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Mortifying the Master's Eye: Intersubjective Vision in *Pride and Prejudice*

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> Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes...

-Charlotte Brontë (Letter to William Smith Williams, April 12, 1850)

<1>Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is an observational drama, as much as it is a romantic comedy. Mr. Darcy's "satirical eye" (25) scans a room of new acquaintances and falls unwittingly upon Elizabeth's own "fine eyes" (27); Caroline Bingley obsessively watches Mr. Darcy watch Elizabeth; on the prowl, Lydia and Kitty's "eyes were immediately wandering up the street in quest of the officers" (71); after his arrival, "almost every female eye was turned" upon Mr. Wickham, who had already caught Mr. Darcy's eye earlier in the street (75); Mr. Darcy's gaze remains "fixed on [Elizabeth's] face" in silence after her excoriating rejection of his first proposal (186); later, Elizabeth's "eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House" (235), where she contemplates the ways that Mr. Darcy's portrait "fixed his eyes upon herself" (240); a surprise meeting with Mr. Darcy results in both of their "eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of both were overspread with the deepest blush" (241); hearing Mr. Darcy's kindnesses to the Gardiners, Elizabeth "scarcely dared lift her eyes to his face," an embarrassment that continues through to the second successful proposal between the lovers. This list comprises only a small sampling of the visual interactions found within the novel.

<2>Within the marriage plot, sight is often linked to desire. Characters watch one another to read in body language evidence for potential romantic compatibility. Austen turns these observational logics inward, most acutely for Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, as the novel's protagonists discover that their visual perceptions are not always accurate, and that their first impressions (the novel's original title) are not

sacrosanct. Austen narrates these perspectival shifts through scenes of discomfiting visual experience that destabilize narrational authority and dissolve what is initially interpreted as the master's gaze. In so doing, her characters develop perceptual models that align with psychoanalytic theories of intersubjectivity, as discussed in the work of Kaja Silverman and Jessica Benjamin. Austen's most known romance presents a method of relationality that rejects the psychological possession of the other and proposes, somewhat surprisingly in a marriage plot of this era, that companionate love relies upon mutual recognition of the other subject's irreducible, ungraspable alterity.

<3>Despite his stated belief in Elizabeth's social inferiority, Mr. Darcy's eyes, "linked to his libido" (Nachumi 3), betray his anxious desire for her:

> Occupied in observing Mr. Bingley's attentions to her sister, Elizabeth was far from suspecting that she was herself becoming an object of some interest in the eyes of his friend. Mr. Darcy had at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty; he had looked at her without admiration at the ball; and when they next met, he looked at her only to criticise. But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. (Austen 24)

Austen's unruly narration uses free indirect style to shift abruptly from Elizabeth's focalized interiority, attentive to Mr. Bingley and Jane, to an external narrator's indication of Elizabeth's distraction, to Mr. Darcy's interior state. Temporalities are likewise muddied, as Elizabeth's actions and Mr. Darcy's consciousness are narrated in the conventional past tense, while the phrase "was far from suspecting that she was herself becoming" introduces a mixture of verb tenses that positions Elizabeth in the presently unfolding scene of "becoming" and simultaneously invokes a future-oriented narrative from Mr. Darcy's perspective. This fluctuating, kaleidoscopic prose allows Austen's irony to prevail; as Mr. Darcy consciously believes that he has trapped Elizabeth as "object," and that he has "allowed" her and "criticize[d]" her, his arrogance is immediately countered by the narration's quick interjection, the word "[b]ut." He believes himself to be immune from desiring Elizabeth, but the reader sees, even if Mr. Darcy is temporarily blinded to it, the erotic tensions immediately signified through his perception.

