

## On Pride and Prejudice

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I will begin with summarizing the novel.

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet live with their five daughters at Longbourn village in Hertfordshire. Mrs. Bennet, who is very eager to marry her daughters, hears that Mr. Bingley, a young man of property, is to rent a nearby Netherfield Park and live there. Her heart bounces with expectation that he may be a candidate for one of her daughters.

Bingley comes to the village, and in no time the ball for welcoming him is held. All young daughters of the village attend it. Bingley has come with a party of five people from London—his two sisters, the husband of the eldest, and a young gentleman called Darcy. Bingley himself is such a good, pleasant gentleman that he is admired by all the attendants at the ball. Jane, the eldest daughter of the Bennets, attracts Bingley and is herself attracted to him as her mother expected. However, the second daughter Elizabeth who is overflowing with wit, is made light of by his friend, Darcy, which repels her. Darcy is very proud. His property and social position are much higher than Bingley's. Because he has been educated aristocratically from the time of his childhood at Pemberley, the Darcies' residence, he still cannot get rid of his haughty attitude.

A little while after the ball, a letter comes to Jane from Miss Bingley, saying that they want her to come to Netherfield. Jane wants to borrow her father's carriage, but after all she goes to Netherfield on horseback, on her mother's advice. Soon after she starts, it begins to rain. The rain does not seem to stop at night, so Jane stays at the house of Bingley as her mother hoped.

Next morning, a messenger comes from Jane with a letter. It says that she has caught cold because she got wet the day before, and she has a sore throat and headache. Elizabeth, worried about her sister, starts to visit her. She walks through the muddy fields, because unfortunately the carriage is occupied, Elizabeth is to stay there also to nurse her sister because her fever does not leave, though Jane thinks it of no matter. First, Elizabeth is delighted to know that all of them are very kind to Jane. But, persons other than Bingley, especially women, are sympathetic only on the surface. Moreover, Elizabeth can see that they are sneering at her bravery to have come through the mud in the rain. Therefore her natural stubbornness begins to raise its head. Only proud Darcy is surprised at her single-mindedness and feels refreshed by her warm heart and witty mind.

A young rector called Collins, who is the inheritor of Bennet's property by

entail, visits the village of Longbourn. He is a frivolous man and thinks vainly that, if he gave a favor of receiving one of the Bennet daughters as his wife, the bereaved family would be safe after Mr. Bennet died. Collins, seeing that the eldest daughter, Jane, will marry Bingley, proposes brazenly to Elizabeth in the room where they are alone. Elizabeth, who despises his frivolity from the first, refuses the patronizing offer.

After that, she gets acquainted with an officer, called Wickham. He looks a pleasant and good-natured person, and Elizabeth is attracted by his suave attitudes. On some opportunity, she hears from him that formerly Darcy and he were on good terms, but lately he has become unhappy because of Darcy's cruel treatment of him. And when she hears further of Darcy's proud and jealous character, she strengthens her antipathy to Darcy still more. Even when Bingley, who is thought to have loved Jane, returns suddenly to London, Elizabeth suspects that Darcy has separated Bingley from Jane. Actually, it was the act of Darcy that separated Bingley and Jane. Darcy was disgusted with the vulgarity of Mrs. Bennet and her younger daughters at the party held by Bingley in Netherfield. Therefore he advised Bingley to leave Netherfield and they all returned to London.

Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's best friend, soon gets married to Collins who was refused by Elizabeth. Charlotte has her own opinion about marriage, and does not mind having Collins as her husband. Elizabeth is shocked by the marriage. After a while, Elizabeth is asked to visit their new house at Hunsford in Kent. She is reluctant, but she goes there feeling obliged to do so. And there she meets Darcy once again. He is again enchanted by her free and witty mind, also by her black eyes that twinkle bright. Therefore he proposes to her, though with introductory words that his family and hers are unproportionally different. It is too sudden and, at first, it disconcerts her. But she refuses his offer flatly because she has antipathy and prejudice against him. Also he hindered the marriage of Jane and Bingley.

However, the letter that dispels her prejudice comes to her from Darcy next morning. She is informed and convinced that Wickham, to whom she has been much attracted, is actually an outrageous prodigal. She is discouraged. For the first time, she notices that she has been the captive of ignorance and prejudice, because she was bewitched by the handsome and kind appearance of Wickham and outraged by the proud attitudes of Darcy at the ball of their first meeting.

