"A FAITHFUL NARRATIVE:" FORENSIC RHETORIC IN PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

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ABSTRACT

Forensic rhetoric is the study of "what did or did not happen." Forensic rhetoric is therefore closely connected to the analysis of narration. Methods for proving "narrative truth" (presented throughout Classical, English Renaissance, and Eighteenth Century rhetoric) can be applied to the case of "Wickham vs. Darcy" from Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice. A proposed concept, the "narrative enthymeme," helps us to see that Elizabeth Bennet (the "judge" in this case) should and in a sense must accept Darcy's narrative version. A narrative enthymeme is defined as the implied moral principle that motivates an action taken in a forensic narrative. When this principle matches one already held by the judge, the narrative argument gains strength. The narrative enthymemes in Darcy's letter to Elizabeth create an overpowering forensic argument. Narrative can be a category of evidence in its own right. The study of conflicting narrative versions is essentially legalistic. It is also epistemological. We sort between conflicting versions in an attempt to recover genuine and convincing knowledge of the past events.

I

In his classic biography of St Francis of Assisi, G. K. Chesterton mentions his frustration at the evidentiary problem of historical records in narrative form. He points out that we are often limited to one source by which both to recover and to verify our knowledge of historical events:

> All our knowledge of certain historical periods . . . rests on certain connected chronicles written by people who are some of them nameless and all of them dead, who cannot in any case be cross-examined and cannot in some cases be corroborated. (136)

In the absence of corroborating evidence we are thrown back on the rhetoric of the narrative itself. We judge truth by the narrative itself, by its internal rhetoric, its intangible sense of validity, or plausibility. Narration therefore can be a category of evidence in its own right; the only question is how far n arration can go in constituting proof in and of itself. Jane Austen observes the evidentiary problem, relating it to to first-hand observation versus second-hand narration in a speech given to Miss Tilney in Northanger Abbey:

> I am fond of history -- and am very well contented to take the false with the true. In the principal facts they have sources of intelligence in former histories and records, which may be as much depended on, I conclude, as any thing that does not actually pass under one's own observation . . . . (84)

For historical events there are two fundamentally different types: first-hand experience and second-hand narration. Anything whatsoever "that does not actually pass under one's own observation" comes by means of a narration. Chesterton notes an inconsistency in our treatment of historical narratives:

> I have never been quite clear about the nature of the right by which historians accepted masses of detail from [ancient chronicles] as definitely true, and suddenly denied their truthfulness when one detail was preternatural. (137)

At a certain point, Chesterton notes, the narration loses plausibility; its internal rhetoric breaks down and its value as evidence is lost.

This evidentiary problem has grown worse in today's post-structural era. Chesterton and Austen would have asked which version of a historical narrative is true. Today, we ask if any version at all is, or can be true. We are becoming more conscious of how narrations may be propagated to suit perspective, slant, and motive. Today's politicoes practise the intentional deployment of "alternate story lines." Even popular fiction today deals overtly with multiple narrations. The human mind in an inveterate narrator; it instinctively re-narrates different forms of the story with, ultimately, an unsettling evidentiary result. In cases where we are asked to judge the truth of two conflicting versions (i.e., essentially "forensic" cases), the actual process of judgement is often narratological; it is our analysis of each narrative's internal rhetorical validity.

The subject of rhetoric in fiction generally, and Jane Austen's novels in particular, has been gaining ground in recent years. Austen provides unique cases in which narratology and rhetorical analysis converge: her novels contains story tellers whose true and false versions of narrative filter through the communities of the novels.

