



PORTSMOUTH ABBEY SCHOOL ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STYLE SHEET

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PREFACE

The following guide will prove immensely valuable to you as you write papers here at Portsmouth Abbey and beyond. Everything you could want to know about how to organize, compose, and arrange your essays you will find in these pages. I am indebted to Dr. Michael Bonin and Mrs. Corie McDermott-Fazzino, who put this guide together a decade ago. Their guidelines, I would argue, are even more important to consult today. Good writing is good thinking, and the world in 2020 no doubt needs clear, coherent thinkers who can express themselves well. Just about everything in the *Style Sheet* remains up-to-date, though there have been slight modifications to MLA style, now in its Eighth Edition. The best way to keep apprised of recent changes is to visit Purdue University's Online Writing Lab, found at owl.purdue.edu.

Writing is something that one learns primarily by doing. Just as learning to ride a bike involves many scrapes and bruises (to the ego as well as the body), learning to write involves trying and falling short of your goal. The one piece of advice I would add to this *Style Sheet* is this: Do not feel obliged to read this guide start to finish before you attempt to write a single word. If you try that you will most likely end up frozen, unable to write anything in fear of making a mistake. Instead, use this guide the way it was intended – as a resource to help you communicate your insights more effectively. After all, helping you uncover those insights is the reason we ask you to write in the first place.

Your teachers and I look forward to hearing what you have to say!

Michael St. Thomas
English Department Chair

September 2020

INTRODUCTION

This *Style Sheet* is a handbook for Portsmouth Abbey School students. It lays out the rules for writing and submitting analytical essays in all English Department courses. (The rules for creative writing, in-class essays, and other assignments will vary.) It is not a grammar or composition textbook, nor an exhaustive guide to the conventions of scholarly writing. The *Style Sheet* is intentionally brief, the better to serve as a quick and convenient guide. Here student writers can find out how an essay's title page should look; what basic typographical conventions to follow; the citation format they'll need most often. A standardized English Department essay format accustoms students to the MLA style, which they'll need to use in many of their college liberal-arts courses.

After briefly defining literary analysis for our purposes, we provide a decalogue of writing commandments, in the fond hope that such grave injunctions may improve student writing. We then include a primer on literary-analytical essays, with step-by-step advice on establishing a thesis, building an argument, offering textual evidence, and drawing a conclusion. The booklet ends with a sample Sixth Form Thesis, which serves as a model of strong literary analysis and proper essay format.

The *Style Sheet* is a how-to booklet. For a broad overview of the writing and speaking programs at Portsmouth Abbey, see the School's two companion booklets, *Writing at Portsmouth Abbey School* and *Public Speaking at Portsmouth Abbey School*.

Our thanks to our Headmaster, Dr. DeVecchi, for his support of this project, and especially Kathy Stark and Kathy Heydt, whose good-humor and artistic work results in so many beautiful School publications.

Michael R. Bonin
Head of English

Corie McDermott
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LITERARY ANALYSIS

Analysis breaks a complex topic or substance into smaller parts to gain a better understanding of it. Mathematicians, laboratory and social scientists, historians, and literary scholars all use analysis to interpret evidence. Analysis goes beyond simply recording or summarizing data. Analysis examines data:

- To show how parts contribute to a whole or how causes contribute to an effect.
- To explain the significance or implications not apparent to a superficial view.
- As evidence to support a thesis or draw a conclusion.

In teaching literature, the Portsmouth Abbey School English Department is guided by the Portsmouth Abbey School Mission Statement, which says that “We believe it is vitally important to introduce our students to the classics and the best of the Western intellectual tradition.” To do so, we draw upon the traditional sources of literary scholarship, such as the author’s biography, the cultural or political influence of the times, and the work’s place in literary history. When it comes to **literary analysis**, however, our chief interpretive method, whether in class discussion or for essay assignments, is **close reading**, an approach most identified with New Criticism. Close reading (or **explication**) concentrates upon the formal, internal aspects of the text, such as meter, diction, imagery, tone, syntax, and metaphor. Skillful close reading shows how these literary devices help to create and reinforce a work’s meaning.