<4>Even as he turns Elizabeth into a surveyable "object," Elizabeth's "fine eyes" counter this reading (Austen 27). The novel's investment in narrating her visual perception grants Elizabeth at least equal status as an observer and reader of human

behavior, and despite her inferior wealth, status, and connections, she returns his gaze to subtly dislodge his authority. Upon first meeting her, Mr. Darcy "looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said, 'She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*'" (13). Elizabeth meets Mr. Darcy's eye and enacts his fantasy of self-enclosure; though he evidently feels attraction to her, proven just pages later when he recognizes her physical beauty and "began to wish to know more of her," he consciously insists upon the superiority of his position in this initial meeting (24). These early scenes of Mr. Darcy's assumed superiority work ironically to commence the swift unraveling of his mastery over Elizabeth *and* his long-established sense of self, as built through normative English frameworks of property, gender, and nation.(1) Martin Jay notes that visual "perception is intimately tied up with language . . . [and a]s a result, the universality of visual experience cannot be automatically assumed," but must instead be read within "what has been called 'visuality'—the distinct historical manifestations of visual experience in its possible modes . . . [and] different scopic regimes" (13). In a novel that takes great pains to identify the cultural norms and hierarchies that structure everyday life, especially marital and financial prospects, one assumes that Mr. Darcy possesses the powerful gaze. Austen's fluid multiperspectival narration, however, works to unseat the dominance of any one eye in the text and allows the assumed powers carried by the eye to be challenged.

<5>That these initial visual exchanges take place at a ball enhances their destabilizing influence. Meaghan Malone writes that these events were "highly subversive: as heroines and heroes synchronously navigate these heavily regimented spaces, they are provided with an outlet in which to challenge and subvert contemporary ideals of sexual repression and appropriate gender performance" (429). Conduct manuals and novels of the period likened "prolonged eye contact" (432) to sexual desire and even forbid it. Though Malone suggests that Mr. Darcy "willingly submits" (443) to Elizabeth within these spaces, we remain in Mr. Darcy's consciousness long enough to learn how unwilling, even coercive, this visual experience is. His attraction to Elizabeth is described as "mortifying" (Austen 24), a word carrying a range of connotations: "humbling, depressing," as well as "vexatious, annoying," and most pointedly in this instance, "humiliating, shameful, embarrassing" ("mortifying"). In this moment, Mr. Darcy's pride falters; surveying her body to find "more than one failure of perfect symmetry" (Austen 24), he finds himself "forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing" and "in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness" (24). All the frameworks that should be informing his perception are activated—he sees that Elizabeth falls short of what the masterful eye

would expect in a potential partner—but Mr. Darcy experiences a painful denial of those imperfections, "forced" into attraction and "caught" by her image.

<6>This moment marks a narrative departure from the dialogue that bookends it, what Jeff Nunokawa describes as a moment of "withdrawal prompted by failures of epistemological nerve caught up, one way or another, as cause or consequence of love" (27). While Austen has set the marriage plot machinery in motion from their first meeting, this second acquaintance sears the certainty of Mr. Darcy's attraction to Elizabeth in the reader's mind, even if (or especially because) Mr. Darcy rebels against it. Austen carves out moments of withdrawal from society for precisely these processes of self-definition; suspensions of time and movement "arise when the bright air of epistemological grace breathed by the participants of Austen's long conversation turns all of a sudden dark . . . brought on by the doubts of the mind sown by the powers of the heart" (29). Nunokawa reads these passages as moments of character freedom, apart from the typically repressive realities of social convention. Mr. Darcy's rank and assumed patriarchal authority generates his great discomfort in this scene, and his conscious insistence on his bequeathed superiority chafes against something much more individualized, affective, and profound: his yearning.

<7>Mr. Darcy's embarrassment gets us to the truth of his desire far more persuasively than if he had allowed it easily. In contrast to Mr. Wickham, whose gregarious charm and visible signs of attraction are exposed as mere covers for his shady machinations, Mr. Darcy's shamefaced withdrawal from his own desire makes it all the more palpable narratively. Claire Jarvis observes that within the Victorian novel, "erotic connection is best inspired through rejection. This counterintuitive point develops in a world in which sexual desire is a key to a successful marriage plot but in which respectability demands that 'good' characters resist their desires" (3). Because scenes of overt sexuality would not be tolerated, she writes, "[s]cenes of sexual pain and delay allow novelists to manage the erotic paradox at the core of realist form that values accurate erotic representation while it also avoids explicit sexual description." While she considers this strategy distinctly Victorian, Austen's detailed examinations of Elizabeth's body coupled with Mr. Darcy's shame anticipates Jarvis's claims. Alice Chandler similarly discusses the erotic sublimation crucial to Austen's fiction, observing how Austen uses allusion, dancing, eyes, and illness to draw attention to the bodily dynamics between characters,(2) and Jill Heydt-Stevenson even suggests that sex is so omnipresent in the novel that its treatment is casual: "The characters cherish good figures and erotic magnetism with a nonchalance that allows, indeed expects, the reader to take sexual appeal for

granted" (*Austen's Unbecoming* 72).(3) Mr. Darcy's anguish and the lovers' delayed gratification, then, drives much of their marriage plot's eroticism.

