Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*

An Ideal Gentleman
Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*:

An Ideal Gentleman

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Yayoi Inada
(Student Number: M03140E)
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Yayoi INADA

Nishinomiya, Hyogo

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Abstract

In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Elizabeth Bennet rejected Mr. Darcy’s first proposal. She judged that he was far from a gentleman despite his high social status and large property. Elizabeth’s rejection led him to reflect upon his nature. For the first time, he became aware of his moral defects—his false pride and its resultant prejudice. Endeavouring to overcome these defects, Darcy greatly improved and succeeded in his second marriage proposal. In his moral improvement, what kind of gentleman did he become? What did the word “gentleman” mean to him? This paper aims to examine Darcy’s development from the viewpoint of an ideal gentleman.

In Austen’s time, the concepts of a gentleman were diverse and controversial, but there appears to have been three main classifications: a conservative (Concept 1), a general (Concept 2), and a liberal one (Concept 3). Darcy’s moral improvement is a transition from Concept 1’s higher standard to Concept 3’s broader definition. His class- and gender-based pride and prejudice were overcome and he became a person who respected others for their inner nature.

At the end of the novel, the narrator reports that the
married couple, Darcy and Elizabeth, were "always on the most intimate terms" with the Gardiners (367). This demonstrates that Darcy ultimately developed into an ideal "nature's gentleman" like Mr. Gardiner, with head, heart, and manners unified.

The equal union of head and heart in one person, which Darcy's improvement represents, is a unique view of humanity. It is neither Romantic nor rationalistic, but even anticipates Virginia Woolf's conception of androgyny.

Austen is sometimes said to "offer a form of conservative feminism" which does "not disrupt class or status boundaries" (Tuite 158-59); Austen's settings and characters are mostly restricted within the gentry of the eighteenth century, and all her novels "affirm patriarchal values with the resolution of marriage" (Kaplan 183). However, in Pride and Prejudice, Austen developed the concept of a nature's gentleman more radically than her contemporaries. In this respect, she is a far more progressive writer than has been considered.
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Introduction

In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Elizabeth Bennet rejected Mr. Darcy's first proposal. She judged that he was far from a gentleman despite his high social status and large property. Elizabeth's rejection led him to reflect upon his nature. For the first time, he became aware of his moral defects—his false pride and its resultant prejudice. Endeavouring to overcome these defects, Darcy greatly improved and succeeded in his second marriage proposal. In his moral improvement, what kind of gentleman did he become? What did the word "gentleman" mean to him?

This paper aims to examine Darcy's improvement from the viewpoint of an ideal gentleman. In Chapter 1, we will survey the concept of a gentleman in Austen's time. In those days, the concepts were diverse and controversial, but there appears to have been three main classifications: a conservative, a general, and a liberal one. In Chapter 2, Darcy's improvement will be analyzed. The process of his development falls into three stages: the immature, the transitional, and the mature period. His view of a gentleman changes remarkably and this internal change is externally embodied in his manners. In Chapter 3, we will consider Austen's concept of a gentleman. We will
demonstrate that Austen enlarges the concept of a nature's gentleman, merging it into the general concept of humanity.
Chapter 1

The Concepts of a Gentleman

_Pride and Prejudice_ was published in 1813, but its original text was written earlier in 1796-97, under the title, “First Impressions.” According to Austen’s letter, it seems that she revised and shortened the original text after the publication of her first work, _Sense and Sensibility_, in 1811 (Jane Austen’s Letters 202). However, “in a form revised we cannot be sure how extensively, this early work ["First Impressions"] was to appear as _Pride and Prejudice_” (Schorer 300).

The temporal setting of _Pride and Prejudice_ is somewhat vague. We explicitly read its location, including Meryton in Hampshire, Rosings in Kent, and Pemberley in Derbyshire. It is also clear that “the action covers fifteen months, from the autumn of one year to the Christmas of the next” (Le Faye 178), because of “a precise chronological order of events in the novel” (Bradbrook 8). However, the years are not explicitly stated in the novel and some critics differ in their opinions about the time. R. W. Chapman and B. C. Southam insist that “the dates in the story fit the 1811-1812 calendar” (Southam 347). On the other hand, Ralph Nash argues that “the events in the novel reflect the calendars of 1799 and 1802,” pointing out
that some dates are not fit to the 1811-1812 calendar (Bradbrook 9). P. B. S. Andrews contends that "the action still took place when she [Austen] had always imagined it, back in the '90s" (342). Anyway, we can safely say that the main time of *Pride and Prejudice* is considered contemporary with Austen's. In those days, the concept of a gentleman was diverse and controversial. According to Penelope Corfield's study of the gentleman, there were three main concepts in Austen's time—a conservative, a general, and a liberal one.

