elizabeth asks about Darcy's "temper", as she tries to form an "illustration" of his character. Darcy knows that Elizabeth has befriended Wickham and that he has most likely told a fabrication of their shared past as he asks her whether she has come to a conclusion on his character:

She shook her head. "I do not get on at all. I hear such different accounts of you as puzzle me exceedingly."

"I can readily believe," answered he gravely, "that report may vary greatly with respect to me; and 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."

"But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity." (*P&P* 184)

Elizabeth admits here, that it is difficult to understand Darcy's true character since she hears "such different accounts of him" (*P&P* 184). In this passage, Darcy touches upon the subject of perspectivism and relativism mentioned by Duckworth. He understands that Elizabeth's perspective of him is subjective since it is influenced by the "report" transmitted to her whether by her community or Wickham, in particular. Thus, her "sketch" of his character "will be partial, for its perspective is limited" (Duckworth 121). He pleads with her not to set her opinion of him at that moment; however, Elizabeth "takes [his] likeness now" (*P&P* 184).

As Elizabeth goes to spend some time at Hunsford Parsonage, her friend Charlotte and her husband Mr Collins's home, she comes to see Darcy several times, as he is visiting his aunt Lady Catherine at Rosings. Darcy seems to become more comfortable with Elizabeth and his frequent visits to the parsonage "suggest that his interest in Elizabeth has been rekindled" (Shapard 359). While there seems to be an evolution in Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship since it becomes apparent that there is a mutual interest, Elizabeth is still unsure of her feelings for Darcy and his true character. During her stay at the Collins's, Elizabeth meets a new character, Colonel Fitzwilliam, who unknowingly shares information with her that makes Elizabeth question Darcy's character once more. Deresiewicz states that "a remarkable feature of Austenian courtship is that young ladies do have a choice" when it comes to who they want to marry (518). In order to choose, the ladies need to connect with other young men and see who is the better fit, and thus there needs to exist "non-romantic premises [...] to develop familiar relationships with one another" (Deresiewicz 518). Consequently, this enables the young women and men to establish friendships amongst each other. This is what happens between Elizabeth and Colonel Fitzwilliam. Although the two have a slight flirtatious connection, they soon realise that they are a good match as friends. An important aspect of Colonel Fitzwilliam is that he is Darcy's cousin, making him a reliable source to learn more about the latter as "she believed he might have the best informed mind" (*P&P* 354). As Elizabeth learns that Colonel Fitzwilliam has shared guardianship of Darcy's sister, Georgiana, with Darcy, she subtly and indirectly talks about her connection with Wickham. The two end

up talking about Darcy's friendship with Mr Bingley and Colonel Fitzwilliam reveals that Darcy "saved a friend from the inconveniences of a most imprudent marriage, but without mentioning names or any other particulars" (*P&P* 364). Colonel Fitzwilliam believes this friend to be Mr Bingley and Elizabeth soon puts the pieces together and realises that Darcy is the reason why Mr Bingley distanced himself from Jane. Thus, once more Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy is influenced by the exchange of information. However, this information is not mere gossip. Colonel Fitzwilliam is a reliable and trustworthy source as he shares these occurrences without any malicious reason behind them since he supports Darcy's actions. Elizabeth learns that Darcy is at fault for her sister's unhappiness and consequently, characterises him as the enemy and does not wish to connect with him any further.

Upon examining the previously mentioned analysis of the effect of the community on Elizabeth's perception of Darcy and consequently, their relationship, it becomes evident that this influence is predominantly negative since Elizabeth has little desire to form any type of connection with the latter. The collective understanding spread through gossip that Darcy is a proud man is absorbed by all members of the community, including Elizabeth. Even if values may vary within the group, as in relation to whether pride is a negative characteristic or not, they still shape how the characters perceive events and thus, Darcy's character. Consequently, Elizabeth as a member of this group uses these perceptions as a framework to respond to her sense of reality. However, Elizabeth's susceptibility to this type of influence also means that she is misled by appearance several times, especially regarding Mr Wickham. Up until Darcy hands Elizabeth his letter in which he explains and confesses the events that have led to her refusal of his first proposal, Elizabeth fails to understand that most of her opinions of Darcy are mere perceptions handed to her by those in her community. Therefore, these perceptions may vary from character to character and do not necessarily reflect Darcy's true character. Thus, "Elizabeth is presented not as a typical person, but as a typical member of her community". She agrees with and promotes "collective judgements", she believes her opinions to be universally true and despite her wit and irony, she is still at risk of facing the same "mental gridlock" as her community (Deresiewicz 509).

1.2 The Influence of the Families on the Characters and Their Connections

This thesis focuses primarily on the formation of connections between the characters, and one cannot analyse this without mentioning the family's significant role in the latter. Indeed, "family is the abiding reality of Austen's world" (Brown 9) considering the relationships within families as well as those established through marriage. *Pride and Prejudice* explores the intergenerational dynamics between the past, present and future generations by highlighting the link between the parental generation and the current generation. The connection between the past and the present is revealed through the significance of the former as the point of reference in making decisions, particularly in the selection of a potential partner by learning "the lessons of the past or [perpetuating] its defects" (Brown 10). Consequently, the act of making decisions in the present is also connected to the implications of the future. Thus, the characters are influenced by their parents' marriage whether positively or negatively in order to understand what they want in their own romantic relationships. In addition, the parents' education of their children also implicates the passing of personality and moral traits that impact their children's ability to form connections. Moreover, in the Regency era, marriage was an important act, specifically for women as "it establishes economic security and social status" (Brown 11). Therefore, it is understandable that Mrs Bennet is intent on finding suitable husbands for her daughters in order to ensure their future. She demonstrates a notable inclination towards arranging marriages for her daughters with suitors "in possession of a good fortune" (*P&P* 2), or at the very least, financially stable and belonging to a higher social class. However, this type of meddling by the mother can also be overbearing and unfavourable, leading to negative outcomes in her daughters' connections. This is evident in Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship, as Darcy, at first, denies his attraction to Elizabeth due to her family's behaviour and social status. Meanwhile, Lady Catherine de Bourgh believes it is her duty to prevent the connection between Elizabeth and Darcy in order for Darcy to marry her own daughter and secure a class-fit and wealthy marriage between the two. Another relationship which is greatly impacted by their family members is Jane and Bingley's with the constant interference of said members.

Mrs Bennet is described by Austen as "a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news" (6). From Austen's description, Marvin Mudrick concludes that "two subjects dominate her life and conversation": the entail which dictates that M. Bennet's estate will be inherited by

his nearest male relative, in this case Mr Collins, instead of his daughters, and the responsibility of securing suitable marriages for her daughter (96). On the other hand, Mr Bennet is the complete opposite of his wife, described by Austen as “so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve and caprice” (4). Everett Zimmermann states in “Pride and Prejudice in *Pride and Prejudice*” that “Mr. Bennet's characteristic speech is ironic, and the pervasiveness of the irony reflects his refusal to commit himself to any action” (66). Deirdre Le Faye further supports Zimmermann's argument highlighting Mr Bennet's imprudence by not attempting to increase his income and “make savings that would provide at least a good monetary legacy for his female dependants” (185). As a whole, Mr Bennet is detached from his responsibilities and always mocking his wife's concerns and behaviour. Longbourn's entail means that after Mr Bennet's death, there is no foreseeable financial security for his wife and their daughters since Mr Bennet has not taken any provisions for them. Therefore, Mrs Bennet's anxiety about having her daughters wed as soon as possible becomes understandable considering that their father failed to provide for them. Le Faye somewhat excuses the mother's behaviour as she may not be “very wise in the way she goes about husband-hunting, but at least she is trying to do her best for them, which is more than can be said for their father” (185). The parents not only serve as “the psychological and moral guides” on their daughters' characters, but they also act as role models for their future relationships and are expected to offer guidance and support (Brown 9). However, it is clear that the Bennet daughters cannot rely on their parents for guidance. This is evident in their parents' personalities but also in their marriage:

[Mr. Bennet] captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour, which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and confidence, had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown. (*P&P* 458)

This passage demonstrates that perhaps Mr. Bennet married for the wrong reasons as he “was captivated by youth and beauty” (*P&P* 458) rather than true affection. Mr Bennet, described as giving great value to intelligence and the ability to conduct intellectual

conversations, has not found these values in his wife. Consequently, the somewhat little affection he had for his wife at the beginning of their marriage, soon disappeared and all “respect, esteem, and confidence” he had for Mrs Bennet “had vanished forever” (*P&P* 458). Mr Bennet has become “lazy and cynical, disappointed in his marriage” (Le Faye 185). His disregard for the importance of selecting a suitable partner results in him losing his “domestic happiness” (*P&P* 458). Elizabeth, to whom Mr Bennet has always deliberately shown a greater affection, “possesses her father’s ironic complacency” (Brown 9). Thus, she must be able to recognise this inherited trait of hers to finally find herself a husband she has true affection for. Elizabeth is also not indifferent to her parents’ flawed marriage: “Elizabeth, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of her father’s behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain” (*P&P* 458). Yasmine Gooneratne states: “Elizabeth’s caution and extreme fastidiousness on the question of marriage originates from her acute sense of the inequalities, perpetually before her eyes, of her parent’s marriage” (88). June Sturrock explains Mr Bennet’s loss of respect for his wife to be involved with “a loss of respect for himself”. She continues by explaining that his choice in finding a suitable partner was faulty; however, “his failure to conceal his contempt is a much less excusable fault” (par. 19). Elizabeth knows she does not want a marriage similar to her parents’. She witnesses how personality profoundly impacts a marriage as her father demonstrates his indifference to his wife daily. Elizabeth recognises her parents’ failure to have a marriage based on “respect, esteem and confidence” since their marriage lacks the “decorum” to not ridicule one’s spouse in front of their children (Sturrock par. 19). Consequently, Elizabeth understands that physical attraction is not a reliable credit to form a connection with her parents’ marriage serving as an example. As Sisi Han writes, Elizabeth’s intention in marriage is thus “not done so merely for the sake of sexual instinct or money” (294).

Hence, the Bennet daughters are on their own, yet they are also “unknowingly acting on the deficient values and attitudes derived from their parents” (Brown 9). Mudrick mentions how Lydia is a younger Mrs Bennet. For Mrs Bennet, everything boils down to one motive: “to be herself secure and comfortable” (99). Consequently, this means getting her daughters settled in suitable marriages with financial stability, except for Lydia who is incapable of forming her own identity (Mudrick 99). Lydia is presented as having no morals or values, only preoccupied with admiring the soldiers stationed at Meryton. Her lack of awareness and

selfish nature leads her to run away with Mr Wickham believing herself to be completely in love with him and he with her. She does what she wants not caring about “the disapproval of society, nor the horror and shame of her family” (Mudrick 100). Lydia’s recklessness is the consequence of “the complete lack of control that results from Mrs Bennet’s indulgence and Mr. Bennet’s inertia” (Sturrock par. 16). Even after her father and uncle must pay Wickham in order to get him to formalise the marriage, she still feels no remorse of the damages she has caused. Lydia follows her parents’ steps in marrying out of passion and youthful recklessness. She is not able to understand or rather does not want to see that Wickham never loved her and never actually intended to marry her. Upon hearing about Lydia and Wickham’s pending marriage, Mrs Bennet, who acts as Lydia’s defender, conveniently forgets about her daughter’s dangerous recklessness and the potential scandal it would bring upon the Bennet family: “To know that her daughter would be married was enough. She was disturbed by no fear for her felicity, nor humbled by any remembrance of her misconduct” (*P&P* 584). As the couple arrives in Longbourn, Mrs Bennet “stepped forward, embraced her, and welcomed her with rapture; gave her hand with an affectionate smile to Wickham [...], and wished them both joy” (*P&P* 315).

As mentioned above, due to the Longbourn entail, Mrs Bennet is preoccupied with securing her daughters’ marriages that will bring them financial security; thus, the wealthier the suitor, the better. Consequently, the focus on finding a husband for Mrs Bennet’s daughters lies on the former’s fortune and not particularly his character, morals, or values. Mrs Bennet is not interested in finding love matches for the Bennet girls but simply a financial security. Her social behaviour demonstrates that she exhibits a tendency to change her opinion of others based on their potential to contribute to her family’s wealth. This can be seen, for example, in her behaviour towards Mr Collins. Mr Collins is first introduced as the cousin, who is the closest male relative to Mr Bennet and thus, the holder of the entail. Responsible for Mrs Bennet’s downfall and homelessness after her husband’s death, he is seen by the former as the “enemy” and thinks of him with indignation and hate. However, once she realises that in his letter, Mr Collins alludes to possibly courting one of her daughters during his visit, she completely changes her demeanour: “There is some sense in what he says about the girls however and if he is disposed to make any my amends, I shall not be the person to discourage him” (*P&P* 122).

Moreover, once Mr Collins arrives and proves to be quite determined to marry one of the Bennet daughters, in this case, Elizabeth, as he learns that Jane already has a suitor, “Mrs. Bennet treasured up the hint, and trusted that she might soon have two daughters married; and the man whom she could not bear to speak of the day before, was now high in her good graces” (*P&P* 140). Mrs Bennet helps and encourages Mr Collins to court and eventually propose to Elizabeth, as she wants her daughter married and does not care about her feelings or desires. Elizabeth realises this as “her mother gave to understand that the probability of their marriage was exceedingly agreeable to *her*” (*P&P* 174). However, Elizabeth refuses to take the hint as she has absolutely no intention of ever marrying Mr Collins. Even after Elizabeth declines Mr Collins’ proposal, her mother does not respect her wishes and says she “will be brought to reason” (*P&P* 214). While trying to bring on said reason during a conversation with Mr Bennet and Elizabeth, she insists on the marriage and says she “will never see her again” if Elizabeth refuses (*P&P* 216). Mrs Bennet shows herself to be greatly angered and disappointed in her daughter for not taking on such an opportunity even if this meant her daughter being unhappy in her marriage. Another instance of Mrs Bennet’s change in her social conduct may be observed in relation to Darcy. Throughout the novel, Mrs Bennet demonstrates her dislike for Darcy criticising him for his conduct and smugness. However, these negative feelings are soon forgotten when she learns about his engagement to Elizabeth. What is striking to see is how she does not mention or focus on her daughter’s happiness and the fact that she is marrying for love but rather the great fortune Elizabeth will have access to as Mrs Darcy: “Oh my sweetest Lizzy! how rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane’s is nothing – nothing at all” (*P&P* 720). Mrs Bennet, who had previously been gushing about Jane’s marriage to Mr Bingley and his great fortune, says that Elizabeth’s newly achieved wealth is nothing compared to Jane’s, demonstrating that she only cares about the financial aspect of her daughters’ connections.

Jane and Mr Bingley’s relationship is not continuously stable throughout the novel, as Jane becomes estranged from Mr Bingley after he moves to London with his family. This estrangement is operated through “five forces”: “her reserve, her parent’s impropriety, Darcy’s interference, Miss Bingley’s co-operation with Darcy, and Bingley’s malleability” (Weinsheimer 408). Mrs Bennet is strongly responsible for the initial approximation between Jane and Bingley. Although the two clearly have an attraction for each other, Jane’s timidity hinders the evolution of their connection. Thus, her mother, who wishes to see her daughter

engaged as soon as possible, uses her cunning ways to create scenarios in which Jane and Bingley get to spend more time together. As Jane is invited to go dine at Netherfield, Mrs Bennet refuses to lend the carriage to Jane. She tells her she must go on horseback “with many cheerful prognostics of a bad day” (*P&P* 56) so that Jane is obliged to spend the night at Netherfield. And these prognostics were right since as soon as Jane left it began to rain hard. Her sisters were concerned for her well-being, yet Mrs Bennet “was delighted” (*P&P* 58). Mudrick states that Mrs Bennet’s “obsession with material security overrides every consideration of kindness or solicitude toward her husband and her daughters” (98). The next morning, news arrives that Jane has become ill; however, Mrs Bennet is untroubled. Even with Mr Bennet’s sarcastic comment exposing her mischievous actions, she remains unrattled: “if your daughter should have a dangerous fit of illness, if she should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders” to which Mrs Bennet replies, “people do not die of little trifling colds. She will be taken good care of” (*P&P* 58).

