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# **Darcy as a Cultural Icon: Deconstructing Desire**

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## ABSTRACT

The main character in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy, seems to have transcended time, and to have become-200 years later- an example of what an ideal man should be and "an influence over the romantic hero stereotypes" (Ailwood, 2008:141).

In the present day Mr. Darcy-whose status as a cultural icon allows us to refer him simply as Darcy- is a masculine icon, a figure of desire whose popularity is still growing even two centuries after the publication of the novel. However, a question concerning this that remains unanswered is the source of Darcy's attraction- a desirability whose source is hard to define- not least because his apparent charms are not so transparent. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy is portrayed as aloof and arrogant, and Austen does not give much account of his physical appearance. Even so, Darcy's desirability is undeniable. The aim of this project is to attempt to discover the reasons behind the popularity of this character, despite his many negative aspects. The following suggestions are an effort to give a plausible answer to the mysterious fascination that Darcy represents for readers.

The first suggestion concerns screen adaptations of the novel. More specifically, the imagistic power of particular actors who play the role of Darcy, the sexuality and physicality they project onto the character and how the manipulations of certain scenes "serve to dramatize Austen's development of Darcy's character" and "make his physical actions speak a 20<sup>th</sup> century emotional vocabulary" (Troost, 1998: 21-24).

The second proposal, however, concerns Austen's narrative manipulation within the novel. The particular way she constructs Darcy, an emphatically disagreeable character at the beginning but, as the twist in the narration uncovers the real goodness of the character-so he becomes a sort of 'saviour'-is, I will argue, central to the abiding notions of desire that attach to him. Moreover, the fact that Austen permits the reader a certain access

to the thoughts and feelings of Darcy gives readers an advantage over Lizzie Bennet's prejudices.

These two assumptions will be tested by focusing on contemporary readers and their experiences when reading and watching *Pride and Prejudice*, since it is such readers who grant Darcy the condition of Ideal Male. The methodology used will be one of qualitative research, based on an online questionnaire composed of ten questions. Five of these will make reference to the screen adaptations and the influence of the actors taking the role of Darcy, - the other five will refer to Austen's narrative strategy. Through this, I will try to show that the core of Darcy's desirability is actually not so indefinable. Obviously, the image projected by a particular actor has a great influence on the idea of desire, since this is the means by which the character is endowed with a physical appearance. However, Jane Austen's narrative strategy in the construction of Darcy is also central indeed, this clearly influences the structure of screen adaptations and, as I hope to show, is an additional factor in consolidating the great sense of desirability that Darcy exudes.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mr. Darcy is, of all Austen's male heroes, the one who enjoys a larger popularity. As the main character of *Pride and Prejudice*, the novel that received a greater acknowledgment of the six the novelist wrote, such recognition might have to do with the attention the character is granted. Nonetheless, his current fame is not the only trait that draws attention to the character. It is actually his status as a desirable man which is more astonishing, considering his acts and Austen's depiction of the character especially in the first part of the novel.

Fitzwilliam Darcy is a tall man with handsome features and noble manners; no more information about his appearance is given. He is introverted and shy and barely expresses his feelings. On his arrival at Meryton, he is perceived as an aloof and stiff man, whose arrogance and feelings of superiority towards the ones who are not part of his social group prevent him from joining or being introduced to the new party. At the beginning of the novel he offends Elizabeth Bennet, the main female character, making a bad remark about her figure while she is within his earshot.

Later, he interferes in the relationship between Elizabeth's sister, Jane, and his friend Mr Bingley, taking the latter away and leaving Jane in a situation of "derision for disappointed hopes" (Austen 1994: 149). His lack of tact and diplomacy leads him to offend the female protagonist a second time, when he declares his love for her and makes Lizzie a marriage proposal. A proposal in which the reasons why he should not marry her and the inferiority of Lizzie and her family gain more importance than the actual love he feels for the protagonist.

Despite all of these awful traits, Darcy represents the ultimate portrayal of what an ideal man should be. A status he does not seem to give up if we take into account readers'

opinions about him: “Mr Darcy has passion, charm loyalty and intensity and when played by Colin Firth he is the sexiest man alive”, “Mr.Darcy, in contrast to the ponces and fops around him, was a genuine, red blooded man” or “Mr Darcy has Pemberly and lots of money”. These statements were taken from the Australian news paper *The Sydney Morning Herald*, an edition from the year 2004. Yet, ten years later readers’ opinions have not changed that much: “As I imagine him to be the handsome Matthew MacFadyen or Colin Firth it was hard to dislike him, even in the first part of the novel”, “Mr Darcy is a strong, introverted and tough man, with a heart full of tenderness. It’s a cliché but it works” or “His introverted character is an absolute contraposition regarding the other characters. He is not showing off in order to gain Elizabeth’s sympathy”

All these opinions, taken directly from readers of *Pride and Prejudice*, show which are Mr Darcy’s traits that have a major influence on readers. His introverted behavior, though maybe created to provoke a feeling of aversion towards the character, turns out to be one of the traits that enhance his appeal and make him stand out among the other male characters. Screen adaptations have as well a great influence on his desirability. Nonetheless, it is Darcy’s change the key factor that turns him into a desirable man and makes the reader forget about all the bad traits mentioned before. As one of the readers said, “The central point of the idealization of Darcy is his change”.

As these comments about Darcy show, readers of *Pride and Prejudice* are the ones who bestow an idealization on Darcy. According to some critics of reading response theory, readers are the ones who give meaning to a text, “the meaning of a text relies on the work of the reader” (Bennet 2009: 12). To put it in another way, certain aspects can be found in Austen’s narrative that tell us Darcy is a character supposed to be admired by readers. Nonetheless, readers’ way of interpreting these signs is what finally grants Darcy the status of masculine icon and contemplate him as an ideal portrayal of masculinity, as

Lennard Davis declares: “Novelists do not create characters but only provide instructions to readers who, in turn, must create a character in their minds.” (Davis 1987:114). Besides, the reading experience is very much influenced by the individual’s personality; that is their desires, needs, experiences and so forth (Bennet 2009:12). These traits are projected in their reading of the character, which discloses that Mr Darcy is so desirable because he represents a kind of masculinity which was radical for the Romantic era, (Ailwood 2008:143) but also rarely found nowadays. Readers’ needs and desires are fulfilled in the figure of Darcy, since he is putting aside patriarchal values associated both in the past and the present with a proper model of masculinity and focuses on pleasing a woman’s desire of what men should be.

Thus, in this paper, I intend to analyze the reasons that are thought to influence Darcy’s idealization. These which are, as I’ll argue: Austen’s narrative and his portrayal of the character, the new model of masculinity the character represents and the adaptations of the novel for TV and cinema. These arguments will be assessed according to the opinions of the direct responsible for Darcy’s status, readers, through an online questionnaire that deals with the assumption given.



## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 NARRATIVE MANIPULATION

“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” (Austen 1994: 10). These are the first traits Austen decided to use in order to introduce readers to the character of Mr Darcy. These unpleasant characteristics will be mentioned continually throughout the novel, not only by the narrator, but also by other characters, particularly by Lizzie, since it is mostly through her eyes that we get to know Mr Darcy. However, despite the apparent reasons to dislike Darcy, he has earned himself the status of ideal man making many readers -especially women- feel a fervent infatuation for him; a fascination completely unattainable, since Mr. Darcy is a fictional character. This phenomenon, forgetting -at least while reading the novel- that characters in novels are not real people and the act of feeling certain emotions that actually can only be felt towards real human beings, is what Karlheinz Stierle calls ‘quasi-pragmatic reception’. Falling in love with Darcy means “believing in him and creating an illusion that make readers transcend the fictional text” (Stierle, 1980, cited in Davis, 1987:111).