In her chapter on "Moral Evidence," Lynn R. Rigberg looks for connections between the text of Pride and Prejudice and the Eighteenth Century school of rhetoric in Scotland known as the New Rhetoric. However, Rigberg makes no mention of narrative as a form of rhetorical evidence, and she does not analyze text, or narratives in particular, in any great detail. Arthur E. Walzer, in "Rhetoric and Gender in Persuasion," ties Austen to a shift in persuasion toward the psychology of the listener during the Eighteenth Century. He connects Austen and George Campbell via the specific term "conviction," and his analysis of the Netherfield debate is particularly textual. However, he does not analyze the two narratives proposed for this essay, the ones by Wickham and Darcy in Pride and Prejudice. Tara Goshall Wallace's more extensive study, Jane Austen and Narrative Authority, focuses on the interesting problem of indeterminacy in Pride and Prejudice. She identifies the gap between the two narratives (that by Wickham and that by Darcy), and the fact that there is no confirming authorial experience. The truth about what happened between Wickham and Darcy is simply not present to the readers of Pride and Prejudice, simply because the events are not within the main narrative line. Between them, these commentators have left room for sustained textual analysis of Austen, and for the particular rhetoric of narration. Outside of the context of literature, communication theorists Joseph Wenzel, Martha Feldman and Lance Bennet have been writing in recent years about the evidentiary value of narration. They study the process of constructing narratives as a form of constructing truth. Their analysis is therefore closely related to that which I propose for this essay, only applied to Austen's fictional narrators and narratives.

The method of analyzing narratives is extensively discussed by the rhetoricians of the English Renaissance, including Leonard Cox and Thomas Wilson. These rhetoricians ask specifically analytical, rather than theoretical questions. They are interested in what it is that underlies, or creates, a sense of plausibility in a narrative. Rhetoricians throughout the English Renaissance have discussed the analysis and causation of narrative plausibility in depth. This question is on record in Eighteenth Century rhetoric as well. George Campbell has a short section on *Testimony* (pp. 54-56) and one on *Plausibility* (82-86) which employ the same language. However, the direct analysis of narration does not appear to be a central question to the extent that it was from the Classical era up until the end of the English Renaissance.

In De Inventione, Cicero delineates the method of analysis: "one examines frequently and carefully one's own narrative of the events and that of the opponent . . . eliciting any clues that each part may afford . . . "(207). In order to examine a narration, and to test it for validity, the rhetorician ponders

> why, with what intent and with what hope of success each thing was done; why it was done in this way rather than in that; why by this man rather than by that; why with no helper or why with this one; why no one knew about it, or why some one did, and why it was this one who did; why another act was performed earlier; why another act was not performed earlier; why this was done in immediate connection with the event, and this other thing after the event; whether this was done intentionally or followed as a natural consequence of the event; whether what he said is consistent with the events or with itself; whether this is a sign of this or of that, or both of this and of that and of which the more; what was done that ought not to have been done, or what was left undone that ought to have been done. (207)

Following Cicero, Quintilian states that the analysis of narratives will provide extensive material and opportunity for the rhetorician:

> To narratives is annexed the task of refuting and confirming them . . . from which no little advantage may be derived. This may be done not merely in connection with fiction and stories transmitted by the poets, but with the actual records of history as well. (vol. 1, 233)

The methods for composing a plausible and convincing narrative version include an undefinable but recognizable narrative plausibility:

The "statement of facts" [i.e., narration] will be credible, if in the first place we take care to say nothing contrary to nature, secondly if we assign reasons and motives for the facts on which the inquiry turns . . . and if we make the characters of the actors in keeping with the facts we desire to be believed: we shall for instance represent a person accused of theft as covetous, accused of adultery as lustful, accused of homicide as rash, or attribute the opposite qualities to these persons if we are defending them: further we must do the same with place, time and the like. He concludes with a remark on the human instinct for narration, i.e., that the audience will very readily pick up and carry away the narrative on its own: It is also possible to treat the subject in such a way as to give it an air of credibility . . . . For some things have such natural sequence and coherence that, if only the first portion of your statement is satisfactory, the judge will himself anticipate what you have got to say in the latter part. (vol. 2, 79)

When the analysis of narration is picked up in the English Renaissance, the same topics are developed in more detail. Leonard Cox advises on tailoring or slanting the narrative version to one's own purposes:

> The narration or tale is the showing of the deed in manner of a history wherein the accuser must craftily intermingle many suspicions which shall seem to make his matter probable (72)

Cox presents an analysis of a standard teaching example (the narrative of Claudius and Milo) that the classical rhetoricians often used. Here are the narrational the features that make Claudius look guilty:

> In . . . Tully's narration are intermingled first that Claudius knew of Milo's going which makes the matter suspect that Claudius went afore to meet with him for this was well known afore that Claudius bore Milo great grudge and malice. Next is showed the place where as Claudius met Milo which also gives a great suspicion for it was nigh Claudius's place where he might soon take succour and the other was in less assurance. Thirdly that he departed out of the city what time it had been most expedient yea and also greatly requisite for him to have been at home. And that again makes the matter suspect for surely he would not . . . in no wise have been absent at such a busy time unless it had been for some great purpose and what other should it seem than to slay Milo. As surely evident it was that they buckled together and this was well known that Milo had a necessary cause to go forth from Town at that time. Contrarily in Claudius could be perceived no other occasion to depart then out of the city, but of the likelihood to lie in wait for Milo. (73)

In his school textbook, Thomas Wilson discusses the features which give a narrative plausibility or truth to nature, and hence persuasive power. By this time, the narrative "topoi" (time, place, person, and so on) are emerging more distinctly. Wilson is sensitive to the listener's propensity to go astray unless the narrator specifically implies the desired interpretation:

> The Narration reported in matters of Judgement, shall seem to stand with reason, if we make our talk to agree with the place, time, thing, and person, if we shall show that whatsoever we say, the same by all likelihoods is true, if our conjectures, tokens, reasons, and arguments be such, that neither in them, there appear any fabling, nor yet that any thing was spoken, which might of right otherwise be taken, and that we not only speak this, but that diverse other of good credit will stand with us in defence of the same, all which reporting may soon be liked, and the tale so told, may be thought very reasonable. Yea, we shall make our doings seem reasonable, if we frame our work to nature's will, and seek none other means but such only, as the honest and wise have ever used and allowed, bringing in and blaming the evil always, for such faults chiefly, whereunto they most of all are like to be subject, as to accuse a spend all, of theft: a whoremonger, of adultery: a rash quarreller, of manslaughter: and so of other. (107)

Traditional methods for analyzing narration include numerous analytical points. Excerpts from Shakespeare show his familiarity with these rhetorical topics, with the idea of "likelihood" (like the rhetorical term "invention" elsewhere in Shakespeare) appearing to be a favourite:

> Why should he call her whore? Who keeps her company?
> What place, what time, what form, what likelihood? (Othello, 4.2.141-142)

> They will scarcely believe this without trial. Offer them instances, which shall bear no less likelihood than to see me at her chamber window, hear me call Margaret Hero . . . . (Much Ado about Nothing, 2.2.33-35)

> This news which is called true is so like an old tale that the verity of it is in strong suspicion . . . . That which you hear you'll swear you see, there is such unity in the proofs. (The Winter's Tale, 5.2.25-27)

> Were it but told you, [it] should be hooted at
> Like an old tale. But it appears she lives. (The Winter's Tale, 5.3.117-119)

Jane Austen's relationship to the rhetorical tradition is not a matter of record. The specifics of her classical education are not known. Her father's library was dispersed (Tomalin, 67), and in her fiction and letters she does not necessarily show the preoccupations of a scholar.

There is evidence of her reading in the Scottish renaissance, including the rhetoricians Hugh Blair and Adam Smith (Bander, 127). The specific linkage between Austen and the rhetorical theory of narrative cannot be claimed as a deliberate connection on her part. However, a recurrent and often fundamental evidentiary motif in her fiction involves a concept that is also central to the rhetorical traditions outlined above. The mode of knowing that takes shape in historical narration is a preoccupation of the rhetorical tradition, and, I will argue, of the internal narrations of accusation and defence within Austen's fiction.

II

The epitome of Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice may be the scene in the early pages of the novel in which the Bennet family is assembled around the breakfast table engaging in an analytical dissection of the letter sent to them by Mr Collins. In their analysis of his letter, we see a model of the judgement process in this novel. The family is attempting to interpret what they can of Mr Collins's character. The interpretation process, which is essentially a judgement process, proceeds upon inherently incomplete information (they have never met him and have only his writing style to go by), and it takes a different perspective with each member of the family: Jane is mild, Elizabeth is critical, and Mary is pedantic. Similar examples of judgement are ongoing throughout this novel. The acts of judgement are so pervasive that the frame of mind or texture of Pride and Prejudice may be described as judicial. Judgement takes place in minor incidents like the above mentioned letter; it also takes place in an extended quasi-judicial dispute between Darcy and Elizabeth at Netherfield, on Mr Bingley's character (42-44). In five separate scenes that often coincide with separate chapters of the novel (pages 11-14, 76-79, 120-124, 198-201, and 255-259), Elizabeth withdraws from the action with her sister Jane in order to take council, to examine and judge the actions and motives of those around her, and her own. These sessions, between the wisest but also most extreme counsellors, distinctly punctuate the novel with a texture of judgement. True to this theme, Mr Bingley says to Elizabeth, "I did not know before that you were a studier of character. It must be a most amusing study" (37).