<8>Elizabeth attaches her own significance to Mr. Darcy's eye, contriving to "let him know that I see what he is about. He has a very satirical eye, and if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of him" (Austen 25). However, Elizabeth does *not* see what he is about. Conditioned to be wary of male attention, Elizabeth's self-objectification affirms the power Mr. Darcy believes his conscious gaze possesses: "She could only imagine however at last, that she drew his notice because there was a something [*sic*] about her more wrong and reprehensible, according to his ideas of right, than in any other person present" (50). Elizabeth reads herself as an object through Mr. Darcy's gaze, and though the narration has already allowed the reader in on the secret that she is, in fact, an "object of admiration," Elizabeth's best estimate of its meaning is critical. She attempts to read his mind through the suggestion of his eye, and she reads it contextually, "according to his ideas of right," without submitting that those "ideas" are equally her own.(4)

<9>Visuality in fiction is often discussed in terms of power, surveillance, control; however, several of psychoanalytic critic Kaja Silverman's most recent books take on the project of discerning how love and vision might intersect in productive, ethical ways. In *The Threshold of the Visible World,World Spectators,* and even *The Miracle of Analogy: Or The History of Photography*, Silverman finds possibility for productive failure in the Lacanian psychoanalytic approach to sight. She grounds much of her theory in the mirror stage, the psychological process which produces an image of ideality that later results in fragmentation, lack, and desire. In *The Threshold of the Visible World*, Silverman emphasizes the role that conscious awareness of ideality's impossibility might play in forging more ethical visual relations. If a subject can recognize ideality as the fiction it is and incorporate D.W. Winnicott's notion of the "good-enough" in the realm of subject-to-subject relations, psychical reality might be restructured so that a subject can extend love where there was once either visual colonization or abjection and recoil (225).

<10>Part of Silverman's discussion relies upon differentiating the *look* and the *gaze*. Often used interchangeably, the gaze for Silverman describes a kind of visual interpretation from the outside encoded in our perception. It "can perhaps best be understood as the intrusion of the symbolic into the field of vision. The gaze is the 'unapprehensible' . . . agency through which we are socially ratified or negated as spectacle" (133). Mr. Darcy's gaze is not necessarily his entire perception—he is emplaced within it, and Elizabeth inhabits that structure of visuality as well when

she turns his critical eye upon herself. Silverman compares the socially-sanctioned gaze with what she calls the look, what challenges, or, in terms of the film camera, "alter[s] what that apparatus 'photographs'" (161). While the gaze constructs the frame of one's vision, the look "conjure[s] something new into existence" because it "depends in part on its acknowledgement and acceptance that the void upon which it depends is the irreducible condition of all subjectivity" (169). The subject who sees must engage in "a constant conscious reworking of the term under which we unconsciously look at the objects that people our visual landscape" intentionally marking "the struggle, first, to recognize our involuntary acts of incorporation and repudiation, and our implicit affirmation of the dominant elements of the screen, and, then, to see again, differently" (184). Silverman finds that there is opportunity for an ethics of looking where vision has not been fully limited by the gaze and where forms of "heteropathic identification" might occur (Silverman, *Male* 23).(5)

<11>Mr. Darcy's narrative arc enacts this transition from masterly gaze to look. Part of what makes him appealing to Elizabeth, and to readers, is the narrative's unraveling of his mastering gaze toward something more vulnerable, cognizant of its limitedness. The novel relies upon both Mr. Darcy's and Elizabeth's recognition that their perceptions are porous, intersubjective sites influenced by the consciousnesses of others. If "optical vocabulary, and its ultimate concern with correct point of view, pervades English fiction perhaps more than any other kind of trope" (Hennelly 191), Austen's novel is unique in that it does not argue for any singular point of view, but rather, a return to one's own point of view in order to challenge, rearrange, and negotiate it in collaboration with others. In doing so, Austen integrates the erotic and titillating components of the visual with a more equitable ethics of love than a nineteenth-century marriage plot predicated on patrilineal entail might suggest.