There are different aspects that can cause this intimate connection with a fictional character, certain qualities a character must have in order to become attractive. These characteristics are presented by Jane Austen’s Mr Darcy, and even if it seems that the narrator’s aim does not seem to get readers to like Darcy -at first- there are several clues in her narrative that reveal that he was actually created to arouse such passions. Besides, they help us to understand why he has become such a desired character despite the first bad impressions.

To begin with, Darcy is the main male character in *Pride and Prejudice*. Central characters are supposed to be likeable. It is one of the purposes of novels and it seems that the novel does not work if there is not a sense of attraction on the reader's part towards the central character (Davis, 1987). In other words, we might be told that Darcy is a despicable man, yet there is the knowledge that he is central for the novel and therefore, readers might expect that at one point these awful first impressions will have a plausible explanation.

Secondly, there is Darcy's physical appearance. The narrator does describe him as aloof and impolite and this is the first input we receive about his character. Nonetheless, in the previous lines readers have been told by the same source that he is handsome: "Mr Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features and noble mien" (Austen 1994:10).

A character's physical appearance might seem just an extra detail and not really relevant for the understanding of the character but, in novels, every character's feature is there for a purpose. This is one of the main distinctions between a real person and a fictional one, nothing is there by chance, and Darcy's fine physical appearance is not an exception. As Leonard J. Davis says in his book *Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction*, beauty conceals a message: "Usually beauty is a sign that such characters are admirable, worthy of imitation and cultural paragons. (...) Their physical beauty is often a sign of their social status" (Davis 1987:123). So, despite the fact that readers are told that Darcy is an unpleasant man, a reason behind his disgraceful behaviour is expected, since he is handsome, and his beauty tells them otherwise. Unconsciously, they do not get to dislike him at all.

However, if it was only a matter of beauty Wickham and Bingley would be equally praised. As well as Darcy, they both are described as handsome men: "[Wickham] His

appearance was greatly in his favour; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and a very pleasing address” (Austen 1994: 59). Mr Bingley-in his turn- “was good looking and gentlemanlike; he had a pleasant countenance and easy, unaffected manners” (Austen: 10)

As Davis suggests (1987: 124) in nineteenth century novels, beauty was not only a sign of nobility, but it was also an indication of a high morality, a requisite that Wickham does not fulfil. He is handsome but turns out to be a liar whose main purpose is to marry a woman who can provide for his eccentricities. Then, he loses all his appeal the moment his real intentions are discovered. On the other hand, there is Bingley who is indeed handsome and the kindest of men so, why is he overshadowed by the figure of Darcy? The difference between Bingley and Darcy is that the former is a completely transparent character. He is handsome -though not as handsome as Darcy: “The gentlemen [Darcy] pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr Bingley” (Austen 1994:10) and he is also pleasant. Bingley’s physical appearance corresponds to his character. This fact turns him into an affable but uninteresting man, since his character does not conceal anything and thus he seems to have very little to offer. However, part of Darcy’s attractiveness remains in the dichotomy between his physical appearance and his behaviour. His look claims that he is - or should be- a kind pleasant man, but we are made to believe that he is not. The mystery this contrast creates around the character is part of his appeal and it is what attracts readers to him. The final revelation about his gentleman-like deeds to save Lydia Bennett’s reputation and his unconditional love for Lizzie confirms that these hints were right; and that he has the necessary requisites to be a central character and become a figure of desire.

Another factor that seems indispensable in order for the reader to feel attracted towards a character is identification. In real life a sense of identification implies having

knowledge of a certain person, in novels that is not necessary. On the contrary, in novels, the process of identification with a character comes before we even start reading the text (Davis 1994:126). In other words, when one is about to start a novel the reader is already inclined to feel identified with one of the characters, the reader desires to identify with a character. Normally, this identification is expected to occur between the main character and the reader. Therefore, involuntarily a feeling of desire towards this particular character is created even before we start reading the text. The idea of desire is another important factor in the reading of a novel. Desire is a necessary concept since it leads to identification. It could be said it is the motor of the act of reading, “it provides a means of linking the energies of characters within a text to those involved in creating and in responding to that text. The process of novel reading is very much dependent on desire” (Spacks 1990: 1). In relation to these two concepts comes up again the idea of beauty. A physical superiority from part of the character enhances the feeling of desire:

In making a character attractive, the author can draw the reader towards that set of signs much as advertisers can draw consumers towards a product by associating it with a physical attractive model. In effect, it is not so much that we identify with a character, but that we desire that character in some non-specific but erotic way. In this sense, part of the novel reading is the process of falling in love with characters or making friends with signs. (Davis 1987: 127)

Darcy is not only the central character of the novel, but he is also handsome. He has been created to elicit identification and become an object of desire. Desire and beauty

increased the need for identification with Darcy and cause that readers perceive Darcy as a highly desired character. As Freud called it, Darcy is cathected<sup>1</sup>.

Darcy's physical appearance, his attitude and how they help to create a specific idea of man that invites identification have already been mentioned in order to explain the source of his desirability. Nonetheless, it is also necessary to refer to Darcy in regard to the romantic hero. As Carabí and Segarra argue, "The romantic hero is supposed to be shy and introverted. A man struggling between the love he feels and the duty his head commands; he is usually unconfident in social contexts. The romantic hero usually presents qualities that are not the ones related to the male archetype" (Carabí & Segarra 2000: 45-46)

As a character of the Romantic era apart from having some of these characteristics, "I'm ill qualified to recommend myself to strangers (...) I certainly have not the talent which some people possess, of conversing easily with those I have never seen before" (Austen 1994: 137), he is also described under Romantic patterns. This means that the novel does not present many descriptions of his physique apart from the one mentioned at the beginning. All the information we get about him only concerns his personality or behaviour. Furthermore, the reader does not have direct access to his thoughts as often as they have to Lizzie's. It is normally the narrator who gives information about his feelings, but actually very few times. It is always through the eyes of Lizzie Bennet that we get to know Mr. Darcy. Getting to know a male character through the eyes of a female character is a very significant fact for the construction of the character for two reasons.

First of all, because as it has been just said, all the information we receive about Darcy passes through Elizabeth's filter. In other words, the details about his persona are

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<sup>1</sup> Cathexis was a term coined by Freud in his studies of psychoanalysis to refer to an emotional charge or energy related to a mental image, idea or object. When we say someone is cathected, it means this person has been charged with an erotic valence. (Freud, 1966, cited in Davis, 1987:128)

not completely objective and they are very much affected by her first impressions of him. Since Lizzie is the female main character and practically the whole novel turns around her, it would be difficult not to be influenced by her thoughts about him. That is if she dislikes him there is a possibility that readers dislike him as well. The same would be true if we were encountering the reverse situation. If she liked him it is very probable readers would like him too. So, the moment Lizzie starts to like Darcy, imposing her gaze on him, he becomes more desirable for the reader. Exercising the power of the look, Elizabeth turns Darcy into an erotic object. This phenomenon is called “the female gaze”.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, one must not forget that in *Pride and Prejudice* both men and women imposed their look on the other sex. For instance, the frequent looks of Darcy towards Elizabeth in their social encounters. When Darcy becomes the observer, the reader is able to get valuable information that Lizzie is not aware of. Darcy’s gazes contradict Lizzie’s view of him since we see that he is not as insensitive as she thinks him to be. So, it is impossible to completely believe Lizzie’s idea of him and consequently dislike him.