After that, Elizabeth travels to the North of England with her uncle and aunt. On their way, they visit Pemberley, Darcy's place in Derbyshire. Darcy treats them very gently and courteously, and shows them the beautiful Pemberley Manor House. Elizabeth feels very thankful for this attitude of Darcy's. Immediately after that, she is informed that Lydia, her youngest sister, has eloped with Wickham and the family is in a predicament. Darcy immediately goes and seeks out the fugitives. He provides suitably for and marries them. By such an act of his, Elizabeth knows

again his affection for her.

Jane and Bingley who have endured their separation with patience are to be united again. Elizabeth and Darcy have at last come to comprehend the beautiful qualities of each other. These two couples are soon to be married happily, blessed by surrounding people though Darcy's aunt, Lady Catherine, is against it.

The novel describes with laughter and irony about the opposite consciousnesses between the middle class to which Elizabeth belongs and the large landed class to which Darcy belongs. It is not necessary to become obsequious, even if you are not so rich. It is natural that you should have conviction and pride about the way of your life. Also, if you are of a noble family, it is not right that you have a haughty pride. The novel describes the difficulties of human relations in which even reasonable Elizabeth could not rightly judge when she had prejudice. And such is a truth in all times. Now I will think about the words "pride" and "prejudice" which are the title of the novel through Elizabeth and Darcy, the heroine and the hero of the novel.

#### "Prejudice"

What is prejudice? If you consult the dictionary, it says "biased view or thought". Well, when is the prejudice born? It is said that the novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, was at first titled "First Impression".<sup>1</sup> We can say with confidence that anyone has the same experience; one of whom you had a good impression at first is actually a bad person; on the contrary one for whom you had a bad impression is a good person after all. In other words, that is "prejudice" born from preoccupation. Also, prejudice can be born when you judge someone by some gossip or wrong information. In Elizabeth's case, she will be agonized to know that her prejudice has been directed at Darcy, her future husband.

Originally, Elizabeth has very keen power of observation. She has confidence in her own judgement of other characters. You can guess her confidence from the following words: "I did not know before," continued Bingley immediately, "that you were a studier of character. It must be an amusing study." "Yes; but intricate characters are most amusing. They have at least that advantage" (p.29).<sup>2</sup> But, when she receives the letter from Darcy and realizes all, "[s]he grew absolutely ashamed of herself. --Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (p.135).

The very beginning of Elizabeth's having prejudice against Darcy is when she hears her mother's and other people's bad information that "he was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world" (p.8). But the most decisive thing is that Elizabeth overhears what Darcy says to Bingley: "'She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me'" (p.9). Darcy has not said this deliberately in

order to let Elizabeth hear, so he does not have any idea that he has hurt her feelings. But that causes her antipathy. Any woman must feel bad if she overhears such words. In addition, there is the above mentioned reputation among the people. So she cannot look well at the inside of Darcy.

About that time Wickham, who is handsome and agreeable, appears. Elizabeth, who has her pride hurt by Darcy, is charmed by Wickham. We can well understand Elizabeth comes to have more and more aversion against Darcy, because she is given by Wickham decidedly bad information of Darcy whom she already thinks a disagreeable man. Moreover she never suspects that information because Wickham, to whom she feels attracted, has told her. One's impression is difficult to be changed if once established. In this way Elizabeth increases her distrust against Darcy and becomes blind about him.

How is Darcy, on the other hand? Kiyoto Shiotani states that the large-landed class's prejudice against the middle class comes from the sense of superiority in family, property, social position and so on.<sup>3</sup> Darcy is not an exception. He slights the middle class. But he becomes charmed by Elizabeth rapidly while she increases her antipathy against him. "[H]e began to find [her face] was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes" (p.16). He takes a fancy to Elizabeth because he is charmed by her. So he disregards disadvantageous factors of her family or relations and the differences in social position. According to the author of the *Nyumon* (Introduction) to *Jane Austen*, Darcy was not prejudiced against her. Moreover, Darcy was charmed by her human nature in spite of the minus factors of her family, relations and social position. After all, he looked at her without prejudice. It seems quite different with Elizabeth. For she longed, not apparently but in some inner part of her mind, to join the upper class and gazed enviously at the material rich.<sup>4</sup>

It may be difficult for one not to have prejudice against anyone. There are many cases when one judges others by the outward appearance. Human relations will go smoothly if one endeavours to see a person's heart and judge that person in one's heart.

#### "Pride"

What is pride? To give the definition of the word is very difficult. Because it has ambivalent meanings as you see when consulting an English-Japanese dictionary. *Unubore*, *kouman*, *hokori*, *jisonsin* and so on. You are given a bad impression if you hear *unubore* and *koman*. But a good impression if you hear *hokori* and *jisonsin*.

