DISSIMULATION IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper I am going to investigate the question whether Jane Austen shares Mary Wollstonecraft's or William Godwin's opinions about dissimulation, falsehood, and secrets in her most widely read novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. While there is no explicit reference to either Wollstonecraft's or Godwin's works in Austen's novels, it is plausible that she was familiar with their ideas. In all probability she read Jane West and Fanny Burney (Rogers lxx), both of whom cited Wollstonecraft in their works, and in one of her letters Austen makes a passing reference to Godwin. Giving an account of the visit of the Pickfords in Bath in a letter dated 21 May 1801 and addressed to Cassandra, she describes one of the men in the family as follows: "~~he~~ is as raffish in his appearance as I would wish every disciple of Godwin to be" (*Letters* 61).

In her "Professed Enemies of Politeness': Sincerity and the Problem of Gender in Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*," Jenny Davidson highlights the main differences between Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's opinion about politeness and insincerity. Davidson concludes that if Wollstonecraft argues that dissimulation is a female attribute first of all, in Godwin's opinion insincerity is primarily determined by class rather than gender relations, and adds that it might deepen class differences (599-600). Davidson argues that Wollstonecraft considers dissimulation "~~a~~ specifically female problem" in her *Vindication* and emphasizes that modesty is the "~~e~~mbodiment of insincerity," and identifies femininity as "~~d~~eceptiveness," calling for a "~~re~~volution in female manners" (599). Wollstonecraft describes two kinds of modesty: the first "~~e~~licits respect" from both men and women, while the other is false modesty, causing women to deceive both themselves and others; she calls attention to the difference between the two forms of modesty, wishing that women abandoned the latter (611-12). She also attacks the "~~fe~~male chastity" formed by conduct books and describes it as a "~~sy~~stem of dissimulation," arguing that "~~c~~hivalry," "~~m~~odesty," and "~~g~~allantry" have transformed women into "~~d~~isgusting hypocrites" (612). If Wollstonecraft identifies politeness as a tool particularly used to oppress women, in Godwin's opinion insincerity generally restrains social reform and political revolution, and he argues that "~~a~~bsolute freedom in the political sphere" can only be achieved if reserve completely ceases (600). Godwin argues that insincerity is as damaging as inequality, and emphasizes that both equality and sincerity are important to the well-being of mankind; he is also disgusted by all kinds of insincerity, including oaths used by the government to enforce "~~re~~ligious and political conformity"

(600-601). Godwin draws on Kant's opinion that we should always avoid lying, because it is our absolute obligation to tell the truth; but while in Kant's view a lie harms the other person, Godwin believes that a liar primarily harms himself (603).

Concealment of truth and consciously employed falsehood—attacked by both Wollstonecraft and Godwin but for different reasons—are central issues in *Pride and Prejudice*. Hiding and revealing secrets has an utmost importance in the development of the story, and makes a great impact on the fates of the characters. Such an important misunderstanding is caused by Darcy, who conceals Jane Bennet's presence in London from Bingley. Darcy says he has many reasons but first and foremost he is not sure about Jane's love for his friend. Darcy's doubt is caused again by concealment, namely, that Jane hides her own feelings from Bingley and others. Generally speaking, *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel of dissimulation, in which the concealment of truth causes the main conflicts. As the story unfolds, the secrets and lies are discovered, and the characters become aware that one should not always rely on their first impressions.

I

Wollstonecraft was interested mostly in the lives of upper-middle class women. She had experiences about the female gentility she criticized, as her family had connections with such families, and she even worked for genteel women. But the difference between Austen and Wollstonecraft is that while Wollstonecraft knew the genteel world as an outsider, Austen was a part of it, and she could observe the "rituals and ceremonies" of this class "as an insider, as a member and participant" (Roberts 157). Though at the time of writing her novels she was living in a relatively humble position, she was, indeed, born into an "atmosphere of respectability" (Roberts 157). She lived with her widowed mother and unmarried sister in a house where they were hosted by her brother, and she could get the best insight into genteel society when they visited her brother's family at his estate. All in all, Austen was in a better position than Wollstonecraft to observe "the finely nuanced social distinctions around her" (Copeland 115).

Austen's novel reveals that much depends on which social class someone belongs to and that people are not always like what they appear to be. A relevant character to demonstrate that is Mr. Collins, a caricature of the worldly clergyman, who turns out to be a sycophant and social climber: "His style, in conversation and in his letters, exposes him as a pretentious, hypocritical fool, who delights us by combining an extravagant sycophancy towards Lady Catherine with supreme self-importance" (Wilson 69). Collins thinks his task is to give moral lessons to young girls especially, and he reads from Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* for the Bennet girls while staying at Longbourn. Claudia L. Johnson cites Fordyce as saying that "'amiable reserve'" should be commended and "women's primary desire and duty is to please men, especially through the affectation of modesty [...]" (76). It is in a similar vein that after Lydia's elopement Collins advises Mr. Bennet "to throw off your unworthy child from your affection for ever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offence" (*PP* 282). This letter is that of a "Job's comforter," and it can be seen as a parody of the prodigal son's parable. On the surface, Collins

is giving consolation in hard times, but consolation disguises an expression of his *Schadenfreude* and the satisfaction felt over his not being involved in that shame.