1.1. Concept 1: A Conservative Concept

The conservative concept was a strict definition by social status and high birth, and referred to only the traditional landowners, who were called the landed gentry or the country gentry (Corfield, "Rivals" 9). Concept 1 was supported by conservatives, such as Edmund Burke, who insisted upon a "traditional reverence for rank and birth" (Corfield, "Rivals" 13):

> We fear God; we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility. (Burke 182)

This concept existed since the Middle Ages and was most common until the sixteenth century. However, it
lost popularity with the spread of Concept 2.

1.2. Concept 2: A General Concept

Concept 2 included not only the landed gentry but also the city gentry or the town gentry (Corfield, "Rivals" 9). Concept 2 developed from the rise of the middle class, for the city gentry consisted of senior professionals and bourgeoisie, such as "clergymen, practitioners of the liberal (but not the mechanic) sciences, leading municipal office-holders for the duration of the Mayoralty, England's army commanders, and successful merchants and businessmen" (Corfield, "Rivals" 6). According to "a modern analysis of the 'Honourable Gentlemen' elected as MPs [Members of Parliament] between 1734 and 1832," "those with commercial and professional interests amounted to just over half the total (2,555 MPs out of 5,034 studied, or 50.75 per cent)" (Corfield, "Rivals" 10). These city gentry "not only formed the leadership of the growing towns of eighteenth-century England but they also intermingled with the landed gentry of the countryside" (Corfield, "Rivals" 11). In short, Concept 2 lightened the social and birth restrictions of Concept 1.

Conservatives called "Tories," deplored strongly the very process of change. For example, "in 1756 John Brown, a literary vicar, poet and playwright, wrote
vehemently to express his fear that England's social leadership had been overcome" by the city gentry (Corfield, "Rivals" 11).

1.3. Concept 3: A Liberal Concept

In the eighteenth century, a number of writers claimed that not family and social class but personal merit should be the most important requirement for a gentleman. This type of gentleman is designated as "nature's gentleman." By promoting a nature's gentleman, "the liberal intelligentsia were able to cut the titled aristocracy and landowning society down to size" (Corfield, "Rivals" 13). Originally, Concept 3 existed since the Middle Ages like Concept 1, but it was never particularly emphasized until the eighteenth century. Concept 3 demanded that a man should be judged by "the innate qualities of virtue" and that his inner nature appear outwardly in his manners (Corfield, "Rivals" 14). (See the diagram on page 7.)
Diagram: Three Main Concepts of a Gentleman in Austen's Time

1. Concept 1: the landed / country gentry (gentle birth / heraldic status)
2. Concept 2: the landed / country gentry + the city / town gentry (superior position / money)
3. Concept 3: nature's gentleman (nature / manners)

Interestingly, Richard Steele, a journalist and representative advocator of Concept 3, portrayed a nature's gentleman in the Guardian of 1713:

[...] a Fine Gentleman [nature's gentleman] has [...] the Frame of Mind [...] graced with all the Dignity and Elevation of Spirit, a clear Understanding, a Reason free from Prejudice, a steady Judgment, and an extensive Knowledge. [...] the Heart [...] firm and intrepid, void of all inordinate Passions, and full of Tenderness, Compassion and Benevolence. [...] his Manners, [...] modest without Bashfulness, frank and affable without Impertinence, obliging and complaisant without Servility, cheerful and in good Humour without Noise. (143)
A nature's gentleman is, in brief, the person who meets these three requirements: strong mind, gentle heart, and good manners.²

Corfield mentions that Jane Austen was one of the writers who promoted a nature's gentleman, but she does not examine Austen's works in detail. In the next chapter, we will look at *Pride and Prejudice* and analyze Darcy's improvement in light of these concepts.
Chapter 2
The Improvement of Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy

Darcy exemplifies a rounded character that improves and overcomes his moral defects. The process of his moral improvement falls into three stages: the immature, the transitional, and the mature period.