However, there is one example of judgement in the novel that is more prominent and central than these, mainly in its level of importance to the plot. Elizabeth and Jane, and their Aunt Gardiner, have a more serious task before them when it comes to judging the intentions of George Wickham. The interpretation of George Wickham's character is not merely part of the background or general texture; instead, it is the central question determining the plot. Wickham's accusation against Mr Darcy is the actual crux of the plot because it is the single real impediment to the union between Darcy and Elizabeth. Until the marriage between Darcy and Elizabeth can take place, the whole comic structure of the novel is on hold; and this marriage will not take place for one overriding reason, Elizabeth's poor opinion, or judgement, of Mr Darcy's character, based mainly on George Wickham's accusation against him: "But it is not merely this affair," she continued, "on which my dislike is founded. Long before it had taken place, my opinion of you was decided. Your character was unfolded in the recital which I received many months ago from Mr. Wickham." (170)

In the case of '*Wickham versus Darcy*,' as in the many cases of judgement in the novel, the actual methodology is the open analytical question. How is Elizabeth or any judge to know which party is telling the truth? In strictly textual terms, the truth between Darcy and Wickham is not "present" in the novel Pride and Prejudice, simply because the events are not narrated first-hand. The only epistemological access to what really happened is secondary, through the two versions of the story as told by Mr Darcy and Mr Wickham. The actual event is prior to the time frame of Jane Austen's narrative, and there is no flash-

back. Accordingly, the main approach to the problem of judgement in Pride and Prejudice is the analysis of narration. We can assess the two versions of the story through a collection of analytical techniques for testing narrative truth. The two judges are seen in the quotes below interpreting a narrative, namely Wickham's abduction of Lydia. As is typical with narrative interpretations, different versions of the same known facts compete for the greater degree of likelihood:

> It appears so very unlikely, that any young man should form such a design against a girl who is by no means unprotected or friendless, and who was actually staying in his colonel's family, that I am strongly inclined to hope the best. (248)
>
> But why all this secrecy? Why any fear of detection? Why must their marriage be private? Oh! no, no, this is not likely. (249)

Analysis of specific narrative information, such as time, place, character of persons, truth to nature and so on, is prominent in literature that deals with the issue of narrative rhetoric.

And the same type of inquiry runs through Jane Austen's other novels. A remark which is ironic and appears trivial early in Pride and Prejudice is echoed in the serious themes of Jane Austen's novels: "A fortnight's acquaintance is certainly very little. One cannot know what a man really is by the end of a fortnight" (5). The same epistemological inquiry -- what constitutes knowing another person deeply (rhetorical "ethos") -- runs through the following excerpts:

> I have not known him long indeed, but I am much better acquainted with him, than I am with any other creature in the world . . . . It is not time or opportunity that is to determine intimacy . . . . Seven years would be insufficient to make some people acquainted with each other, and seven days are more than enough for others. (Sense and Sensibility, 50)
>
> Let us wait . . . for this letter. It may bring many extenuations. It may make many things intelligible and excusable which now are not to be understood. Don't let us be severe, don't let us be in a hurry to condemn him. (Emma, 274)
>
> Interested people have perhaps misrepresented each to the other. It is, in short, impossible for us to conjecture the causes or circumstances which may have alienated them, without actual blame on either side." (Pride and Prejudice, 76)

Three problems which are inherent in the judgement process are present in these novels. One is forming judgement in the face of inherently incomplete information, i.e., narrative as an evidentiary endeavour. Another is narratology, the analysis of narrative versions; this is the actual method of arriving at judgement. The third problem is the role of ethos, or credibility as it relates to narration. All three of these questions go to the root of our understanding of Austen's Pride and Prejudice, in the relationship between Darcy and Elizabeth, in the reasons that Darcy's side of the story prevails, and in the author's thematization of epistemological certainty over doubt.