Mr. Bennet's reply is very short, and he only writes back to Collins after Elizabeth confesses to him her feelings towards Darcy. The family problems having been solved, Mr. Bennet, supposedly, has no need to cover his judgment of Collins's character. He seems to write to Collins what he really thinks, asking him to "[c]onsole Lady Catherine as well as you can. But if I were you, I would stand by the nephew. He has more to give" (*PP* 362). Mr. Bennet, in general, is a character who appears to openly tell his opinion, especially when his intellectually shallow wife is concerned. In the case of Mr. Collins, however, he also chooses to employ dissimulation when he decides on not exposing the truth about Darcy settling Lydia's marriage. Though he is happy about marrying off three of his daughters, he might seem to be bearing in mind that Collins remains the lawful inheritor of the Bennet family estate.

At the beginning of the novel, there is another example for Mr. Bennet's dissimulation. After Collins's first visit, Mr. Bennet advises him to "[r]isk any thing rather than [Lady Catherine's] displeasure; and if you find it likely to be raised by your coming to us again, which I think exceedingly probable, stay quietly at home, and be satisfied that we shall take no offence" (*PP* 121). Of course, Mr. Bennet drops the hint that he does not wish Collins to visit them again. An apparently straightforward man, even Mr. Bennet is likely to employ indirect hints, which might also be seen as a form of dissimulation.

Though there are comparatively few examples of men concealing the truth from other men in *Pride and Prejudice*, these quite fundamentally influence the development of the story. Some of these lies are told by Mr. Darcy—a man apparently always telling his mind, even if he hurts others. Unlike Collins, he appears to be a stuffy, solemn, and proud man, but, like Collins, he believes that he is authorized to interfere with the private lives of other people. The first falsehood Darcy employs is aimed to separate Bingley from Miss Jane Bennet by assuring his friend about Jane's indifference towards him. At first, when Jane's feelings are not openly expressed, Darcy might reasonably distrust her love, but after Elizabeth gives him assurance about her sister's feelings, he knowingly conceals that information from Bingley. Darcy assumes some degree of responsibility when he confesses this to Elizabeth in a letter, but in his own opinion his actions are pardonable. Later, though, he does feel remorse for acting insincerely: "There is but one part of my conduct in the whole affair, on which I do not reflect with satisfaction, it is that I condescended to adopt the measures of art so far as to conceal from him your sister's being in town" (*PP* 194).

There is another key detail that Mr. Darcy hides from Bingley and that he later discloses to Elizabeth. Darcy wants to conceal his sister's, Miss Darcy's, meditated elopement with Wickham, because his future plan is to marry her off to Bingley. This plan and the assumption that Jane does not return Bingley's affections make Darcy decide on interfering. Carrying out his plan does not seem very difficult, as Bingley's nature is "unaffectedly modest' and he is passive and acted upon, without ever acting himself" (Wilson 66).

The last thing that Darcy keeps secret from the Bennet family, but especially from Elizabeth and Mr. Bennet, is his role in Lydia and Wickham's marriage. First, it is told to the Bennets that Mr. Gardiner paid off Wickham's debts and arranged the marriage, but Lydia lets out the secret that Darcy attended the wedding ceremony. Elizabeth writes to her aunt, requesting her to reveal the truth. Mrs. Gardiner admits that it was Mr. Darcy who

tried to find the couple and persuade Lydia to go back to her family. It was also Darcy who paid off Wickham's debts and arranged the marriage. Though the whole family is involved in this secret, it is Mr. Bennet who gets to know the truth last. He spends several days in London, trying to track down his daughter, and after a few days he returns home. Though he appears to take responsibility for what happened to Lydia, in actual fact he is ~~a~~ware of his limited capacity to face up to it properly" (Wilson 44). Darcy's chief reason to aid the Bennets is, of course, his love for Elizabeth. When Elizabeth confesses to her father that she too loves Darcy and is engaged to him, Mr. Bennet simply does not believe her; that's why she decides to disclose the truth about Darcy's part in Wickham and Lydia's marriage. Mr. Bennet's reaction is quite surprising: ~~"~~I shall offer to pay him to-morrow; he will rant and storm about his love for you, and there will be an end of the matter" (*PP* 357). The real Mr. Bennet is not the likable, amusing, and straightforward character he appears to be at first. He is far from being overwhelmed by a sense of guilt over Lydia's shame and is happy to avoid financial responsibility. His intended offer to pay Mr. Darcy would be insincere, because he knows he does not command the economic means to do so. Darcy would know that too, and his anticipated ~~"~~rant[ing] and storm[ing]" would be, in this context, just as disingenuous.

Clearly, dissimulation is not a problem occurring primarily among women, as Wollstonecraft suggests. On occasion, men also choose to conceal their real feelings and the real circumstances. The male characters examined above have all sorts of different reasons for not telling the truth: Collins tries to play the role of the charitable clergyman; Mr. Bennet wants to hide his opinion about Collins because his family's future depends on the latter; and Darcy thinks he is entitled to supervise his friend's love life. At this point, Godwin's view that dissimulation and insincerity are not a problem of gender but of class relations seems much more plausible. In the situations cited above, men employ falsehood and conceal the truth mainly because of social and economic differences: Collins uses his ecclesiastic authority to increase his social influence; Darcy wants to prevent Bingley's marriage partly because of the Bennets' relatively lower economic prestige and partly to find a moneyed husband for his sister; and Mr. Bennet is keen to maintain an appearance of social superiority without the matching financial background.