<12>The transition from gaze to look is psychologically laborious and shocking for Mr. Darcy, and there are several elements of protest in the few passages articulating his interiority. As the tension between what his vision should perceive and what it really does mounts, he unconvincingly determines, after admitting that "[s]he attracted him more than he liked," to refuse any external display of warmth towards her (Austen 59). "He wisely resolved," the narration reveals sarcastically, "to be particularly careful that no sign of admiration should *now* escape him, nothing that could elevate her with the hope of influencing his felicity." The narrator's play on "elevate" references both how Mr. Darcy assumes Elizabeth will read his gaze and the act of radically raising Elizabeth's rank, highlighting the potentially progressive social repercussions of this new vision. He routinely fails to hide his desire; even as he "was beginning to determine not to fix his eyes on Elizabeth . . . they were

suddenly arrested by the sight of the stranger" (71). The language of capture and distress attached to Mr. Darcy's vision tells of the fracturing of his subjectivity, what was originally granted authority through the subjection of women, and of Elizabeth (and what she represents to him) especially. Elizabeth's eyes challenge this inherited power, and he is made vulnerable by what he experiences as the contaminating influence of desire.

<13>Recognition, though, allows for more enriching and fulfilling forms of relation.(6) In narrated moments of suspension and interiority apart from the demands of a masculine sociality, Mr. Darcy initiates the intersubjective return Luce Irigaray writes of in *The Way of Love*. Within a philosophy of love premised in exchange, she offers, "it is necessary without doubt to admit that there does not exist a world proper to all subjects: one truth alone, one beauty alone, one science alone" (8). Irigaray contends that "each must bring a meaning of one's own into the dialogue," such that meanings become entangled materialities in "co-belonging" (70), without demanding complete understanding. This relation is an encounter with difference, the intermingling of thought and feeling, and most importantly, a return to the self for negotiation rather than incorporation of the other—understanding how the self has been transformed by the encounter. As in Silverman's theory, full understanding of the other *cannot* exist because it comprises a fantasy of wholeness, ideality, and mastery. The recognition of this impossibility, however, allows for more ethical and fruitful encounters.

<14>Jessica Benjamin discusses a similar phenomenon through the term intersubjectivity, defined by her as "that zone of experience or theory in which the other is not merely the object of the ego's need/drive or cognition/perception, but has a separate and equivalent center of self" ("An Outline" 35). What begins in the *The Bonds of Love* as a review of the ways psychoanalytic inquiry can both illuminate the psychological origins of domination and "harbo[r] the best rationalization of authority" (8), Benjamin later argues in *Shadow of the Other* that the root of mastery is the tendency to disavow the importance of negation in one's relation to the other. Benjamin's theory supposes that we must think through the ways one "recognize[s] the concrete other" (82) by "understand[ing] the deepest obstacles within the self, and acknowledg[ing] that this ideal of autonomous knowing reason has served to obscure those dynamics, if not, indeed, to foster them" (84). Not only must the subject understand their own being-moved by the other, but they must allow the processes of othering to occur before returning back to the self, as "[o]nly the externality of the other that survives destruction allows a representation of the other as simultaneously outside control and nonthreatening–a form of negation that social relations of domination enforced by violence

intrinsically prevent" (96). In Mr. Darcy's case, he must allow those ego-driven recognitions of difference that feel natural to him (even as they are constructed), observe the ways in which he seeks to destroy and negate that difference, and tend to what is left over, what cannot be assimilated, what can only then be loved. Benjamin posits that

> the notion of intersubjectivity postulates that the barbarism of incorporating the Other into the same, the cycle of destructiveness, can only be modified when the Other intervenes. Therefore *any subject's primary responsibility to the other subject is to be her intervening or surviving other*. . . . It permits a differentiation between the simple reversal of complementary power relations and concrete negation that breaks up fixed identity and allows survival. (99, emphasis in original)

As Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth learn through their relationship to one another to "transcend their narcissistic egoism," they recognize and ultimately hold space for the radical alterity of the other's consciousness, and the ways in which that alterity informs their relationship (101).