2.1. The First Stage: The Immature Period

The first stage mainly develops in three scenes: the dance party at Meryton, the encounter at Netherfield, and the first proposal at Rosings.

2.1.1. The Dance Party at Meryton

Darcy attended the dance party at Meryton with his friend, Mr. Bingley. At first, he was the center of attention and judged a fine gentleman, owing to his large annual income of ten thousand.

Darcy's income far exceeds the average landlord in those days, which ranges from five thousand to eight. In fact, his income equals the average aristocracy. Darcy is not titled, but has wealth comparable to the aristocracy. When we compare his income with Mr. Bennet's, two thousand, Darcy's financial power is evidently far superior (See Appendix.)
At the party, Darcy was not at all amiable or sociable. His stiff, distant manners signified both his disposition and his sense of superiority. In other words, his poor manners came partly from shyness and partly from pride. Darcy said, "I certainly shall not [dance]. You [Bingley] know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner," (13) and did not accept Bingley's advice to dance. This shows his shy disposition. Also, Darcy was great and far above the local lesser landlords, including the Bennets and Lucases. His class pride entailed prejudice and contempt for their society as inferior. He had no intention of developing a good relationship with the local lesser landlords.

Deborah Kaplan does not mention Darcy's disposition nor his class pride, but points out only his gender pride in this scene:

Mr. Darcy demonstrate[s] power based specifically on gender at a neighborhood ball. [...] Mr. Darcy relishes his power to decide to dance or not [...] by his exhibiting himself detached and free. (187)

Darcy did not try to become friends with the local lesser landlords, much less to choose his dance partner out of them. It seems more reasonable to interpret that Darcy did nothing but walk around alone, because of shyness and
class pride, rather than because of only gender pride.

The Bennets and Lucases noticed Darcy's arrogance, felt a great antipathy against him, and criticized him severely:

[...] he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased [...].

His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and every body [sic] hoped that he would never come there again. (12-13)

This judgment by the Bennets and Lucases is partly true but also partly false. They failed to consider Darcy's shy disposition; therefore, their first impression of Darcy was much worse than his true personality.3

2.1.2. The Encounter at Netherfield

Elizabeth came to Netherfield with her flushed complexion from exercise and muddy petticoat. She walked alone for three miles, because she felt anxious about her sister's sickness. Obviously, this behaviour was against the time's decorum. As Alice Chandler explains, "a sedate stroll through cultivated parklands or
gardens or an accompanied walk to town, is an appropriate activity for a woman; but rapid, immoderate movement, especially when unescorted, is both alluring and perturbing" (398).

Darcy's response to Elizabeth's behaviour expresses his class pride. Although he felt attracted to her physical beauty, such as her ruddy complexion, Darcy thought her behaviour so bold that it was not fit for ladies of his own class. He even declared that he never wished his sister to do such a thing.

In this scene, it was Bingley who thought highly of Elizabeth; only he praised her for "an affection for her sister" (36). Darcy could not perceive how wonderful her heart was. Owing to his arrogance and his conventional, prejudiced view of women, he did not have insight into Elizabeth's tenderness to her sister. True, Darcy had a liberated view of women's rationality and he even admired Elizabeth for her "liveliness of mind" (359)4, but his view of women was still notably conventional.

2.1.3. The First Proposal at Rosings

In his first proposal to Elizabeth, Darcy most openly displayed his arrogance. Despite her social inferiority, including her low connections and a small dowry, he was strongly attracted to her. So greatly he admired and so
ardently he loved her "pleasing figure and playful manners" (24), her "liveliness of mind" (359), and her sense of humour, that he determined to propose to her. In his proposal, however, there were no words to praise her nature; he expressed only regret and lament for his unreasonable love:

"In 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." [...].

He spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority, of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit. (185)

Above all, he dwelt on the fact that her uncle, Mr. Gardiner, was a mere merchant with his own warehouses in London. We can easily perceive Darcy's class pride causes prejudice against the bourgeoisie, as well as the lesser landlords, and that he unjustly despises them. To sum up, he does
not regard a bourgeois or lesser landlord as a gentleman. In this sense, he views a gentleman similar to Concept 1, but his standard for social status is much higher.