II

According to Edward Ahearn, we can speak about four leading social classes in Austen's period: the aristocracy (represented by Lady Catherine de Bourgh or Mr. Darcy); the gentry (including the Bennets); the ~~"~~pseudogentry" or the ~~"~~nonlanded," including lawyers, clergymen, and businessmen (such as Mr. Collins); and the commercial class—the Gardiners (399). In the eighteenth century, the position of women radically changed due to the expansion of capitalist industry. Women became isolated from public business and their role was confined to the private world of their home. The ~~"~~middling-sort" of society also wanted to take part in the cultural life of its social superior, where women had never worked. This share in gentry culture is called gentility (Irvine 7-8).

Pride and Prejudice gives an insight into this genteel female life. Young women are taught from conduct books and their favorite activities are attending balls and visiting

neighbors. The most appropriate examples for this kind of women are Charlotte Bingley, and Lydia and Kitty Bennet. However, from the example of the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, we can see that young women are not necessarily selfish or intellectually shallow.

Austen introduces Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst, who almost always spend time together, and are characterized as ―very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of being agreeable where they chose it; but proud and conceited" (*PP* 17). They are perfect examples of propertied women who enjoy ―claiming social superiority by laughing at deviations from strict propriety" (Meyer Spacks 73). But they are the kind of ladies who do not express their real opinion in public in order to keep the appearance of politeness. They rather choose dissimulation, as they do with Jane Bennet. During her stay at Netherfield because of her cold, they appear to be worried about her health—but in her presence only. Later, when Jane is staying in London, Miss Bingley only visits her because she does not want to seem ill-mannered. Just as she keeps her real opinion of the Bennets secret, she also conceals the fact that their family fortune comes from trade. Miss Bingley wants to marry Mr. Darcy, and it is only when she recognizes Elizabeth as her potential rival that she tries to express her superiority over Elizabeth in Darcy's presence, criticizing Elizabeth behind her back in an unseemly fashion.

An example for aristocratic propertied women is Lady Catherine. She is a caricature of the aristocratic class and is someone who ―likes to have the distinction of rank preserved" (*PP* 158). In one of the most notably characteristic episodes, she offers an opportunity for Elizabeth to practice the piano. Her proposal seems to be generous, but when she adds that in Mrs. Jenkinson's room ―she would be in nobody's way" (*PP* 169), it sounds not only sarcastic but is also indicative of the supposedly pronounced social gap between her and the Bennet family.

The main difference between Miss Bingley and Lady Catherine is that while the former chooses dissimulation to hide her real opinion, Lady Catherine behaves straightforwardly. She emphasizes this aspect several times, for example, when she tells Elizabeth: ―You know I always speak my mind" (*PP* 205). She can be described as a snob, ―incapable of perceiving human merit when class inferiority is present" (Mellor 62). She thinks that she can do anything just because she has money and influence. ―She upholds arranged marriages, superior breeding and unlimited snobbery" (Wilson 69). When she visits Elizabeth to make sure of Darcy's proposal, Lady Catherine continuously emphasizes her superiority, and she even tries to threaten her. But, with perhaps an ironic overtone, Elizabeth declares that ―I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your ladyship" (*PP* 335).

Elizabeth has a very special relationship with her sister Jane, but we cannot say that they are always sincere with each other. Jane has a simple nature, and, occasionally, she even seems to be naive. In Elizabeth's opinion, it is only Jane who can ―take the good of every body's character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad" (*PP* 17). That is why it is so hard for Jane to identify Miss Bingley's hidden intention to marry Darcy. Jane has a good opinion of her, and even after Miss Bingley's visit in London, she expresses her opinion very carefully: ―If I weren't afraid of judging harshly…" (*PP* 146). But when Jane begins to recognize Caroline Bingley's real nature, she writes in a letter to Elizabeth: ―there is a strong appearance of duplicity in all this" (*PP* 146).

However, in some cases Elizabeth chooses to hide information from Jane. She does that because she does not want Jane to prejudge Darcy, for instance, when she con-

ceals Darcy's interference into Jane and Bingley's relationship. Elizabeth explains the cause of her secrecy with the fact that ~~[s]~~he had been unwilling to mention Bingley; and the unsettled state of her own feelings had made her equally avoid the name of his friend" (*PP* 354).

There is one cardinal aspect of their lives that both girls keep secret from each other: their own feelings. Elizabeth confesses her love for Darcy only when they are engaged. After Bingley's move to London Jane also tries to conceal, and even suppress, her feelings toward him. She tries to persuade Elizabeth about the fact that she does not love him any more. Just as Elizabeth does not believe her, so does Jane not believe that her sister and Darcy are going to get married. Though they might conceal their true feelings from each other, they discuss almost everything else. They are both very worried about Lydia's elopement, for which they blame themselves, because in this case they concealed something together: they had known about Wickham's past, but they did not want to expose him.

