

*Pride and Prejudice* by Claire F. Martin – June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023

I love this doubling! Seven is a fantastic number for any potential producing organization, and it also presents you with all sorts of interesting challenges. In a story in which public life vs. private feelings can be a particularly bold thread, how would you like to create the sense of place in the “crowd scenes”, in ballrooms, in town, etc.? Or, are you most interested in crafting those private moments and intimate conversations that can sometimes get overshadowed by spectacle, both in the world of the story and in the crafting of adaptations of the story?

You’ve brilliantly managed to get the whole Bennet clan on different tracks; RIP Kitty.

How many essays has Mary written? Has anyone in the family actually read them? Mary can be read and written as a distempered, priggish character (much like Edmund Bertram), but who is she *really* in your version of this story?

A writing prompt for you: draft some more of Mary’s essay! What does that famous opening quote mean in her context? How might these words return at other moments in the play?

In *Pride and Prejudice* (whether by Austen or Martin), words are currency. Having the last word, or the cleverest word, or eliciting a particular word from someone else means you “win” in this world. Who has a voice in the Bennet family? Who is truly heard, and who shouts into the void? Who doesn’t even try to raise their voice? Conversely (and zooming out from just the Bennets) when is there power in silence? Can you win by not playing?

Is Lizzy “no fun” by any objective measure? Or just to Lydia?

How would each sister describe herself, in one or two words? How would each sister describe each other sister, in one or two words?

Does Lydia think that matrimony is only a prison for men? Is there part of Lydia that wishes she could live as freely as a man does, with her own sexual and financial freedom? What’s the difference, for Lydia or just in this play in general, between hoping The Man Of Your Dreams exists and hoping for a husband? Does she want to tame a rake, or be one herself?

How much does each sister know about romance, love, and sex? (And who knows the difference between those three things?) Who has had her first kiss? Who has been in love before, including “young love” or a first crush? Who has had a heartbreak or an unrequited longing?

Why do the girls feel the need to hide from their parents? Is it to hear their unvarnished conversation? Do the Bennet parents hide things from or try to protect their daughters from Too Much Information? How often do the girls eavesdrop, on their parents or otherwise? Have they ever heard (or may they ever hear in the course of the play) something they wish they didn’t? Again, words and information are currency in this story. How do you collect currency and how do you spend it?

In your version of this story, what is the nature of the Bennet parents’ romantic/marital relationship? Are they still into each other after all this time, but fight a bit of a merry war? Or is Mr. Bennet largely checked out, whilst Mrs. Bennet is too dialed in? How does the primary example of

marriage the girls have had influence their own romantic choices? What other marriages are being modeled for them?

It's really smart to get that "four grown daughters" line in to reassure audience members who know the story that they haven't missed anything in re Kitty.

Let's chat about "esquire" as a term – it indicates gentry-but-not-titled to a Regency/English audience, but I wonder if a modern American audience is going to think "lawyer"?

"An infestation of daughters" is so great.

"And I suppose a man trapped inside a house with five women deserves some kind of recreation." An interesting moment of potential internalized misogyny from Elizabeth—is she a "not like other girls" girl at the start of this play? How does her perception of women, the role of women, society's perception of women, both others and herself, evolve over the course of the story?

Lydia is our aspiring Restoration heroine – what's her stratagem? Another potential writing exercise: if Lydia were the protagonist of a Restoration pastiche, what would the outline of the play be? How might the language of the story, or the stage directions, or even the plot change if it were all about her?

Let's take it one step further: in what ways are each of the girls living out their own play? Even pretending I don't know anything about this play except exactly what's on the page, by virtue of the doubling you've provided we know we are seeing P&P (Elizabeth's Version) – maybe with a hint of Featuring Darcy (from the vault). But what might (Jane's Version), (Mary's Version), (Charlotte's Version) look like? If (Lydia's Version) is a Restoration comedy gone wrong when we realize who Wickham really is, what genre do the other characters live in?

Oh my gosh is Mary gay happy pride to Mary Bennet if so :)

To give this note more professionally, what role does queerness play in your adaptation of a book that doesn't (explicitly) have any? To give this note more existentially, in our period pieces or adaptations of pre-21<sup>st</sup> century base texts, how/do we fit in happy queerness? Unrequited queerness (Marriott from *Belinda*) or queerness existing outside a romantic context because there's no romance in the plot (Lilli in *Cottingley*) is pretty simply accomplished, but what do we do about Jane Austen?

"And that is why Jane Bennet shall live a charmed life, and I shall be single forever."

Does Elizabeth want to get married (at any given point in the play)? What does she see as her options in life – is running away to Paris actually an idea she'd pursue given the proper accomplice? Did Jane ever earnestly feel like that plan, or a more reasonable non-theft version of that plan, could be possible or desirable?

Also thinking about that same line, would Jane herself say she has a charmed life? What are the events or circumstances of Jane's life thus far that leads Elizabeth to believe her life is charmed?

Fleeing to Paris is a fanciful notion—is it an old joke of a long-gone childhood, or one last holdout from childhood? Who are the grown-ups in this household, *really*? What does it mean to be a grown-up in this play?

Caroline Bingley and her one word answers are sending me; what a great take on this character!

“Some women value discretion.”

“And some women prefer to dance.”

And neither of those women are wrong! One thing about Elizabeth Bennet is that she loves to make broad sweeping statements like “A man with nothing to say is by definition ineligible to spend his life with a woman.” How many different ways can this get her in trouble, or more specifically, prevent her from forming relationships with anyone who doesn’t agree with her right off the bat?

Has Caroline been to Germany? Is this a subtle flex of her wealth and status, following up a blatant flex about her superiority over a “country girl”? She clearly prizes her wealth and status – does she think Darcy prizes those things, too? What attracts her to him? He’s handsome, but anyone can be handsome. He’s rich, but so is everyone else she knows. What about *him* in particular makes him her target?

FITZY oh it’s just appalling I am delighted!

Caroline’s propriety—about names, at least—is situational. How far outside the bounds of her own ethical/moral/social standards is she willing to go to get what she wants?

Bless Bingley and Jane and the sunsets. He’s incredibly sweet, and through him we see a wildly different side of Darcy in a matter of moments – comfortable, easily conversant Darcy hides behind stoic, aloof Darcy.

Darcy might think he’s protecting Bingley (from himself if nothing else), but that’s a reciprocal relationship – much like many of my friends in my life, having an extrovert to go out in public with makes it so much easier to socialize. Does Darcy realize that he relies on Bingley for social grace and compassion as much as Bingley relies on him for prudence and thoughtfulness?

Does Darcy have any legitimate marital interest in Caroline? Is she a safe option because she’s the devil he knows? Is there any world where they have one of our 50% marriages – suitable but not soulmates? She gets money, status, and bragging rights; he gets a beautiful, socially acceptable woman he tolerates and further closeness with his best friend’s family.

Which of these characters would only ever marry for love? Who might marry for money, companionship, the possibility of children, to escape, to spite someone, any other reason?

Is Elizabeth sensitive about her appearance? This is a wonderful cohesive little moment – Charlotte beats anyone else to the punch by claiming plainness; Elizabeth bristles at being derided for her alleged lack of desirability.

What is the line between “acting like sisters” and legitimate cause for upset? Is reading Jane’s letter crossing a line? Is such a strong verbal insult as “intrusive brat” crossing a line? What is the point of no return for these sisters?

No notes on these parallels between our two main couples, nor any questions. It’s beautifully laid out!