The idea of the gaze is not only important because it turns Darcy into an erotic object, hence enhancing his appeal, but also because it establishes a sense of equality between the two main characters, Lizzie and Darcy. This equality is the result of the imposed gaze of Darcy on Elizabeth and vice versa. Making both of them objects of desire of the other and at the same time onlookers Austen established a feeling of equality between both sexes. (Malone 2010: 80). The female gaze is important because it makes Lizzie an active part in the courtship, instead of granting her a passive attitude for being a woman as it occurred with many other female characters in novels of the time.

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<sup>2</sup> The concept was actually coined under the name “male gaze” since men are usually the ones who exercise the look on women. However, since all of *Pride and Prejudice* is written under the perspective of a woman and it is through a woman that the character of Darcy is revealed, the term has been changed to ‘female gaze’. (Cano, 2010)

Furthermore, it is also important because it presents masculinity through a female perspective.

Secondly, apart from the importance of the female gaze on the hero to elicit desire on the subject looked at, there is the issue of how masculinity is created through a female perspective. Meaghan Malone in her article “Masculinity and the Female Gaze in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*” (2010) proposes a very interesting vision of masculinity in Jane Austen’s works, particularly in regard to the character of Mr Darcy. The scholar states that Darcy is the representation of a new kind of masculinity, one that is the fusion of the two ideal masculinities that both Mary Wollstonecraft and Edmund Burke defended in their works. The former presents a more feminist and innovative kind of masculinity for her time, the latter defends the importance of chivalric manners in a man and how he thought they were being lost during the Industrial Revolution era.

The Romantic society Jane Austen’s works are set in was one dominated by stoicism and proper manners. In an environment like this, controlling one’s emotions was essential. These norms regarding restraint behaviour in social contexts greatly affect the character of Darcy, who is continually struggling between his rational being and his emotions. For this reason, as a man of the Romantic era he was expected to behave moderately and control his emotions. Moreover, as a Romantic hero of a high class society he was not only examined under the model of a Romantic man but also under the model of a man of the nobility. This is the reason why his first proposal to Elizabeth turns out to be so unpleasant, since it could be said he is working under the commands of his most rational being: “Why with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character?” (Austen 1994:149). It is when Darcy discovers what Elizabeth wants from a man that he understands that he has to change himself in order to become a better man for her. In this

radical realization for is where the author invented a new kind of masculinity. This new masculinity is based on his disposition to change himself according to Lizzie's ideals, along with his gentlemanlike behaviour, which although chivalric at times is never too sentimental. His display of feelings in a passionate way but, without forsaken rationality prevents him from losing his virility even if he is modelling himself according to a women's view (Malone 2010: 67).

This mixture of rationality and chivalric manners removed of exaggerated sentimentalism can be appreciated in his willingness to save Lizzie's sister, Lydia, and her family from a bad reputation after Lydia runs away with Wickham. He does so out of his love for Elizabeth and not to prove his masculinity or superiority over Lizzie because he is able to save Lydia due to his position while Lizzie cannot. In other words, Darcy arranges Wickham's wedding with Lydia just because he loves Lizzie. Besides, the fact that he wants to conceal it from her turns the deed into less sentimental, moving it from the old chivalric codes.

Darcy is a completely rational man. So rational at times, that as it has been mentioned his first proposal becomes an insult more than a proof of his love for the protagonist. It is later, when he learns to combine both sentimentalism and rationality, when Austen's fusion to create a "new man" is finally achieved, "She [Austen] combines Burke's ideals of romance and chivalry with Wollstonecraft's reason and rationality to create men who are able to express emotion while never descending to foppery, melancholy, or sycophancy" (Malone: 67). But the most important fact in Jane Austen's new model of masculinity and what probably turns Darcy into one of the most desirable men is that he displays a new masculinity where men "are able and (most importantly) willing to adapt to their lovers desires" (Malone: 63)



## 2.2 SCREEN ADAPTATIONS

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* has been adapted for TV and cinema six times, not counting other versions as *Bride and Prejudice*, the Bollywood adaptation, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, or *The Bridget Jones Diaries* that were inspired by Austen's novel. However, the adaptations that probably received the most attention were the 1940 version starring Laurence Olivier, Andrew Davies' adaptation for the BBC with Colin Firth as Darcy and the 2005 version with Keira Knightley and Matthew Macfadyen.

This data is very significant to understand the popularity that the novel reached and the great influence they had over the male hero, since movies contribute to enhance the desirability of the character. The primary reason is because they give the character a physical body, a physical image readers can relate the character with. Thus, depending on the generation Mr Darcy would be associated with one actor or other. This is very important if we take into account there are not many descriptions of Darcy's appearance in the novel as it has been said previously. Moreover, the actors who play the role of Mr Darcy are usually inside the model of what it is considered attractive, intentionally intending to draw out this attraction from the viewer. Therefore, they endow Austen's Darcy not only with physicality, but with an appealing one, which leads to that feeling of attraction.

Along with the physical appearance, movies also positively affect the vision of the character due to the addition of extra scenes. Extra scenes make reference to the modifications made to Austen's original plot. These manipulations are usually criticized by many scholars such as Cheryl Nixon who defends that "they depart from the values of Jane Austen's time and alter the image of appropriate masculinity". (Ailwood 2008: 145).

Nonetheless, extra scenes are necessary in order to make the story and its characters more attractive for modern audiences.

The BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* is said to be the one that ignited the “Darcy fever” (Sokol 1999: 94), because unlike the novel or other adaptations the character of Mr Darcy receives considerable amount of attention regarding his feelings, thoughts and body. This extra attention, not present in the novel, is translated in the series as Darcy extra scenes, “nearly all of Davies’s departures from the novel involved Darcy” (Nixon 1998: 23). These scenes usually involved Darcy in some kind of physical activity, for instance fencing, bathing or the memorable pool-diving. These actions no doubt contribute to emphasize the sensuality of the character. However, they are not there for the mere purpose of glamorizing Darcy’s body, they are used to reveal Darcy’s emotional struggle.

“The BBC adaptation uses Darcy’s body to dramatize Darcy’s emotional struggle, which in the novel is communicated to the reader through literary rather than cinematic techniques” (Ailwood 2008:146) and it reveals information about Darcy that in the novel is shown through other means. This is why sometimes it is necessary to include in films an episode not present in the original plot, because novels have certain stylistics features impossible to portray on screen, for instance, focalization (Ailwood: 146). Very few times in *Pride and Prejudice* we get to access Darcy’s mind, but when we do, we are able to know his real feelings and thoughts for Elizabeth. In Davies’ adaptation this is shown through Darcy’s physical activities. For instance, in episode two, we see Darcy playing billiards when by accident Elizabeth comes into the room. They stare at each other and Elizabeth apologizing leaves quickly. After she leaves Darcy strikes the ball violently. This proves that Elizabeth provokes an emotional reaction in him (Troost 1998: 32), an emotion he has to conceal due to the conventions of his time, when emotional display had to be regulated.

These obvious departures from the plot are also a way of bringing the audience closer to the story and its characters. As a novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *Pride and Prejudice*'s portrayal of masculinity is quite different from the one of today. In the author's world "public displays of affection were considered vulgar and intimate touching and kissing were behaviours reserved for the bedroom; male protagonists prove their worth by meeting a demand for social restraint" (Sokol 1999: 101). This definition does not match the modern view of masculinity where modern day audiences want emotional and erotic display. In order to make Darcy more attractive for spectators and portray a model of masculinity they can relate to, the character needs to be reconfigured.