However, Mrs Bennet indirectly also participates in the estrangement between Jane and Bingley due to her “irrepressible vulgarity in discussing Jane's prospective marriage to Bingley” (Mudrick 100):

Mrs. Bennet seemed incapable of fatigue while enumerating the advantages of the match. His being such a charming young man, and so rich, and living but three miles from them, were the first points of self-gratulation [...]. It was, moreover, such a promising thing for her younger daughters, as Jane’s marrying so greatly must throw them in the way of other rich men [...]. In vain did Elizabeth endeavour to check the rapidity of her mother’s words, or persuade her to describe her felicity in a less audible whisper; for to her inexpressible vexation, she could perceive that the chief of it was overheard by Mr. Darcy, who sat opposite to them. [...] Her mother would talk of her views in the same intelligible tone. Elizabeth blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation. She could not help frequently glancing her eye at Mr. Darcy, though every glance convinced her of what she dreaded [...] (*P&P* 194)

As Mrs Bennet was having this conversation it is made clear by Elizabeth that Darcy was intently listening to everything that was being mentioned. Although Elizabeth is well aware of

how badly her mother's words can be interpreted and tries to persuade her to speak in a less audible tone, it is of no use. Mrs Bennet continues to boast about Bingley's wealth and how "Jane's marrying so greatly must throw them in the way of other rich men" (*P&P* 194). Darcy's overhearing of the conversation convinces him that a definitive connection between Jane and Bingley would be most "imprudent and degrading" (Mudrick 100). Rands states a similar opinion as she believes that it is "Mrs Bennet's loose tongue" when speculating too freely about Bingley's feelings for Jane" that "sabotages their relationship" (par. 9). Thus, Mrs Bennet's lack of refinement can be seen as a significant obstacle to the possible marriage between Jane and Bingley. However, Darcy's motivation for preventing their union is not mainly due to a mother's oversharing and boasting about her daughter's suitor's wealth. Darcy's true concern is the different social statuses between Jane and Bingley, and also the former's unfavourable financial situation. Darcy is concerned that the Bennet family might view his friend as merely a means of accessing his wealth. Moreover, Jane's subtle way of showing her affection for Mr Bingley makes him believe that she does not share true feelings as he does for her, as he mentions in his letter to Elizabeth that "her look and manners were open, cheerful and engaging as ever, but without any symptom of regard, and I remained convinced from the evening's scrutiny, that though she received his attentions with pleasure, she did not invite them by any participation of sentiment" (*P&P* 386). Moreover, Mr Bingley's malleability makes it easy for Darcy to influence their relationship since Mr Bingley looks at Darcy as a kind of mentor and follows his advice.

Miss Bingley also influences the estrangement between Jane and her brother. Alongside Darcy, Miss Bingley convinces her brother to leave Netherfield for London. Although it is clear that Mr Bingley is in love with Jane, in a letter to the latter, Miss Bingley pretends that Mr Bingley is indifferent to Jane and that a marriage between Georgiana and her brother would be most agreeable as it would "secure the happiness of so many" (*P&P* 230). Jane's naïveté makes her believe Miss Bingley's words, thinking she's trying to protect her from getting her feelings hurt. However, Elizabeth soon understands what is truly happening: "We are not rich enough, or grand enough for them; and she is the more anxious to get Miss Darcy for her brother, from the notion that when there has been *one* intermarriage; she may have less trouble in achieving a second" (*P&P* 230). Elizabeth means here that a union between Georgiana and Mr Bingley would facilitate a marriage between Miss Bingley and Darcy. Although Jane wants to believe that Mr Bingley's sisters only wish for their brother's

happiness, Elizabeth is sure that Miss Bingley's true motive for separating her brother from his lover is her own greed, as she wishes to increase her family's fortune: "They [Mr. Bingley's sisters] may wish many things besides his happiness; they may wish his increase of wealth and consequence; they may wish him to marry a girl who has all the importance of money, great connections, and pride" (*P&P* 262).

The importance of money and great connections in a marriage also plays a significant role in Elizabeth and Darcy's connection. There are "differing social positions" between Elizabeth and Darcy creating "conflicting demands" for the hero and heroine (Shapard XXVIII). Darcy is the grandson of an earl and possesses a great fortune "comparable to that of many titled lords, is almost part of the aristocracy" (Shapard XXVIII). On the other hand, Mrs Bennet, who is the daughter of an attorney, comes from the middle class, and Mr. Bennet belongs to the gentry, making Elizabeth also belong to the latter on her father's side. Although the two heroes belong to the same social class, the gentry, as Elizabeth mentions, "he is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal" (*P&P* 680), there was still a difference in their social status due to Darcy's great wealth compared to the Bennet's. Their love story concentrates on their supposed approximation and then distancing mainly due to the social divide that exists between Elizabeth and Darcy. At first, although Darcy is clearly very much attracted to Elizabeth, her social position prevents him from considering marrying her. In fact, Darcy's uneasiness of being attracted to Elizabeth often leads him to behave even more distant and detached towards her. On the other hand, Elizabeth hesitates to consider the possibility that he may like her due to his higher social position, making her misinterpret his conduct several times (Shapard XXVIII-XXIX). Moreover, Elizabeth's family's behaviour is also what makes Darcy reluctant to act on his feelings for Elizabeth. The conversation Darcy heard of Mrs Bennet gushing about Mr Bingley's wealth can also be applied to Darcy and Elizabeth's connection. Sturrock supports this by stating Mrs Bennet's behaviour at the Netherfield ball is "the chief 'cause of repugnance' that concerns Darcy enough to make him hesitate over Elizabeth and drive him to discourage the amenable Bingley from pursuing his courtship of Jane" (par. 15). Indeed, Darcy is well aware that his great fortune can influence other people's intentions of connecting with him. He understands that possible suitors may only wish to marry him due to this wealth, and Mrs Bennet's explicit fixation with money contributes to his suspicions that the Bennet family would also only want access to his fortune.

The influence of family on relationships, or rather the attempt of influence, is evident with Lady Catherine De Bourgh's, Darcy's aunt, meddling in Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship. Once Lady Catherine hears of a possible engagement between Elizabeth and Darcy, she heads to Longbourn to persuade Elizabeth to refuse Darcy's proposal. Lady Catherine's hearing of their possible engagement can be connected to the idea of gossip mentioned in the first subchapter and demonstrates the influence of the community in the building of connections (Rands par. 11). Lady Catherine is a member of the aristocracy and believes that her social rank permits her to behave superior to everyone else. Therefore, she believes to have a say in who Darcy should marry: "Miss Bennet, do you know who I am? I have not been accustomed to such language as this. I am almost the nearest relation he has in the world, and am entitled to know all his dearest concerns" (*P&P* 676). Lady Catherine announces that Darcy is supposed to marry her daughter, Miss De Bourgh, as this was an arrangement made between Darcy's mother and Lady Catherine herself when their children were still babies. The match between Darcy and Miss De Bourgh was incentivised through the "knowledge that both were heirs of wealthy estates, and that a union of the two would greatly enrich the family" (Shapard 679). Thus, Lady Catherine is recognisably not supportive of Darcy and Elizabeth's engagement, as she says that their marriage shall not be "prevented by a young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family!" (*P&P* 678). The marriage between Elizabeth, a woman of "inferior birth" (*P&P* 678), and Darcy would prevent Lady Catherine's daughter's wealth from increasing and reinforcing her social status.

Mudrick states, "Lady Catherine is chiefly amusing because of the incongruity between the importance she assumes to herself and the actual influence she exercises upon the story" (103). This is evident as Lady Catherine fails to exercise her supposed power in breaking off Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship. Instead, her meddling prompts Darcy to propose to Elizabeth a second time: "Lady Catherine's unjustifiable endeavours to separate us, were the means of removing all my doubts" (*P&P* 726). Mudrick explains:

In her arrogant effort to dissuade Elizabeth from accepting Darcy, she gives Elizabeth the opportunity to set her own proud value upon herself as an individual, and later, having angrily brought the news to Darcy, encourages him to believe that Elizabeth may not refuse him a second time. (103)

The influence of family on relationships is relevant in several different ways. The Bennet parents play a crucial part in shaping their children's personalities, acting as both psychological and moral advisers. Additionally, their marriage also serves as a role model for their daughters' future relationships and the parents are expected to provide their children with guidance and support. Nevertheless, it is evident that Mr and Mrs Bennet fail to provide said guidance as their marriage is not a great match since they show no true affection for each other. Elizabeth is able to see her parents' failures in their marriage and learn from their mistakes, in order to not repeat them in her own marriage. Lydia, on the other hand, fails to learn the lessons as she acts according to her own wishes, disregarding her parent's shame by running away with Wickham. Moreover, Mrs Bennet's main priority as a mother is not to find love matches for her daughters, but rather to secure their financial stability. This can be seen in Mrs Bennet's treatment of Mr Collins and Elizabeth's connection. The mother helps and encourages Mr Collins in pursuing Elizabeth even though, Elizabeth does not love him, nor does she want to marry him. Mrs Bennet also indirectly contributes to the estrangement between Jane and Bingley as a result of her excessive praise of the latter's wealth, leading Darcy to believe that the Bennet family only see a union between the two as a means of accessing his friend's fortune. Consequently, Mrs Bennet's behaviour also has an impact on Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship, since Darcy is already weary of forming a connection with Elizabeth due to their differing social statuses and is aware of the significance of his wealth in considering potential partners. Finally, Lady Catherine De Bourgh has similar concerns to Darcy's. Lady Catherine feels a responsibility to prevent an engagement between Elizabeth and Darcy, as this would hinder her own daughter in forming a connection with Darcy and thus, enhance her own financial status and reinforce her social rank. Therefore, it becomes clear that family does have a great impact on connections between the different characters, whether they may be negative or positive. Nevertheless, it is upon the characters to become aware of this influence and exercise their free will in order to understand whether they will let this influence be decisive or not in their relationships, as Elizabeth and Darcy clearly do not.

1.3 The Formation of Awareness and a New Community

The first two subchapters of this thesis have focused on the ways the Meryton community and family have an influence on relationships and their development as well as the characters'

traits, particularly Elizabeth's. However, as the novel ends with Elizabeth and Darcy coming to accept and acknowledge their feelings for each other, it is also important to analyse how Elizabeth is able to form awareness of how her views of Darcy are mere constructions provided to her by those around her, and the impact of her own view of the world as someone who does not want to become involved but rather stay a mere observer. Indeed, Elizabeth firmly holds the belief that her personal freedom comes from her detachment from the way she perceives the events occurring around her and from her ability to stay objective. However, as Morgan asserts, it becomes evident that "intelligence can be a matter of the heart" (57) and Elizabeth must understand that her refusal of intellectual growth, of a serious and moral life, prevents her from true understanding and only leads to wrong judgment. This can then be applied as one of the explanations to Elizabeth's attraction to Mr Wickham and her susceptibility to being misled by his appearance despite her wit and intelligence. Elizabeth's idea of free thought is influenced by two characters: Mr Bennet and Charlotte. These two characters possess a rather negative and cynical view of the world, actively distancing themselves from emotions and moral responsibility. Elizabeth's moral growth is shaped by her understanding that she must distance herself from this type of thought, with the help of her sister Jane as the "opponent of negativity" (Morgan 64). Elizabeth's formation of consciousness is then to understand that true freedom of thought is to become personally engaged and understand different perspectives. This then permits Elizabeth and Darcy through their union to create a new community that involves open communication and the sharing of differing opinions without judgement.

Elizabeth Bennet's popularity among readers comes greatly from her witty and ironic personality putting her in great contrast compared to the other characters. Elizabeth is portrayed as mocking social conventions and thus, distancing herself from the latter. However, as mentioned in this first chapter, Elizabeth is not exactly free of these social conventions as she, as a member of the Meryton, is still influenced by her social circle. She must thus, form awareness in order to break herself free from this influence, and she is only able to do this through moral and intellectual growth. Consequently, *Pride and Prejudice* also revolves around the idea of "free and lively thought" and questions "the meaning of freedom" (Morgan 45). Morgan states that this importance in the sense of freedom comes from the fact that many critics discuss the novel "in terms of a dichotomy" in which on one side stands Elizabeth's freedom and on the other a social sense. Thus, Elizabeth's growth could be

interpreted as a transition from a state of polarity to one of harmony represented by her marriage to Mr. Darcy (55). An example of this can be seen in Duckworth's interpretation that "for Jane Austen an individual's moral duty is necessary for society" and that *Pride and Prejudice* "achieves an ideal relation between the individual and society" (118). However, Morgan does not agree with this statement, as it implies that Elizabeth never makes any mistakes, which Morgan believes is not the case. The scholar argues that "Jane Austen's 'social' concerns are with human relations, not society" (55). To view *Pride and Prejudice* in terms of a dichotomy would then mean that Darcy represents society while Elizabeth represents individualism. However, as Morgan states, this does not work since Darcy's nature which is far from being social cannot represent society as a whole. Instead, the focus of Jane Austen on the link between freedom and intelligence is that of a love story. Hence, Elizabeth's growing feelings for Darcy are closely linked to her intellectual growth. Morgan argues that Austen tries to define freedom and intelligence through gratitude, particularly the gratitude Elizabeth expresses to Darcy (57): "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" (*P&P* 512).

Consequently, Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship development is not interpreted as a resolved dichotomy (Morgan 57). Elizabeth's personal freedom does not come from a rejection of society, even though the two are still closely related and she does exhibit an impertinence in which she shows defiance towards social conventions, but rather comes from "a freedom of becoming involved": "Elizabeth believes that understanding, intelligence, perception, depend on being independent of their objects, and she wants most powerfully to be an intelligent observer of her world. [...] But for Elizabeth it means to be apart from events" (Morgan 57). Thus, Elizabeth believes that her ability to remain objective and detached from how she interprets the world around her is the key to her personal freedom.