III

In the large perspective of this novel, Pride and Prejudice contains a courtroom analogy. Wickham, the accuser, conveys a narrative about Mr Darcy to Elizabeth while they are playing cards during a social evening. This accusation, and its subsequent misprisions, conditions the first half of the novel. Mr Darcy, the accused, then argues against the charges, and his self-vindication conditions the second half of the novel. It is typical for a comic novel to fall into this quasi-legal pattern, as Northrop Frye indicates:

> The action of comedy . . . is not unlike the action of a lawsuit, in which plaintiff and defendant construct different versions of the same situation, one finally being judged as real and the other as illusory. This resemblance of the rhetoric of comedy to the rhetoric of jurisprudence has been recognized from the earliest times . . . . (166)

At the centre point of the novel, Mr Darcy has a turn to act as defendant and to place his own version of this story in front of a "judge" who is soon to be very perplexed, Elizabeth Bennet. Thus, Jane Austen retracts the turning point of her novel, the comic discovery moment which normally occurs near the end, to the exact mid-point of this novel. Mr Darcy's letter is the point of realization. But it is placed comparatively early in the novel, with the result that the whole second half of the novel is open space for events to confirm the truth of Darcy's version. Austen is evidently thematizing judgement and truth rather than leaving them merely as structural points in the comic plot.

The readers of Pride and Prejudice, like Elizabeth, should be alerted to the moral implications of Mr Wickham's narrative. His method of telling the story should cast doubt on its truth. For example, he is telling private business to a relative stranger, and the slander that he creates by telling the story contradicts his pledges of loyalty within the story. Finally, his narrative contains a characterization of Mr Darcy that should in itself arouse suspicion. Elizabeth's sister Jane makes this point in a later conversation (76), where she indicates that an accusation this severe (the betrayal of a childhood associate with no other means of support and provided for by his father's dying wish) should automatically be treated with skepticism. Quintilian likewise remarks that "the horrible nature of a charge is in favour of the accused, until the charge is proved" (vol. 2, 125).

For Elizabeth and the readers, the only epistemological access to the original events is through the two second-hand narrations. The novel simply does not contain any first-hand presentation of the events and transactions between these two men. Elizabeth is aware of this potential epistemological abyss: "On both sides it was only assertion" (182). However, the novel Pride and Prejudice escapes the abyss of uncertainty. Indeed, as Roger Gard states,

> . . . there is none of that penumbra of vagueness -- doubts and uncertainties -- that is much admired in other, mainly later, prose fiction. Wickham, for example, may charm at first, then disgust, then be lightly tolerated -- but there is no ultimate doubt as to what he is like. There is no ambiguity in Jane Austen: the reader is never long unsure about what has happened, and never finally unsure as to how to take it. (12)

There is little or no reason to believe that the novel itself comes down on the side of uncertainty or in any way deconstructs itself. Within its own framework, Wickham is lying and Mr Darcy is telling the truth. One sign of this certainty is that the acquiescence of the judge is involuntary; Elizabeth is forced against her will, not cajoled or persuaded, to accept Darcy's version. Indeed, Elizabeth is a reluctant, an egregiously biased judge:

> With a strong prejudice against every thing he might say, she began his account of what had happened at Netherfield. . . . She wished to discredit it entirely, repeatedly exclaiming, "this must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!" (181-182)

In her struggle in the chapter immediately following his letter, and then for the remaining second half of the novel, the truth of Darcy's version and his credibility are confirmed and then reconfirmed again and again. Seeing his property, viewing his portrait, hearing the witness of his employees, and seeing him demonstrate service and change, all represent literary methods of elongating the comic experience of truth emerging and being reconfirmed. This process, as Frye states, is inherent to the genre of comedy, but it is emphasized by Jane Austen, in this novel, as a central thematic preoccupation.

To give the argument between Darcy and Wickham a post-modern cast, we would follow the rhetorical traditions outlined earlier; we would picture Wickham as a victim of Darcy's excessive moralism and as a youthful prodigal, not a reprobate. We would say that he fell in love with Georgiana and Lydia, not that he abducted them with the aid of his London procuress, Mrs Younge. We would call his mercenary activities practical, and excuse later outrages as acts of desperation ultimately brought on by Darcy's implacable opposition. All of these points we would develop extensively with argument and narration, which could easily be done. We would generate uncertainy as to the actual nature of Wickham's transgressions and Darcy's vindication.