According to Meaghan Malone "sexuality in Austen's novels is never explicit" (Malone 2010: 62). Added scenes in the screen adaptations, however, respond to the desire of modern audiences for open emotional displays. Both in the BBC version and the 2005 versionn by Joe Wright, we found evidence that these scenes satisfy audiences' demand. In Davies' version, Darcy and Elizabeth kiss after the wedding. In Joe Wright's version Darcy holds Elizabeth hand and helps her get into the carriage. There is a direct shot of them holding of hands, which indicates the importance of the moment since it is a direct proof of Darcy's attraction for Elizabeth.

To summarize, the importance of the screen adaptations regarding Darcy's desirability remains in the fact that their main purpose is centred on turning Darcy into an object of desire. They add desirability to a character that according to some lacks attractiveness for modern audiences.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 THE SAMPLE**

Since readers are the ones who grant Darcy the status of ideal man, they were asked to fill a questionnaire concerning the aspects thought to influence his desirability.

These students were part of 6 different literature courses, five of them taken at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and the remaining one at the University of Barcelona (UB). The courses belonged to different academic years: Renaissance Literature (Year 3), Cultural Studies: The Harry Potter Series (Year 4), 19<sup>th</sup> Century North American Literature (Year 2), 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Narrative (Year 1), Contemporary English (Year 4) and the one from the UB, 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Narrative (Year 3). There was a seventh group formed of undergraduates who are not taking any literature courses or who were not students of the universities that participated in the project.

The groups were divided into four categories, taking into account the gender and age of the participants. In other words, for each literature group, as well as for the other extra group formed by students not enrolled in literature classes, there were four subgroups: Women under 25, women over 25, men under 25 or men over 25.

A total of 54 individuals took the survey. Of these 54 respondents, 51 were women. Inside the group of women, the majority, 44, were under the age of 25 and seven were over 25. Only three men answered the questionnaire and the three of them were under 25.

### **3.2 THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

With the aim of finding out to what extent the reasons given to explain the source of Darcy's desirability were plausible or not, the students completed a ten question survey. In order to answer the survey, participants were required to have read the novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Otherwise the questionnaire itself would have not made sense, since the object analyzed, Darcy, is the product of Jane Austen's novel.

The survey was divided into two parts. The first five questions made reference to the screen adaptations of Jane Austen's novel. These questions wanted to test the assumptions commented on previously: the influence of a physical body, the manipulation of scenes and how they positively affect the image of the character. The second part of the questionnaire made reference to the novel, how Jane Austen's construction of the character and her narrative manipulation also have an influence on the perception of the character.

The answer options were always 'Yes' or 'No', except in question number 3, where due to the kind of question a longer statement was needed, '*I found him more appealing in the novel*' or '*I found him more appealing in the film*'. Furthermore, the subjects had also the possibility of adding extra comments to their answers, which contributed valuable information about why or why not they agreed with the statements or which specific traits make the character appealing.

### **3.3 METHOD**

The questions were passed through an online questionnaire. Participants were given a month to answer the survey. They were not obliged to answer all the questions.

## 4. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

### 4.1 RESULTS

Focusing on the whole sample, the majority of the responses were favorable towards the statements given. That is, respondents agreed with the reasons thought to be the cause of the desirability of the character. Especially, with the ones related to the novel, which exhibited a significant difference between the amount of people who answered yes and the ones who answered no.

The first question<sup>3</sup> was very significant, because it was important to know how many people had read the book before seeing a screen adaptation, since the screen adaptation would have influenced their reading of the novel and, therefore, their vision of the character of Darcy. Half of the participants, 52%, said they had seen a screen adaptation before reading the novel. In the second question<sup>4</sup>, 48% of them said to have been influenced positively by the actor that played the role of Darcy, seven percent said they were not and the remaining 45% that made no answer correspond to the ones who read the novel before seeing any screen adaptation. In question number 3, these participants were asked to choose in which of the two versions, the novel or the screen adaptation, they found Darcy more appealing. The majority, 31 % chose the novel, whereas 17% chose the screen adaptations.<sup>5</sup>

Extra scenes hold part of the positive effect screen adaptations have on the character of Mr. Darcy, since they tend to glamorize and romanticize the character.

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<sup>3</sup> To see the exact statement of the question see Appendix.

<sup>4</sup> To see the exact statement of the question see Appendix.

<sup>5</sup> The 52% left are the respondents who saw a screen adaptation before reading the novel, therefore did not answered that question.

Question number 4<sup>6</sup> made reference to this idea, the majority of the respondents, 83%, answered ‘Yes’, seven percent answered ‘No’, and another seven percent made no response. This was one of the questions where respondents provided more comments. In many cases subjects declared that in screen adaptations Darcy’s love for Lizzie and the reasons behind his acts were clearer than in the novel. Furthermore, according to some, screen adaptations portray Darcy in a more positive light than in the novel and this influences their perception of the character.

The last question of this first part of the survey made direct reference to Darcy’s body and to what extent the fine physical appearance of an actor might overshadow the wrong decisions of the character. Half of the participants agreed with the assumption<sup>7</sup>, 48% did not and two percent made no response. Even though the majority acknowledged the power a fine physical appearance has over a character, the comments of these questions were quite varied. Some participants admitted that the opinion we hold of someone depends very much on his appearance and that their vision of him would change if he was not good looking. On the other hand other declared that his attractive appearance did not help and that at the first stages of the story they did dislike him. Other interesting views were the ones that stated that they did not find Darcy’s behavior unpleasant at all.

The second part of the survey, as mentioned before, was the one where the respondents showed a more favorable attitude towards the premises given. Participants demonstrated that Jane Austen’s narrative manipulations contributed to the desirability of the character to a considerable extent. The questions where respondents were more in agreement with the statements, were the ones regarding Darcy’s traits and actions.

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<sup>6</sup> To see the exact statement of the question see Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> To see the exact statement of the question see Appendix.

Darcy's change is a key point of the novel and of the character, as well as one of the most relevant facts to regard him as ideal. This is why in question six<sup>8</sup>, participants were asked if they thought Darcy's change contributed to the idealization of the character. Of all the respondents 83% answered 'Yes', 12% answered 'No' and four percent made no response. Some of them added a comment supporting the idea, for instance: "From my point of view, it is obvious that the central point of the idealization of Darcy is his change and development as a character" or "The fact that he accepts his own flaws and actively tries to improve himself to be a better person, the kind Elizabeth would have accepted, is a big part of why he is so ideal".

Questions 8 and 9 dealt with Darcy's character and how it contrast with other characters, especially Bingley and Wickham who are the two other male characters that receive more attention in the novel. The two questions were related since Darcy's introverted character is one of the qualities that most distinguishes him from the other male characters. In both questions, the answer 'Yes' held more positive responses. In question 9, 'Does the fact that Darcy is so different from other characters (such as Mr Bingley, who—though undoubtedly a very good person is basically uninteresting—or Mr Wickham, who eventually turns out to be bad) enhance your interest in him?' 61% of the respondents answered 'Yes'. In question 8, 'Do you think part of Darcy's attractiveness depends on his reserved and introverted character?' 81% of the participants said it does. Some of the comments made let us see in what way his introversion influences his appeal; as some respondents said, Darcy is a reserved man whose introverted character makes him interesting because it makes readers want to know more about him. Another respondent stated that silent men are usually more interesting due to the myth that it seems they always have deep things to say, especially to the woman they love. Here it is where part of his

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<sup>8</sup> To see the exact statement of the question see Appendix.



desirability comes from. Darcy represents the idea, mentioned before, of the ideal man not so common in real life. A man who changes himself for a woman and whose introversion is believed to conceal deep thoughts related to his beloved and the deep love he feels for her.