Close readers must beware of interpretive traps or errors, especially the following three, as defined by the New Critics:

The Heresy of Paraphrase: assuming that the meaning of a literary work can be captured by a detailed summary or paraphrase. A convincing interpretation demands that we analyze the style and content together. For example, a poem’s tone and imagery may be at odds with the literal, paraphrasable sense of the lines. The meaning of the poem lurks in that conflict.

The Intentional Fallacy: equating the meaning of a poem or text with the author’s intentions. Do not assume that the text declares the author’s own beliefs or opinions. Authors freely create poems, plays, stories, or novels containing perspectives they may or may not profess themselves. Careful close readers ascribe evident opinions to the characters, narrators, or to the work of literature itself, not to the author. Hamlet feels suicidal; we do not know whether Shakespeare ever did. Nabokov’s narrator in *Lolita* is a pedophile; that doesn’t mean Nabokov was, too.

The Affective Fallacy: confusing the meaning of a text with how it makes the reader feel. One reader’s emotional response to a text may differ drastically from another reader’s. Close reading relies upon reasoned argument based upon textual evidence rather than subjective personal feelings.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF LITERARY ANALYSIS

- I. **Write with conviction.** Unless you care about your subject, no one else will. Readers respond to a writer's own urgency, to a keen note of interest or commitment to an idea. This, more than anything, brings words to life on the page.
- II. **Write an argument.** In literary analysis you must make your case to the reader. Your thesis statement is the case you intend to prove. That thesis and every subsequent paragraph's topic sentence should be specific, debatable assertions about the text you are analyzing. Support your assertions with textual evidence. Write to convince.
- III. **Pay close attention to words.** The reader's royal road to a work's meaning and to insightful literary analysis is strenuous attention to the words on the page. Read with these questions in mind from line to line: "How is this author using words? Why this word rather than another? What is the verbal or rhetorical effect? How do these words reveal, deepen, or complicate the theme?"
- IV. **Always cite your sources.** Quotations or references to specific moments in the text, and *any* words or ideas taken from another source, always require accurate, complete citation. Never risk plagiarism; when in doubt, cite. True scholars always do so, and integrity demands it.
- V. **Use the present tense.** Even though you read the novel yesterday, literary characters and events exist in a permanent present. Always use the present tense to discuss a literary work: Holden Caulfield *lives* (not *lived*) in Manhattan; Beowulf *dies* (not *died*) in battle with the dragon.
- VI. **Use the active voice.** The active voice usually saves words and invigorates your prose. The passive voice has its place, but can become a bad habit.
- VII. **Avoid the first person.** Your essay will necessarily be comprised of your own thoughts, therefore the phrase "I think" is redundant. State your assertions without resorting to "I."
- VIII. **Avoid clichés.** Lazy writers rely upon worn-out or stale phrases, which make their ideas sound dull. Pay close attention to your *own* words, too.
- IX. **Avoid slang and contractions.** By convention academic writing demands a certain degree of formality (*not* stuffiness) from the writer. Slang and contractions undermine that formality; reserve them for occasions when you wish to adopt a deliberately informal tone. Your essay should have voice (that style which makes it sound like you), but you are not texting or tweeting your friends.
- X. **Proofread.** Grammatical errors, typos, misspellings, and formatting mistakes irritate the reader and undermine confidence in your entire essay. Careless writing and editing suggests careless thinking and tempts the reader to dismiss your work altogether.

ESSAY FORMAT

“**MLA style**” is the standard format for English academic papers on the high school and college level and for professional scholarly articles in many humanistic disciplines. Follow these rules for all analytical essays written for Portsmouth Abbey English classes, unless your teacher directs you otherwise.

- Type your paper on a computer and print it out on standard, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper.
- Double-space the text of your paper, and use a legible font (e.g. Times New Roman). The font size should be 12 point.
- Leave only one space after periods or other punctuation marks.
- Set the margins of your document to one inch on all sides.
- Indent the first line of paragraphs one half-inch from the left margin. MLA recommends that you use the Tab key as opposed to pushing the Space Bar five times.
- Create a header that numbers all pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin.
- Use italics throughout your essay for the titles of longer works and, only when absolutely necessary, providing emphasis.
- If you have any endnotes, include them on a separate page before your **Works Cited** page. Entitle the section **Notes** (centered, unformatted).