Moreover, he looked down on Elizabeth not only for her class but also for her gender. In Austen's time, upper- and middle-class women, generally did not work, so matrimony was the only method to gain financial security and a stable social position. In the patriarchal society, men usually had the initiative in marriage and freedom to choose their wives, while women were subject to men's choices and had little freedom. Women without large dowries had special difficulty getting married.

As for Darcy, he never imagined Elizabeth's rejection since he was an upper-class male. This ridiculous confidence came partly from his self-complacency in "judgment and understanding" (18). However, more importantly, it reveals his arrogance and prejudice concerning class and gender. Being the inheritor of a great landlord, his arrogance did not allow for her rejection. His pride caused the presumption that Elizabeth should willingly accept his proposal. Chandler states that in this scene's conflict, there are differences of opinion as to class and gender and that Elizabeth points out Darcy's superiority complex over her:

Overtly, the dialog focuses upon the social
differences between them, with Darcy insisting of his social superiority while Elizabeth argues that it is behavior, not rank, that makes the gentleman [...]. Also in conflict before them are the issues of superiority between male and female, with Darcy aggressively urging the claims of his male superiority, while Elizabeth acts out a traditionally defensive female role.

(399)

Against his expectations, Elizabeth accused him of ungentlemanly manners and of defects of nature, such as “arrogance”, “conceit”, and “selfish disdain of the feelings of others” (188). Until then, he justified himself on the pretext of being unsocial and shy, and “liked to have his own way very well” (179). He did not care how others felt about his unsocial behaviour. His friend Bingley and his cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam had no objection to what he said and did, being “at his disposal” (179). Darcy was satisfied with the limited society of his family and friends, but for the first time he was severely criticized and rejected. Elizabeth's “cutting critique of his manners” denied “his very identity” (Jones 29). Her critique caused his self-reflection. Thus started his moral improvement.
2.2. The Second Stage: The Transitional Period

Reflecting upon himself and his life, Darcy probed his moral defects of "arrogance," "conceit," and "selfish disdain of the feelings of others" (188). For the first time, he became aware of deep-seated pride and biases, and found their source in his upbringing and education. His parents spoiled him; they respected their aristocratic family so highly that they taught him to care for almost none beyond their own family circle:

"[...] I have been a selfish being all my life [...]. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. I was spoilt by my parents, who though good themselves, 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."

(349)

Self-recognition is the first step to self-improvement. He struggled and endeavoured to overcome his arrogance, until he developed into a person who respects others for their inner nature. In terms of the concepts of a gentleman, this moral improvement can be regarded as the transition from Concept 1 to Concept 3. This completed
transition marks the final stage of his growth.

So far, many critics have analyzed Darcy's improvement in light of his love for Elizabeth. For instance, Vivien Jones states that "romantic love makes individual happiness both the motivation and the goal of moral and social change," (35) and argues that "Darcy acts out of love for Elizabeth" (35). Chandler regards Darcy's transition as "the redefinitions and readjustments" of his love to Elizabeth (400). However, if we consider his romantic love to be the prime cause of his development, we cannot explain why he grows to respect Mr. Gardiner most, despite Gardiner's social inferiority. The transition of his perception of a gentleman defines his moral improvement. His romantic love is but one of the factors to encourage it.

2.3. The Final Stage: The Mature Period

When Elizabeth and the Gardiners discovered Darcy at Pemberley, Elizabeth was very surprised that he changed so completely. Although "she was overpowered by shame and vexation" (241), Darcy did not see her as a "vulgar bourgeois tourist" (Tuite 140); he did not only spoke to her but also "enquired after her family with such civility" (242). Clara Tuite analyzes Darcy's altered behaviour toward her:
At that moment when he would be perfectly entitled to see her as a mere tourist—as she marches up and down his grounds with her aunt and uncle from Cheapside—he sees her without her prejudice. (141)

Despite the fact that Mr. Gardiner was engaged in trade, Darcy's behaviour to the Gardiners was quite opposite from the dance party at Meryton:

[...] so far from going away, [he] turned back with them [Elizabeth and the Gardiners], and entered into conversation with Mr. Gardiner. [...]. The conversation soon turned upon fishing, and she [Elizabeth] heard Mr. Darcy invite him, with the greatest civility, to fish there as often as he chose, while he continued in the neighborhood [...] and they parted on each side with the utmost politeness. (244-45)

Formerly Darcy underestimated Mr. Gardiner as a mere merchant, but this time, when he finally met the Gardiners face to face, he conducted himself "with the greatest civility"(244). Darcy was all politeness and kindness from first to last. His good manners were full of consideration and tenderness, so that Mr. Gardiner could enjoy their conversation without feeling their class difference. "Such good manners suggest," David
Monaghan observes, “that the needs of his guests, rather than his own importance, are uppermost in Darcy’s mind” (86). Now Darcy fully realizes that “to be guilty of hauteur is to deprive people of a pleasing sense of self-esteem that it is legitimate for them to have” (Johnson 84).