Due to the fact that Lizzie Bennet is the protagonist of *Pride and Prejudice* and most part of the story is seen through her eyes, in question number 7, ‘Did your sense of attraction towards Darcy increase when Elizabeth—after visiting Pemberley—realizes that she might be in love with him?’ a higher percentage in option ‘Yes’, was expected, since we get to know Darcy mostly through Lizzie and this arouses identification towards her. Nonetheless, only 56% of the respondents answered ‘Yes’ and 39% answered ‘No’. Most of them suggested that is actually Darcy’s inner qualities and specially the moment he starts to change himself what made them feel attracted to the character.

Finally, question 10, ‘The way that Darcy frequently gazes at Elizabeth uncovers his love for her and reveals that he is not as insensitive as it appeared. Does this indirect revelation of feelings heightens Darcy’s desirability?’, is the one participants agreed more with. The majority, 86% answered ‘Yes’, seven percent answered ‘No’ and another seven percent made no response. Readers are receiving information Elizabeth does not, and as one of the comments said this shared intimacy make readers feel attached to him. Others focused on the emphasis he puts on the protagonist features, which indicates how profound his feelings are. Lisa Hopkins, in her essay “Mr Darcy’s Body” makes reference to these gazes and how they uncover certain Darcy’s qualities and some of his feelings for the protagonist, which every woman wants to believe real men have:

“[...]creating male characters who crave the love of the heroine with an intensity, we may fear, real men rarely experience. [...] What we want to see, I think is not just Darcy in the

abstract: it is Darcy looking-particularly at Elizabeth but also, on other occasions, at images which have been contextualized as being poignantly redolent of her absence. These looks too can signify his need. And we look back in a silent collusion, because it is in that need that we most want to believe.” (Hopkins 1998: 120)

## **4.2 DISCUSSION**

The present study was undertaken with the aim of finding out the possible reasons that make readers, specially women, perceive Darcy as a figure of desire. The main novelty this project presents is that it analyses Jane Austen’s Darcy from a new perspective; that is analyzing the source of Darcy’s desirability from readers’ point of view. There is no other study to compare these results with. Thus, the results will be evaluated according to the analysis of the character made previously in this project.

First of all, it has to be acknowledged that in the event that the sample was wider the results would probably vary. Especially considering the following factors, the majority of the respondents were literature students, therefore, they may show a special sensibility and approach the character with a different critical edge. It would have varied as well if there had been a greater participation from part of men, since it could have been possible to perceive Darcy from a male perspective and probably some of the assumptions would have received different results. Nevertheless, it also has to be considered that these literature courses were a part of the English Studies degree, were the majority of the enrolled students are women.

After analyzing the data, the most striking result was this limited participation from part of men. It is true that a questionnaire with such characteristics might be thought to be intended especially for women. Nonetheless, the participation of men was considered necessary and an interesting source of information in order to know how men perceive

Austen's male hero, since Darcy is a male character written by a woman and seen through the eyes of a woman during the whole novel.

The questionnaire was meant to test two different hypotheses; how the imagistic power of an actor, along with the manipulation of certain scenes within screen adaptations of the novel are responsible for Darcy's current fame and enhance the appeal of the character. The second one, how Jane Austen's narrative is as well at play in the recognition of Darcy as a figure of desire, considering as main points of this idealization, Darcy's new model of masculinity, his character in contrast to other male characters of the novel and Lizzie's gaze on the character.

Regarding the first part of the questionnaire, the one dealing with the first hypothesis, the most remarkable fact was the amount of respondents that preferred the Darcy of the novel in regard to the Darcy of the movies. Bearing in mind that screen adaptations tend to portray a more appealing version of Darcy, it would have not been surprising that readers felt more attracted to the cinematographic version of the character. Nonetheless, considering these respondents had read the novel before watching the movie, it is probable their idea of Darcy was already defined and the representation the adaptations do of the character did not fit their perception. On the other hand, the participants who saw the movie before reading the novel agreed to have been influenced positively by the adaptation. This is due partly to the manipulation of scenes. The results obtained in the question dealing with this specific topic were as expected and successfully corroborated that movies enhance the character appeal and portray it in a more positive light; indicating his qualities and motivations more clearly than in the novel and consequently manipulating the audience perception of the character.

On the contrary, taking into account screen adaptations have the advantage of being able to relate Darcy with an attractive physicality, a higher agreement was expected in question 5. Darcy's physical beauty was considered one of the possible motives why he still holds such fascination and why readers like him despite his apparent in-existent charms. Movies took over the popular function of classical novels and continued with the tradition of making the hero attractive (Davis 1987: 23). Therefore, it was thought that the sexuality a certain actor projected in the fictional character would have a higher effect on the perception of the character, taking into account the theory that equals beauty and the worth of a character and that in the novel there are not many descriptions of Darcy's physique. Despite these theories, only half of the respondents said it had influenced them and that it had helped to minimize their negative perception of him.

In the second part of the survey, the one dealing with the second hypothesis, the results were quite foreseeable, if they are evaluated under the theory given previously. Questions 6, 8 and 10 are the ones that harbored a major agreement with the statements introduced in the questions. These questions dealt with Darcy's change, Darcy's character and Darcy's gaze on Lizzie respectively. Question 6 shows that Darcy's change is indeed key for the idealization of the character. Question 10 evidences that the hints of Darcy's love for Elizabeth the narrator uncovers do as well influence Darcy's reading. Since, in a way the veil that surrenders the character is broken and readers get access to his thoughts and feelings, discovering Darcy's true self before the protagonist does. Besides, the fact that Elizabeth is not aware of this information creates an intimacy that brings Darcy closer to readers.

However, there was a premise which was thought to receive much more agreement, Elizabeth's influence on the reader's perception of Darcy. As a main character and as the main focus and source of information, it was expected that participants were much more

influenced by her gaze on Darcy. That the moment she frees herself from hating Darcy, accords him justice and starts feeling gratitude and even identification with him (Whiltshire 2001: 114) will make readers undergo the same process as Lizzie and as the protagonist recognize their love for him. Nonetheless, Darcy's construction proved to exert much more influence on the readers' view since most of them stated that they already like Darcy before Lizzie realized she was in love and discovered the underlying goodness of the character. It is actually the character itself who has a major weight on his popular status.

In general, the hypotheses got a positive reception by the majority. These positive results ought to be worth for further study on the deconstruction of the popularity of Darcy, since it draws out and reveals the more relevant factors for the readers when referring to the source of Darcy's desirability.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

As seen in this project, after assessing the possible reasons for the source of Darcy's desirability, the results show that the different assumptions set out at the beginning of this study are plausible and that they relate to reader's actual feelings towards the character.