Mary, a young lover of literature, tells about pride as follows: "Pride ... is a very common failing, I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that it is very common indeed, that human nature is particularly prone to it, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the

score of some quality or other, real or imaginary. Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us” (p.14). In other words, pride is self-estimation. And that is Japanese *jisonsin*, *hokori* and *jifu*. Well, when is pride regarded as *unubore* or *kouman*? That is engendered when other people receive that critically. Even if you do not have that in your mind, you are regarded as *kouman* when other people judge that your behaviour is *kouman*.

In the novel, Darcy is just the example. He tells about vanity and pride as follows: “‘Yes, vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride—where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good regulation’” (p.39). Judging from his words, Darcy thinks that he does not have either vanity or *kouman* (arrogance). He thinks that the pride he has is *jisonsin* or *jifu*. But his pride is actually received as *kouman* by other people.

The title words of the novel, pride and prejudice, are generally accepted to suggest Darcy and Elizabeth. But it is possible to think reversely that Elizabeth, instead of Darcy, is suggested by the word, pride. It can be proved from her following words: “‘I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine’” (p.14). The pride of Elizabeth who has confidence in her way of life is *jifu*. So the title of the novel would be, if pride were applied to Elizabeth, *Jifu* (not *Kouman*) to *Henken* in Japanese.

According to Kiyoto Shiotani, Mark Shorer states that in England they may think “pride” in the title applies to Darcy, and “prejudice” to Elizabeth. But in America the interpretation may be reversed. That is, “pride” to Elizabeth, “prejudice” to Darcy. Darcy has prejudice against the lower class. Elizabeth is proud against his prejudice in spite of her poverty.<sup>5</sup> Such interpretation may be possible in a sense. But in English society upper class people have many factors to make them proud. For example, Charlotte speaks about Darcy, who belongs to the upper class, as follows: “‘His pride does not offend me so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, every thing in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a right to be proud’” (p.14). Briefly, in England, Darcy and pride are naturally united. But people who do not live in such a society may conceive that Elizabeth has pride.

Now, is it possible that a person who is thought *kouman* by other people can change his attitude? In the case of Darcy, he succeeds to change his attitude completely. Elizabeth visits Pemberley, Darcy’s place, when she is travelling with her uncle and aunt who keep a shop in London. When she meets Darcy there unexpectedly, she is astonished at his attitude quite different now from the former one. Darcy’s change is a result of his reflection that his behaviour has been selfish

and proud (*kouman*), though not in ‘principle.’ He reflects on himself modestly when he is blamed by Elizabeth.”<sup>6</sup> His change can be understood from his following words.

I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. As a child I was taught what was *right*, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately an only son, (for many years an only *child*) I was spoilt by my parents, who though good themselves, (my father particularly, all that was benevolent and amiable,) allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to *wish* at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest 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 (p.237).

His attitude and way of speaking has no haughtiness now, but contains even courteousness and kindness. He behaves politely to her uncle and aunt, the Gardiners, who were looked down by him because they are engaged in trade. Moreover, he offers even to introduce his sister. Thus, Darcy can look at himself, admit that he has been *kouman* and change his attitude because he has it pointed out by Elizabeth.

After all, whether human pride is *jifu* or *kouman* is in other people’s hands. Even if you think you have *jifu*, you are *kouman* after all, if other people judge that you are *kouman*. But still, the person who does not have pride of fearing the label of *koumon* is the meanest. To have pride means to admit and approve of oneself. Those who cannot accept themselves will not be able to accept other people. So it is wonderful that people have pride. Certainly, to search for the way of having acceptable pride is assigned to each of us.

#### Notes

1. Hiroko Naono, “3rd Chapter. On *Pride and Prejudice*” in *Jane Austen’s Novels* (Tokyo: Kaibunsha Shuppan, 1996), p.64.
2. Donald Gray, ed., “*Pride and Prejudice*”: *A Norton Critical Edition*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1933). All subsequent references are to this edition.
3. Kiyoto Shiotani, “5th Chapter. On *Pride and Prejudice*” in *Jane Austen Nyumon* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Shoten, 1997), p.148.

4. *Ibid.*, p.153.
5. Borrowed from *Ibid.*, pp.147-48. Mr. Shiotani refers to Mark Shorer's "Introduction" in *Pride and Prejudice*, Riverside editions (Houghton Mifflin, 1956), pp.xii-xiii.
6. Hiroko Naono, *Jane Austen's Novels*, p.76.

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