In the first subchapter, I analysed how Wickham has a great influence on Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship, as Elizabeth is misled by Wickham's charms and attractiveness and is unable to see his true nature. When looking at Elizabeth's ability to interpret people's intentions, this comes as a surprise, considering that she is quick to see through the Bingley sisters and their vanity or Mr Collins and his conceitedness. Wickham demonstrates several signs of his deceptive personality. In the passage analysed in which Wickham explains his relation to Darcy (see p. 12), his extravagance in relating his feelings and the silliness of his

unoriginal tale are examples of his deceiving personality. Morgan argues that Elizabeth is charmed and deceived by Mr Wickham because “he and his story are such clichés” (61). By this Morgan means that Elizabeth as an observer is attracted to everything that is entertaining and ridiculous to her as she stands disinterested in the position of a bystander merely watching. Moreover, Morgan touches upon Elizabeth’s lack of morality as someone who does not want to take life seriously:

Jane Austen has deliberately and obviously made Mr. Wickham a stock character in order to point to Elizabeth's central moral weakness, that she does not take life seriously. [...] Elizabeth sees the world as some sort of entertaining game. [...] Elizabeth is morally disengaged. What she wants is to understand what she sees and she also hopes that what she sees will be exciting, will be worth understanding. And this, of course, is just what she thinks Mr. Wickham can offer. His stereotyped charm confers no individual feelings and invokes no personal obligations. (61-62)

Elizabeth is morally and emotionally detached from Wickham. Her attraction and connection to him are purely out of entertainment and excitement, as she “sees the world as some sort of entertaining game” (Morgan 61). She does not have true feelings for him, for it is obvious that she does not let herself get properly involved in their connection. In contrast to Darcy, who is presented by Austen as an individual, Wickham represents a type: the charming, attractive one. Thus, Darcy is able to evoke true love-based feelings in Elizabeth, while Wickham does not. Elizabeth and Wickham’s relationship is based on superficiality and mere physical attraction, which allows Elizabeth the freedom of not becoming involved. Other critics such as Elaine Bander, explain Elizabeth’s readiness to believe Wickham’s deceiving stories and fall for his charms to be the result of her “sexual” (26) or “erotic interest” for him (31). Blander states that Wickham, in opposition to Darcy’s first appearance, does not display “snootiness” behavior and gains the admiration of the public, especially of the young ladies, including Elizabeth’s (31). Hence, one can compare Bander’s opinion to Morgan’s and conclude that although formulated differently, both critics share similar opinions. Elizabeth’s attraction and interest in Wickham is based purely on physical attraction. However, Rands then continues her argument by stating that “Austen portrays Elizabeth as a woman who is ready to fall in love” and that this is the reason for Elizabeth’s uncritical acceptance of

Wickham's cover story (32). Rands' argument indicates the involvement of feelings, while Morgan argues the exact opposite, as for her, Elizabeth and Wickham's connection is only possible due to Elizabeth's freedom of not becoming involved. Deborah Kaplan, on the other hand, believes that Elizabeth "is quick to identify with Mr Wickham" since his position in society is similar to that of Elizabeth as a "marginally genteel woman" (188). His father was a country attorney just like Elizabeth's maternal grandfather and her uncle, Mr Philips. Thus, Kaplan bases Elizabeth's connection with Wickham on feelings of empathy, meaning that she lets herself get involved. However, one could argue that feelings of empathy are not the same as feelings of love and, consequently, Elizabeth remains somewhat emotionally distant from that connection. Similar to Morgan, David Monaghan argues that Elizabeth "does not build up their relationship into more than it is, or lose touch with the fact that her feelings for him are rather limited" (77). Monaghan bases Elizabeth's ability to remain emotionally uninvolved in her relationship with Wickham on her "secure emotional balance" (77), thus proving Elizabeth's formation of awareness. Elizabeth realises the artificiality of their relationship once Darcy reveals his side of the story on what truly happened between him and Wickham. Elizabeth concludes that every virtue Wickham possessed came from "his countenance, his voice and manner". However, as she tried to recollect "some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity or benevolence that might rescue him from the attacks of Mr. Darcy", she could not because she did not truly know him (*P&P* 402). Thus, Morgan argues that the gratitude defined by Jane Austen cannot be applied to their relationship (62). While critics seem to have different opinions on Elizabeth's emotional involvement in her connection with Wickham, I would like to argue that even if there is any emotional involvement at all, it is far away from being made up of feelings of love. Elizabeth's attraction to Wickham is purely physical, since she admits to herself that she does not know Wickham truly and could thus not fall in love with him. Whether Elizabeth gets charmed by Wickham out of entertainment, sexual interest or empathy, she shows a formation of awareness and consciousness, since she knows that a marital connection to Wickham would be imprudent and based on the wrong reasons.

This view of achieving intelligence and freedom through objectivity and detachment, involving the use of the mind rather than the heart, is reinforced to Elizabeth by her father and Charlotte (Morgan 63). Elizabeth must learn to set herself apart from Charlotte's emotionally detached point of view regarding relationships and her father's cynical negative

perspective of the world. Sturrock argues that Charlotte is established as “Elizabeth’s intellectual equal” and thus, her thoughts and opinions are worth the reader’s attention (par. 18). Her function in the novel is to “further the discussion of marriage” (Sturrock par. 18). Charlotte makes it clear to Elizabeth that her life’s goal is to marry for security and stability: “Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; 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” (*P&P* 238). She is indifferent to the compatibility of her love match in terms of love and attraction. Spacks states that Charlotte’s character draws attention to the “issues of economics and class” (12). Her family has several children but little money, making it difficult for the Lucas’s to provide for all of them. Charlotte is aware that her financial circumstances are not very favourable in attracting potential partners, nor is her age as a 27-year-old “plain” woman (Spacks 2). She acknowledges that she is unable to make many demands, and since Mr Collins is able to provide her with a stable and secure life, she views this as her chance of achieving her happiness. Consequently, she has developed a “pragmatic and un-romantic, indeed cynical, view of marriage” (Spacks 2). Charlotte recognises that she is not emotionally involved in her connection with Mr Collins. However, contrary to Elizabeth who believes in a love marriage, Charlotte thinks her financial stability is the key to a successful marriage. This is made evident in her discussion with Elizabeth on Jane’s relationship with Mr Bingley (*P&P* 42). On the one hand, Elizabeth believes that Jane and Mr Bingley have not had sufficient time to determine their compatibility for marriage, as they have only known each other for a fortnight. Charlotte, on the other hand, argues that considering Mr Bingley’s prospects, Jane should secure the engagement as soon as possible:

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 twelvemonth. Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. [...] it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life. (*P&P* 42)

Charlotte even argues that becoming too involved in a possible connection could prevent it from becoming successful and evolving into marriage. She believes that the less the two people know about each other, the less they know about one another’s imperfections.

According to Charlotte, marriage is not a matter of love but rather “a matter of chance” (*P&P* 42). However, it is made clear that Elizabeth does not share the same opinion as Charlotte as she is outraged by the latter’s engagement to Mr Collins. Elizabeth firmly believes that only a true love match is the key to a happy marriage. Elizabeth believes that it is important “to like and respect the man you marry”, something Charlotte does not feel for her fiancé, Mr Collins (Spacks 12). Nevertheless, the influence of Charlotte’s emotionally detached perspective is somewhat passed on to Elizabeth. While Elizabeth might not share the same opinion as Charlotte regarding what a successful marriage looks like, she still exhibits a “behavioral and emotional stasis” in her possibility of marrying (Deresiewicz 510). In response to Charlotte’s view of Jane’s securing her engagement, Elizabeth states: “Your plan is a good one [...] where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married; and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it” (*P&P* 42). Elizabeth is being sarcastic in her response since she does not think Jane should follow Charlotte’s line of thought. However, the phrase “or any husband” (*P&P* 42) is an indication of Elizabeth having “forsworn marriage” (Deresiewicz 510). Thus, even when she does meet her suitable partner, Darcy, she at first, remains stuck in her wrong judgements. Spacks further supports this argument as she demonstrates that even though Elizabeth is in a similar situation to Charlotte’s with having four other sisters who also need to be married, she does not show any concern for what will happen to her if she does not find a husband (12). As a result, while Elizabeth firmly believes in a marriage based on love and respect, she must also separate herself from this emotionally detached perspective of not caring whether she will succeed in marriage or not to form a true connection with Darcy.

Mr Bennet has a cynical perspective on life, not treating anything too seriously. He consistently mocks his wife and uses other characters such as Mr Collins as laughing stocks. Le Faye shows that Mr Bennet has failed in his role as a parent since he is bored “by the folly of his three younger daughters which he makes no attempt to correct” (185). While he shows a preference for his oldest daughters, Jane and Elizabeth, specifically for the latter as she shows to have inherited his intelligence, he has otherwise “abdicated from his responsibilities as husband and father” hiding himself away in his library (Le Faye 185). He does not seem to be very involved in his role as a father, as he does not show any true interest in his daughters’ connections. This becomes evident through his consistent acknowledgement of Lydia’s “silliness” without a hint of pity or regret for the fact that his daughter possesses such a

character (Morgan 63). It is Elizabeth who must call her father's attention to the repercussions her younger's sister's actions might have on the whole family (Han 292). Once Elizabeth learns of Lydia's departure to Brighton, which had a reputation for "licentiousness" according to Shapard (447), she advises her father not to let her go. However, even though she tells her father that Lydia's flirtatious behaviour already has had repercussions for their family's reputation, her advice is in vain, for Mr Bennet does not take her warnings seriously and even mocks Elizabeth asking "what, has she frightened some of your lovers? Poor little Lizzy!" (*P&P* 448). Elizabeth warns her father that if he does not "take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will be soon beyond the reach of amendment" (*P&P* 448). Elizabeth is right in her warnings, for it is during her stay at Brighton that Lydia runs away with Wickham and obliges her father to pay a settlement in order to ensure their marriage. It is Mr Bennet's lack of involvement as well as his cynical view of life that encourages his daughter to behave irresponsibly and selfishly as he fails to provide her with guidance.

Although Elizabeth is shown to juxtapose Charlotte and her father's views and opinions, she is still influenced by the latter and also has some of these negative and cynical perspectives. After learning about Mr Bingley's departure from Netherfield and Charlotte's engagement, Elizabeth is completely blinded by her disappointment and shares a cynical view of the world with her sister Jane:

You wish to think all the world respectable, and are hurt if I speak ill of any body. [...] 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. (P&P 258-260)

With this type of commentary Elizabeth is violating her intelligence and abnegating her humanity (Morgan 63). Although she sees herself as the objective observer who shares no personal feelings towards Mr Bingley, she is actually choosing to interpret his behaviour in the most negative manner. This type of narrow and cold-hearted way of thinking is approved of by her father. The same goes for her opinion of Mr Collins and Charlotte since she harshly bashes any woman who would marry that "conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man"

as not having “a proper way of thinking” (*P&P* 260). Elizabeth’s intellectual growth is then a “movement away from these ‘sensible’ and coldly self-deceptive visions, of freeing her intelligence from defensiveness and negation” (Morgan 63). What Morgan argues is that Elizabeth’s intellectual growth is related to her moral and emotional growth as she must set herself apart from these “sensible and coldly self-deceptive visions”.

Jane is used by Austen as the opposition to Mr Bennet and Charlotte’s points of view, presenting her as someone who holds a more compassionate perspective on the world. Although Elizabeth is praised in the novel for her wit and intelligence, meaning that she should “think faster and more effectively of those around her”, she still misinterprets situations and characters (Spacks 20). Hence, Jane counteracts Elizabeth’s misinterpretations and broadens her perspective. Indeed, during Elizabeth’s sharing of her negative thoughts of the world and particularly of Mr Collins and Charlotte’s engagement, Jane alerts to her sister’s harsh opinions: “My dear Lizzy, do not give way to such feelings as these. They will ruin your happiness. You do not make allowance for difference of situation and temper” (*P&P* 260). She alludes to the fact that Elizabeth and Charlotte are two different people with different circumstances and personalities, meaning that the two do not have to think alike and thus, Elizabeth should not judge Charlotte’s decisions based on her own judgments. Morgan argues that Jane comprehends that “to view the world coldly is neither perceptive nor superior nor safe from wrong”, and her “role as the opponent of negativity is central to understanding Elizabeth’s mistakes, her choices and her intellectual growth” (64). Despite Jane’s inclination to have a positive opinion of others and give them the benefit of the doubt, this does not always make her perceptive, particularly when it comes to the Bingley sisters as she always believed them to only want the best for their brother and prevent Jane from getting hurt. However, it does allow her to grasp a certain truth that is not attainable for those who prefer to gain clarity by avoiding involvement. Elizabeth’s supposed freedom, which she believes enables her to make impartial judgments unaffected by emotional attachment, does not ultimately result in true understanding (Morgan 66).

In the later scenes of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth becomes aware of her emotional and moral detachment and its obstruction in finding her happiness. Her intellectual growth is demonstrated by her concern to actually try to understand the people around her and her willingness to get herself involved in the situations she is put in. The evidence of this is the evolution of her relationship with Darcy as she tries to respond to other perspectives. For

example, after Lydia's elopement with Wickham, Elizabeth is sure that Darcy no longer wants to marry her or wants to have anything to do with her as she says, "had Lydia's marriage been concluded on the most honourable terms, it was not to be supposed that Mr. Darcy would connect himself with a family, where to every other objection now be added, an alliance and relationship of the nearest kind with the man whom he so justly scorned" (*P&P* 594). In this passage, Elizabeth shows that she cares about Darcy's opinion, regardless of his intentions of marrying her or not, demonstrating "how much he has risen in her esteem" (Shapard 595). She is no longer impartial to Darcy's perspectives and is considerate of his opinion of her. Another example of Elizabeth's consideration for Darcy's opinion of her is Lady Catherine's visit to Longbourn after hearing about Elizabeth and Darcy's engagement. Elizabeth is concerned about how Lady Catherine's opinion might influence Darcy's view of her: "It occurred to Elizabeth that she must meditate an application to her nephew; and how he might take a similar representation of the evils attached to a connection with her, she dared not to pronounce" (*P&P* 686). Thus, Elizabeth's formation of awareness is based on the realisation that to be involved leads to true understanding as she is able to show concern for other points of view without judgement as "she has come to value the connections and partialities which inform truth" (Morgan 67). It is only so that Elizabeth is also able to learn about her feelings for Darcy. After learning about his involvement in Lydia and Wickham's marriage, she has a completely new perspective of him as he demonstrates the lengths he will go to out of his love for her. As Zimmermann argues, "Elizabeth's attachment to Darcy results from the clarification of her vision, not from the modification of her values" (71). Elizabeth is grateful for his love for her despite all the obstacles they have met along the development of their relationship. Marcus Mordecai claims that Darcy and Elizabeth possess a deep enough bond that allows them to maintain hope for "each other's continued affection even after circumstances have borne strong evidence against it" as "they are able to stand up against excessive social claims" (277).

The formation of awareness for both Elizabeth and Darcy permits them to create a "new community" (Deresiewicz 528). The reader is not shown what this community looks like in detail or how it behaves. Instead, the last chapter describes the dynamics of the new community by explaining the different outcomes for each character. Deresiewicz argues that through this new community "Austen sketches an arc of error and correction and error, an upward curve of self-knowledge and maturation that we are meant to see as extending

beyond the end of the novel" (529). Elizabeth and Darcy are meant to educate each other through their new accomplished consciousnesses by combining the latter. The last chapter leads with a conversation between Elizabeth and Darcy demonstrating their open communication which will prevent the mental stagnation of the first community presented in the novel (Deresiewicz 529). They will stimulate each other by sharing their opinions and be open to listening to different perspectives that might juxtapose their own. Han further supports Elizabeth and Darcy's communication skills stating that they are able to achieve "mutual affirmation" since "both of them were willing to talk, communicate and debate their ideas and opinions sincerely" (294). Communication is then the key to building a new community shifting from "a community of blood to one of spirit" (Han 295). Moreover, Rands demonstrates how Elizabeth and Darcy choose their community and how each of its members can be present in their lives. (par. 19). For example, Elizabeth learns to limit her time with her mother and permits Lydia to visit without her husband when he is gone to London or Bath. Rands describes Mr and Mrs Gardiners as "valued members of Pemberley's shared community" (par. 19). Similarly, Duckworth argues that Elizabeth and Darcy's closeness with the Gardiners and their ongoing friendship in the last chapters demonstrate how Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage allows the coming together of "three classes": "nobility, gentry and trade" (131). Thus, this new community eliminates the distances of classes by enabling them to come together without prejudice. Deresiewicz interprets Elizabeth's happiness and laughter in her letter to her aunt Gardiner as "the blessing of awakened consciousness" (529).

Initially, Elizabeth perceives personal freedom and lively thought as embodying the role of an objective observer who refrains from getting emotionally involved in the situations she finds herself in. However, it becomes evident that Elizabeth's true intellectual growth is related to her moral and emotional growth, and this can only be achieved by showing concern in trying to understand the different perspectives around her. Elizabeth's attraction to Wickham is based on superficiality and mere physical attraction, allowing her to maintain a love-based emotional detachment in their relationship and thus, be free of maintaining serious behaviour. Moreover, Mr Bennet and Charlotte reinforce her view of achieving intelligence and freedom through objectivity and detachment. However, Elizabeth must learn to set herself apart from Charlotte's emotionally detached point of view regarding relationships and her father's cynical negative perspective of the world. On the other hand, Jane is portrayed as the opposition to Mr Bennet and Charlotte's points of view since she is

depicted as someone who possesses a more empathetic outlook on the world. Her position as the opponent of negativity is central to Elizabeth's intellectual growth as Jane challenges Elizabeth's negative view of the world. Elizabeth's formation of consciousness on how her emotional and moral detachment are obstructing her from finding happiness lead her to demonstrate a concern for understanding others and a willingness to get involved in situations. This is evident in her relationship with Darcy, where she shows concern for other perspectives without judgment. Elizabeth's intellectual growth also allows her to learn about her feelings for Darcy and appreciate his love for her despite several obstacles that they face such as their prejudices against each other. The formation of awareness for both Elizabeth and Darcy allows them to create a "new community," which is meant to prevent the mental inertia previously seen in the first community as they stimulate each other by the exchange of thoughts and their receptiveness to different perspectives.