Also, his second proposal contrasts strikingly with the first one. His manners were perfectly gentle and cordial. He respected Elizabeth’s feelings first, not his own:

“You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject for ever.” (346)

It is especially noteworthy that the subject of the first sentence in each proposal has changed from “I” into “You” (from “In vain have I struggled” to “You are too generous to trifle with me”). This suggests that his moral improvement results in “transcending his social and sexual egocentricity” (Chandler 401).

Now let us consider the relationship between Mr. Gardiner and Darcy in view of our conceptions of a gentleman. As a London tradesman, Mr. Gardiner has city gentry status, but at the same time, he is a fine
example of a nature's gentleman. Mr. Gardiner is "a sensible, gentlemanlike man" (137); he has "intelligence," "taste" and "good manners" (244). Monaghan points out Mr. Gardiner's good manners as follows:

[...] they [the Gardiners] realise that there are certain absolute standards of politeness, and are thus able to greet Darcy with a proper mixture of dignity and respect [...]. Mr. Gardiner does not demean himself by expressing awe at the grandeur of his companion [...]. At the same time, the Gardiners do not let the notice of a great gentleman go to their heads. (86-87)

Mr. Gardiner capably "contributes to an atmosphere of harmony and mutual respect," regardless of their social positions (Monaghan 86). He possesses proper self-esteem, so he can behave without prideful prejudice. In this sense, he is the moral center in this novel.

Here we should notice that Lady Catherine contrasts sharply with Mr. Gardiner. Lady Catherine belongs to the aristocracy, the highest of all the characters, while Mr. Gardiner is a merchant, the lowest. However, Lady Catherine is so snobbish and arrogant that she cannot but flaunt her wealth and nobility:

Her air was not conciliating, nor was her
manner of receiving them, such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank. (159)

Regarding social rank and human nature, Lady Catherine and Mr. Gardiner are antithetical in a significant, chiastic way.

At the end of the novel, the narrator reports that "With the Gardiners, they [Darcy and Elizabeth] were always on the most intimate terms" (367). This demonstrates that Darcy ultimately developed into an ideal nature's gentleman like Mr. Gardiner. As the proverb goes, birds of a feather flock together.
Chapter 3
Austen's Concept of a Gentleman

3.1. Darcy's View of Women

Darcy's moral improvement clearly shows that Austen supports a nature's gentleman. However, in connection with Austen's concept of a gentleman, it is more interesting to note that Darcy's view of women includes a feministic aspect—respect for women's rationality. What is the relationship between Darcy's moral improvement and his feministic view of women?

For Darcy, one of Elizabeth's chief attractions is her mind. This significantly suggests that he does not accept the Romantic view of women. In other words, Darcy does not admit to a difference between the mental functions of men and women.

Chandler analyzes the married Darcy and Elizabeth from the Romantic viewpoint. She assumes that the hero, Darcy, personifies the head, while the heroine, Elizabeth, embodies the heart:

Ideally, she [Georgiana, Darcy's sister] will be a child of Darcy's head and Elizabeth's heart, of his principles and her feelings, or—to oversimplify—of the union of rationality and emotion that their marriage represents. (403)
If we construe that Darcy plays only the masculine part of the "head", it is difficult to explain his moral improvement. From the beginning, Darcy was "clever" (18) and superior in mind, but, as we have seen in Chapter 2, his inner nature was not mature. He tended to "think meanly of their [others'] sense and worth" (349). His heart was immature; he had his deep-seated pride and its resultant prejudice. His moral improvement means the dissolution of false pride and prejudice, the cultivation of his heart and, ultimately, the unification of his head and heart internally. He develops into an ideal nature's gentleman with head, heart and manners unified. In this sense, his improvement results in that unification.

