**Austen’s Development of Collins and Darcy**

**Pride and Prejudice Chapters 10-14**

One of the delights of reading Austen is witnessing her remarkable skill at shaping characters into unique individuals through the most commonplace actions or events. In these chapters, for example, the development of Darcy and Mr. Collins' characters is of special interest. The personalities of both men are revealed through similar acts — letter writing, speaking, and reading — but while their activities are the same, the manner in which they engage in the activities varies with each man, thereby illustrating the differences in their personalities.

Before the advent of devices such as the telegraph or telephone, letter writing was a very important mode of communication, as demonstrated by the large number of letters and references to letters that occur in *Pride and Prejudice*. As Darcy and Bingley discuss, one's style of writing reflects that person's way of thinking. So it is natural for someone as impetuous and changeable as Bingley to write, as his sister describes, "in the most careless way imaginable. He leaves out half his words, and blots the rest."

Darcy's writing style is quite different, though. He states that he writes "rather slowly" and that his letters "are generally long." Miss Bingley comments that he writes evenly and Bingley declares that Darcy "does not write with ease. He studies too much for words of four syllables." These characteristics of Darcy's writing style serve to reinforce and expand what readers have already gathered about him: Darcy likes to think things through and is cautious when making choices or decisions, even when choosing the right word to write. Additionally, to whom he is writing to is as important as how he writes her. By writing a long, carefully worded letter to his sister, Georgiana, Darcy exhibits that he both cares for his sister and takes his responsibility for her seriously. These hints at an emotional attachment to his sister contradict Elizabeth's perception of him as cold and unfeeling. However, just as Austen's readers aren't able to read that letter, Elizabeth is not yet able to truly read Darcy.

Meanwhile, Mr. Collins also writes a letter that introduces himself not only to Mr. Bennet but to Austen's readers as well. The impression the letter gives is that the writer is a curious blend of arrogance and obsequiousness. Mr. Collins apologizes in one sentence for a breach between the families, and then brags about his patroness and his position as clergyman. He then begins apologizing again for potentially offending the Bennet daughters. Regardless of whether he is apologizing or bragging, Mr. Collins delivers his sentiments in extremely long and complex sentences. From this letter, Elizabeth can accurately assess him as a man who lacks sense.

Just as their style of writing reflects different aspects of Darcy and Mr. Collins' characters, so does the two men's style of speaking. Darcy, who is slow to write and careful of his word choice, is slow to speak and speaks judiciously, so that no word is frivolous. However, it is interesting to note how quickly this reticent man can be provoked into a fast-paced debate by Elizabeth. When Miss Bingley tries to get his attention while he is writing the letter to Georgiana, he responds with curt statements or with silence. However, as soon as Elizabeth makes a comment, Darcy begins responding at length, easily matching her intelligence and wit. His reaction to Elizabeth indicates how much he enjoys challenging and being challenged by her sharp mind.

Mr. Collins' speaking style, on the other hand, is as rambling as Darcy's is reserved. Like his letter, Mr. Collins communicates in long, convoluted sentences that range from unending apologies for some imagined slight to imperious moralizing for some perceived lapse into impropriety. Whereas Darcy usually requires someone to draw him into a conversation, Mr. Collins needs no such invitation. In fact, he generally delivers dense monologues on his or Lady Catherine De Bourgh's opinions with little concern for what others may think or want to say. It appears that the only person Mr. Collins finds more interesting to listen to than himself is Lady Catherine.

Austen rounds out the revelations of Darcy and Mr. Collins' characters in these chapters by showing the men's different approaches to reading. Darcy's extensive library at Pemberley is described earlier in the novel, indicating that Darcy and his family enjoy books and reading. Also, Miss Bingley notes that Darcy prefers the solitary activity of reading over the social activity of cards. As in the case of his writing to his sister, Miss Bingley finds it nearly impossible to distract Darcy from his book. She is finally able to gain his attention when she asks Elizabeth to join her in walking around the room. Just as Darcy is drawn out of his reticence when speaking with Elizabeth, he is also drawn out of his reading by her as he "unconsciously closed his book" to observe her moving around the room.

Mr. Collins, on the other hand, seems to have an entirely different relationship with books. His rejection of novels and consequent limiting of his exposure to books contrasts Darcy's ever-growing library. Additionally, while Darcy reads silently, Mr. Collins readily agrees to read aloud to the Bennets. Rather than selecting something that everyone will enjoy, Mr. Collins chooses a book of sermons and reads them "with very monotonous solemnity." His style of reading is just as imposing and ridiculous as his style of speaking or writing. Similarly, Darcy's style of reading reflects his reserved and aloof mannerisms.

Kalil, Marie. *CliffsNotes on Pride and Prejudice.* 11 Sep 2012  
 <http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study\_guide/literature/id-147.html>.

**Character Sketch Chart**

Using a character and quotes from *Pride and Prejudice*, fill in the chart. Then write a 500-750 word character sketch (in the style of the Collins/Darcy piece) about the character you chose. YOU MAY NOT USE COLLINS OR DARCY.

What the Character Does

What the Character Says

What Others Say About the Character

What the Character Thinks