In conclusion, *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on the love story of its heroes, Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy. However, as this first chapter has proven, it is much more than a mere love story: it is the story of the Meryton community, its dynamics, and events. Considering that Austen's main character is the community as a whole, consequently, this also means that it is the community that moves the plot forward influencing every single occurrence in the story. Thus, the community's influence on the characters and their connections is quite significant. As already discussed, the social circle of Meryton is both small and stable, leading to every character having some form of connection or acquaintance with one another. This not only leads to the spreading of gossip, causing opinions to be shared which are then sometimes indirectly or directly influenced by one another but also the feeling of responsibility of having an opinion or even interfering in every matter that happens within the community.

Since Elizabeth is the heroine of the story, the reader has access mostly to her opinions and thoughts and thus, the influence of the community on her character is the most evident. This is mostly witnessed in her relationship with Darcy and its evolution. The sharing of opinions and ideas between several different characters influences Elizabeth's own opinion of Darcy rather negatively. The idea of a "collective consciousness" becomes important in the analysis of Elizabeth's trail of thought. This collective consciousness does not mean that every single member of the community shares the same values, yet these values still shape how the

characters perceive events as they come to a collective understanding. Consequently, the collective understanding that Darcy is a proud gentleman is shared throughout the whole community and thus, Elizabeth as well. Up until Darcy's letter in which he explains everything that Elizabeth has held against him, such as his relationship with Wickham and his influence on Jane and Mr. Bingley's relationship, Elizabeth maintains a rather negative opinion of Darcy, and this is mostly due to the opinions she is fed by her community but two characters in particular: Wickham and Colonel Fitzwilliam. Although Wickham purposefully portrays Darcy in a bad light in order to negatively influence Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy, Colonel Fitzwilliam is simply relating to a friend some of his conversations with Darcy. What Elizabeth fails to understand is that her judgements of Darcy are mostly influenced by the opinions of those in her community. Thus, these perspectives may differ across individuals and may not necessarily reflect Darcy's true character. Elizabeth is presented as a typical member of her community, making her susceptible to the same mental stagnation as the latter as she unconsciously participates and promotes collective judgements.

The influence of the members of the community on characters and relationships is further reinforced by the families. *Pride and Prejudice's* main plot is that of marriage, as the narrative explores several courtships and the parents' role in these courtships is made clear from the very first chapter. The reader witnesses a mother's desire to see her daughters married and thus, secure their happiness as well as her own. This happiness is achieved through a life of security, which requires being financially secured for. Therefore, the wealthier the suitor and the more elevated his social standing is, the more appealing he becomes. Consequently, Mrs Bennet tends to act desperately and obnoxiously in order to secure her daughters' engagements. She does not care for matches based on true love, as is evident in her support of Mr. Collins' proposal to Elizabeth. However, this tends to have the opposite effect since Mrs Bennet indirectly contributes to the estrangement between Jane and Bingley and her behaviour makes Darcy uncertain on whether to act on his feelings for Elizabeth or not. Parents should have an influence on their children as they serve as role models for their character development. However, Mr and Mrs Bennet clearly fail to do so, as their own marriage is based on superficiality and run-out passion. Elizabeth's formation of awareness involves the ability to see through her parents' failures as parents and husband and wife to avoid repeating their mistakes. Furthermore, it is the characters' role to be conscious of the

influence that is inflicted upon them and determine whether this influence will be pivotal in their relationships or not.

As the novel concludes with a happy ending, as several marriages take place, most notably between Elizabeth and Darcy, it is evident that the characters are able to form awareness and consciousness of the constraints imposed on them by their community. Elizabeth initially perceives herself as an objective observer who avoids involvement and concern in the events occurring around her. However, her true intellectual growth is linked to her moral and emotional growth which requires understanding different perspectives. Her formation of awareness includes her detachment from her emotionally detached, cynical and negative view of the world which is reinforced on her by Charlotte and her father. Jane is portrayed as the opposition to these views as she has a more compassionate outlook and thus, challenges Elizabeth's own point of view. It is only once Elizabeth comprehends that to obtain true understanding she must be involved in what is happening around her that she is also able to confess her feelings for Darcy and appreciate his love for her despite all obstacles faced. Elizabeth's formation of awareness is thus proved by her ability to create a new community alongside Darcy which is based on open communication and bringing all members of their social circle together.

2. Public vs Private Spaces

The first chapter looked at the influence of the community on Elizabeth Bennet and concluded with the latter's formation of awareness and consciousness as she is able to break free from the cognitive constraints of the community. But how exactly is Elizabeth able to do so? In order to understand this, this chapter will use the analysis of setting, more specifically the difference between public and private spaces as a framework to analyse Elizabeth's formation of consciousness. Indeed, when analysing how the community has a great impact on the formation of relationships and connections, it becomes evident that public spaces play an important role in this. Social gatherings such as assemblies are the main social setting to form connections. On the other hand, private spaces such as domestic spaces or landscapes within private homes allow the reader to witness more intimate interactions between characters without the interference of others.

In his article "The Spaces of Privacy", Francis R. Hart emphasises Jane Austen's insistence on "accuracy of distance, geographical and social" and states that thus, her "sense of true and false society, of true and false intimacy, of privacy threatened and achieved is defined architecturally and geometrically" (306). By this, Hart means that Jane Austen uses the specific places, public or private, to provide the reader with insight on human interactions between the characters which demonstrate the development of their connections. Domestic spaces in particular are heavily interconnected with privacy and intimacy. But what is actually meant by privacy and intimacy? John Curtis Raines explains that privacy:

implies an inner world, a self-space which is real, an invasion of which is a real invasion, a place we prize and preserve before others. [...] It is less "being alone" than enjoying the right to determine when and how much of oneself is to be known by others. Intimacy is not the opposite of privacy. Intimacy is the sharing of privacies. The opposite of privacy is emptiness, resentment, or trivialization of inner space, making our business everybody else's, or having it made such. (55)

Although a private space clearly represents a place where one is by one's self, able to have some introspection and be at peace with one's own thoughts, for Raines, "privacy" is less about "being alone" but more about what one decides to share about one's self with others.

Consequently, intimacy is then the want to share these privacies (55). Hart states that Austen's privacy, its primary role being that of protecting personal intimacy, is "the opposite of the social" (308). Austen's age was both disturbed and captivated by the intrusion of personal matters into social life. Thus, an individual possesses several social selves according to the different groups of people whose opinions he or she values as claimed by Hart (310). Consequently, these individuals display different aspects of their personality to each specific group. The "authentic private self" is then hidden from simple sociability and "this self was a wholeness to be restored by temporary retreat to a space where the person can "collect" or "compose" herself, and to be nourished and sustained in the social privacy of a stable domestic company of true intimates" (Hart 310). Austen then uses several spaces to juxtapose this idea of public vs private moments demonstrating the sharing of false or true intimacies such as "the visits, the small parties, the balls, the tea or dinner" (Hart 312). According to Rebecca Posusta, Austen's "physical spaces are not only used to illustrate the dichotomy between public and private interaction but also to demonstrate a contrast between her heroine's psychological place on the one hand and her physical situation on the other" (78). Private correspondence is characterised by its inherent exclusivity as is shown by the letter Darcy hands to Elizabeth in which he shares his privacies, fully bearing his authentic self to Elizabeth.

Public space is demonstrated to be rather repressive for the characters. This is evident in Elizabeth who, according to Daniel Cottom, rarely spends time by herself (157). Even when she tries to have a quick moment by herself walking in the park, she is suddenly interrupted by crossed paths with Darcy, Colonel Fitzwilliam or Lady Catherine. Thus, privacy proves to be an issue in *Pride and Prejudice*. Moreover, privacy can also be linked to "propriety", which according to James Sherry "suggests a kind of behaviour which is particularly careful not to violate the privacy, the integrity, and the right to respectability of every individual. As a concept governing social relations, then, 'propriety' is intimately concerned with the discretion and reserve necessary to prevent individuals or actions from becoming 'common' through excessive familiarity" (608). Due to the prioritisation of societal norms that "considerations of propriety outweigh considerations of truth", as stated by Cottom (157), Elizabeth and Darcy are constrained by these limitations and consequently, unable to share intimacies that will lead them to discover their true authentic selves. Therefore, it is important

to acknowledge that social gatherings such as assemblies, dinners and tea parties prove to be challenging for Elizabeth and Darcy to truly understand each other's characters.

This chapter will then focus on specific episodes and settings which enable the reader to perceive the evolution of relationships as the couples are able to become more intimate with each other through the sharing of privacies. This is done by the analysis of interactions between the characters in public spaces, particularly balls, where the rules of propriety limit the possibility of intimacy opposed to the episode in Netherfield which can be seen as a private space yet still crowded and thus, not as intimate as a tête-à-tête. On the other hand, the sharing of Elizabeth's true intimacies with the reader is done through a look at Elizabeth's most private space: her own mind. This type of introspection is only achieved by Elizabeth when she finds herself in completely private places and once she is physically outside of her community. Finally, Pemberley proves to be one of the most important settings of *Pride and Prejudice*. As Darcy's domestic private place, it is here that the heroes are able to fully bare themselves to one another out of the public eye.

2.1 Assemblies vs the Netherfield Episode

As mentioned above, in this second chapter, the emphasis is on setting and its influence on the development of romantic relationships. Public places have significant relevance in this research since it is in these settings that couples have the opportunity to meet and establish connections. At a time when propriety was extremely important, the couples were not allowed to meet in complete privacy. Although there are different public spaces mentioned in the novel, this subchapter will focus specifically on the importance of the assemblies or balls. Allison Thompson argues that "an assembly was more than just a dance; it was a prime area for young ladies and gentlemen to get to know each other" (par. 24). Similarly to Thompson, Susannah Fullerton writes that assembly balls provided the chance to "touch, talk, flirt, and toggle" and thus "balls were much, much more than simply venues for dancing" (41). When not dancing, the young people were expected to conduct casual conversations among each other as a sign of manners and thus, also be able to make acquaintance. The reader witnesses Jane and Bingley's relationship flourishing during these balls. Dancing was also seen as "a clue to character, negative or positive" (Fritzer 41). It involved a whole set of rules due to social norms, since men were expected to display courtesy and behave like gentlemen by

maintaining a respectful physical distance from their dance partners. On the other hand, the act of dancing also provided the possibility to explore some of these boundaries as through the touch of hands, the physical boundaries diminished, and some intimacy is felt between the two partners. Nevertheless, due to the propriety expected during balls and their crowdedness, true intimacy could not be truly achieved by the couples. Consequently, private domestic spaces play an important role in the ability of experiencing true intimacy, as they enable the reader to observe more intimate interactions between the characters, as these settings allow for certain social rules to be disregarded to an appropriate extent. The episode at Netherfield, in which Jane and Elizabeth are obliged to stay with the Bingleys, will be used as an example to analyse the interactions between the characters in a private domestic scene, yet still somewhat crowded. Although Netherfield does not provide for a tête-à-tête, which can be seen as the ultimate intimate interaction between two characters, it still enables the reader to witness how the couples, in this case Elizabeth and Darcy, navigate such social gatherings, in contrast to public settings such as assemblies.

Dancing is very much linked to courtship and marriage as the lady “must judge each of her dancing partners for appearance, style, character, and most importantly, compatibility, not just for the dance, but also for possible marriage” (Adams 56). During these dances, which can be seen as “courtship dances”, the couples are not merely dancing for fun but use this time to proactively and attentively analyse each other’s character to understand whether there is a possibility for a love match and eventually marriage. In his article “Jane Austen: Strictly Ballroom”, John Mullan writes that balls are the couple’s opportunity for “physical intimacy” (par. 15). Although the balls do not permit them to embrace each other romantically, they bring the couples closer than they could have on any other occasion. Furthermore, if the couples were excellent dancers, they could converse while dancing as shown by Elizabeth and Darcy (Mullan par. 15). It is during their dance at the Netherfield ball that Elizabeth questions Darcy on several matters in order to have an “illustration of [his] character”, thus demonstrating that dancing is used as a manner to try and learn more about each other (*P&P* 184). Hence, Austen uses the dance scenes as a “combination of propriety and passion” (Mullan par. 4). The couples are expected to interact with each other during these dances and converse as Elizabeth sarcastically remembers Darcy’s obligation to speak: “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” (*P&P* 180). Adams also highlights

the importance of a dance proposal for the heroine, since, due to social etiquette, “accepting one dance actually meant to accept two” and “a woman who turned down a proposal from one partner must not dance with another” (56). Consequently, Elizabeth cannot refuse Mr Collins’ dance proposal since this entails not dancing with any other man for the rest of the night (Mullan par. 4). However, Elizabeth describes these two dances as “dances of mortification” because Mr Collins is a terrible dancer “often moving wrong without being aware of it” (*P&P* 172). However, Mr Collins seems unaware of his performance failures and believes the dances to be a success and “a preparation for his proposal of marriage the next day” (Mullan par. 4). Moreover, these social etiquettes also entailed that a gentleman is supposed to interact with a series of partners rather than one (Thompson par. 11). This justifies Mrs Bennet’s excitement after the first ball when telling her husband that Mr Bingley danced with Jane twice as “she was the only creature in the room that he asked a second time”. Bingley’s choice to ask Jane a second time demonstrates his clear fondness of her (*P&P* 22).

Due to the strict conduct codes of the Regency era, social behaviour was frequently seen as a manifestation of character considering whether these conduct codes were respected or not. Thus, Austen’s description of dancing and the characters such as Darcy and Bingley’s social behaviour at these assemblies can be seen as an indication of their true nature: “Austen shows that a lack of moderation combined with too great a love of pleasure reflects questionable character. Other negative indications include poor dancing, desire to precede, or exclusion from the society of dancers” (Fritzer 41). Darcy’s first conversation present in the novel is between him and Bingley in which he refuses to ask Elizabeth or any other woman to dance as he does not like to dance with women with whom he is not “particularly acquainted” (*P&P* 18). This type of behaviour would be frowned upon at the time considering that it was a gentleman’s duty to be social and interact with young women. Once Bingley suggests that he might ask Elizabeth to dance, Darcy refuses as she is “not handsome enough to tempt [*him*]” and he is “in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men” (*P&P* 20). By this Darcy means that Elizabeth’s status would rise if she was invited to dance by him after being neglected by other gentlemen. Moreover, Darcy’s condescending tone could also be suggesting that dancing with him, will give Elizabeth “a special dignity” demonstrating Darcy’s superior view of himself (Shapard 21). Sir William Lucas flatters Darcy’s dancing: “I have been most highly gratified indeed, my dear Sir. Such very superior dancing is

not often seen. It is evident that you belong to the first circles" (*P&P* 181). This passage shows that Sir William is trying to excessively praise Darcy with this display of gallantry. He is trying to suggest that Darcy's dancing skills are indication to his higher social status. Although Sir William might be right that Darcy has managed the right techniques and steps of dancing, the latter in his many refusals to dance has clearly failed to respect the social conduct expected of a gentleman. Moreover, Darcy's response that "every savage can dance" (*P&P* 181) to Sir William's compliment demonstrates Darcy's "tactlessness" once again (Fullerton 55).