The equal union of head and heart in one person, which Darcy's improvement represents, is a unique view of humanity. It is quite distinct from both Romanticism and Rationalism, because in Romanticism, the roles of men and women are divided into head and heart respectively, and in Rationalism, the roles are not divided, but the head is valued more than the heart in both genders.

This problem is connected with the "Feminist / anti-feminist Controversy" that Margaret Kirkahm points out in her feminist critique. In Austen's time, feminists like Wollstonecraft thought "Sense, or Reason, a better guide to moral principles than Sensibility, or Feeling, and
wished to show that women were no less capable of rational judgment than men"; on the contrary, "poets and novelists of Romantic tendency followed him [Rousseau] in making Man rational and Woman emotional" (Kirkahm 23). Kirkahm maintains that "Austen follows Wollstonecraft" (26) and her feminism is "associated with Mary Wollstonecraft's criticism of the anti-feminist streak in Romanticism" (23). However, Austen's point of view on the equality of Head / Heart essentially differs from that of a rationalistic feminist. Darcy's moral improvement being the equal union of head and heart indicates very decidedly that Austen does not treat the head as "a better guide to moral principles" than the heart. In this respect, we cannot say that "Austen follows Wollstonecraft."

3.2. Elizabeth's Improvement

To make this point more clear, let us consider Elizabeth's improvement. As we have seen in Elizabeth's affection toward her sick sister at Netherfield, she was very considerate. When she heard that Charlotte Lucas determined to marry Mr. Collins, Elizabeth could not help feeling "the pang of a friend disgracing herself and sunk in her esteem" (123). Collins was "a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man" (133) and Elizabeth lamented that her "sensible, intelligent" (19) friend "had sacrificed
every better feeling to worldly advantage" (123). Elizabeth painfully sympathized with her friend.

Initially superior in heart, Elizabeth's apparently complete nature displayed immaturity. She was very confident of her mind as "a studier of character" (42) or "a rational creature" (106); she had pride in her mind. It is true that she had cause for this pride; both her father and Darcy, who were highly intelligent characters, respected her mind. However, she misjudged Darcy and Wickham owing to her "vanity" (201). Like Darcy, after his first proposal, she realized that the cause of her prejudice was empty pride—in her words, "vanity":

She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. —Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd. [...].

"I, who have prided myself on my discernment! —I, who have valued myself on my abilities! [...] vanity, not love, has been my folly.—Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself." (201-02)
At Pemberley, she could “complete the act of recognition” and appreciate Darcy’s “true worth” (Tanner 385).

Her development includes the correction of vain pride and the cultivation of her mind. Finally she accomplished the union of head and heart. Elizabeth’s improvement reached the same goal as Darcy’s. Consequently, when Elizabeth talked with men or Lady Catherine, she was neither overwhelmed by their social rank or gender, nor did she follow their opinions blindly. She could express her own opinions clearly. This shows her intelligence. Her easy and playful manners expressed her quick and independent mind and considerate heart.

We conclude that Austen provides her heroine with the same three qualifications of a nature’s gentleman: strong mind (head), generous heart and good manners. Thus, Austen’s concept of a nature’s gentleman essentially includes not only “men” but also “women.” In other words, this concept suits humans in general, regardless of class and gender. In this point, Austen’s concept of a gentleman is very unique. It surpasses Steele’s concept of a nature’s gentleman, because when Steele mentioned a nature’s gentleman, he focused on men alone and ignored women. He regarded women’s personalities and “a Female Imagination” as superficial and trifling; therefore, beneath his consideration:
I found that a Lady is not difficult to be pleased, and that the Town swarms with fine Gentlemen. A nimble Pair of Heels, a smooth Complexion, a full-bottom wig, a laced Shirt, and embroidered Suit, a pair of fringed Gloves, a Hat and Feather; any one or more of these and the like Accomplishments ennobles a Man, and raises him above the Vulgar, in a Female Imagination.

(142)

Judging from Darcy's final view of women and the moral improvement of both Darcy and Elizabeth, Austen's view of humanity seems to be nearer to that of a twentieth century writer, Virginia Woolf. Woolf assumes that ideally, both men and women should have head and heart equal. She argues that "there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body" and that "they also require to get complete satisfaction and happiness" (96). According to Woolf, the union of "the man" and "the woman" exists when one's mind grows enough to exercise all its functions; "a great mind is androgynous" (97):

[...] in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of
being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. [...]. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine, I thought. (97)

Woolf also states that “it is one of the tokens of the fully developed mind that it does not think specially or separately of sex” (97). We may safely say that Woolf’s “the man” and “the woman” includes the traditional, Romantic concept of “the head” and of “the heart” respectively.