<15>This intersubjective relation does not happen for Mr. Darcy by the first proposal *or* the explanatory letter that follows. Instead, the proposal and letter mark the last attempt at Mr. Darcy's assumed mastery. His infamous words to Elizabeth are fraught with self-interest: "In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (Austen 185). Mr. Darcy retains the language of compulsion that forces Elizabeth to consider his perspective as a master's: "You must, therefore, pardon the freedom with which I demand your attention; your feelings, I know, will bestow it unwillingly, but I demand it of your justice" (191). Darcy attempts to recuperate his psychological distress by projecting it outward and possessing the object that instigates it rather than recognizing her difference, and it is clear that his attempt at this moment is to assuage his own mortification. If Elizabeth's eyes have captured him against his will, narrated as a kind of ravishment, he believes his only defense to be an entrapment of his own design. It is only during the second proposal that Mr. Darcy's transformation becomes clear, as he admits to the ways Elizabeth has influenced him. He begs her to burn the letter, lamenting, "I believed myself perfectly calm and cool, but I am since convinced that it was written in a dreadful bitterness of spirit" (348). He lists persons throughout his life that empowered his limited perspective, submitting, "Elizabeth! What do I not owe you? You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled" (349). In this way, the "ocular drama" exhibited through Mr. Darcy's

watchful eye upon Elizabeth does not result from "learn[ing] to see through mere physical appearances in order to gain insight to Elizabeth's interior beauty," as Mark Hennelly suggests (198); instead, it results from Mr. Darcy's recognition of mastery's false promise, bringing him to a kind of psychological openness suitable for Elizabeth's, and the reader's, love.(7)

<16>Elizabeth's other proposal provides some contrast to show how essential demastery is to the novel's ethics. Upon visiting Longbourn for the first time, Mr. Collins asserts his dominion over the space by complimenting its wares: "his commendation of everything would have touched Mrs. Bennet's heart, but for the mortifying supposition of his viewing it all as his own future property" (64). Rather than being undone by another's eye, he is emboldened by his own. Endeavoring to marry a Bennet daughter as a half-hearted form "of atonement" (69) for the entail that threatens to leave the women destitute, he assumes before meeting them that he will be accepted, and "[h]is plan did not vary on seeing them." He has no desire for or humility toward the Bennet women, wanting only the boost in his social profile that arises through marriage. He even shifts his target, quickly and superficially, from Jane to Elizabeth after learning that Jane may already be approaching engagement.(8) His vision is steeped in normative desires for property, wealth, and status, all of which render him ridiculous, gauche even.(9) When Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth, the language of visuality vanishes—the characters do not, as in the other proposals, meet one another's eye. His proposal appeals only to reasons why Elizabeth's inferior social position should necessitate her acceptance, a form of domination over the woman's right to refusal.

<17>Mr. Darcy, in the novel's logic, is the rightful partner for Elizabeth, but intersubjectivity requires *mutual*recognition, and so Elizabeth, too, must complete this narrative process (Benjamin, "An Outline" 35). Her transformation begins by reading his letter, where Austen uses the language of the "turn" to represent Elizabeth's growing ability to imagine narrative through other positionalities. This formative pivot shows Elizabeth's intellectual movement from a totalizing worldview, encompassing the values of her family and community, to a fractured, partial image of social reality susceptible to diverse interpretations. Reading and rereading Mr. Darcy's letter, she cognitively leaps from one perspective to another to flesh out, as much as is possible, a vision of the whole:

> Her feelings as she read were scarcely to be defined. With amazement did she first understand that he believed any apology to be in his power; and stedfastly was she persuaded that he could have no explanation to give, which a just sense of shame would not conceal. With strong prejudice against every thing

> he might say, she began his account of what had happened at Netherfield. She read, with an eagerness which hardly left her power of comprehension, and from impatience of knowing what the next sentence might bring, was incapable of attending to the sense of the one before her eyes. (Austen 199)