The premises that received more favorable responses were the ones related to Jane Austen's narrative manipulation. This result is not at all surprising taking into account Austen's construction of the character, especially the treatment of masculinity and how it relates to Darcy's change, which is essentially one of the most important factors that contributes to the character's attraction, since it redeems him from being a 'bad guy' and—through his capacity for positive introspection and personal development—unveils his underlying goodness

On the other hand there was the influence of screen adaptations, where the results clearly validated my initial assumptions. Nevertheless, taking into account the comments provided by the participants and statistics for their responses, it can be said that readers actually seem to show greater preference towards the text based narrative.. This fact is in part reasonable bearing in mind that Darcy is the original product of Jane Austen's narrative, and that every feature that makes the character appealing is essentially passed into the adaptations, and then mostly in order to enhance the character's attractiveness. However, respondents accepted that the manipulation of scenes greatly influenced their vision of Darcy, one of the main premises forwarded as being accountable for this continuous fascination for Darcy. It should not be forgotten that movies constantly reinvent Darcy and bring him closer to modern audiences, helping to maintain his popularity.

What it is most important of this project as a whole is that the insights resulting from the study have helped to draw an idea of readers' actual opinion of Jane Austen's principal male protagonist in *Pride and Prejudice*. The fact that the project is based on how readers perceived the character, taking into account their experiences and other external factors such as screen adaptations, makes it valuable for further studies. In other words, it offers a new insight into how to approach the study (and indeed the teaching) of the character, since the project is, in effect, a tool that facilitates approaching the character from the basis of defined ideas, and not of abstract hypotheses, of how Fitzwilliam Darcy is actually understood.

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## APPENDIX

### 1. QUESTIONNAIRE:

1. Before reading *Pride and Prejudice*, had you seen any of the screen adaptations?
2. If the answer to question one was ‘Yes’ did the actor who played the role of Darcy affect your perception of the character in a positive way while reading the novel?
3. If the answer to question one was ‘No’, if you have since seen a screen adaptation, did you find Darcy in this adaptation more or less appealing than your previous notion of him?
4. Do you think the way certain scenes are represented in the screen adaptations influence the way you see Darcy? (For example, the lake swim in the 1995 BBC version, or Darcy's holding Elizabeth's hand when she gets into the carriage in the 2005 Joe Wright version.)
5. Does Mr Darcy's physical appearance diminish his unpleasant behaviour?
6. Does Darcy's change into a better person (notably for Elizabeth) contribute to making him “ideal”?
7. Did your sense of attraction to Darcy increase when Elizabeth—after visiting Pemberley—realizes that she might be in love with him?
8. Do you think part of Darcy's attractiveness depends on his reserved and introverted character?
9. Does the fact that Darcy is so different from other characters (such as Mr Bingley, who—though undoubtedly a very good person is basically uninteresting—or Mr Wickham, who eventually turns out to be bad) enhance your interest in him?
10. The way that Darcy frequently gazes at Elizabeth uncovers his love for her and reveals that he is not as insensitive as it appeared. Does this indirect revelation of feelings heighten Darcy's desirability?

## 1.2 TABLE OF RESULTS

Group	Respondents	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
UAB_RenEn_CF Y3_F-25	1	Yes	Yes	No Response	Yes
UB_C19BritNarr Y3_F-25	11	Yes (7). No (4)	Yes (6). No (1). NR (4)	Novel (4). NR (7)	Yes (9). No (2)
UAB_Cstud_Y4 F-25	11	Yes (7). No (4)	Yes (6). No (2).NR (3)	Novel (4). Film (1) NR (6)	Yes (10) No (1)
UB_C19BritNarr Y3_F+25	4	Yes (3). No (1)	Yes (3). No (0). NR (1)	Novel (0). Film (1). NR (3)	Yes (4). No (0)
UAB_C19USLit_ DO_Y2_F-25	7	Yes (3). No (4)	Yes (3). No (1). NR (3)	Novel (4). Fillm (1). NR (2)	Yes (6). No (1)
UAB_ContEng_ Y4_F-25	3	Yes (0). No (3)	Yes (0). No (0). NR (3)	Novel (0). Film (3)	Yes (3).
UB_C19BritNarr Y3_M-25	1	No	No Response	No Response	No Response
UAB_C19USLit_ EP_Y2_F-25	6	Yes (2). No (4)	Yes (2). No (0). NR (4)	Novel (2). Film (2). NR (2)	Yes (6)
UAB_C20BritLit CF_Y1_F-25	1	No	No Response	Novel	Yes
UAB_C19USLit_ DO_Y2_M-25	2	Yes (0). No (2)	Yes (0). No (0). NR (2)	Novel (0). Film (0). NR (2)	Yes (0). No (0). NR (2)
UAB_CStud_Y4 _F+25	1	No	No Response	Film	Yes
UAB_ContEng_ Y4_F+25	2	Yes (2)	Yes (2)	No Response (2)	Yes (2)
F-25	4	Yes (3). No (1)	Yes (3). No (0). NR (1)	Novel (2). NR (2)	Yes (3). No (0). NR (1)

Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8	Question 9	Question10
No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No Response (but commented)
Yes (8). No (3)	Yes (10).NR (1)	Yes (8). No (2). NR (1)	Yes (10). NR (1)	Yes (8). No (2). NR (1)	Yes (10).NR(1)
Yes (7). No (4)	Yes (8).No (3)	Yes (7). No (4)	Yes (9). No (2)	Yes (10). No (1)	Yes (11). No (0)
Yes (2). No (2)	Yes (3). No (1)	Yes (1). No (3)	Yes (3). No (1)	Yes (1). No (3)	Yes (4). No (0)
Yes (2). No (5)	Yes (6). No (0). NR (1)	Yes (2). No (4). NR (1)	Yes (5). No (1). NR (1)	Yes (4). No (2). NR (1)	Yes (5). No (1). NR (1)
Yes (1). No (2)	Yes (2). No (1)	Yes (1). No (2)	Yes (1). No (2)	Yes (1). No (2)	Yes (1). No (2)
No Response	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes (4). No (2)	Yes (6)	Yes (4). No (2)	Yes (5). No (1)	Yes (4). No (2)	Yes (5). No (1)
No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
No (2)	Yes (2)	No (2)	Yes (2)	Yes (2)	Yes (2)
No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Yes (1). No (1)	Yes (1). No (1)	Yes (1). No (0). NR (1)	Yes (1). No (0). NR (1)	Yes (0). No (1). NR (1)	Yes (1). No (0). NR (1)

### 1.3 RESPONDENT'S COMMENTS

***Q1: Before reading *Pride and Prejudice*, had you seen any of the screen adaptations?***

-No comments were made.

***Q2: If the answer to question one was 'Yes' did the actor who played the role of Darcy affect your perception of the character in a positive way while reading the novel?***

- Since I already knew how the actor looked like when I read the novel and therefore I was inclined to be physically attracted to him.
- Through the BBC adaptation you are able to perceive the different attitudes that he has towards Elizabeth, and you can comprehend his behaviour easily. Perhaps it is more complicated to appreciate those changes through the novel.
- (Yes) The actor seemed to me very attractive and masculine.
- As I imagined him to be the handsome Matthew Macfayden/Colin Firth it was hard to dislike him even in the first part of the novel when we are supposed to dislike him because he is so stiff and prejudiced.
- Matthew Macfadyen's portrayal of Mr Darcy in the 2005 adaptation has stayed with me and shaped my reading of Mr Darcy more than any other actor has. He plays Darcy with a sort of awkwardness that contrasts a lot with his physical appearance. He added an extra layer of humanity to the Darcy of the first half of the book when I read it.
- I must admit that I fell in love with Mr. Darcy after watching the 2005 adaptation, with Matthew MacFadyen acting as Darcy. However, when I read the book I could pinpoint differences between the Darcy from the book and the Darcy from the film.
- I have the impression that he has no social skills at all. In fact, he was antisocial and he does not like people.
- For me Mr. Darcy has the face of Matthew Macfadyen.