Mr Bingley, on the other hand, conducts himself in the most gentlemanly fashion (Thompson par. 11). He is described as soon having made "himself acquainted with all the principal people in the room; he was lively and unreserved, danced every dance, was angry that the ball closed so early, and talked of giving one himself at Netherfield" (*P&P* 18). Bingley makes sure to walk around the room, talk to several people and dance every dance as is expected from society. Moreover, Bingley "does his duty by the neighbourhood" not only by attending the ball but also by dancing with Meryton's former mayor Sir William's two daughters. He is "a positive model of ballroom department" (Fullerton 58). As opposed to Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship, the reader does not witness Jane and Bingley's development of their relationships as closely. Le Faye explains that the reader "sees and hears nearly all the action through Elizabeth Bennet's eyes, almost as if we were her shadow" (181). Consequently, Jane Austen only provides the reader with descriptions of the balls in which one learns whether Jane and Bingley danced together or not and provides descriptions of how they feel about each other which are only seen from the perspective of them transmitting their feelings to their intimates but never to each other. Not once does Austen narrate a conversation held between the two lovers. Thus, the reader must rely on these descriptions to have a sense of Jane and Bingley's relationship and the assemblies play a significant role in this. David Monaghan states in his book that "one of the functions of the dance motif has been to establish contrasts between Bingley's relationship with Jane and Darcy's with Elizabeth" (80). Indeed, at the end of the Netherfield ball, the scene closes with a description of what each character is doing, and Jane and Bingley stand out as they are the only ones who "achieve harmony" (Monaghan 79): "Mr Bingley and Jane were standing together, a little detached from the rest, and talked only to each other" (*P&P* 200). In contrast to Elizabeth and Darcy, Jane and Bingley seem to get along from the very first moment they meet. Fullerton goes even further by stating that "Mr Bingley and Jane Bennet fall in love on that first evening"

(130). In the first ball, as opposed to Darcy who refuses to ask Elizabeth to dance, Bingley asks to be introduced to Jane so that he can invite her to dance with him twice. While Elizabeth is described as repudiating Darcy at the Netherfield ball, Jane and Bingley are described as passing by “dancing together” (*P&P* 182). It is Bingley’s “sociability and pleasantness in a ballroom” that shows Jane what kind of man he is, while “Jane’s beauty and smiles” are the reason for Bingley’s admiration (Fullerton 135). However, Fullerton credits the act of dancing as the catalyst for their admiration and love for each other. Another glimpse of Jane and Bingley’s relationship is given a few pages later by Elizabeth who:

turned her attention almost entirely on her sister and Mr. Bingley, and the train of agreeable reflections which her observations have birth to, made her perhaps almost as happy as Jane. She saw in her idea settled in that very house in all the felicity which a marriage of true affection could bestow [...]" (*P&P* 192).

Elizabeth’s happiness for her sister’s connection with Bingley, as well as Jane’s own, is a clear indication of Jane and Bingley’s potential match. Moreover, as already mentioned, Elizabeth’s idea of a happy marriage is based on a relationship “of true affection” (*P&P* 192) and she believes that Jane and Bingley do share true feelings for each other. After their meeting at the first ball, it becomes clear that Bingley has made a good impression. The reader is given a description of Jane’s perspective which is shown through a conversation between her and Elizabeth: “He is just what a young man ought to be, [...], sensible, good humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy manners!—so much ease, with such perfect good breeding!” (*P&P* 26). By “ease”, Austen meant “the quality of getting along easily with others” and by “good breed” she understood “good manners” (Shapard 21), thus, once more demonstrating Bingley’s gentleman-like behaviour as opposed to Darcy’s at the same ball. On the same note, Austen provides Bingley’s opinion of Jane through a conversation with Darcy: “Oh! She is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld!” (*P&P* 20) and a few pages later he mentions again that “as to Miss Bennet, he could not conceive an angel more beautiful” (*P&P* 30). Even the Bingley sisters show their admiration for Jane as they “pronounced her to be a sweet girl and one whom they should not object to know more of. Miss Bennet was therefore established as a sweet girl, and their brother felt authorised by such commendation to think of her as he chose” (*P&P* 30). Thus, the descriptions of the assemblies and the couple’s harmony, as well

as the mention of Jane and Bingley's several dances together demonstrate that the two, are indeed, a perfect match.

On the other hand, Elizabeth and Darcy do not show evidence of being a perfect match from the very first moment they meet. On the contrary, as Monaghan argues, "Elizabeth and Darcy have quickly developed an extremely frustrating relationship" (71). Although Darcy is clearly attracted to Elizabeth, he fails to properly approach her due to his uneasiness about their differing social positions. Similarly, Elizabeth's objection against Darcy's behaviour prompts her to reject his attempted approaches several times. In order to explain the challenging dynamics between Elizabeth and Darcy, Monaghan draws on the concept of the "approach and rejection movement" in regard to four distinct incidents involving dancing proposals (71). Mullan makes a similar analysis to Monaghan's as he indicates Elizabeth and Darcy's treatment of each other at the assemblies as the establishment of their "complicated and mutual attraction" (par. 9): "they approach and retreat, tease and repel each other, as in an elaborate dance" (par. 2). They appear to be the opposite of Jane and Bingley with their disdain for courtesy codes demonstrated in the first incident of their dance proposals. In fact, as previously stated, during the first assembly described in the novel, Darcy fails to invite Elizabeth to dance with him, despite Bingley's efforts to persuade him to do so. Darcy appears oblivious or indifferent to the fact that Elizabeth overhears his adamant refusal to a dancing proposal and does it in a manner that provokes "her hostility" (Monaghan 69). Darcy's view of himself as superior to the Meryton society leads him to exhibit arrogant and condescending behaviour. Fullerton states that the Meryton assembly is where all action and misunderstandings begin (59). Darcy's sense of superiority makes him "prejudiced against his company even before he enters the room", while Elizabeth becomes "prejudiced against him by the time she leaves it" (Fullerton 59).

The second incident occurs at Sir William Lucas' party during which Darcy is once more put in the position of asking Elizabeth to dance (Adams 59):

'You cannot refuse to dance, I am sure, when so much beauty is before you.' And taking her hand, he would have given it to Mr. Darcy, who, though extremely surprised, was not unwilling to receive it, when she instantly drew back, and said with some discomposure to Sir William, 'Indeed, Sir, I have not the least intention of dancing.—I

entreat you not to suppose that I moved this way in order to beg for a partner.' (*P&P* 48)

This time, Darcy is "not unwilling to receive" Elizabeth's hand (*P&P* 48) and thus demonstrates he is no longer so adamant in refusing to dance with her. Monaghan argues that moments before this dance proposal, Darcy learns that Elizabeth "has more substantial virtues" as she shows a concern for others (70). Elizabeth performs at the piano for the people at the ball. However, she recognises that though her performance might be "pleasing", it is "by no means capital" (*P&P* 44) and in order to prevent burdening the attention of her listeners, she gives up her position at the piano after a song or two (Monaghan 70). Fullerton describes Darcy and Elizabeth's first encounter as Darcy emerging "triumphant" since he insulted her and she could not respond to it. However, this second dance proposal is "very different" (66). Elizabeth's instant reaction to drawing back demonstrates that she is surprised at such a request. Nevertheless, she refuses to accept his hand. This might be from her remembering well the humiliation she endured during their first meeting or her refusal to accept his proposal, since it was Sir William who pushed Darcy into asking her in the first place. Elizabeth mocks the situation stating that "Mr. Darcy is all politeness", to which Sir William replies, "He is indeed—but considering the inducement, my dear Miss Eliza, we cannot wonder at his complaisance; for who would object to such a partner?" (*P&P* 48). Shapard interprets Elizabeth's words as a possible intent to criticise Darcy. On the one hand, Elizabeth believes that it is only politeness which prompts him to invite her to dance. On the other hand, it is also possible that by "politeness" she means that he only adheres to rules of etiquette out of a sense of obligation but without showing genuine "friendliness or consideration for others" (Shapard 49). Moreover, the word "complaisance" also adds "another ironic touch to the scene" (Adams 59). The irony in this statement stems from Darcy's proud and unbending behaviour which is juxtaposed with his willingness to surrender and ask Elizabeth to dance with him. On the other hand, Elizabeth shows her unwillingness to be readily complacent towards Darcy, even if her refusal to dance with him means she cannot dance with any other men for the rest of the evening. Contrary to expectations, Darcy does not appear to be offended by her refusal. He shows admiration for her behaviour since it aligns with his own resistance to complacency. This scene can be interpreted as a "foreshadowing of Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth" as

Elizabeth refuses his dance proposal, “just as she will refuse his proposal later on”(Fullerton 67).

The third episode happens during Elizabeth’s stay at Netherfield due to her sister Jane having fallen ill. However, since I will analyse the episode in greater detail next, I would like to first explore Darcy’s fourth and final dance proposal to Elizabeth which happens during the Netherfield ball. On this occasion, Darcy is not being persuaded or confronted by someone else. Elizabeth is engaged in a conversation with Charlotte when Darcy unexpectedly surprises her with a sudden request to dance: “she found herself suddenly addressed by Mr. Darcy, who took her so much by surprise in his application for her hand, that, without knowing what she did, she accepted him” (*P&P* 178). Elizabeth is so taken aback that she agrees to his request without any hesitation. Although the evening begins with great expectations for Elizabeth, “she is doomed to disappointment” (Fullerton 67). Consequently, Monaghan explains Elizabeth’s acceptance “without knowing why she did it” by the fact that her thoughts at the Netherfield ball are occupied by several matters, including her “disappointment at Wickham’s absence” and a combination of amusement and disgust upon learning of Mr Collins’ desire to marry her (76). Darcy’s proposal to dance is thus, contrasted with the mortification of having danced with Mr Collins (Adams 60). Dancing with Darcy allows her to restore her poise as she is “amazed at the dignity to which she was arrived in being allowed to stand opposite to Mr. Darcy, and reading in her neighbours’ looks their equal amazement in beholding it” (*P&P* 178). However, Elizabeth is able to recompose herself and her thoughts and tries to establish some distance between herself and Darcy by ridiculing the formalities of dance in order to “deny its significance as a courtship ritual” (Monaghan 76). Fullerton focuses on the dialogue between the couple during this dance and describes it as “electric” as “tension builds and tempers are frayed (68). Elizabeth takes this opportunity to accuse Darcy of his harm towards Wickham and their talk turns into a “form of duelling” (Fullerton 127). The movement of their dance which creates a harmonious pattern is a great contrast to their conversation. “There is no meeting of minds, as there is a meeting of hands”, as Fullerton states (127).

As previously mentioned, the third proposal occurs during the Netherfield episode. It is an “interesting and unusual” episode which provides the gathering of “friends and strangers together in a private place without formal occasion or monitors. No styles, no distances, are set; various activities are mixed together” (Hart 324). This type of episode allows the reader to juxtapose Elizabeth and Darcy’s interactions with each other in a private domestic space as

opposed to public spaces, at which assemblies take place. However, this private space contains several opinions and interruptions due to the crowdedness of the scene revealing how Elizabeth and Darcy manage to handle such situations of pressure. The issue of complete privacy is evident in this episode as the only time Elizabeth is mentioned reading a book, she is in a drawing room full of people and unable to complete her activity without being interrupted by others to ask her to engage in another kind of activity (Spacks 309). As Deresiewicz argues, “their conversations at Netherfield, though by no means affectionate or even cordial, follow the pattern of communal flirtation and ultimately accomplish its purpose” (526). The two are able to have a deeper understanding of each other by engaging in several debates concerning different matters. Thus, they are able to “create a degree of intimacy even in the absence of affection” (Deresiewicz 526). This becomes clear since Darcy’s third proposal to dance comes from his “growing interest in Elizabeth” and out of his “own volition” (Adams 59). Yet once again, Elizabeth refuses his proposal, but this time she does it in a “playful, ironic tone” (Adams 59): “I have therefore made up my mind to tell you, that I do not want to dance a reel at all—and now despise me if you dare” (*P&P* 96). However, Darcy is incapable of despising her. On the contrary, Darcy shows to be more intrigued by her than ever as Austen provides a confession of his feelings: “Darcy 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” (*P&P* 98). At this point, Darcy is aware of his feelings and attraction for Elizabeth. Nevertheless, he is also aware of her “inferior connections or family ties”, and believes this to be prevention enough to keep him from actually falling in love with her (Shapard 99). Fullerton uses the analysis of the dance scenes to portray Darcy’s struggles with his feelings for Elizabeth as he “is at war with himself” (134). Similarly to Shapard, Fullerton argues that Darcy disapproves of Elizabeth’s family and that “he does not want to link his aristocratic lineage with a ‘nobody’ from a country town” (134). Nevertheless, Darcy is enchanted by Elizabeth’s mind and body and “he falls in love, in spite of himself (Fullerton 134).

The conversations held between Elizabeth and Darcy at Netherfield are “fundamentally different from others” previously described in the novel, they are “in a word, arguments” (Deresiewicz 523). The first is seen in their debate on what each sees as female accomplishments. While Darcy adds to the list of “the common extent of accomplishments” (*P&P* 72) a good sense of reading and learning which could be considered a compliment to

Elizabeth who a few pages earlier was called by Miss Bingley “a great reader” (*P&P* 68), Elizabeth ignores the potential compliment and engages him in a sharp discussion:

“All this she must possess,” added Darcy, “and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.”

“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.” (*P&P* 72)

Elizabeth takes this opportunity of being in close proximity to Darcy in a more private setting to pay attention to the conversations held between the group of friends in order to get further insight into his character. She joins the group during a card game, but instead of playing, she chooses to only observe giving her an advantage of analysing the dynamics between the characters. While doing some needlework, Elizabeth paid attention to the conversation held between Darcy and Bingley on the latter’s hasty style of letter-writing. However, Elizabeth soon joins the discussion and it “quickly intensifies into a more general debate about the value of precipitance” (Monaghan 74). Darcy is criticizing Bingley’s impulsive conduct and calls for his attention to propriety, while Elizabeth judges Darcy of allowing “nothing for the influence of friendship and affection” (*P&P* 94). She clearly believes that Darcy is being harsh in his critiques of his friend. Elizabeth demonstrates that she is not afraid of opposing Darcy and sustains her opposition in contrast to Bingley, who prefers to avoid conflict and arguments. As Shapard argues, “by having them argue directly”, Jane Austen provides Elizabeth and Darcy with “a greater sense of the other person’s intelligence, to reveal crucial facets of [their] characters” (95). Although one would suppose that Elizabeth’s directness and harsh words in opposing Darcy would hurt his pride, this has the opposite effect as Darcy becomes more and more “bewitched” by her (*P&P* 98). However, Elizabeth stays oblivious to Darcy’s increasing admiration of her and “remains fixed in her negative first impression” (Bander 30). She notices his obvious attentions but does not know what to make of them: “She hardly knew how to suppose that she could be an object of admiration to so great a man; and yet that he should look at her because he disliked her, was still more strange” (*P&P* 96).

Darcy demonstrates that he is not as self-conceited as he has yet been portrayed by the Meryton community and Elizabeth. He “feels the rudeness” of Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst as they attempt to exclude Elizabeth from their morning walk and invites her to join them (*P&P* 98). Thus, Darcy demonstrates his capability “of attending to the needs of others” and shows a concern for Elizabeth’s well-being (Monaghan 75). Elizabeth refuses to join them as she is aware of the Bingley sisters’ attempt to exclude her and makes up an excuse to get away from them (Bander 30). The same evening, a similar sequence of events takes place. Miss Bingley decides to parade before Darcy in an attempt to draw Darcy’s attention. Yet she is only able to do so once she asks Elizabeth to join her who “was surprised, but agreed to it immediately” (*P&P* 106). Elizabeth uses this opportunity to tease Darcy once more as she calls him out for lacking a sense of humour. Moreover, Elizabeth takes the opportunity to accuse him of “vanity and pride” (*P&P* 108). Darcy replies to this accusation by making a distinction between the two terms: “Yes, vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride—where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good regulation” (*P&P* 108). Darcy offers “some very clear guidelines to his strengths and weaknesses” (Monaghan 76). He might be guilty of vanity, but he also possesses a justified feeling of pride that comes from acknowledging the significance of his role in society. Nevertheless, as Monaghan argues, “Elizabeth is so busy repelling Darcy that she ignores indications that there is more to his character than she supposes” (76). Bander argues that Elizabeth laughs at Darcy during this interaction because she is so “devoid of erotic interest” in him that she finds him an “object of derision and contempt (30). Although both of them gain a deeper knowledge of each other’s character during Elizabeth’s stay at Netherfield, they still fail to truly understand each other as Darcy accuses Elizabeth’s defect to “willfully misunderstand” him (*P&P* 110). At Netherfield, Elizabeth remains “sexually and emotionally unaware of Mr. Darcy except as an unpleasant person who has obstructed her relationship with Wickham” (Bander 31).