While Darcy's "account of the real" is rather straightforward, the meanings and effects it elicits in Elizabeth shift upon each reading. Beginning her inspection already decided against Darcy, she responds with "amazement" that he would resume his position of mastery following her rebuff, assuming her own mastery over his language. As she submits herself further to repeated "mortifying perusal[s]" of Mr. Darcy's letter, however, she concludes, "every line proved more clearly that the affair, which she had believed it impossible that any contrivance could so represent, as to render Mr. Darcy's conduct in it less than infamous, was capable of a turn which must make him entirely blameless throughout the whole" (199). This "turn" embeds thematically within the narrative what Austen accomplishes formally through free indirect style and irony: revealing the multiplicity of language and meaning, the instability of interpretation, and the ways in which words on the page can transform beneath your eyes upon re-reading. With her revelation of this "turn," Elizabeth comes to recognize her own narrow perceptions, admitting to being previously "blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (201) and reframing her understanding of Mr. Darcy through this inevitable partiality of perspective.(10) While reading the letter opens Elizabeth's psychical space in the "mortifying" ways Mr. Darcy's has already been made penetrable, her visit to Pemberley affirms her attraction to Mr. Darcy. In her travels to Pemberley, that picturesque space that Jillian Heydt-Stevenson suggests "present[s] an analogue to body-mind co-mingling with erotic connotations" ("Sexualities" 200), Elizabeth undergoes an intersubjective transformation.

<18>Pemberley is a veritable feast for the eyes. As in previous passages revealing Mr. Darcy's interiority, Elizabeth is "distressed" upon her approach to the estate, "blush[ing]" at the possibility of seeing Mr. Darcy on his own turf (Austen 232). Austen concludes the second volume in this state of high libidinal investment, with Elizabeth just on the cusp of viewing this grand space, before opening the third volume by delving into her consciousness:

> Elizabeth's mind was too full for conversation, but she saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view. They gradually ascended for half-a-mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness

> wound. 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! (235)

The comparatively lengthy passage describing the estate emphasizes the singularity of its aesthetic excellence. Like Mr. Darcy's visual arrest in Elizabeth's presence, Pemberley insists upon its grandeur, as Elizabeth's "eye was instantly caught," ensnared, captured by its magnificence. Though the longer paragraph begins with "Elizabeth's mind," we transition to "the eye," making diffuse the experience of viewing Pemberley—it is our vision blended with Elizabeth's that sees. Many of the visual pleasures found arise from the rugged, wild elements that organically integrate and balance the estate, an entanglement of the natural and architectural, a true English picturesque. This prolonged description of Pemberley is significant because, as Andrew Elfenbein has shown, *Pride and Prejudice* is oddly tight-lipped about detail. Description is quite sparse, and the narrative is composed mostly of dialogue. Austen's lean prose differentiates her realism from those that precede her (as well as the fat, descriptively-dense nineteenth-century novels that follow her), and this moment of thickened description within Elizabeth's perception demands that the reader pay close attention to the processes of her interiority as they interact with this new sight. The movement from "distress" to pleasure summons us to look at Mr. Darcy through this rich and erotically-articulated eye, further encouraged when the visual pleasures of Pemberley are extended to Mr. Darcy's large portrait.(11)

<19>Standing beside the portrait, Mrs. Reynolds applauds Mr. Darcy's kindness and generosity, a gesture Austen suggests extends past her wish for job security. Elizabeth's view of his portrait, though, contains many of the same distressing connotations depicted in Mr. Darcy's narrated interiority; the portrait "arrested her" and "beheld a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy," language mimicking Mr. Darcy's previous mortifying visual experience (Austen 240). Elizabeth looks at the portrait for "several minutes," turning about the room and "return[ing] to it again." Her journey to Mr. Darcy's portrait recycles the same language of mortification, recognition, and return that Austen has primed us for in earlier scenes, setting the reader up for Elizabeth's full transformation as she stares into Mr. Darcy's painted representation, feeling "a more gentle sensation toward than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance . . . as 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." The portrait illuminates aspects of Mr. Darcy's image she had consciously overlooked but that nevertheless found their way into her memory. Though Mr. Darcy has presumably posed for the painter, only Elizabeth can see Mr. Darcy's portrait as narrated because it reflects a *particular*look that he shares with her alone, not the gaze she has read him through before that is available within the structures of visuality that organize English life. As Elizabeth "fixed his eyes upon herself," she desires no intellectual mastery over him; rather, she willingly offers herself up as an object by inhabiting his look. She recognizes that her interpretation of his "fixed" glare in their previous interactions was mistaken and revises her perceptions, and the narration focalized through Elizabeth becomes more tactile, moving from critical judgment to "gentle sensation," "warmth," and a mind "softened."