Besides her sister Jane, Elizabeth has a friend who is very important to her: Charlotte Lucas. They both criticize genteel society, but there is one point in which they absolutely differ. Elizabeth could never imagine marrying a man whom she does not love. But Charlotte's opinion is that ~~it~~ is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life" (*PP* 24). She thinks that marriage is the ~~p~~leasantest preservative from want" and that it is the ~~o~~nly honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune" (*PP* 24). Although Elizabeth is familiar with Charlotte's views on marriage (which were, in all probability, universally shared by young genteel women and their social environment), she cannot believe that Charlotte is going to marry Collins. While Elizabeth is convinced that the clergyman is a caricature and a fool, she believes that Charlotte is a clever and intelligent woman, and so she must be conscious of a future where she ~~w~~ill have to suppress all these qualities that constitute her identity and hypocritically pretend affection and respect for a husband she despises" (Wilson 70).

The letters exchanged between Elizabeth and Charlotte after the marriage reveal that their relationship changed a lot. In this relationship, Charlotte is the one who conceals the truth from Elizabeth. In her letters, she mentions only those things which she can praise. She writes about their house, the visits to Lady Catherine at Rosings, and the garden, but she is silent on her marriage. Elizabeth is intelligent enough to find out its reason, and when she visits them along with Charlotte's family, she can see it with her own eyes. Charlotte pretends to be happy, but in fact she feels lonely. If she is content with her life, it is not because of her husband. She has got everything she ever wanted: independence, a stable financial situation, a nice house, but she did not find true love. Elizabeth notices this, and it gives her the feeling that Charlotte is not honest with her. Charlotte does not dare to admit that her opinion about marriage was not right. They continue to write to each other regularly, but their correspondence is not as unreserved as it was (*PP* 144).

Elizabeth spends a lot of time with the Gardiners, who visit the Bennets regularly and also get involved in settling Lydia's elopement. There is one circumstance, though, that they are not aware of. Mrs. Gardiner is especially interested in what kind of relationship exists between Elizabeth and Darcy: ~~E~~lizabeth was longing to know what Mrs. Gardiner thought of him, and Mrs. Gardiner would have been highly gratified by her niece's beginning the subject" (*PP* 259). But Elizabeth conceals information before the Gardiners, and so she must find an excuse when she does not wish to visit Pemberley. She says she is ~~ti~~red

of great houses" (*PP* 232), but the real reason is that she does not wish to meet Mr. Darcy.

The Gardiners have a large impact on the development of the story. Mr. Gardiner helps Mr. Bennet find Lydia in London, and he is said to be the person who arranged Lydia and Wickham's marriage. It is also kept secret that it was Darcy who saved Lydia from shame. While Lydia is chattering about their marriage, she reveals that Darcy, too, attended the wedding ceremony. So the secret is partly disclosed by Lydia, but it is Mrs. Gardiner who reveals the whole story and Darcy's role in it.

If Lydia cannot keep a secret, neither can Kitty. When the family is informed about Lydia's elopement, Kitty does not seem to be surprised, because she knew about the plans. The two girls are similar to their mother in not being always aware of what they are saying. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are occasions when Elizabeth decides to give a ~~li~~ttle falsehood" (*PP* 339) to her mother.

Mrs. Reynolds, the housekeeper at Pemberley, appears only for a short time but has an impact on the outcome of the story. She has known Darcy since his childhood, and she tells Elizabeth and the Gardiners the true version about Darcy and Wickham's past. It is, surely, a turning-point in the novel, because the old lady's credibility assures Elizabeth about Darcy's integrity and trustworthiness.

At first sight, Austen's opinion of dissimulation and insincerity among women can be properly described in Godwin's terms again. The female characters here presented employ falsehood for different reasons. Dissimulation is particularly characteristic of Caroline Bingley, who is similar to Mr. Collins in pretending to be someone else than she really is. She hides her real opinions in order to seem kind and well-behaved. She is often insincere, and criticizes people who are in a lower social position behind their backs. She does that to emphasize her—real or perceived—social superiority, providing a very appropriate example for Godwin's ideas. Similarly, for Lady Catherine, the preservation of rank is of utmost importance, and she might be similar to Darcy, who thinks that it is his privilege to always tell the truth, even when it hurts people. We cannot properly speak about dissimulation in Jane and Elizabeth Bennet's case, though. Although they hide information from each other, they do that because they want to prevent causing grief and disappointment to each other. In their situation, acts of concealing the truth are supposed to signify on the plot level how much they care about each other.

III

In this part I examine how and why women hide things from men in the novel. The first case to describe is the marriage between Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins. Through this marriage, Charlotte expects to obtain financial security, while Collins tries to fulfill Lady Catherine's instructions to find an appropriate wife. They both conceal not only their real feelings but also their motivations. ~~M~~Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her imaginary" (*PP* 120)—though this opinion is not revealed directly by either Elizabeth or Charlotte, they both know that it is a reality.

Collins proposes to Charlotte Lucas after having been rejected by Elizabeth. He simply cannot believe that Elizabeth does not want to marry him, although she expresses her opinion quite clearly: "I am perfectly serious in my refusal,—you could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make *you* so" (*PP* 105). At this point Elizabeth does not care about good manners any more. While Collins's proposal to Elizabeth and the way he takes her refusal illustrates his self-conceit, his surprise is also quite understandable in that historical and social context. Several young women would have accepted his offer because of his potentially good financial situation as the lawful inheritor of the Longbourne estate and a privileged servant of Lady Catherine. Charlotte does, indeed, choose to marry him in order to gain independence and ensure her future.