The importance of public spaces, specifically assemblies, becomes evident through the practice of dancing since it is strongly linked to courtship and marriage. These courtship dances enable couples to actively assess each other's character and thus, to determine the potential of a love match and eventual marriage, as is seen in Jane and Bingley’s relationship. Austen's description of the dances and character's social behaviour at these assemblies can be interpreted as a reflection of their true nature. Bingley is shown to exhibit exemplary behaviour in accordance with the social etiquette of the time, as he is described as engaging

in dancing and conversation with several people. In contrast, Darcy maintains a reserved and snobbish demeanour, declining to dance with anyone. The descriptions of the assemblies prove Jane and Bingley's compatibility, and the mention of their numerous dances together serve as a confirmation that they are, indeed, a perfect match. Elizabeth and Darcy, on the other hand, do not have a harmonious relationship, as the couple fails to maintain a consistent connection. Darcy's uneasiness towards Elizabeth's inferior connections prevents him from properly approaching her, while Elizabeth's disapproval of his behaviour leads her to reject his advances on many occasions. Four distinct dancing proposals from Darcy to Elizabeth demonstrate the evolution of their relationship. This movement of approach and rejection of dance proposals allows Elizabeth and Darcy to establish a relationship of some sort. Although the last dance proposal does not come with an immediate resolution between Darcy and Elizabeth, for it is during this dance that Darcy pleads with Elizabeth to not establish his character based on the opinions of others, yet Elizabeth refuses. Nevertheless, Elizabeth's willingness to accept Darcy's approach enables the potential for a matrimonial union. The episode at Netherfield provides the couple with an opportunity to learn more about each other's characters in a more secluded setting. The dialogues between Elizabeth and Darcy in Netherfield are fundamentally different from others previously described in the novel since they are mostly debates. Through direct conflicts and arguments, Elizabeth and Darcy are able to have a deeper understanding of each other's intellect and consequently, learn essential aspects of their personalities. Despite Darcy's admission of his strengths and weaknesses, so exposing his true self to Elizabeth in order to provide her with a better understanding of his character, Elizabeth still ignores indications that there is more to his character than she supposes.

2.2 Elizabeth's Private Spaces: the Bedroom, her Mind and Outside of her Community

The second subchapter looked at public space and the Netherfield episode, which is interpreted as a private setting. However, a private space represents a place where one is by one's self, capable of having some introspection and sit down with one's thoughts, something that the heroine was clearly not able to do in such a crowded scene. As defined by Raines, privacy is also about what one decides to share about one's self with others, and this is only

possible when the characters find themselves in a secluded setting where no one else is able to hear the sharing of these intimate thoughts (55). Thus, “the fuller sharing of privacies is contrived by a walk in the shrubbery, that crucial and perilous space ancillary to the comfortable home” (Hart 312), or in the bedroom, described by John Mullan as “a sanctum, [where] only special people may enter” (35). Such private spaces are used by Jane Austen in order to portray these private conversations only held between true intimates. Moreover, this second subchapter focuses on Elizabeth's formation of awareness and her ability to break free from her community's influence. Thus, it is no surprise that Elizabeth is able to do so once she finds herself physically outside of the Meryton community where she no longer is flooded by the opinions and views of others. During her stay at Hunsford Parsonage, the reader is provided with a glimpse of Elizabeth's most private space: her own mind. Here, Elizabeth is forced to confront her thoughts and feelings by doing some introspection without being able to exchange opinions with her most intimate person, her sister Jane. Moreover, Hunsford Parsonage also enables the reader to see the development of Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship as the couple is finally able to have the privacy to meet each other without the interruption of others. It is through private correspondence that Darcy is able to share his privacies, completely bearing his authentic self to Elizabeth. She must, thus, come to terms with Darcy's proposal and confessions by herself, while trying to distance herself from her previous misconceptions of his character.

In his chapter *Do Sisters Sleep Together?*, John Mullan focuses on the relevance of a shared bedroom between sisters and how this might contribute to the sisters' closeness. Mullan sees the bedroom as “this place of joint retreat where talk would be intimate” (33). Similarly Kaplan states that “the friendships thrive best in privacy; women alone together are more open with one another than they generally are with others” (192). Consequently, in the bedroom, the sisters have full privacy to talk about their most intimate thoughts and feelings which they do not desire to share with anyone else. Mullan deduces that Elizabeth and Jane share a bedroom. In the scene where Bingley comes to propose to Jane at her home, Mrs Bennet hurries their maid to help Jane dress and to leave Elizabeth's hair as it is (*P&P* 655). Thus, one can suppose that the maid was attending both of the sisters in the same room, which thus implies that they do share a bedroom (Shapard 665). Moreover, there is also the mention of “their own room” (*P&P* 226) when going upstairs to talk privately. Similar to Mullan, Shapard states that “this sharing of a room would reinforce the sisters' closeness”

(655). This becomes evident since throughout the novel, the reader witnesses how Elizabeth and Jane rely on each other to acknowledge their true feelings towards their respective potential partners: "When Jane and Elizabeth were alone, the former, who had been cautious in her praise of Mr. Bingley before, expressed to her sister how very much she admired him" (*P&P* 26). The reader learns about Jane's admiration for Bingley only once the two sisters find themselves alone with no one else listening. Jane is very much captivated by Bingley, but she only confesses this to Elizabeth and Elizabeth alone as she "had been cautious in her praise of Mr. Bingley before", not wanting to admit it before the others. Hence, their relationship is characterized by "emotional intimacy and frankness" (Kaplan 192).

Once Jane receives a letter from Miss Bingley in which the latter confirms their indefinite absence from Netherfield, Elizabeth can sense Jane's uneasiness even after she "recollected herself soon" and moments after "a glance from Jane invited her to follow her up stairs. When they had gained their own room, Jane, taking out the letter, said, 'This is from Caroline Bingley [...]. You shall hear what she says'" (*P&P* 226). Unrestricted conversation comes naturally in their shared bedroom as Jane confides in Elizabeth about everything: "But you do not know *all*. I *will* read the passage which hurts me. I will have no reserves from *you*" (*P&P* 228). As Mullan states, "when Mrs Bennet talks to her daughters of this prospect, it is painfully embarrassing for them and comic for the reader; when Jane and Elizabeth discuss it in their bedchamber, we hear the truth of their feelings and uncertainties" (34). Thus, it is only in the privacy of their room, isolated from the rest of their family, that Elizabeth and Jane may openly discuss the possibility of Jane marrying Bingley. Additionally, there is a reference to their conversation taking place in the shrubbery, a place on the domestic territory, yet standing apart from the house and thus, providing them with a secluded space for private discussion. It is here that Elizabeth tells Jane about Wickham's narrative of his association with Darcy. Elizabeth realises the delicacy of this subject, considering that it provides intimate details on both Wickham and Darcy and if it were to be shared with others from the community, this could have damaging effects on Darcy's already somewhat tarnished reputation. Consequently, this demonstrates Elizabeth's trust and consideration for her sister as she confides in her such sensitive information. Hence, it is crucial for the sisters to have this talk at a location that ensures them absolute confidentiality. Moreover, it is not only Jane who shares her feelings for Bingley in their shared bedroom. Elizabeth informs Jane of her engagement to Darcy in their room: "At night she opened her heart to Jane" (*P&P* 710).

Elizabeth tells her of how she fell in love with Darcy as “all was acknowledged, and half the night spent in conversation” (*P&P* 714).

At Hunsford, Elizabeth finds herself physically outside of her community where she is finally able to be by herself, as the familial space can be quite stifling: “There was novelty in the scheme, and as, with such mother and such uncompanionable sister, home could be faultless, a little change was not unwelcome for its sake” (*P&P* 288). Due to Jane’s prolonged absence while staying with the Gardiners in London, Elizabeth had no true companionship. Therefore, her decision to go to Hunsford was made quite easily, since this also entailed a layover in London where she could visit her sister. Although her stay with the Collins’s meant a change in scenery, Elizabeth soon learned that Darcy was expected to visit his aunt at Rosings. Darcy comes without his usual entourage as Bingley and his sister stay in London. Consequently, the reader is able to witness for the first time Elizabeth and Darcy’s interactions together without the usual interruptions of other. The first tête-à-tête happens during one of Darcy’s visits at the Collins’s as he believed all the ladies to be at the house, yet once he arrives, Elizabeth is the only one there. The two engage in a conversation on a woman’s attachment to her home and Darcy’s growing affection for Elizabeth becomes evident in his behaviour:

Mr. Darcy drew his chair a little towards her, and said, “You cannot have a right to such very strong local attachment. You cannot have been always at Longbourn.” Elizabeth looked surprised. The gentleman experienced some change of feeling; he drew back his chair, took a newspaper from the table, and, glancing over it, said, in a colder voice [...]. (*P&P* 352)

Elizabeth believes that Darcy supposes that her arguments are in relation to a possible marriage between Jane and Bingley. However, what she fails to understand is that “Darcy could be wondering about her attachment to home because of his own interest” (Shapard 353). This explains his investment in her response as he draws closer to her, thus showing another side to him as he feels more at ease around Elizabeth. However, since the two are not an engaged couple but find themselves alone, a physical distance should be kept between the two. Darcy soon realises what he is doing and tries to regain his composure by creating distance between himself and Elizabeth. He picks up a newspaper and pretends to read it to create the illusion that he is not that invested in her response. Even Charlotte is surprised by

his visit and “suspects Darcy’s real feelings” (Bander 34) as she tells her friend that “he must be in love with you, or he would never have called on us in this familiar way” (*P&P* 352). However, Elizabeth tells her this is not likely due to his silence, demonstrating Elizabeth’s denial of recognising Darcy’s feelings for her. Bander states that Elizabeth’s failure to read the situation accurately is due to her having categorised Darcy “as a non-suitor” “so thoroughly” (34).

Darcy’s visits to the parsonage become more and more frequent and “more than once did Elizabeth, in her ramble within the Park, unexpectedly meet Mr. Darcy” (*P&P* 358). As Shapard suggests, “these incidents, along with Darcy’s frequent visits to the personage, suggest that his interest in Elizabeth has been rekindled” (359). This becomes evident as Darcy finally decides to visit her in order to propose marriage. Elizabeth is astonished by his proposal, which happens to be rather insulting as Darcy acknowledges her inferior familial and social position but that he loves her despite these obstacles. The two fall into a heated argument as Elizabeth clearly refuses his proposal since he is the one at fault for Jane and Bingley’s detachment. During this conversation, the couple is for once direct with each other in their feelings and opinions of each other. There are no formalities as Elizabeth takes the opportunity to judge Darcy’s actions without remorse: “I have every reason in the world to think ill of you. No motive can excuse the unjust and ungenerous part you acted *there*” (*P&P* 374). Darcy leaves and the end of this argument would make it seem that there is no resolution to their relationship.

However, the next morning, as Elizabeth decides to take a walk where she will be in complete privacy and able to collect herself and her thoughts, Darcy hands her a letter. This letter is of utmost importance in the novel since it is used as a tool by Austen to develop Elizabeth and Darcy’s relationship as it significantly changes Elizabeth’s perception of Darcy. According to Bander, the shock of the letter is the cause for Elizabeth’s “enlightenment” and her “path to love” since it makes her reflect on her feelings and opinions of Darcy (28). In this letter, Darcy explains the true origins of his relationship with Wickham as well as his reasoning for opposing Jane and Bingley’s potential engagement and, consequently, his actions in preventing it. Through this letter Darcy shares his intimacies and is thus able to bear his authentic self to Elizabeth. As Deresiewicz argues, “neither social niceties nor the conventions of intimacy nor her own wit or intellect enable her to eliminate the contradictions Darcy presents”, only this letter is able to do so (523). Shapard states that “it was improper for a man

to correspond with an unmarried woman, unless he was engaged to her or they had a family connection" (383). These rules of propriety are the reason why Darcy must give it to her by hand and not send it to her.

The fact that Elizabeth is given the letter while still at Hunsford is considered by Deresiewicz as an important detail in its success. Elizabeth is physically outside of her community and thus, "outside of it symbolically as well": "Had Elizabeth been at home, we know by now how she would have responded both to the letter and to the conversations that surround it" (Deresiewicz 523). She would have discussed the content of the letter with others, letting herself be influenced by their opinion and views and most likely not come to the same conclusions as she did by herself. Greenfield also highlights the importance of Elizabeth's "isolation" as it suggests "the general subjectivity of any interpretative act" and resists "the error of common received interpretations" (344). Away from her community, she is no longer subjected to the neighbourhood's disdain for Darcy. That she would have discussed the letter with someone else is proved by her discussion with Jane in which she confesses her unhappiness once she read the letter: "I was very uncomfortable, I may say unhappy. And with no one to speak to, of what I felt, no Jane to comfort me and say that I had not been so very weak and vain and nonsensical as I knew I had! Oh! how I wanted you!" (*P&P* 438). Consequently, the talking over the contents of the letter is "replaced by introspection when Elizabeth finds herself alone" (Deresiewicz 523). Therefore, the reader is provided with Elizabeth's most private space, her own mind which describes her coming to terms with this new perception of Darcy. Elizabeth is described as re-reading the letter repeatedly in order to "examine the meaning of every sentence" (*P&P* 398). Greenfield argues that Elizabeth's act of re-reading the letter is proof of her "mental growth" (344). Elizabeth's "perturbated state of mind" (*P&P* 398) reflects how the revaluation of each line is also a revaluation of "her own thoughts" (Greenfield 344).

Elizabeth shows embarrassment for the way she has treated Darcy up until now: "She grew absolutely ashamed of herself.—Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd. 'How despicably have I acted!' she cried" (*P&P* 404). Elizabeth acknowledges that she has misjudged Darcy; however, as Sherry argues, she is now also "faced with the problem of understanding him. It is a problem she shares with the reader" (617). After Darcy's departure from Rosings, he is only reintroduced by Austen once Elizabeth visits Pemberley a few chapters later, preventing the reader from

directly observing him after these new revelations. Thus, Elizabeth and the reader must depend on the letter and the insights it provides about his previous behaviour in order to begin a re-evaluation of his character. Greenfield argues that it is Darcy's absence that ignites new thoughts in Elizabeth because "thanks to his body's disappearance, her own mind is enlarged" (337). She explains that Darcy's presence is what makes Elizabeth confused and unable to think properly. Once he is absent, she is "alerted to her lack of knowledge" which then "elevates her mind by forcing it to work" (Greenfield 344). Sherry states that even though the letter might not "excuse the extent of Darcy's pride, it must at least make it possible for us to accept Darcy's own estimate of his character - that his faults are rather of temper than understanding" (617). Darcy's letter clarifies that his objections to Elizabeth's family were mostly due to their impropriety rather than low social status. Consequently, this proves that Darcy's pride and reserve can be separated from his perception as a snob and be seen instead as "both unobjectionable and necessary" (Sherry 617).

Moreover, Deresiewicz states the importance of Darcy's apologia to be "in written form" (524):

Elizabeth is forced to take its antithetical positions seriously. No longer can they remain externalized, embodied in the person of an interlocutor whose rebuff can be made to stand for their refutation. No longer can the words that express them be driven back on themselves, turned, toyed with, punned into a new meaning, pooh- poohed, or subjected to any of the countless other tactics permitted by the fluidity and impalpability of conversation and by the demand that conversation places on any position to continue generating verbiage for itself. (524)

Since Elizabeth is reading a letter and not actually having a discussion with Darcy, she must take in the information without being able to reply and question Darcy on what is being said. Darcy's words can no longer be played with or "punned into a new meaning" by Elizabeth as she cannot give her own opinion. The only way Elizabeth can deflect Darcy's words which prove her opinion of him and Wickham to be wrong is by no longer reading the letter and refusing to think about it: "She wished to discredit it entirely, repeatedly exclaiming, "This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!"—and when she had gone through the whole letter, [...], put it hastily away, protesting that she would not regard it, that

she would never look in it again" (*P&P* 398). In order to defend herself against the harsh truth she is reading, Elizabeth refuses to continue reading or even think about what she has just learned. However, she does not feel content with this evasion, and upon closer examination of the letter, she must acknowledge "a contradictory voice into her own mind" (Deresiewicz 523). Since Elizabeth stands physically outside of her community, she no longer has the support of the community's perspective which incentivised her to resist these contradictory voices.