<20>Just after, Mr. Darcy surprises Elizabeth at Pemberley. In a moment too predictable by this point, "[t]heir eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of each were overspread with the deepest blush" (241). Highlighting the novel's "erotics of mortification," Mary Ann O'Farrell writes that the blush functions to make the body behave, if perversely (21). The blush makes legible characters' recognition of their transgressions, intentional or not, since one only blushes if she is aware of how her own infelicity compares to accepted standards of behavior. While not consistently within the character's control, it also performs the work of revealing alternate versions of what is stated or consciously performed, engaging in a hydraulics of concealment and the "pleasures of exposure" (24). The blush communicates something interior that becomes an object in the interwoven space of their encounter, and while they have dissolved their rigid perceptual boundaries individually, they have not yet learned to hold the look together. Feeling only shame at her previous myopia, Elizabeth "instinctively turned" and "scarcely dared to lift her eyes" rather than intermingling with his eye (Austen 241). The next several pages following this uncomfortable encounter depict Elizabeth experimenting with and revising forms of visual engagement with Mr. Darcy. She first attempts to "turn her eyes on Mr. Darcy" (250); later, Elizabeth registers her eye's desire for an "involuntary glance" at Mr. Darcy which reveals him to possess a "heightened complexion" (257); and at the very same event, she notices by looking that Mr. Darcy's "eyes fixed . . . on her more, and more cheerfully" (258). In the final proposal scene between the two lovers, Elizabeth's mortified reactions to Mr. Darcy's presence parallel his opening reactions to seeing Elizabeth, ensuring in the novel's logic the intensity of her erotic desire for him now. In this scene, she "forced herself to speak," still lowering her eyes. While Mr. Darcy's appearance now represents his delight in her acceptance,

"she could not look," but "she could listen," a final gesture within their power battle that negates the other in order to love them better (346).

<21>The rightness of Mr. Darcy's and Elizabeth's coming together is *not* predicated on those values of nineteenth-century fiction we might expect: sympathetic identification, social necessity, contingency, empirical confirmations of truth.(12) It *does* depend, as Joseph Allen Boone notes, upon "never . . . creat[ing] expectations for her protagonists that an enlightened understanding of marriage cannot fulfill" (90). All of the novel's psychological complexity works toward a turn of mind that accepts companionate marriage as its fulfilment, hardly a progressive outcome for readers today. But what it adds to that vision of psychological complexity is the way that Austen stages a cognitive and affective change that maintains, still, the distance between the lovers' consciousnesses, converting what was originally a competition for mastery on both sides to a mature recognition of the other's irreducibility. Their suitability as lovers contrasts all of the other marriage plots within *Pride and Prejudice* precisely because their love is founded first on mortification, negation, and fundamental not-knowing, what Sam See calls "the pleasure of ignorance: the pleasure of renouncing our desire to fill the hole of knowledge, to make knowledge whole, to master those to whom we bear relation" (196). Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth do not fully submit to the other, nor do they fully submit to their desire for mastery over the other, but use the influence of the other to restrain their own perceptions.

<22>Eyes in Austen's fiction are shown again and again to be vulnerable organs. Harnessed and conditioned by ideological forces, susceptible to intensely subjective experiences, and not completely governable, vision in her novels can disrupt confidence in one's perceptual reality and invite new interpretations even in the most seemingly normative and straightforward environments. But as the psychoanalytic theorists mentioned here suggest, this kind of disruption can be generative and even pleasurable, leading to more ethical relationalities. The demastery of the eye in *Pride and Prejudice* allows Mr. Darcy, in spite of the incredible power his social position and wealth potentially lords over Elizabeth, to become a desirable marriage partner. Austen meaningfully undermines their individual perceptions and leaves them at the height of their joint recognition, still mystified by the power and influence of the other, to suggest that we need not feel ashamed of our inherently limited subjectivities. Rather, we should feel happily humbled by them, and learn to see them for what they are—reflections of the necessarily relational and interdependent.