Formatting the First Page of Your Paper

- Do not make a title page for your paper unless specifically requested.
- In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, list your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date. Again, be sure to use double-spaced text.
- Double space again and center the title. Do not underline, italicize, or place your title in quotation marks; write the title in Title Case (standard capitalization), not in all capital letters.
- Use quotation marks and/or italics when referring to other works in your title, just as you would in your text: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as Morality Play; Human Weariness in "After Apple Picking."
- Double space between the title and the first line of the text.
- Create a header in the upper right-hand corner that includes your last name, followed by a space with a page number; number all pages consecutively with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.), one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin.

Source: “MLA Formatting and Style Guide.” OWL: *Purdue Online Writing Lab*. 2010. Web. <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>>

The *Sample Sixth Form Thesis* in the Appendix of this booklet illustrates these MLA conventions.

THE ANALYTICAL ESSAY STEP BY STEP

I. The Title

Compose your title last, after writing the essay, when you are sure of your topic and thesis. Your title should **inform** and **interest** the reader.

Inform: Your title should state the subject and focus of the essay to a general reader who might be browsing in an essay collection or bibliography.

Interest: As you compose your title, consider including a linguistic twist, paradox, sound pattern, or striking phrase taken from the work you are analyzing (the aptness of which phrase the reader comes gradually to see).

You can combine the interesting and informing functions in a single title or split them into title and subtitle. The interesting element shouldn't be too cute; the informing element shouldn't go so far as to state a thesis. Here are some good examples:

- Form and Formality in *Romeo and Juliet*
- Dagger of the Mind: The English Epigram in the Early Seventeenth Century
- "Taming a Seahorse:" Rhetorical Domination in Browning's "My Last Duchess"
- Inferior and Free: The Power and Poetry of Sacrifice in *Paradise Lost*

Put the title of any literary work long enough to be published alone (e.g. novels, plays, epic poems) in italics: *A Tale of Two Cities*. Shorter works or parts of longer works (e.g. short stories, poems, essays) are enclosed in quotation marks: "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Observe this convention throughout your essay.

II. The Introduction

Your introduction should quickly engage the reader's interest and orient the reader. What information about your text and topic will the reader need in order to follow your argument? Set up your argument by briefly establishing such things as the work's title and author, and the specific characters, scenes, passages, literary devices, themes, or issues you will analyze. Don't spend a lot of time or space summarizing plot; presume you are writing for a reader already familiar with the work. The following example orients the reader and sets the stage for the thesis statement:

Taken together, Shakespeare's four major history plays, *Richard II*, *1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*, and *Henry V* constitute an epic, *The Henriad*. Obviously these four plays are not an epic in the usual sense – there is no evidence Shakespeare planned them as a unit – but they do have remarkable coherence and they possess that quality which in our time we take to be the chief characteristic of epic. (Kernan 245)

III. The Thesis Statement

The thesis is your main insight or idea about the text, and the main proposition which your essay goes on to demonstrate. It should be true but arguable – not obviously or patently true, but one alternative among several. It should govern the entire essay (not fade in and out of the discussion). The thesis is the interpretive case you intend to make. A thesis is **not**:

- A topic: “Imagery in *Hamlet*”
- An observation: “Hemingway uses short sentences.”
- A generalization: “Down through the ages many authors have described romantic love in different ways.”

A thesis takes a stand. It declares *how* the author uses specific ideas, language or literary devices to create meaning in the literary work. For example:

In *Henry IV, Part 1*, only Prince Hal inhabits both the court world of the high plot and the tavern world of the subplot. Shakespeare makes this “dual citizenship” the crucial trait of kingship: a deliberately ambiguous, even deceptive, identity which allows a ruler to be all things to all men.

T.S. Eliot composes “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” from fragments – broken lines of blank verse, images of body parts, detached allusions, random voices – in order to portray modernity’s disintegration, personified in one incoherent sufferer.

In *The Age of Innocence*, houses are never simply buildings. Edith Wharton makes each house – its architecture, interior decoration and atmosphere – characterize its owner and reinforce the meaning of the scenes which take place within its confines. These walls *can* speak, along with these windows, paintings, flower arrangements and bookcases.