She starts her reassessment by addressing the least delicate matter for her, which is Wickham's reputation. When she tries to find evidence that Darcy's recounting cannot be true as she did not see any malicious intent in Wickham, she realises that the essence of the observations upon which she had formed her judgement of him relied on "his countenance, voice, and manner" which "had established him at once in the possession of every virtue" (*P&P* 402). However, as "she tried to recollect some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity or benevolence, that might rescue him from the attacks of Mr. Darcy", she discovered that "'no such recollection befriended her. [...] she could remember no more substantial good about him than the general approbation of the neighborhood'" (*P&P* 402). Elizabeth understands that "her romantic attraction to Wickham had overcome her critical judgement" (Bander 34). Once more, the approval of Wickham comes from a general opinion of the Meryton community shared by Elizabeth as well which is combined with Elizabeth's attraction to Wickham. Nevertheless, Elizabeth soon re-evaluates the conversation held between her and Wickham at Mr Philips's and realises "the impropriety of such communications to a stranger" (*P&P* 402). Elizabeth soon comes to the conclusion that she did not truly know Wickham and that his portrayal of himself was a deceptive façade to make him appear favourable in contrast to Darcy.

Elizabeth is ashamed of herself for having so easily believed Wickham's portrayal of Darcy, considering that this has led her to misjudge him and treat him with prejudice on several occasions. Greenfield states that Elizabeth realises that her own thoughts can be "as deceptive and inaccessible as Wickham and Darcy" and that, "like the external reality they so easily misinterpret, thoughts can misread themselves" (344). Hence, Elizabeth recognises the instability of thought and that she must re-evaluate her own. Following the delivery of the letter, Elizabeth returns to Longbourn but she ceases to engage in the communal activities that she was previously described as partaking in throughout earlier chapters of the novel.

Deresiewicz describes this as marking a “profound alienation from her surroundings” (525). While talking to Jane, Elizabeth assumes her and her community’s misconceptions surrounding Darcy’s character:

The misfortune of speaking with bitterness, is a most natural consequence of the prejudices I have been encouraging. [...] and if I endeavour to undeceive people as to the rest of [Wickham’s] conduct, who will believe me? The general prejudice against Mr Darcy is so violent, that it would be the death of half the good people in Meryton, to attempt to place him in an amiable light. (*P&P* 438)

No longer under the influence of Wickham’s charms, Elizabeth acknowledges that she has created “an entirely false character for Darcy” (Bander 34). In this passage, Elizabeth recognises “the communal origin” of her error (misjudging Darcy) and assumes accountability for having contributed to this error (Deresiewicz 525). Elizabeth and Jane are deliberating whether Elizabeth should reveal Wickham’s true character to the Meryton community or not. However, she is aware of the community’s negative perception of Darcy, which would likely make them reluctant to believe her since this would place Darcy in “an amiable light” (*P&P* 438). Consequently, Deresiewicz relates this to the reason she decides to distance herself from both this misjudgement and her community (525).

Private domestic spaces enable the characters to share their most intimate opinions and thoughts with their close ones. The bedroom plays a significant role in Jane and Elizabeth’s relationship as it is here that they confess their feelings for their lovers. The sisters do not feel comfortable to talk about such matters in front of their family due to their mother’s dramatisation upon hearing about the prospects of a possible marriage. It is only once Elizabeth steps outside of her community that she is able to fall in love. Her stay at Hunsford enables Elizabeth and Darcy to have private interactions between themselves through which each of them are able to learn more about each other. Elizabeth, at first, fails to recognise Darcy’s rekindled interest and feelings for her despite his several attempts to approach. Her misconceptions of his character as a proud snob fed to her by her community as well as her learning of his responsibility in preventing an engagement between Jane and Bingley lead her to reject his first marriage proposal. Darcy’s letter forces Elizabeth and the reader to re-evaluate the entire first half of the novel. This letter is of most significance in the development

of their relationship, as it is an invitation to learn about Darcy's most intimate details about his life. Elizabeth and the reader must "recognize not only the errors of judgment which can proceed from a prejudice for sociable people but the limitations of sociability itself, the danger of living so much in the public eye that familiarity turns to contempt" (Hart 619). Elizabeth realises that her mistake was to partake in the collective consciousness relating not only to Darcy's character but Wickham's as well. Thus, Elizabeth is finally able to break free from her community's influence and, through Darcy's sharing of his privacies, Elizabeth is finally able to create her own most genuine and accurate opinion of Darcy.

2.3 The Importance of Pemberley as a Setting

As this chapter focuses on the importance of setting in the development of relationships, it is central to analyse the effect of Darcy's estate, Pemberley, on Elizabeth and Darcy's connection. Indeed, Pemberley might even be interpreted as the most important setting in the evolution of Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship, since it is here that Elizabeth witnesses Darcy's most authentic self and comes to realise her feelings for him. This is due to the fact that Darcy's behaviour completely changes once he finds himself in the privacy of his domestic space, demonstrating that the latter's setting is also a condition of his being. Thus, "the reader cannot have a true picture of Darcy until he sees him at Pemberley. For if we are to follow the logic of the novel, we must see Darcy's setting before we truly see him" (McCann 74). Pemberley is mentioned several times during the first two volumes of *Pride and Prejudice*; however, the reader is not permitted to "see it" until the third volume, creating a certain mystery about Darcy and suspense in the revelation of the estate and its effects on Elizabeth. Consequently, Austen's description of the characters' homes serves as an indicator of their nature as well. This is evident in the opposition between the description of Rosings compared with Pemberley and their owners. Lady Catherine's condescending and "god-like" (Monaghan 85) behaviour towards her guests contrasts greatly with Darcy's welcoming demeanour. However, it is not only setting that Darcy seems sensitive to but characters as well. As mentioned, an individual possesses several social selves according to the different groups of people whose opinions he or she values. This then induces the characters to demonstrate different aspects of their personality depending on whom they are engaging with. Before Elizabeth is able to interact with Darcy at Pemberley and witness his change of demeanour, she is given a new perspective

on his character by his maid, Mrs Reynolds. Mrs Reynolds' description of her master's treatment of his servants is a complete contradiction compared to his feelings of superiority with the Meryton community.

Pemberley's first sighting is described through Elizabeth's eyes:

It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills;—and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something! (*P&P* 472-474)

Up until the first sighting of Pemberley, the reader learns about the estate through the descriptions of other characters, mostly Miss Bingley. Through her eyes, Pemberley “may very well match its so-far-disagreeable master” (McCann 71). However, Elizabeth's description demonstrates that Miss Bingley's report has not been a reliable or accurate source as the house does not reflect at all Darcy's character up until now. Although she is still somewhat unsure of its master's character, she arrives at Pemberley “knowing enough of her own ignorance” after learning the truth about Wickham “free for new perceptions” (Greenfield 345). Monaghan argues that “at first sight the park and the house not only create an impression of great dignity but also display that balance of Art and Nature which in the eighteenth century indicated moral worth as well as aesthetic value” (84). Elizabeth describes Pemberley as being an elegant “stone building”, not embellished but with natural beauty and located “on rising ground” (*P&P* 472-474). The grounds, “while aesthetically pleasing, are quite without pretension or evidence of extravagance”, and Elizabeth gives great importance to the nature surrounding the house extending its beauty (Duckworth 123). Even when from inside the house, the different views from the windows reveal the grounds' perfection: “As they passed into other rooms, these objects were taking different positions; but from every window there were beauties to be seen” (*P&P* 474). Even the interior of the estate “contributes further to the sense of proper proportion, dignity and taste” (Monaghan 84).

Duckworth implies the idea “that excellent taste denotes excellence of moral character” (124). Thus, Elizabeth’s feeling that “to be mistress might be something” can be related to her notion that wealth and status can be associated with Pemberley, but also its worth as a place that embodies traditional social and ethical values. Consequently, she recognizes the potential it holds as a “setting for her responsible social activity” as its mistress (Duckworth 124). Until her visit to Pemberley, Elizabeth has relied on either first-hand observations of Darcy or “testimonies” about him provided by Wickham, her neighbours and Darcy’s letter (Greenfield 345). However, there is still some information lacking and Pemberley enables her to deepen her knowledge since “Pemberley is the first space to provide objects that represent him in his absence” (Greenfield 345). As Bander argues, “by the time Elizabeth arrives at Pemberley, she knows that Darcy is a good man” (35). Nevertheless, she still does not show the same romantic attraction for him as Darcy has shown for her. Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley is the pivotal initiative for Elizabeth’s evolution of her feelings for Darcy from admiration to love. When Jane asks her at what point Elizabeth became first aware that she was in love with Darcy, she replies, “It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley” (*P&P* 710). Although Elizabeth says this in a joking tone, it still shows how deeply Pemberley affected her and its undeniable influence on her growing affection for Darcy.

However, Elizabeth’s change of mind is truly influenced once she is inside Pemberley and hears Mrs Reynolds’s, Mr Darcy’s housekeeper’s account of the latter’s true character:

“I say no more than the truth, and what every body will say that knows him,” replied the other. Elizabeth thought this was going pretty far; and listened with increasing astonishment as the housekeeper added, “I have known him ever since he was four years old.” [...] “If I was to go through the world, I could not meet a better. But I have always observed, that they who are good-natured when children, are good-natured when they grow up; and he was always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted, boy in the world.” [...] “He is the best landlord, and the best master”, said she, “that ever lived. [...] Some people call him proud; but I am sure I never saw any thing of it. To my fancy, it is only because he does not rattle away like other young men.” (*P&P* 478-482)

In this passage, Mrs Reynolds beholds Darcy as “the best landlord, and the best master” (*P&P* 482), and as a child, he was “the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted, boy in the world” (*P&P* 478) which she still believes him to be as an adult. As Monaghan argues, Mrs Reynolds’ “knowledge of Darcy, his family and his house is intimate. She can speak with authority not only about Darcy's excellent conduct as master of Pemberley but also of his virtues as a four-year-old child” (83). She knew Darcy’s father personally and knows about the family history through the several portraits of them hanging in the house. She is also able to give exact details about the functionality of each room in Pemberley. These characteristics described by Mrs Reynolds are very far from the ones Elizabeth would use to describe Darcy. It becomes clear that Mrs Reynolds’ tale influences Elizabeth’s opinion as she “listened with increasing astonishment” (*P&P* 478). She then connects Mrs Reynolds’ description to the portrait of Darcy where he appears to be smiling and not at all unsocial: “She stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression” (*P&P* 484). As mentioned before, Greenfield highlights the importance of Darcy’s absence in Elizabeth’s ability to re-evaluate her thoughts and consequently, her opinion of him. Thus, during this passage, she highlights the importance of Elizabeth’s thoughts while observing Darcy’s portrait in the absence of its referent (345). Greenfield states that “by replacing the ‘original’ Darcy with her own idea of him, Elizabeth Bennet makes a man” (345). Elizabeth realises here that she has indeed been prejudiced towards his character due to her limited perspective. Indeed, Darcy is “the best master”, which Mr Gardiner argues is something not all servants can say of their own masters. This master-servant relationship demonstrates Darcy’s true characteristics, as he proves to be a true gentleman with good manners. Darcy does not see his servants as simple “instruments of labour, but rather as rational human beings who must be included in the community of the big house and introduced to Pemberley values in order that they might play their part in preserving proper social standards” (Monaghan 83). Pemberley’s description suggests a strong connection between taste and character. Consequently, the estate enables Elizabeth to perceive Darcy’s true character. As Walton Litz maintains, “every evidence of sound aesthetic judgment is converted by Elizabeth into evidence of Darcy's natural amiability, and joined with the enthusiastic testimony of the housekeeper until Pemberley becomes an image of his true nature” (105).

Elizabeth agrees to visit Pemberley since she believes Darcy to be absent and would thus, not encounter him at his home. However, Darcy returns home a day earlier, and both of the heroes are surprised to see each other. The most recent encounter between them took place in Hunsford, following Elizabeth's rejection of his marriage proposal. Hence, Elizabeth was mortified to see him again since she had hurt his pride and realised that she had severely misjudged him the entire time. Consequently, Elizabeth is surprised by Darcy's extremely agreeable and civil behaviour towards herself, her uncle, and her aunt:

Never, even in the company of his dear friends at Netherfield, or his dignified relations at Rosings, had she seen him so desirous to please, so free from self-consequence, or unbending reserve as now, when [...] even the acquaintance of those to whom his attentions were addressed, would draw down the ridicule and censure of the ladies both of Netherfield and Rosings. (*P&P* 508)

Elizabeth had never seen Darcy "so desirous to please" as he appeared to be at that moment. Despite appearing embarrassed to encounter Elizabeth, he nonetheless makes "civil enquiries after family" (*P&P* 486). Moreover, Darcy asks Elizabeth to be introduced to Mr and Mrs Gardiner, which demonstrates his change in demeanour in wanting to socialise with Elizabeth's family, "some of those very people, against whom his pride had revolted, in his offer to herself", since the Gardiners are in trade (*P&P* 492). Darcy's good manners demonstrate that his concern for the needs of his guests is of utmost importance to him. This is evident in Darcy's actions regarding the well-being of Elizabeth's aunt and uncle. When the conversation turned to fishing, Darcy invited Mr Gardiner to fish at Pemberley as often as he wanted. Additionally, Darcy offers to provide him with fishing equipment and guide him to the best parts of the streams to fish. Darcy also extends an invitation to Elizabeth and Mr and Mrs Gardiner to go into the house and have some refreshments. Han states that Darcy's newfound manners become evident in his reception of Mr and Mrs Gardiner and that this transformation "verifies that Pemberley is a community of spirit". Han believes that Darcy gets along with Mr Gardiner because their relationship is based on "mutual understanding and respect" (298). Consequently, Darcy makes a good impression on the latter with his good manners as Mr Gardiner describes him as "perfectly well behaved, polite and unassuming" (*P&P* 498). Mrs Reynolds' description of Darcy helped to depict him as a person with no "hierarchical

discrimination”, which proves to be true in his treatment of Mr and Mrs Gardiner (Han 298). Similarly, Bander argues that it is only after Darcy’s “marked civility to her aunt and uncle, his perfectly polite and unassuming manners, and his offers of hospitality” that Elizabeth begins to think of him as a possible suitor (35). Darcy’s high regards for Elizabeth are further proved through his initiative of having her meet his sister Georgiana and thus, paying “her a compliment of the highest kind” (*P&P* 496). Darcy’s intent on Elizabeth meeting his sister and his change in behaviour are proof to Elizabeth of his “enduring love for her” (Bander 36). In return, Elizabeth feels gratitude for Darcy and her feelings of admiration and respect turn into feelings of love. The change in Darcy’s behaviour towards Elizabeth and her family during their visit to Pemberley is a clear indication that “love works upon Darcy to open and soften his heretofore inapproachably proud character” (McCann 72). However, as McCann argues, Darcy’s feelings for Elizabeth are confirmed well in advance of her visit to Pemberley (72). One may then wonder why Darcy’s change only happens later on. Bingley touches upon this subject as he remarks on Darcy’s character: “I declare I do not know a more awful object than Darcy, on particular occasions, and in particular places; at his own house especially” (*P&P* 94). Hence, Darcy’s “setting seems to be a condition of [his] being” (McCann 72). This becomes evident in the next few chapters as Elizabeth meets him once again but this time at Longbourn. At the Bennet’s home, Darcy’s is once more at his most “forbidding” (McCann 72):

Darcy, after enquiring of her how Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner did, a question which she could not answer without confusion, said scarcely any thing. He was not seated by her; perhaps that was the reason of his silence; but it had not been so in Derbyshire. There he had talked to her friends, when he could not to herself. But now several minutes elapsed, without bringing the sound of his voice; and when occasionally, unable to resist the impulse of curiosity, she raised her eyes to his face, she as often found him looking at Jane, as at herself, and frequently on no object but the ground. More thoughtfulness, and less anxiety to please than when they last met, were plainly expressed. She was disappointed, and angry with herself for being so. (*P&P* 638)

At Longbourn, Darcy returns to his reserved introverted demeanour. Although he asks about Mr and Mrs Gardiner’s well-being, he displays little inclination to deepen the conversation further with Elizabeth. At Pemberley, Darcy was most talkative and tried to socialise with his

unexpected guests. However, at the Bennet's, Darcy no longer shows this approachable side of him. On the contrary, he demonstrates "less anxiety to please than when they last met" (*P&P* 638). Elizabeth realises that "perhaps he could not in her mother's presence be what he was before her uncle and aunt" (*P&P* 636), therefore, proving Darcy's sensitivity to both setting and character. At Longbourn, where Darcy does not feel at ease and is appalled by the Bennet family's behaviour, he assumes a forbidding manner. However, at Pemberley, where he finds himself in a pleasant environment and in the company of Elizabeth, Darcy's forbidding manner disappears, revealing that it was really a polite expression of indignation. Thus, "at Pemberley, with those he cares for, he can be his true self" (McCann 73).