However, Jane Austen takes the contrary route, and spends one hundred and fifty pages establishing the truth of Darcy's version and the weight and value of his character. Hence, the novel Pride and Prejudice is much more about the experience of discovery and confirmation, i.e., the experience of certainty, than it is about the epistemological problems of doubt.

Elizabeth's belief in Mr Darcy's narrative is simultaneous with her change of heart toward his character. The plausibility of his narrative is tied to his credibility; in turn, his credibility is revealed through the moral nature of his narration. Mr Darcy is in the difficult and self-reflexive position of responding to an accusation against his character, through an assertion of his character. It is similar to the quandary expressed by Hermione in The Winter's Tale, when she must present her own credibility as the argument in a case which turns on the question of her credibility:

> Since what I am to say must be but that
> Which contradicts my accusation, and
> The testimony on my part no other
> But what comes from myself, it shall scarce boot me
> To say "Not Guilty." Mine integrity
> Being counted falsehood shall, as I express it,
> Be so received. (3.2.20-26)

But in Mr Darcy's case, his representation takes the form of a narrative; thus, he is able to prove his credibility by drawing upon the rhetorical resources of narrative argument. He tells a fundamentally moral story, and one which Elizabeth Bennet in particular will perceive to be moral.

Elizabeth Bennet believes Mr Darcy's version because the story itself argues or reveals the moral credibility of its narrator. The moral axioms that underly Darcy's plot indicate a character who holds certain values. In this paper, I would like to add this technique to the list of narratological methods, a technique that I would like to call the '*narrative enthymeme*.' The narrative enthymeme is another method, in addition to the analytical methods from the rhetoricians listed earlier, for testing narrative plausibility. A narrative enthymeme is the implied motivation for an action taken in a narrative. Like the logical enthymeme, the narrative enthymeme is a truncated formula. Any action implies a motivation which defines the moral cause. Hence, the narrative enthymeme is specifically connected to argumentation in the form of narrative. If one narrates a course of action, then the narrative enthymemes will convey an undercurrent of world view and moral standpoint. The listener will perceive the moral perspective underlying the narrative. The analysis of narrative enthymemes thus reveals the credibility of the narrator and thus of the narrative version. When, in Pride and Prejudice, the narrative enthymemes of Mr Darcy's narrative coincide with value system held by the judge, Elizabeth Bennet, then the narrative argument imposes a strong degree of persuasion. My contention is that Darcy's strength of argument, though purely rhetorical, approaches that normally attributed only to valid logical argument. This explains the overwhelming force of his narration to compel belief, even though the potential abyss is not filled, even though the actual events are not present first-hand in the novel.

During the course of reading and assimilating his letter to her, Elizabeth Bennet is forced to accept this version of the narrative between Darcy and Wickham as the true version. In Darcy's letter the credibility of the speaker (ethos) is the main type of argument. In turn, narration with moral underpinnings is the main medium. The judgement of Darcy and Wickham is inextricably tied into processes that are both narratological and moral. Elizabeth's final judgement derives from her perception of the moral axioms which must have motivated the decisions and actions that Darcy takes in his story. She sides with Darcy against her own will because of the compelling strength of his narrative argument. Elizabeth must decide which man is telling the truth, limited to an analysis of their narrative rhetoric. The fact that Mr Darcy writes, rather than (like Wickham) speaks his narrative piecemeal, and that he writes in so accurate a style, at such a time when events have morally obligated him to communicate, all indicate a reticent but principled character. Darcy's letter also derives strength from the outline principles described by Quintilian in the Institutio Oratoria. The exordium is especially necessary in Darcy's case because of Elizabeth's bias against him: "the exordium is never more useful than when it is necessary to divert the judge from some prejudice that he had formed against us . . ." (vol. 2, 95). Darcy's exordium constrains the judge's attention through (as advised by Quintilian) a point of justice:

> the effort which the formation, and the perusal of this letter must occasion, should have been spared, had not my character required it to be written and read. . . . I demand it of your justice. (174)

This is the first moral linkage -- a demand upon justice -- between the author and the reader of Darcy's letter. Next, Darcy's "statement of facts" formulates a very specific definition of the two charges against him, separating Jane and Bingley, and destroying Wickham:

> . . . that regardless of the sentiments of either, I had detached Mr Bingley from your sister . . . . (my emphasis, 174) . . . that I had, in defiance of various claims, in defiance of honour and humanity, ruined the immediate prosperity, and blasted the prospects of Mr Wickham. (my emphasis, 174)

It is only the conditional phrasing (emphasized) that allows Mr Darcy finally to escape these charges: he did not separate Jane and Bingley regardless of the sentiments of either, and while he did ruin George Wickham, he did not ruin him in defiance of various claims, honour or humanity. These conditional statements are also examples of narrative enthymemes: in both of these issues (regard for affection in marriage, and regard for the claims of honour) Darcy's story demonstrates moral axioms that the character Elizabeth has specifically expresses at points throughout the novel. She herself has refused two extremely advantageous marriage proposals on the grounds of affection, and in the proposal from Darcy in particular her ground for refusal is that his character lacks honour and humanity.

As she reads through his letter, Elizabeth begins to see a deep agreement on moral perspective between herself and Mr Darcy. In a daring emphasis on character argument, Darcy does not deny the charges against him; instead, he claims that his decisions were the right thing to do. Hence, he takes the line of argument that Quintilian indicates is the most difficult but also the most emphatically moral:

> For . . . far the strongest method of self-defence is, if possible, to deny the charge. The second best is when it is possible to reply that the particular act with which you are charged was never committed. The third and most honourable is to maintain that the act was justifiable. (vol. 1, 453)

The actions that Darcy admits to are narrated in a way that implies worthwhile motives. It turns out that this moral framework happens to be identical to Elizabeth's own. Refusing Wickham the church position, splitting up Jane and Bingley, and writing his letter to Elizabeth are all actions based on values that Elizabeth herself already acknowledges. She acknowledges that "sermon-making was not so palatable" (291) to Mr Wickham; hence, she would agree with Darcy's decision to refuse him the position of a clergyman:

> [Wickham] had found the law a most unprofitable study, and was now absolutely resolved on being ordained, if I would present him to the living in question . . . . You will hardly blame me for refusing to comply with this entreaty, or for resisting every repetition of it. (179)

In spite of compassion for her family even in their breaches of decorum, Elizabeth also acknowledges this value. The value of decorum is the root of her affection for her Aunt and Uncle Gardiner. She herself admits to embarrassment over her family's behaviour during the Netherfield ball:

> To Elizabeth it appeared, that had her family made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, it would have been impossible for them to play their parts with more spirit, or finer success. (91)

This feeling connects precisely to Darcy's, as he states in his letter:

> The situation of your mother's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison of that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father. (176)

Elizabeth also values commitment to her siblings, especially to her sister Jane; thus she will respond specifically to Darcy's statement: "Regard for my sister's credit and feelings prevented any public exposure . . ." (180). Thus, the moral axioms underlying Darcy's narrative match Elizabeth's own values quite specifically. As Elizabeth listens to his narrative, and the underlying motives emerge, she recognizes that his values are identical to her own. As these connections gather momentum, his narrative takes on incontrovertible strength. I would argue that, because of this deep agreement on moral premises, Darcy's rhetorical narrative has a persuasive force equal to the force normally acknowledged only in logical argumentation. Elizabeth has little real choice in whether or not to believe Mr Darcy's version of the events. His narrative version is, to her who holds the same values, plainly and self-evidently true.

Once the moral first premises are accepted, a narrative argument has the same strength as a logical argument. In such a situation, the listener will feel compelled to accept a narrative version as true. A narrator who not only claims but demonstrates the same moral axioms as the listener will compel belief. What Mr Darcy calls his "faithful narrative" (Pride and Prejudice, 180), therefore, may compel a full and rational belief on the part of Elizabeth. Ethos, or belief in the person, is the root of conviction in Pride and Prejudice. This ethos originates within the argument itself, from the narrative enthymemes. The implied motives behind Mr Darcy's actions and decisions align perfectly with the motives that Elizabeth herself understands instinctively. This is a type of argument that requires a leap of faith, but it is a faith based on a sense of moral recognition, character, or ethos. Narrative truth thus can be "self-evident;" it can compel belief to the same extent that other forms of rational argumentation can compel belief.

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