Charlotte's example gives an insight into the marriage market of the age. The main goal of young genteel women was to find a rich man to marry in order to occupy a respected social position and to live in financial security. Right at the beginning of the novel, the narrator states that "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (*PP* 5). With Austen's typical irony, the sentence refers to young girls who want a future husband with a large fortune, and characterizes the aims of young women at that time (Van Ghent 301). Austen delicately criticized female genteel life along with its rituals and ceremonies. Though she had been part of this world once, when she was older she was able to regard it from an outsider's perspective. Her social position lent her an advantage "in describing the perturbations of love. She sat apart on her rocky tower, and watched the poor souls struggling in the waves beneath" (Simpson 294).

Austen authentically presents the pressures of the "marriage market" of the eighteenth century, because she looks at it from the women's point of view. A great problem was that competition among young girls could be very ruthless. Once they reached a certain age, they had less chance for finding an appropriate man in the marriage market. If Austen could live, for better or worse, without a husband, Charlotte Lucas begins to scale down her expectations in order to get married, only because living with her family after a certain age was a shame for a girl (cf. Roberts 161-73). As Austen writes in a letter dated 13 March 1816 to her niece, Fanny Knight: "Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor, which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony" (*Letters* xxxiv).

The marriage market was a kind of market where there were also brokers. A very good example is Mrs. Bennet, who has five daughters, and whose main goal is to find a rich husband for each. She is a very resolved marriage broker, and she does not hesitate even to use falsehood to reach her goals. When Jane is ill and stays at Netherfield, Mrs. Bennet exaggerates Jane's bad condition so as to get her to stay there as long as possible. On the other hand, Collins's proposal to Elizabeth illustrates Mrs. Bennet's unsettled opinion. After Collins's letter to the Bennet family, she says how much she hates the clergyman. However, after recognizing that with marrying off one of her daughters the family could be rescued from losing their estate, she encourages Collins to propose to Elizabeth.

Mrs. Bennet does not hesitate to give hints in other situations, such as when she criticizes Darcy's self-importance and pride. She is speaking about William Lucas, whom she describes as a real gentleman, and at that point she comments, while looking at Darcy, on "those persons who fancy themselves very important and never open their mouth" (*PP*

43). Though she does not mention his name, it is absolutely clear that this statement is being asserted to criticize Darcy. Money, therefore, does not seem to be the single most important factor in evaluating a potential husband's worth. Darcy, who has a large fortune, is described by Mrs. Bennet as ~~t~~he proudest, most disagreeable man in the world" (*PP* 13), exactly because he refuses to recognize the Bennet girls as potential commodities for which he could—and *should*, in Mrs. Bennet's view—bid in the marriage market. At the end of the novel, her opinion changes about him. When Elizabeth speaks to her about their engagement, Darcy begins to appear a handsome and charming man in Mrs. Bennet's eyes. She recognizes that he is even richer than Bingley, and she immediately begins to speak about the luxury in which Elizabeth is going to live: ~~H~~ow rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have!" (*PP* 357)

Like her mother, Elizabeth also has a very negative opinion about Darcy in the first half of the novel. Partly, that is why she rejects his first proposal in very vehement terms: ~~I~~ had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry" (*PP* 188). She tells him plainly what she thinks of him: she describes him as a selfish, arrogant, and conceited man who never cares about other people's feelings.

Darcy falls in love with Elizabeth, because she is so different from the other girls. She is described as having ~~a~~ lively, playful disposition" (*PP* 14), and she represents Austen's ideas about genteel manners. Elizabeth holds ceremonies and rituals in low regard, and she pays no attention to the skills and accomplishments taught to young women. Instead, she spends time with reading to broaden her mind, and her view on the accomplished woman is the same as that of Darcy, who also emphasizes the importance of extensive reading.

The reader learns that Elizabeth's love for Darcy develops gradually. As the story gets complicated, it becomes clear to Elizabeth that she must keep her feelings secret. On the one hand, she is not quite sure about her own feelings, and on the other hand, she fears that after rejecting him, Darcy's love for her is fading away. She decides to conceal her feelings from everyone—even from her family, including Jane. That is why it is so painful for her when Mr. Bennet invites her to laugh with him over the letter in which Collins suggests that Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy might soon get married. Her father does not know her feelings, and he says things which hurt Elizabeth. However, she cannot disclose the truth to her father at this point, because she is not sure about Darcy's feelings. Therefore, she must laugh when she would rather cry: ~~H~~er father has most cruelly mortified her, by what he said of Mr. Darcy's indifference" (*PP* 344).

Elizabeth's opinion about Darcy changes for different reasons. One is that she comes to understand Wickham's real character once his past is revealed to her. At the beginning, Elizabeth seems to show much interest in Wickham, because of his „handsome looks, good physique and conversational charm to manipulate everyone he comes in contact with" (Wilson 71). As Wickham's story about his past gradually turns out to be a lie, Elizabeth begins to recognize Darcy's real nature. These two men are in sharp contrast with each other, because Darcy has ~~a~~ll the goodness," while Wickham has only ~~a~~ll the appearance of it" (*PP* 217). The reason why Elizabeth does not hesitate to drop Wickham hints at the fact that she already knows the truth about his past is because she feels deceived and aggrieved. When they meet at a ball, Wickham wants to ~~e~~ngage her on the old subject of

his grievances," but Elizabeth, knowing everything about his past, is ~~in~~ no humour to indulge him" (*PP* 226).