The importance of setting to understand a character's true nature is further confirmed through the example of Lady Catherine de Bourgh and the opposition of her treatment of her guests compared to Darcy's. McCann states that the summary description of Rosings "is to give the impression of a new, flashy establishment, a fit casing for snobbish Lady Catherine de Bourgh" (70). Indeed, as the hostess, Lady Catherine has the responsibility of ensuring the comfort and well-being of her guests at her home. Nevertheless, she fails to fulfil her duty, since she treats her guests in a way that intentionally reminds them of their lower social status. Furthermore, Lady Catherine also takes on a sense of superiority while talking to her guests:

When the ladies returned to the drawing room, there was little to be done but to hear Lady Catherine talk, which she did without any intermission till coffee came in, delivering her opinion on every subject in so decisive a manner as proved that she was not used to having her judgment controverted. (*P&P* 314)

Lady Catherine takes on the lead of starting and continuing the conversation among her guests. However, it almost does not seem like a conversation, considering that she is the only one talking "without any intermission" (*P&P* 314). The guests seem to be relieved by the fact that they do not have to start or engage in discussion, as Lady Catherine proves to be used to engaging in conversation without having anyone oppose her opinions. As Monaghan states, the guests' "task is simply to listen and be informed as Lady Catherine pronounces authoritatively on a variety of subjects" (85). Therefore, Lady Catherine's behaviour is a great contrast to Darcy's behaviour towards their guests and Elizabeth is able to witness both and

juxtapose them. Elizabeth then understands that despite their shared high social status, Darcy does not exhibit a sense of superiority as his aunt does.

At Pemberley, Jane Austen finally highlights a pattern of approach and acceptance. Here Elizabeth is able to witness Darcy's "authentic private self" (Hart 310), the self one is able only to witness at his estate where he is the most comfortable and surrounded by those he truly cares about. Elizabeth is, thus, able to fully reassess Darcy's character and able to acknowledge her feelings for him. The connection between character and taste is alluded to by Jane Austen. Therefore, Elizabeth's first sighting of Pemberley is an indication of its master's true character and her future role filled with responsible social activity as its mistress. Nevertheless, it is only once Elizabeth is inside the estate and she meets Darcy's servant, Mrs Reynolds, that her emotional maturity is stimulated. Considering that Mrs Reynolds has known Darcy ever since he was four years old, her recount of her master's nature, as a true gentleman with good manners, is reliable and considered as a verdict by Elizabeth. Moreover, it is Darcy's treatment of Mr and Mrs Gardiner, individuals far below his social status, that proves his concern for his guests and contradicts Elizabeth's judgment of his pride. Indeed, Darcy's setting is a condition of his being proven by his change in behaviour once the heroes meet again at Longbourn where Darcy no longer feels comfortable showing his true self. Finally, Pemberley proves to be the "home of felicity usually open only to those who are compatible with its true elegance and with the personalities of its master and mistress" (McCann 72).

To sum up, Jane Austen employs distinct settings, whether they be public or private, to offer the reader a deeper understanding of the interactions between characters and thus, demonstrate the evolution of their connections. This is evident through an analysis of Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship, since it is through the analysis of setting that one is able to understand Elizabeth's formation of awareness of her feelings for Darcy and his true character. Since this thesis focuses on the community's influence on the development of relationships and connections, it is clear that public spaces play a significant role in this process. Assemblies serve as the primary social settings for establishing connections. Meanwhile, private spaces, more specifically domestic spaces such as Netherfield and/or Pemberley, provide the reader with a more detailed look at intimate interactions between the characters without the direct interference of the community.

Public spaces permit the characters to socialise and become acquainted with one another, thus seeking their potential romantic partners. Austen uses dancing as an activity to illustrate and facilitate the characters' connections. Indeed, at the assemblies, young men and women are expected to socialise with one another, and this is mostly done through dancing. Thus, these courtship dances allow couples to get to know each other by evaluating each other's characters and determining the possibility of establishing a romantic connection and eventual marriage.

Furthermore, the descriptions of these assemblies are important to understand the evolution of Jane and Bingley's relationship. Indeed, the novel never once depicts an intimate interaction between Jane and Bingley. Jane and Bingley's fondness of each other is seen through their dancing together at the balls. Thus, their several dances together prove their compatibility and confirm their connection as a perfect match. However, contrary to Jane and Bingley, Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship is not as harmonious. There are four distinctive dance proposals from Darcy to Elizabeth that demonstrate their unstable connection and growing affection for one another through the movement of approach and rejection. The fourth and final dance proposal is the only one Elizabeth accepts, and she uses this opportunity to form a better understanding of Darcy's character. Although this dance does not enable an immediate resolution between the two lovers, it still enables the potential for a matrimonial union.

The Netherfield episode is an example of how private spaces enable the reader to have a more intimate view of the interactions between characters as well as of their subjective outlooks. At Bingley's estate, Elizabeth and Darcy have the chance to gain deeper insight into each other's characters without the formalities of a ball. Since they find themselves secluded in a space with a smaller and more intimate social circle, they are able to exchange ideas and perceive how they interact with others. By engaging in direct disagreements and debates, Elizabeth and Darcy gain a more profound comprehension of each other's intelligence. Despite their increased familiarity with each other's personalities throughout Elizabeth's time at Netherfield, they remain unable to fully comprehend one another, as Darcy accuses Elizabeth of deliberately misinterpreting his intentions.

The relevance of private domestic spaces for the reader to gain a more detailed insight into the characters' thoughts and opinions is seen through the example of the bedroom. It is through their sharing of a bedroom that Jane and Elizabeth are able to have private

conversations in which they confess their feelings for their respective lovers. Consequently, this creates a stronger bond between the sisters, since their private space permits them the security to share their most intimate thoughts with one another. Moreover, Elizabeth's ability to fall in love with Darcy and acknowledge her attraction for him can only be experienced once she physically steps outside of her community and is, thus, also secluded from the influence of the same community. Elizabeth's time at Pemberley allows her and Darcy to engage in intimate exchanges, enabling them to get deeper insights into each other's character. Elizabeth's misconceptions of Darcy's character, instilled in her by the Meryton community, coupled with her discovery of his role in preventing an engagement between Jane and Bingley, caused her to decline his first marriage proposal. It is only once Elizabeth receives Darcy's letter that she is truly able to understand his character and the reason for his actions. Indeed, Darcy's letter forces both Elizabeth and the reader to reassess the entire first half of the novel, since it provides them with Darcy's point of view on the mysteries surrounding his character: his relationship with Wickham, Wickham's connection to Georgiana, and Darcy's reason for intruding in Jane and Bingley's relationship. Elizabeth acknowledges that her mistake involved participating in the collective consciousness regarding both Darcy's and Wickham's characters. Consequently, Elizabeth finally manages to liberate herself from the influence of her community. Elizabeth's formation of awareness of her misjudgment of Darcy is achieved by Darcy's disclosure of his privacies.

However, Elizabeth can only form a genuine and accurate judgment of Darcy at Pemberley, where she can observe his authentic private self. Darcy only demonstrates this side of himself at his estate, where he feels most at ease and is in the company of those he truly cares about. Jane Austen makes an indirect reference to the relationship between character and taste. Hence, Elizabeth's first sighting of Pemberley serves as a revealing insight into Darcy's true nature and also foreshadows her forthcoming role as the mistress of the estate. Elizabeth's guided visit to the interior of the estate by Darcy's servant, Mrs Reynolds, enables her to judge the relationship between master and servant. Mrs Reynolds describes Darcy as the best master, a true gentleman with good manners. This description is far from Elizabeth and the Meryton community's perception of Darcy as a proud snob. Mrs Reynolds has known Darcy since his childhood, allowing Elizabeth to finally hear the perspective of someone who actually knows him. Furthermore, Darcy's behaviour towards Mr and Mrs Gardiner, who are of lower social standing than him, demonstrates his concern for his visitors

and contradicts Elizabeth's judgment of his pride. Thus, Darcy's setting is a condition of his being, since he can only show his true self once he finds himself in the seclusion of his domestic space.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that *Pride and Prejudice* relies significantly on the community in order to form connections between the characters. The several romantic plots of the novel are propelled by the community's ability to share information amongst its members and thus influence the perception of characters regarding each other's nature. As a result, the reception of information passed on from character to character has an impact on the formation of consciousness and awareness in several characters, as well as their ability to form connections. This is most evident in Elizabeth Bennet, since the story focuses mostly on the heroine's point of view. Her initial negative perception of Darcy is rooted in a collective consciousness established by the Meryton community's first impressions of him. Nevertheless, Elizabeth is also able to discover and understand Darcy's true nature through the exchange of opinions and perspectives. Setting, specifically the juxtaposition between public and private spaces, becomes an important tool to analyse the formation of awareness of the characters when processing the information received concerning each other's character.

Although the novel focuses primarily on the love story of its heroes, Elizabeth and Darcy, it is also about the Meryton community and its events. The plot is moved forward through the actions of the community, whether made purposefully or not. The small and stable social circle in Meryton leads to gossip, the sharing of opinions, and the feeling of responsibility for each member to have an opinion or interfere in every matter that happens within the community. Therefore, one single opinion of a character can lead to a collective judgment of that character and influence the whole narrative. This is supported by the perception of Darcy's character and how it influences Elizabeth and their relationship. This thesis primarily concentrates on Elizabeth's development of awareness and her capacity to establish a connection with Darcy, given that the reader has primarily access to her opinions and thoughts. Therefore, the community's influence on Elizabeth's perception of Darcy stands out as the most prominent example. The collective consciousness held by the entire community that Darcy is a proud snob is extended to Elizabeth as well. Elizabeth's primary mistake stems from her failure to comprehend that the opinions of her community largely influence her judgments of Darcy. Consequently, opinions may vary among its members and

may not accurately depict Darcy's true character. Thus, Elizabeth is shown as a typical member of her community. She is susceptible to the same mental stagnation as the others and unconsciously participates in and promotes collective judgments.

The families further reinforce the influence of the community on characters and their relationships. The narrative explores several courtships, and the parents' role in these courtships is made clear from the very first chapter since they desire to ensure their daughters' happiness through marriage. Mrs Bennet gauges the success of a marriage based on the wealth of the suitor, rather than the level of affection between the lovers. This leads her to behave desperately and obnoxiously, consequently having a negative impact on her daughters' connections, since she contributes to Jane and Bingley's estrangement as well as Darcy's apprehension about marrying Elizabeth. Moreover, parents are expected to serve as role models for their children's moral growth. However, Mr and Mrs Bennet do not successfully fulfil this task, since their marriage is founded on superficiality and run-out passion. Therefore, the characters' responsibility is to recognise the influence they receive and assess its potential impact on their relationships. Elizabeth demonstrates a clear capacity to develop an awareness of her parents' marriage failures, thus enabling her to prevent repeating the same mistakes.

The novel concludes with several marriages, particularly between Elizabeth and Darcy, showcasing the characters' ability to overcome the influence of their community. Elizabeth's formation of awareness is the most evident. Her ability and openness to understand other perspectives in the final chapters of the novel demonstrate that her intellectual growth is linked to her moral and emotional maturity. Elizabeth realises that in order to obtain true understanding, she must actively engage with her surroundings and be open to hearing Darcy's point of view. Only then is she able to acknowledge and openly express her feelings for Darcy and, consequently, appreciate his love for her despite all the obstacles they face.

To understand Elizabeth's intellectual growth as well as her moral and emotional maturity, an analysis of the setting becomes important. Indeed, at Netherfield, Elizabeth and Darcy find themselves somewhat secluded from the rest of the community, as the only people in the house are the Bingleys, Darcy, Elizabeth, and Jane. Within this domestic space, specific social rules still apply, but they may also be ignored to some extent. Although the Netherfield episode is a domestic scene, it is still quite crowded. The interaction between Elizabeth and Darcy is thus not as intimate as a tête-à-tête, but it still provides a closer look at their

interactions in a smaller social circle. Therefore, by actively participating in direct arguments and discussions, Elizabeth and Darcy get a deeper understanding of each other's intelligence. Nevertheless, Elizabeth leaves Netherfield, continuing to believe the misconceptions about Darcy's character fed to her by her community.

It is only once Elizabeth arrives at Hunsford and is physically outside of Meryton that she is able to distance herself from the influence of her community. The reader is finally provided with several tête-à-têtes between Elizabeth and Darcy, demonstrating the development of Darcy's feelings for Elizabeth and, eventually, his first proposal. The intimate exchanges between the characters enable them to develop a more profound understanding of each other's personalities. However, it is not until Elizabeth receives Darcy's letter, in which he shares his privacies, that both the reader and Elizabeth are able to truly have a better perception of Darcy's character and the reasoning behind his confusing behaviour. Elizabeth finally learns Darcy's point of view regarding his relationship with Wickham and understands that she was mistaken about both Darcy's and Wickham's nature. She realises that her mistake was to form her opinion of Darcy based on the collective understanding of his person. Elizabeth acknowledges the communal origin of her mistake and takes responsibility for having contributed to this error. Since she finds herself alone without anyone else to discuss the letter with, Elizabeth is obliged to take in the information received and process it by herself without the influence of others. Consequently, she is able to make a true judgment of her own.

The authentic private self is hidden from simple sociability and is also demonstrated in a domestic space in the company of true intimates. Thus, it is evident that Elizabeth is able to perceive Darcy as his most authentic self. Darcy exhibits this self only inside the confines of his estate, where he feels most comfortable and is surrounded by those whom he genuinely cares about. Darcy's attentive and gentlemanlike behaviour is a great contrast to his forbidding manner within the Meryton community. His relationship with his servant is an indication of his importance concerning the well-being of his staff and his understanding of his responsibility as the master of Pemberley. This is further provided by his civil treatment of Mr and Mrs Gardiner. Although they are in trade and thus from a lower social status than Darcy, he does not treat them with arrogance and shows concern for their well-being. Pemberley becomes the home of a new community established by Elizabeth and Darcy. This new

community is an indication of Elizabeth and Darcy's formation of awareness, as it welcomes all members of their social circle without prejudice.

Public spaces are also of significant importance in the development of relationships, considering these spaces are where the community is able to gather and its members are able to connect with one another. One of the main public settings used by Jane Austen in the novel is assemblies. At these balls, the couples socialise mainly through dancing, allowing them to get better acquainted with and evaluate each other's characters. Thus, the act of dancing is linked to courtship and marriage. The descriptions of assemblies are crucial in understanding Jane and Bingley's relationship, as they showcase their compatibility and potential for marriage. Their relationship flourishes as they engage in several dances together, ultimately leading to their falling in love with one another. In contrast, Elizabeth and Darcy's successive dance proposals demonstrate their frustrating and unstable connection. Elizabeth's refusals to accept Darcy's dance proposals demonstrate her rejection of the opportunity of trying to perceive him from another perspective. Therefore, even though Elizabeth and Darcy initially form their connection in public spaces, it only transforms into a genuine love bond when they are able to express their most vulnerable selves in the privacy of Pemberley.

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