As these examples demonstrate, your thesis should state three things: **What, How, and Why**.

- **What:** an interpretive claim or analytical insight.
- **How:** the literary devices (themes, motifs, symbols, diction patterns, characters, etc.) which reveal or reinforce your claim or insight.
- **Why:** the significance of your idea for understanding the literary work. Your answer to the question “So what?”

IV. The Argument

After stating your thesis, your essay should then proceed in organized paragraphs to build a supporting argument. Each body paragraph should include:

- A **transition** from the previous paragraph.
- A **topic sentence** which states the paragraph’s controlling idea.
- **Textual evidence** in support of the paragraph’s controlling idea.
- **Analysis** or explanation of that evidence.

Your argument should be organized and easy for the reader to follow. **Transition sentences** serve as road signs, letting the reader know where the argument stands and where it is going. Transitions need to be clear and helpful because a good argument should *develop* from paragraph to paragraph, exploring and complicating the interpretation, not simply reiterating the thesis (“Macbeth is ambitious: he’s ambitious *here*; and he’s ambitious *here*; and he’s ambitious *here*, too; thus, Macbeth is ambitious”).

The **topic sentence** is a miniature thesis statement for the paragraph. It should state the major point or argument that this paragraph will make. It should substantiate, support, or elaborate upon the essay’s overarching thesis, and set up the evidence and analysis which follows in the paragraph.

V. Textual Evidence

The purpose of an analytical essay is not simply to *state* your reading of a work, but to *persuade* your audience that your reading is valid. You can only do this by *showing* how specific details in the text lead to your insights. What is freely asserted is freely denied: without textual evidence, your interpretive statements cannot earn the reader’s assent. Here are three crucial “rules of evidence” for literary analysis:

- Provide specific, pertinent details, examples, instances, or quotations to support your topic sentence and thesis.
- Quotations must be *exact*, not roughly accurate. Proofread; double-check; worry about it.
- Plot summary must be faithful to the text, not shaded to suit your point.

Citing Textual Evidence

The **MLA style** dictates how you present quotations in the body of your paper, and how you cite those quotations. There are too many possible citation forms to cover briefly, so you should always rely upon the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or the many websites that cover the MLA style.

The MLA style uses an **author-page citation method**. This means that 1) the author's last name and the page number(s) from which the quotation or paraphrase is taken must appear **in the text of your essay**, and 2) a complete reference must appear on your **Works Cited** page. The author's name may appear either in the sentence which introduces the quotation, or **in parentheses** following the quotation or paraphrase. The page number(s) should always appear in the parentheses. The parenthetical citation format will depend upon the literary work you are quoting. Here are three examples you are likely to use in Portsmouth Abbey English classes:

- Novel (author’s Last name, page no.): (Austen 45)
- Shakespeare (Last name, Act no.scene no.line no.’s): (Shakespeare 1.3.24-39)
- Epic poem (Last name, Book no.line no.’s): (Homer 5.7-13)

In-Text Quotations. Shorter quotations (no more than **four typed lines of prose** or **three lines of poetry**) should remain part of the essay’s paragraph. These are called **in-text quotations**. For example:

The opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*, “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife,” establishes the narrator’s characteristic note of confident irony (Austen 3).

As you see above, in-text quotations are cited in parentheses **before** the period at the end of the sentence.

If you are quoting from a poem or dramatic verse (such as Shakespeare’s plays), **use slashes to indicate line breaks**. For example, if you were analyzing Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 71,” in-text quoted lines would appear as follows:

It would be hard to find more a more doleful-sounding sentiment than “No longer mourn for me when I am dead,/Than you shall hear the surly, sullen bell/ Give warning to the world that I am fled” (1-2).

Note that when you quote **poetry** the parenthetical note cites **line numbers**, not pages.

Block Quotations. If the quotation is **longer than four typed lines of prose** or **more than three lines of poetry** it must be set off in a **block quotation**. Here are two examples:

Note that this ironic narrator regards marriage as a competitive and financial enterprise, and that Mrs. Bennet, in the novel’s first spoken line, uses real estate to introduce a new suitor:

However little know the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some or other of their daughters.