Elizabeth's opinion about Darcy changes in the opposite way when she begins to realize that he is not the proud and conceited man whom he seemed to be at first. In spite of her initial dislike of Darcy, she remains honest with him throughout. Later, when she discovers that her feelings toward him have changed, she reveals to him the ~~d~~readful news" (*PP* 263) about Lydia's elopement. She even confesses to Darcy that she knew about Wickham's past, but she concealed it from her family in order to avoid Wickham's humiliation. It is at this point that Elizabeth shares her most intimate secrets with Darcy. However, later on she regrets that ~~fr~~om the distress of the moment" (*PP* 294) she did not hide this information. Lydia and Wickham get married, and the ~~u~~nfavourable beginning" should have been concealed ~~fr~~om all those who were not immediately on the spot" (*PP* 295).

Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship provides an example for what Wollstonecraft thinks of the ideal marriage. In her *Vindication*, she argues that marriage should be based on ~~r~~ational love" rather than ~~er~~otic passion or sexual desire" (Mellor 34). In other words, mutual understanding and respect between husband and wife should be the key to a happy marriage. We can find two more marriages in *Pride and Prejudice* which fit this description: those between Jane and Bingley, and Mrs. and Mr. Gardiner. Other marriages are based on either passing fancy (as in the case of Wickham and Lydia, and even Mr. and Mrs. Bennet) or financial considerations (Charlotte Lucas and Collins). Based on how these relationships are presented, the reader is likely to draw the conclusion that these latter types of marriage were common in the eighteenth century, and, as a result, married women were ~~t~~ypically pathetic and often unpleasant, as if resentful and defensive over their situation but without understanding why" (Roberts 166).

Though Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage is based on love, mutual understanding, and intellectual equality, Austen emphasizes that a woman must show gratitude to her husband, due to her economically subordinated status. It has been observed that in Austen's opinion Elizabeth should be grateful to Darcy for rescuing her from ~~th~~e financial deprivations of spinsterhood" (Mellor 55). That can be the one of the reasons why she refrains from using her otherwise almost habitually ironic tone when she discusses Bingley's nature with Darcy: ~~E~~lizabeth longed to observe that Mr. Bingley had been a most delightful friend; so easily guided that his worth was invaluable: but she checked herself. She remembered that he had yet to learn to be laughed at; and it was rather too early to begin" (*PP* 351). Elizabeth and Darcy are never going to be equal in marriage, because, financially speaking, Elizabeth will always remain dependent on him. On the last page of the novel, the reader is informed that Elizabeth often refuses to send money to Lydia, or to help place Wickham at the court, since she only has a small personal income. This might also account for what Georgiana Darcy learns about marriage via Elizabeth's relationship with her brother: ~~B~~y Elizabeth's instructions she began to comprehend that a woman may take liberties with her husband, which a brother will not always allow in a sister more than ten years younger than himself" (*PP* 366-67). So, while Elizabeth, on occasion, might be free to ~~ta~~ke liberties" with him, Darcy remains the unequivocal master of Pemberley, and should he wish to do so, he ~~s~~till has the power not to allow either his sister or his wife to ‗take liberties' with him" (Mellor 57).

In conclusion, because of the general fact that eighteenth-century marriages as described in Austen's novel were based on the woman's sacrifice of self, women often had to hide their feelings and opinions: first, to remain a desirable commodity on the marriage market, and later, not to jeopardize their economically dependent position beside their husbands. In the novel, Elizabeth's character represents a—however slight—deviation from the norm. Unlike most other female characters in the novel, she usually tells the truth in her relationship with her father and her future husband, while, more typical of contemporary female behavior, at certain times she prefers to hide her feelings and opinions. And though her admittance of Lydia's elopement in front of Darcy strengthens their long-term relationship, it must be less out of the ordinary when Elizabeth's preliminary expression of her anxieties felt over the possibility of that moral catastrophe is not at all taken seriously by a father who is otherwise uncommonly tolerant and supportive towards his daughter. The novel seems to suggest that duplicity is the norm in male–female relationships: Mrs. Bennet, for example, not long after having expressed her hate toward Collins, encourages him to marry one of her daughters. In an opposite case, her negative opinion of Darcy immediately fades away as she realizes that her daughter is going to join him in a financially advantageous marriage. It is similar to what Charlotte Lucas does to Collins when she pretends to love him in order to gain social position, and she sacrifices her happiness in order to ensure her future financial security.

IV

In this part, I examine in what ways and to what extent men act insincerely with women, also paying attention to the influence of social status on men's behavior.