Hence, we conclude that Austen developed the concept of a nature's gentleman more radically than her contemporaries; Austen, as a progressive writer, anticipates Woolf's view of androgyny.
Conclusion

In terms of the concepts of a gentleman, Darcy's moral improvement is a transition from Concept 1's higher standard to Concept 3's broader definition. His class- and gender-based pride and prejudice were overcome and he became a person who respected others for their inner nature.

The transition of his concept evokes his moral improvement. His romantic love for Elizabeth, which many critics consider the source of his development, is but one of the factors to encourage it.

At the end of the novel, the narrator reports that Darcy and Elizabeth were "always on the most intimate terms" with the Gardiners (367). This demonstrates that Darcy ultimately developed into an ideal nature's gentleman like Mr. Gardiner, equally complete with head, heart, and manners.

The equal union of head and heart in Darcy's improvement represents a unique view of humanity. Austen enlarges the concept of a nature's gentleman, merging it into the general concept of a human. Austen's view of humanity, neither Romantic nor rationalistic, even anticipates Woolf's view of androgyny.

It is sometimes said that "Austen offers a form of
conservative feminism" which does "not disrupt class or status boundaries" (Tuite 158-59); Austen's settings and characters are restricted within the gentry of the eighteenth century, and all her novels "affirm patriarchal values with the resolution of marriage" (Kaplan 183). However, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen developed the concept of a nature's gentleman more radically than her contemporaries. In this respect, she is a far more progressive writer than has been considered.

We have focused mainly on Darcy in this paper, but in *Pride and Prejudice*, there are other "gentlemen" to notice, such as Bennet, Bingley, Collins and Wickham. Comparing them with Darcy, we would like to investigate Austen's concept of a gentleman more thoroughly.
As Corfield points out, "the combination of [social and personal] qualities reflected a chivalric ideal," which flourished in the Middle Ages (Corfield, "Rivals" 3). If we take into consideration Burke's pronouncement that his ideal is "the ancient chivalry" (Burke 170), it is possible that Burke's concept of a "gentleman" is not conservative (Concept 1) but chivalric. The chivalric concept includes not only social status but also personal merit. Here, I provisionally adopt Corfield's view that Burke is a leading exponent of Concept 1. I would like to investigate Burke's concept in detail in the future.

Steele's "mind", "heart" and "manners" may be considered to be equivalent to "property in thinking", "generosity in feeling" and "justice in acting", which Rev. J. Harris regarded as the qualifications of the true gentleman in *An Essay on Politeness... by a Young Gentleman* (1785) (Corfield, "Democratic History" 44).

We should notice that Darcy's class pride is not always false. His excellent management of the Pemberley estate is an example of his "proper and justifiable" class pride (Kliger 261), which is traditionally designated as "noblesse oblige" (Kliger 261). For Darcy's proper pride, see Kliger 261 and McCann 322.
4 For Darcy's liberated view of women's rationality, see Chapter 3 of this paper.

5 Darcy was attracted by Elizabeth's personal merit and he proposed to her, but in fact, her nature was partly immature. Like Darcy, her immaturity was also caused by her false pride and prejudice. We will analyze Elizabeth's moral improvement in Chapter 3.

6 In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft severely criticizes the Romantic view that women were created for the entertainment of men. She argues that women's faults are not a proof of their natural inferiority but a proof of the intrinsic inferiority of their environment. She claims that women are "rational creatures" by nature (82) and persuades women "to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body" (82), because "in the regulation of a family, in the education of children, understanding [...] is particularly required" (157). She insists that "reason is absolutely necessary to enable a woman to perform any duty properly and that sensibility is not reason" (158).
Works Cited


___________. "The Rivals: Landed and Other


Appendix: The Main Characters in *Pride and Prejudice*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>classes</th>
<th>the definitions by lands and occupations</th>
<th>range of income (£)</th>
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This table is based on Yamamoto (1983) and Mingay’s “English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century” (1963) and *The Gentry* (1976).