***Q3: If the answer to question one was 'No', if you have since seen a screen adaptation, did you find Darcy in this adaptation more or less appealing than your previous notion of him?***

- No comments were made.

***Q4: Do you think the way certain scenes are represented in the screen adaptations influence the way you see Darcy? (For example, the lake swim in the 1995 BBC version, or Darcy's holding Elizabeth's hand when she gets into the carriage in the 2005 Joe Wright version.)***

- I think the setting, the actual way they look at each other...Those actions are open when reading the story. that is to say, I can imagine those little details in a different way that will be performed in the film or the screen adaptation. however, in the screen adaptation that choice is made for you. that is, to me, a kind of manipulation/influence in the way I see/imagine Darcy.
- It's like these scenes demonstrate the humanity of Mr.Darcy.
- In the way that you become aware about the attraction that is increasing from Elizabeth.
- These scenes help to perceive the attraction within both characters. Also, Through these manipulations the perception of Mr Darcy as a cold human being is broken momentarily, so that we notice his tenderness.
- They humanize him.
- The way I perceive him as a stunning man with strong personality and convictions, also the physical appearance, or the body language are other ways to reinforce his desirability.

- Make him more appealing to the female audience. He seems more of a gentleman as give him a softer side.
- Yes, we get to see a more romantic and idealized Darcy. I think in the novel there are subtle hints in different moments when he is being very rude, but most of the times we do not realize, and these hints definitely do not appear in the films.
- These scenes (2005 Joe Wright version) give us more information about the character, while in the book we only have Elizabeth's prejudiced point of view.
- In the book he is not so nicely portrayed as in the films. The film had the objective to make him more appealing to the viewers. Darcy is improved in character just to make people like him more easily.
- They tend to romanticise more the character. For instance, in the 2005 version, Darcy first declares his love to Elizabeth in a temple like building while it's heavily raining and there is a moment when it feels like him and Lizzy are going to kiss. At first this feels romantic and I've seen this first declaration quoted endless time as the ultimate love confession, when the novel makes it clear that he is arrogant and insensitive to the one he so much professes to love. This portrayal used to make me think about Darcy in these romantic terms, although now I'm relatively able to separate movie!Darcy and book!Darcy.
- You feel he is more "human".
- It makes you think that the character is more romantic and sweet than he is in the novel.
- They make him more attractive to the viewer, something that doesn't happen in the book precisely because we fall in love with him at the same time Lizzie does. We are told the story from Lizzie's point of view, and at the same time she realizes that maybe Darcy is not as bad as she thought, the reader realizes the same. In the films

and BBC series these little scenes make Darcy already appealing for the viewer, and we don't emphasize so much with Lizzie.

- The power of the eyes's actors are great and they transmit certain feelings on me that I cannot see through the novel.
- I see him more a desire object, as for Elizabeth and for me as a reader.
- I do not think these manipulations affect my view of Darcy, precisely because these scenes do not appear in the novel. However, I think these scenes that appear both in the novel and in the screen adaptation are the ones that might affect my view of Darcy.
- In a positive way, he looks really cute in these scenes.
- (Yes) In order to justify his commitments.
- Mr. Darcy is one controversial character, so I'll try to make myself clear here though I can't guarantee it. In the book, Mr. Darcy does not leave any clues of his "inner nature" until, at least, half of the novel is passed. On the contrary, in the screen adaptations, the actor makes gestures, faces, that help us guess there is more than what we see on the surface.
- In the books, you have only Lizzie's point of view, so you can only see his positive traits when she sees them. In a visual representation, that you have the camera as a point of view, you can appreciate how he is without Lizzie's interference.
- We can see his human side and know that he has feelings too.
- I think in the film they want the audience to see Mr. Darcy as the perfect man so the gestures that he makes are more lovely and make us, the women, fall in love with him more easily.
- The screen adaptations want us to love Mr.Darcy so that we see him in a kindly way, even though he appears to be rude or unkind.



- It's what I call 'the colonized visualization': you lose the ability to read without thinking of the adaptation, even the scenes that were never filmed. Also, the famous 'lake scene' sexualized Darcy in a way that is not at all obvious in the novel. Austen always has a sexy man and usually this is the wrong guy (George Wickham is, well, wicked...). Her leading men are NOT sexy, and nor is Darcy in the novel. Andrew Davies changed that for ever. The 'holding hands' scene is not relevant to me - as I do not attach any significance nor interest to the 2005 version. I don't like Keira Knightley at all and that's the reason why I'm so negative about it.

***Q5: Does Mr Darcy's physical appearance diminish his unpleasant behaviour?***

- The way Darcy acts towards Elizabeth and the way he talks to her is rude. That is the way I see him, as a very rude guy. I could not really feel Darcy was sorry for the way he behaved before. I must say in favour of Darcy's acts that the actor who performs the role of Darcy is good looking to me, but I do not feel attracted to him. May be, if the actor would have been any other actor I fancy most (i.e. Chris Evans), I would have 'forgiven' Darcy's mistreatment towards Elizabeth and therefore diminish his unpleasant behaviour.
- I don't think his behavior unpleasant.
- Unluckily the perspective of someone changes depending of his/her appearance. However, even if it helps to diminish his unpleasant behavior; he is still so rude that, at least for me, he is seen in the first stages as an asshole.
- He's so attractive that he can do whatever he want no matter what.
- I think character is what makes a person more or less sexy so his character when Darcy is being unpleasant makes him less appealing.

- In my opinion, negative traits or flaws tend to be diminished in the case of good looking characters, especially male.
- To a certain extent it does. To me Macfayden is \*the\* Mr. Darcy and as I said he plays Darcy with an awkwardness and insecurity that combined with his looks makes you like Darcy almost immediately.
- Sometimes his behavior can be seen as a way of distancing himself from others. This idea of the lonely man, so mainstream during romanticism, can be taken as an attractive quality. More than his physical appearance, I find him attractive for this association of ideas.
- And maybe because we're used to these kind of stories, I think you already know from the beginning he will end up being a nice man, and marrying Lizzie. But anyway, yes.
- I know people that would tell you otherwise, but for me it didn't diminish his bad behaviour. At the beginning of the film, when I had no idea what he was like, I thought he was a completely asshole. Only later, when he relaxes in front of Lizzie, smiles and jokes (particularly in her visit to Pemberley) my view changed.
- At the beginning, although knowing that he is attractive, I disliked him because of how he act in the first ball or with the proposal.
- I do not think his physical appearance diminishes his unpleasant behaviour. If you have read the novel before watching the adaptation, the moment at which you are watching the screen adaptation, you already know what is going to happen. Hence, the spectator does not attribute his/her sympathy to Darcy due to his physical appearance, but because we know what is going to happen. One ends loving Darcy at the end of the novel because he has developed as a character and the same 'love'

intensity that has been felt by the reader when finishing the novel is transferred into 'the first-minute Darcy' of the screen adaptation.