Notes

(1)And even, as Mikhal Dekel has recently speculated, ability–Dekel considers how our common understanding of Mr. Darcy as prideful by "agency and choice" may be a misinterpretation of neuroatypicality (par. 3).(^)

(2)Lesley H. Willis agrees: "on the simplest and most concrete level the visual element . . . has sexual significance" (157).(^)

(3)Susan Morgan, on the other hand, argues that Austen intentionally de-eroticizes her fiction because the literary ecosystem at the time of her writing tended to conflate strong sexuality with various forms of sexual assault–rape and seduction plots, in particular. Dennis Allen similarly suggests that desire is repressed and sublimated in actions like dance and "the glance" because Austen ultimately wants to subject these wild forces to the taming influence of normativity (427). These critics offer a different perspective on the functions of desire in the novel; this essay contends, however, that these humbling forms of sexual excitement are crucial to the construction of the intersubjective vision the novel endorses.(^)

(4)Interestingly, the character who seems to read the multiperspectival glances populating any one room in the novel with the most accuracy is Caroline Bingley. Austen relegates to her the role of accurate perceiver, though the position does not come with many perks. She often leers, and her vision reveals two unsavory root causes: her ambition to entrap Mr. Darcy in a marriage with her, and her envy triggered by his wandering eye, both of which suggest her desire for mastery. Her eye "saw, or suspected enough to be jealous" (Austen 51) of Darcy's attentions toward Elizabeth, and she notices the severe disturbance this desire causes him and seeks to stoke it–not recognizing, perhaps, that to fan the flames of mortification further draws Mr. Darcy to Elizabeth.(^)

(5)Heteropathic identification, introduced to Silverman's lexicon in her 1992 work *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* and originally found in Max Scheler's *The Nature of Sympathy*, involves a way of identifying with the other without incorporating or "swallow[ing]" (205) their alterity to shore up and define the self. Later, Silverman uses the term to describe an "identifi[cation] at a distance with his or her proprioceptive self" (*The Threshold* 23). The subject agrees to hold the ideality conferred by the "visual imago" separate, "at the expense of an imaginary bodily unity" (23). This orientation to the other de-emphasizes the visual in favor of the haptic.(^)

(6)Tony Tanner suggests that the novel's "drama of recognition" aligns it with the "great tradition of Western tragedy–*Oedipus Rex, King Lear, Phèdre*" but "shifted

to the comic mode" (105). His argument considers Enlightenment-era epistemologies that undergird Austen's investigation of perception and knowledge.(^)

(7)See Sarah Raff's *Jane Austen's Erotic Advice* for further discussion of how Austen's narrators play the role of matchmaker for the reader, too.(^)

(8)Though limitedly discussed, Jane and Mr. Bingley's relationship is characterized by "easiness," hospitality, earnestness, and even naiveté (Austen 18). They embody from the beginning the humility that Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth learn, and the language of visuality is not often used within their story—they are mostly looked upon, and manipulated, by others.(^)

(9)Read more generously, it is *because* Mr. Collins comes from less economic stability than Mr. Darcy that he desires these class markers more than he desires a romantic partner—in a sense, when it comes to class and its intersection with masculinity, Austen's novel conditions us to desire what is already secure and mock what is tenuous. On this point, Claudia Johnson notes in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* that "[i]f *Pride and Prejudice* legitimizes a progressive yearning for pleasure, it also gratifies a conservative yearning for a strong, attentive, loving, and paradoxically perhaps, at times even submissive authority" (73).(^)

(10)Sarah Raff also discusses how the embarrassment Elizabeth experiences upon reading the letter's contents stems from her recognition of the ways that her small-town society has constructed a particular worldview distant from the "wise, cultivated, proper" world outside of it, thus linking her to Mr. Collins, whose braggadocio is repeatedly humbled by public opinion (50-1).(^)

(11)Susan C. Greenfield points out that the lovers' transformations happen in the absence of the other; "Pemberley is the first space to provide objects that represent [Mr. Darcy] in his absence" (345), where Elizabeth's eyes can be free to perceive without being seen herself. She is, in this sense, not the object of the look but a pure observer; she does not in this moment need to consider the ways that the master's eye codifies her.(^)

(12)D.T. Walker writes against the long history of reading *Pride and Prejudice* as a lesson in empirical understanding: "The trajectory of Austen's knowledge plot, at the very crux of its conclusion, seems to eschew anything like an integrated image of the truth. As the lovers accept each other, facts do not so much prove elusive as go unaddressed" (434). See also Felicia Bonaparte, "Conjecturing Possibilities: Reading and Misreading Texts in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.(^)

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