The falsehood which has the greatest impact on the development of the story is told by Wickham. His lies about his and Darcy's common past determine the way everyone thinks about them both. As his lies are gradually uncovered, Darcy's real character is revealed to Elizabeth. When Darcy first meets Elizabeth at the Meryton ball, he expresses his contempt for the company first, and then he insults her by telling Bingley that ~~–~~She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me" (*PP* 13). Elizabeth overhears this remark, which establishes her negative opinion about him. Despite the negative opinion expressed openly about Elizabeth, Darcy appears to begin to feel something for her at that point. When she and her sister leave Netherfield after Jane's recovery from cold, he admits that ~~–~~she attracted him more than he liked" (*PP* 59). But, first, he tries to suppress *and* hide his feelings because there is a social and financial gap between them. Things get more complicated with Wickham's appearance. He is described as a man who has ~~–~~all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address" (*PP* 71). He can easily manipulate everyone he comes into contact with—especially the young ladies, not excluding Elizabeth. When he gives her an account of his common past with Darcy, he refers to his feelings about Darcy as ~~–~~a sense of very great ill usage, and most painful regrets at his being what he is" (*PP* 77). It not only strengthens Elizabeth's negative opinion of Darcy, but she also begins to feel sorry for Wickham.

The next piece of information which increases Elizabeth's dislike of Darcy is revealed by Colonel Fitzwilliam. As they are walking together, Fitzwilliam begins to speak

about Darcy, who ~~c~~ongratulated himself on having lately saved a friend from the inconveniences of a most imprudent marriage" (*PP* 181). Though Fitzwilliam does not name names, it is absolutely clear for Elizabeth that he is speaking about Jane and Bingley. When she asks him about Darcy's reasons for his interference, Fitzwilliam tells her that ~~t~~here were some very strong objections against the lady" (*PP* 181). In the novel, Fitzwilliam's function is similar to that of Mrs. Reynolds, in that both appear for a short time in the story, although both have very important roles in its development. While Mrs. Reynolds intentionally ensures Elizabeth about Darcy's being a good person, Colonel Fitzwilliam unintentionally does the opposite. Though unwittingly, he reveals to her a secret which hurts both her pride and her feelings.

Not long after this episode, Darcy proposes to Elizabeth. He confesses to her that ~~i~~n vain have I 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" (*PP* 185). In Wilson's view, Darcy's proposal is ~~f~~lawed with misgivings he expresses about the sociopinional inferiority of her connections and by the honour he imagines he is conferring upon her" (35). Though his confession is meant to be honest, it insults Elizabeth's social pride, while the proposal itself is made at the worst time possible.

After being rejected, Darcy writes a letter to Elizabeth in which he uncovers the motives behind everything he has done. His letter is especially detailed on two subjects: on the one hand, he admits his interference with Bingley and Jane—for which he also describes his reasons—and on the other hand, he discloses what is supposed to be accepted, on the plot level, as the real story of his common past with Wickham. His first reason for interference was the social position of Jane's family. Second, he admits his assuring Bingley of Jane's indifference, because he thought that Jane showed his friend no ~~s~~ymptom of peculiar regard" (*PP* 192), and so he could easily persuade Bingley not to return to Hertfordshire. Third, he admits that he concealed from Bingley Jane's presence in London, of which he does not think with much satisfaction. Though he confesses everything he did to separate Jane and Bingley, he does not apologize. On the contrary, he argues that ~~p~~erhaps this concealment, this disguise, was beneath me.—It is done, however, and it was done for the best" (*PP* 194). It is the fact that he does not feel remorse which makes Elizabeth angry. At the same time, on re-reading the letter, Elizabeth must gradually recognize the truth behind what Darcy says about her family. Similarly, when she recalls Charlotte's opinion about Jane's modesty—that she should express her feelings more openly—she has to acknowledge that Darcy could fairly interpret Jane's modesty as indifference.

The other main topic in Darcy's letter concerns Wickham's past, and he refers to Colonel Fitzwilliam as someone who can confirm his words. In Susan Morgan's interpretation, Wickham's character was created to show Elizabeth's central moral weakness: she sees the world as a game, and she cannot imagine ~~t~~hat anything could be expected of her" (343). She is not presented to be as silly as Lydia or Kitty, and she believes Wickham only because ~~t~~here was truth in his looks" (*PP* 85). In other words, he is ~~a~~n embodiment of favourable but misleading impressions" (Wilson 70).

Darcy's letter is the novel's turning point for several reasons: the most important being, in the present context, that in the following episodes he and Elizabeth share their secrets with each other—at least to a degree. One example is when Darcy gives her an account of ~~M~~iss Darcy's meditated elopement" (*PP* 257). This information was carefully

kept secret, especially from Bingley. Although it is not explicitly phrased, Elizabeth is clever enough to recognize that Darcy left it undisclosed in front of his friend because he was planning to marry off his sister to Bingley. Though Darcy does not speak about it openly, this plan was, surely, an important motivation behind his attempt at separating Jane from Bingley.