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” said his lady to him one day, “have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?” (Austen 3)

Frost frequently lulls the reader into inattention through repetition and simple rhymes, as he does at the end of “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening:”

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep. (13-16)

Here, the soothingly quiet lines convey the speaker’s drowsiness and muffle the poem’s suggestion of death and annihilation.

Block quotations, as you can see, should stand apart from your paragraph, and must be **indented**. The citation appears in parentheses **after** the period at the end of the quotation.

If you are quoting **dialogue from a play**, your quotation must **appear as it does in the text** – that is, retaining the original lineation:

When Lear emerges from his madness, he is confused and suspicious:

LEAR

Am I in France?

KENT

In your own kingdom, sir.

LEAR

Do not abuse me. (4.6.75-76)

Integrating quotations. You should not simply jam quotations into your text. There should be a smooth transition, not an abrupt shift, from your own words to the quotation. A clear **signal phrase** should guide the reader into the quotation. This can be done in several ways.

- Signal phrase:

According to Vendler, “The speaker of Shakespeare’s sonnets scorns the consolations of Christianity” (25).

Lear admits he is “mainly ignorant/What place this is” (4.6.64-65).

- Signal phrase with colon:

Iago, incapable of feeling or understanding love, instead sees all human relationships as cash transactions, hence his repeated advice to the love-struck Roderigo: “Put money in thy purse” (1.3.382).

- Signal phrase within the quotation:

“Thou, Nature, art my goddess,” Edmund declares, as he vows, “To thy law/My services are bound” (1.2.1-2).

VI. Analysis

In each of your essay’s body paragraphs the topic sentence makes an assertion and the textual evidence supports that assertion. The real business of the paragraph, however, is **analysis**. You should reflect upon the idea you have demonstrated and respond to the reader’s constant but unspoken question: “So what?” This analysis can take many forms, including the following:

- Explain the meaning or implications of the textual evidence: “‘Nature’ can here only mean Tennyson’s ‘nature, red in tooth and claw,’ unmitigated by any human kindness.”
- Raise an issue or complication: “Yet Milton’s description of the unfallen Eve includes repeated references to her *sinful* nature.”
- Ask or answer a question: “Why would the Duke’s language shift from prose to verse in the middle of this speech?”

- Define your terms: “Isabella should also be regarded as an ‘authority figure’ because she often sermonizes other characters in the play; she presumes her own *moral* authority.”
- Consider or anticipate a counterargument: “On the other hand, these lines may be read innocently, without any suggestion of impending doom.”
- Offer a qualification: “Despite all these references to Purgatory, *Hamlet* does not posit a Catholic afterlife; the textual evidence is contradictory.”

VII. The Conclusion

The conclusion should echo (**not** baldly repeat) your essay’s thesis statement, bringing the reader full circle after you have finished making your case. It may synthesize your argument’s major ideas, but “tying it all together” should not entail a tedious and needless summary of the essay. It may also leave the reader with something to consider:

- A striking phrase or quotation which captures the significance of your major insight.
- A provocative question or issue raised by your argument.
- A broad implication for understanding other literary works or even the human condition.

Here are three excellent conclusions. The first and simplest neatly suggests that the essay’s thesis (how Shakespeare’s style develops from the beginning to the end of his 154 *Sonnets*) may serve as a way of understanding the entire arc of Shakespeare’s career as a dramatist:

[The *Sonnets*] brought Shakespeare towards a new relationship with his medium, the language, and a new use of it; that use remains, in essentials, permanent – the method of his maturity. The *Sonnets* are a sort of embryo, in which the essential evolution of the whole of Shakespeare is carried out in miniature. (Crutwell 140)

The second concludes its discussion of *Moby Dick*’s genre by asserting something about the nature of literature itself:

The great thing about fiction, which is simply the telling of a story in written words, is that it is fiction. That it is “made up” is not its weakness but, as with all art, its greatest strength. In the successful work of fiction certain kinds of possibilities, attitudes, people, acts, situations, necessities, for the first and last time exist. They exist only through form. So it is with *Moby Dick* – Ishmael’s vast symbolic prose-poem in a free organic form. From *olim erat* [“once upon a time”] to *finis* is all the space and time there is. (Bezanson 657)

The third declares why *Julius Caesar* will always speak to us. Literary analysis need not be dry; the writing here is urgent and compelling:

In this light, we can see readily enough why it is that Shakespeare gave Julius Caesar that double character. The human Caesar who has human ailments and is a human friend is the Caesar that can be killed. The marmoreal Caesar, the everlasting Big Brother – the Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, Franco, Peron, Stalin, Kruschev, to mention only a handful of his more recent incarnations – that Caesar is the one who must repeatedly be killed but never dies, because he is in you, and you, and me. Every classroom is a Rome, and there is no reason for any pupil, when he studies *Julius Caesar*, to imagine that this is ancient history. (Mack 301)

VIII. Works Cited Page

All the works cited parenthetically in your essay should appear on a **Works Cited** page at the end of your paper. Like the in-text citations, these entries must follow the MLA style. Here are a few basic citation formats and examples, but for more detailed information consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or the many websites which explain the MLA style (Purdue University's OWL: *Online Writing Lab* is excellent: www.owl.english.purdue.edu).

Book: One Author:

Last name, First name. *Title*. Publishing Location: Publishing Company, year of publication.

Medium of publication.

Fussell, Paul. *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*. New York, New York: Random House, 1951. Print.

Book: Two Authors:

Last name, First name and First name Last name. *Title*. Publishing Location: Publishing Company, year of publication. Medium of publication.

Harmon, William, and Hugh Holman. *A Handbook to Literature*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009. Print.

Book: Author and Editor:

Last name, First name. *Title*. Editor, First name Last name. Publishing Location: Publishing Company, year of publication. Medium of publication.

Wharton, Edith. *The Age of Innocence*. Ed. Candace Waid. New York, New York: W.W. Norton, 2003. Print.

Book Article or Chapter:

Last name, First name. "Title." *Book or Collection Title*. Editor, First name Last name. Publishing Location: Publishing Company, year of publication. Page range. Medium of Publication.

Crutwell, Patrick. "Shakespeare's Sonnets and the 1590's." *Modern Shakespearean Criticism*. Ed. Alvin B. Kernan. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970. 110-140. Print.

Journal Article:

Last name, First name. "Title." *Journal Title*. Issue. Volume (Date): Page range. Medium of Publication.

Gray, Hannah H. "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24.4 (1963): 497-514. Print.

Article in an Online Journal:

Last name, First name. "Title." *Journal Title*. Issue. Volume (Date if available). Page or page range if available (use "n.p." if no page numbers are available). Medium of publication. Date site was accessed.

Mullen, Alexandra. "The Artful Dickens." *The New Criterion* 28.10 (June 2010): n. p. Web. 25 October 2010.

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Kaitlin Gladney *[Appendix: Sample Sixth Form Thesis in MLA Style]*

Dr. Bonin

English 5 AP

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Know Thyself: Irony's Role in *Pride and Prejudice*

Irony reveals reality in *Pride and Prejudice*. Individual self-awareness stems from the characters' capacities to perceive the irony in their lives. The narrator's supreme capacity for irony provides an ultimate, objective perspective, which displays an accurate and unfiltered view of the characters' true selves. The disparity between the narrator's view of the characters and the characters' perceptions of themselves—colored by their personal pride and prejudices—further augments the irony. Elizabeth Bennet, who initially appears quite self-aware, is revealed to be nearly as self-ignorant as the rest of her family. Arrival at self-awareness necessitates the complete removal of her biases—something even the newly-humbled Mr. Darcy never achieves.

The narrator's objective perspective provides a trustworthy lens for analyzing the characters in *Pride and Prejudice*. Each individual character's view is skewed to some degree, most frequently by pride, prejudice, and vanity. Mr. Collins' vanity causes him to believe himself the confidant of Lady de Bourgh, who views him merely as a petty clergyman. His constant references to the way "her Ladyship's carriage is regularly ordered for us," suggestive of intimacy, crumble before Lady Catherine's brusque, condescending manner (155). "You know I always speak my mind," she states in unnecessary confirmation before refuting his statements (205). Mr. Collins' pride and sense of self-importance become evident in his lengthy, self-indulgent soliloquies. His pretentious language augments nothing but his own ego: "The