If Darcy is ready to disclose, at least partially, his secret about his sister's past, he just as readily assures Elizabeth of his secrecy when her family is in trouble. Elizabeth reveals Lydia's elopement with Wickham to Darcy, which she later regrets. But the link between the two situations (that is, Wickham's person) is the safest guarantee of the mutual trust between Darcy and Elizabeth: in both situations Wickham acts as the seducer who aims to endanger a family's reputation. First, Darcy is shocked by this information, and he takes his leave almost immediately. Elizabeth misreads the—undisclosed—motives behind Darcy's sudden departure, and she does not learn until later that he leaves instantly in order to make quick arrangements to mend the matter, for which he is ready to take the blame—though not in public. When, later, Mrs. Gardiner relates Darcy's part in Wickham and Lydia's marriage to Elizabeth, she recognizes both the reason of his instant leave and his generosity of heart. Darcy wants to keep his intervention secret, but after Lydia's slip of tongue, Mrs. Gardiner cannot conceal this information from Elizabeth. When, at the end of the novel, Elizabeth and Darcy are walking together, he confesses that he helped her family because of her. He also admits that he disclosed the truth to Bingley about his interference into his and Jane's relationship. At this point he thinks that what he did was ~~a~~absurd and impertinent" (*PP* 351), and he seems to feel remorse for it.

According to Marilyn Butler, the two couples (Jane and Bingley, and Elizabeth and Darcy) are contrasted in how they think about the people around them. Both Darcy and Elizabeth are described as ~~s~~atirical," which means that ~~t~~hey tend consistently to adopt a low opinion of others" (324). In this, they are the opposites of Bingley and Jane, who ~~a~~re modest about themselves and charitable about others" (Butler 324). The same contrast exists between Bingley and Darcy, when they have different opinions about the people of Meryton, or when the arrogant Darcy is convinced about Elizabeth's love for him, while the modest Bingley is uncertain about Jane returning his feelings. Jane and Elizabeth can also be contrasted with each other: Elizabeth admires Jane for her capability to always think well of others, but in the individual cases she persists ~~i~~n her own characteristically astringent view" (Butler 325).

Though, in the narrator's intention, Elizabeth and Darcy are destined for a happy marriage, her father seems to be worried about the future because he knows that she could live happily only when she esteems her husband. If Mrs. Bennet's concerns stop at finding a husband for her daughters, Mr. Bennet is much more worried about their marital future—at least about that of Elizabeth. When he adds, ~~M~~y child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to respect your partner in life" (*PP* 356), he seems to be speaking about his own marriage. Surely, Mr. Bennet has come to the belief that marriage should be based on mutual respect, and the implied meaning of his warning is that instead of demanding Elizabeth's respect, Darcy must deserve it—this is exactly what happens at the end of the story, and Darcy grows into a ~~m~~odern feudal patriarch," where ~~p~~atriarchy depends on merit, not right" (Harris 12).

Another key episode in Elizabeth's life relates to Mr. Collins's marriage proposal. Although Elizabeth rejects him very vehemently and in unequivocal terms, Collins takes her response as a sign of feigned modesty and tells her it is ~~t~~the established custom of your sex to reject a man on the first proposal" (*PP* 105). Collins himself always feigns politeness and modesty in his social interactions: he often tells ladies compliments, and he chooses the words he uses with great care. He has been described as one who cannot make a distinction between those ~~d~~esires and ambitions that can be appropriately spoken of and those that are better left concealed" (Herrle 242). These ambitions and desires appear in his talk, and he even seems to be proud of them. At the same time, he ~~c~~annot even project the appearance of sympathy or compassion" (Herrle 242). This is the fundamental aspect in which he differs from Wickham. Both have the aim to make a good impression on everyone they come into contact with, but especially on women: but while Wickham easily deceives others with his self-confidence and with his appearance of goodness, Collins can make a good impression on practically no one because of his pretended politeness, which can be straightforwardly recognized as obsequious pretentiousness.

To conclude this part, I should say that the characters and episodes I investigated show that telling lies or keeping things secret are characteristic not only of women but also of men. The lies described in this chapter are told for different reasons, but social status has an important role in most of these cases. It seems, then, that it is not gender alone that affects honesty, and social gap is at least as important a factor in passing on and withholding information.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I tried to decide whether Austen goes along with Wollstonecraft's or Godwin's ideas on dissimulation and falsehood. It seems that the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* hide or change information for very different reasons. We can clearly establish, though, that dissimulation and insincerity are not characteristic of women only. Through the examples of Mr. Bennet, Collins, or Wickham we could see that men are not always what they appear and may not always mean what they say. Darcy, a seemingly honest gentleman, hides and alters information to separate his friend from a woman who stands in a lower position on the social ladder. It is absolutely similar to what Lady Catherine aims to carry out. Likewise, Miss Bingley looks down on Elizabeth and her family because of their inferior economic status; she represents in the novel the genteel woman who applies dissimulation in order to always appear polite and well-mannered. While, indisputably, Austen cannot be termed, in any sense, a Godwinist, she clearly shares some of Godwin's ideas on dissimulation and insincerity: socially and economically motivated dishonesty is characteristic of both sexes in *Pride and Prejudice*: both men and women tell lies and wish to appear to be someone else in order to preserve their superior position on the social ladder, while those on a lower rank also do not hesitate to be insincere in order to attain a higher position. At the same time, some of Wollstonecraft's ideas are also unmistakably visible in *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen thinks about ideal marriage and the role of women in society in much the same terms as Wollstonecraft and, more importantly, she criticizes the cult of ~~f~~emale chastity" as a powerful tool widely used in her age to diminish the degree and

influence of women's participation in public fields of life. However, Austen's ironic takes on false and true modesty—which may equally result in the deception of the self and the other—deserve a separate investigation.

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