disagreement between yourself and my late honored father always gave me much uneasiness...I flatter myself that my present overtures of goodwill are highly commendable..." begins his initial letter to the Bennets (61). The narrator bluntly states, "Mr. Collins was not a sensible man," removing any uncertainty (69). Mrs. Bennet, hoping to make Bingley fall in love with Jane, orders Jane to walk to Netherfield despite a looming storm. "'This was a lucky idea of mine, indeed!'" said Mrs. Bennet, more than once, as if the credit of making it rain were all her own," upon Jane's catching cold (32). The narrator wastes no pity in pointing out that luck rather than cleverness resulted in Jane's overnight stay at Netherfield. The narrator provides similar pithy revelations of every character.

Juxtaposing the narrator's objective view with the subjective and often highly mistaken views of the characters reveals their individual degrees of self-awareness. Mr. Collins, as demonstrated by his speech and suggested (false) intimate associations with his patron, possesses very little self-awareness. The perpetually silly Mrs. Bennet—so foolish as to, in a debate, "fancy she had gained a complete victory over him [Darcy]" —lacks self-awareness to the extent that it embarrasses both her husband and her eldest daughters (43). Mr. Bennet's sarcastic yet accurate comments regarding his family, such as his proclamation that his youngest daughters "must be two of the silliest girls in the country," reveal a heightened degree of awareness of both his position and his family because the narrator confirms them (32). After mocking his wife's nerves, the narrator validates Mr. Bennet's comments by stating that "she was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper." (7).

The great disparity between the narrator's view and those of the characters adds to the novel's irony. The characters go about their business, convinced that the world exists a certain way, quite contrary to the reality presented by the narrator. This failure to understand reality

leads to many of the Bennets' problems over the course of the novel. Mrs. Bennet incorrectly believes she can influence others and as a result unsuccessfully meddles in the affairs of Jane and Bingley. Reality escapes Lydia entirely. She elopes with Wickham, unable to recognize that "she has no money, no connections, nothing that can tempt him" or give incentive for him to marry her (263). Kitty possesses a similar lack of realistic perspective, influenced by Lydia's wayward disposition.

The characters' respective degrees of self-awareness correlate to their capacities to perceive the irony in their lives. Irony completely evades both Mr. Collins and Mrs. Bennet, directly relating to their abysmal self-awareness levels. Mr. Bennet, endowed with a somewhat higher degree of self-awareness, observes a good deal of the irony present in his life. When Jane catches cold walking to Netherfield in the rain, Mr. Bennet, aware that nobody can be forced to fall in love, remarks to his wife that "if she should die, it would be a comfort to know it was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders" (32). Mr. Bennet also notes Kitty and Lydia's rampant misbehavior but makes no effort to correct their foolishness. He fails to realize that his negligent parenting contributes to their flighty manner, revealing him to ultimately be quite self-ignorant as well.

Elizabeth Bennet, however, appears to possess a great degree of self-awareness. Her clear-eyed view of her family suggests that she objectively views her entire world. "Elizabeth's opinion [was not] all drawn from her own family," but rather from multiple sources and her own sharp wit (228). Deriving her point of view from multiple sources allows her to view the world with a wider lens than her family members. Elizabeth's perspective also provides insights into her society, allowing her to maneuver through its suffocating social restrictions. She makes efforts to understand the "illustration of character" of those around her so that she might better

comprehend the surrounding society (92). Furthermore, the narrator never explicitly comments on her levels of foolishness or self-ignorance, leading the reader to believe that they are significantly higher than those of her next of kin.

However, Elizabeth prides herself too greatly on her ability to read others, a vice that becomes her downfall. Her immediate dislike of Mr. Darcy clouds her perception of his true character. In defense against one of her attacks on his disposition, Darcy states tongue-in-cheek that “where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will always be under good regulation” (56). In response, Elizabeth accuses him of excessive hubris, claiming sarcastically, “I am perfectly convinced by it that Mr. Darcy has no defect. He owns it himself without disguise” (56). She fails to recognize her prejudice’s blinding effects and refuses to acknowledge Darcy’s admirable traits.

Elizabeth becomes so enveloped in her dislike of Mr. Darcy that it soon obstructs her discernment of others. Despite ample evidence that Wickham possesses no honor or discipline, Elizabeth’s pride and prejudice prevent her from admitting her mistaken attributions of character. More importantly, she fails to notice Darcy’s growing affection for her. Elizabeth’s “astonishment was beyond expression” when Darcy professes his love for her (185). Such errors demonstrate that despite Elizabeth’s confidence in her own self-awareness, she greatly overestimates her ability to remain an objective observer. As a result, her self-ignorance nears her family’s deplorable level.

Darcy’s proclamation of love provides the turning point for Elizabeth’s journey to true self-awareness. Her total shock shatters her stubborn conviction to despise Darcy. Almost against her will, Elizabeth finds herself reevaluating her opinion of Mr. Darcy, as well as her general perspective. “How differently did every thing now appear in which he was concerned,” the

narrator affirms (201). Darcy's truthful confession opens her up to other truths as well. She finally begins to believe the things she has heard about Wickham, and painfully acknowledges the Bennet's "family problems" as recounted by Mr. Darcy (185). After coming to terms with her new revelations, Elizabeth recognizes "that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, and absurd" (201).

Her newly unfettered perspective reveals Elizabeth's previous blindness. She feels humiliated upon realizing that the very thing she prided herself on—a keen sense of discernment in the analysis of others—was what rendered her unable to read those around her. "Vanity, not love, has been my folly," she observes, noting that the two have similar effects (202). Upon acknowledging her folly's extent, Elizabeth recognizes the importance in removing all bias in order to objectively understand the world around her.

Mr. Darcy, the catalyst in Elizabeth's transformation, proves unable to make a similar transition himself. His gentlemen's upbringing, with its strict adherence to class divisions and associations, prevents him from fully removing his prejudices. Fraternizing with the lower classes signifies an unforgivable breach of etiquette. His love for Elizabeth compels him to attempt to overcome his instinct of superiority. However, the Bennets do not make this easy for him to accomplish. Lydia's elopement certainly does not aid his transformation, for "it was not to be supposed that Mr. Darcy would connect himself to a family, where to every other objection would now be added an alliance and relationship of the nearest kind with the man whom he so justly scorned" (295). Out of love Darcy does his utmost to tolerate their antics; however, his disapproval remains. While he may change enough to defy his preplanned engagement and wed a "young woman without family, connections, or fortune," Mr. Darcy still believes "the situation of [Elizabeth's] mother's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison of the total

want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by [her] three younger sisters, and even occasionally [her] father.” (337, 193). In other words, he finds their lower-class connection-grubbing manner repugnant. Lydia’s marriage to Wickham, the way in which the Bennet family (with the exception of Elizabeth and Jane) conduct themselves, and Mrs. Bennet’s ability to remain “occasionally nervous and invariably silly,” even after achieving her life goal of marrying her daughters to respectable men, only detract from his efforts to conquer prejudice (364).

Mr. Darcy’s proposal to Elizabeth represents a major breakthrough, because he knows that “a connection with [her] must disgrace him in the eyes of everyone” (335). “His sense of her inferiority” becomes tempered by his affection; however, he cannot fully remove his bias regarding her lower-class family, even when humbling himself to pursue love (185). His heartfelt confession still contains numerous excuses, compelling Elizabeth to question his feelings, asking, “you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character?” (186). Darcy feels no remorse for “the scruples that had long prevented forming any serious design” (188). Rather, he believes his reaction to be “natural and just” (188). His ingrained sense of superiority induces him to ask Elizabeth, “Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?” (188). Even at his humblest moment, Mr. Darcy cannot completely overcome his pride.

The narrator’s objective perspective reveals the personal transformations (or lack thereof) of the characters throughout *Pride and Prejudice*. It also exposes the many layers of irony that emphasize the characters’ self-ignorance. These layers compliment Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy’s journeys to self-awareness by providing juxtapositions to other characters and reference points to

track their respective transformations. Elizabeth's shock at Darcy's feelings jolts her into revising her clouded perspective and permits her to achieve a heightened level of self-awareness. Mr. Darcy, despite his efforts, remains a victim of his gentlemen's upbringing and only partially succeeds in removing his societal biases.

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