- Absolutely. I can't imagine how my view of him would dramatically change if he was ugly. He is always presented as an incredibly handsome man, and in the screen adaptations this is more evident. In BBC's adaptation, my favourite I must say, Colin Firth is gorgeous. You fall in love with him first, and in the end with Darcy. It's obligatory, to preserve our love for Darcy, to choose a handsome actor (but in the British style, of course!).
- I don't think so. The same way that Wickham is not less bad because he is handsome. The effect that their words and actions have is more important than how they look.
- Absolutely. If he was ugly and rude we would never like him. Sometimes he is unpleasant but, I think, his appearance makes Elizabeth feel something special and she can't stop thinking of him.
- It depends on what you mean. In the novel I never got a clear idea of his looks - he could be handsome like Colin Firth or not so handsome like Matthre MacFadden. I would accept either version, as I think we judge Darcy mainly by his acts and his kindness towards silly Lydia. He is 'handsome' in the novel in a general, unspecific way. Having said that, it would be hard to accept that he looks ugly...

***Q6: Does Darcy's change into a better person (notably for Elizabeth) contribute to making him "ideal"?***

- Definitely. Darcy is probably not as bad as he is portrayed, but he likes Elizabeth and he knows the only way to get her is by changing his behaviour. The same happens to all the female readers, we have the feeling that Darcy is doing

something nice for her, because he really likes her, how can't this help it? Darcy's change contributes to the idealized version of him.

- More than perfect it would be "more ideal" because he is still a snob and arrogant but he has been developed into a better person.
- To make him more ideal, but not ideal.
- (Yes) Also this change is what the audience and the readers are expecting to happen, women especially.
- His character and his qualities change making him a nicer and more attractive person.
- This is a tricky question. I don't think he wasn't a good person (or not good enough), his actions had good intentions, especially when people he cared about were involved. But, in relation to the question, his change of attitude towards Elizabeth is what makes us see him with better eyes.
- The fact that he accepts his own flaws and actively tries to improve himself to be a better person, the kind Elizabeth would have accepted, is a big part of why he is so ideal. His Pemberley properties don't hurt either.
- He is better indeed, but not ideal.
- Well I don't really think he was a "bad" person, he was just afraid to get close to someone and then get hurt, and his way of protecting himself was being an arrogant bastard (can I say that?). I think that it's the whole process that makes him ideal, not the result. This "becoming a better person when you're in love" thing is kind of appealing I guess.
- I still don't think he is the "ideal" of a man, he has many defects. I do think, though, that his efforts should be taken into account.
- He becomes less human to become almost the perfect man for every girl.

- From my point of view, it is obvious that the central point of the idealization of Darcy is his change and development as a character. I would like to make a point in this question I think it would be useful for your degree-final project. If we think about the most spread idea or perception of love in the 21st century, we will probably end up arguing that this idea is nowadays a kind of deconstruction or a revisionist (taking into the marxist connotations of the word) construction of Romanticism. One of the most important traits of this revisionist construction is the concept of Idealism. Idealism, trivializing, is based on the mental construction of an image regardless of the material base we have. What does this mean? Well, we can create an image of whatever we want without taking into account the scientific method (i.e. materialism). Hence, our mind produces an image we are constructing although we may not have a material base. My point is, lots of women, under this Idealist perception of love, expect their partner to change for them or expect to have someday a partner that will be ready to do whatever they want for them because women create this image thanks to the current perception of love (and thanks to the postmodernism philosophy too, of course). Darcy is a perfect example of this. Darcy is a character who develops and during his development, the image of 'changing for love' emanates from his character, which is one of the reasons why he is still so popular nowadays. I hope something of this will be helpful for you!
- I think that he has always been this way, but when he realizes that he is in love Elizabeth, his actions are more public, like if he doesn't care what the others may think about him anymore.
- If he was not mean in the beginning, we would probably not appreciate him that much for becoming a normal decent man.

- In my opinion, he is still not perfect or not a person who I would want to date or spend time with in many ways at the end of the novel. That he is so rich and, I think, suited for Elizabeth makes me like the couple, but not him, if I had to imagine dating him or whatever.
- I think all women want to see that the man they love would change to a better person because of them. Also, women want to feel their lovers are happier when they are together or because he is in love.
- Darcy's change indicates that he can learn from his past errors. This is what makes a person "ideal" in my opinion. On the other hand though we have little evidence that he will always learn from his faults, and consequently we cannot guess whether he will remain "ideal" or not.
- No, I think he's idealised because we don't really know him. Elizabeth first convinces us that he's a horrid man, then the letter reveals a different man and his behaviour proves he's a nice guy. However, we never have access to his thoughts and I think this is part of his being idealised. Also Pemberley... Same guy with less money would not be idealized by the ladies

***Q7: Did your sense of attraction to Darcy increase when Elizabeth—after visiting***

***Pemberley—realizes that she might be in love with him?***

- You cannot be passive after that scene. Obviously, your anxiety grows as soon as you, as a reader, realise everything could end up in a happy ending.
- It could influence a little, but what influenced me was his transformation. How he accepted his errors.

- Yes in the book, but actually in the movie I start to like Darcy when he fixes all the "tragedies" (convincing Mr Bingley to marry Jane or paying everything for Lydia and Wickham's wedding)
- (Yes) As the reader feels identified with Elizabeth.
- (Yes) Because the story is written generally from Elizabeth's perspective so as her feelings change so do the reader's.
- Yes indeed. I guess we all identify with Lizzie- want to be Lizzie- so we tend to like him even more after Pemberley.
- To me the defining moment is right before that, in Pemberley itself, when Elizabeth and Darcy have the opportunity to talk and you can see how well they get on, and how much he tries to improve himself to be worthy of her.
- (Yes) Austen manages very well to make you feel the same emotions Elizabeth feels.
- I think so, but I think the "In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you." had a greater impact in this aspect. (Which is really wrong, because the whole conversation leads to the "revelation" that Mr. Darcy thinks she's beneath him!)
- Yes, as I said before we are told the story through Lizzie's eyes and I did feel my sense of attraction increase for him.
- As a reader, I started to feel attraction before, the fact that she acknowledges her feelings doesn't interfere with that.
- The reaction makes the reader think about Darcy as 'not as bad as we thought', thus we distribute part of our sympathy towards him, but I think this has nothing to do with 'the sense of attraction'.

- I don't feel attraction to him. But he was much more interesting when Elizabeth starts to like him or be in love with him. Moreover, I definitely wanted to know about him and them when she falls in love with him.
- It's obvious from the beginning they are going to fall in love and that Mr. Wickham is lying.
- I already was in love with him.
- Of course, when the main character starts thinking that she might be in love with him, you start thinking: oh, maybe he's not that bad!
- The fact that Elizabeth was, or not, in love with Darcy was irrelevant for me at that point, probably because in part I guessed they would be in love eventually.
- Yes, because I took pity on him. I hate that scene and hate Lizzie's mercenary approach to marriage. Her greed when she discovers Pemberley makes me think of Darcy's generosity and this is why I like him. I think he'd be happy without Pemberley but Lizzie would not like him that much.

***Q8: Do you think part of Darcy's attractiveness depends on his reserved and introverted character?***

- Someone who does not show his emotions and passions is always attractive. The unknown is always interesting and you want to know why. I am not talking about shy people, but people that decide firmly to keep some information about them just for the sake of not sharing it. For example, someone might not talk to somebody because s/he is shy or may contribute in a conversation for a short period of time due to his/her shyness. However, someone that stands there confident about what they are doing (not talking) makes me feel interested towards him.



- It's attractive to see someone that interrupts the common traits of the humankind. Being a difficult person always attracts, specially when this person becomes more social specially to you/and thanks to you; like a prize.
- Sort off actually! In my opinion, the attractiveness is based on even though he's quite reserved and introverted he opens himself with Elizabeth who destroys this wall that makes Mr Darcy a quite unsocial person.
- Shyness has always been cool.
- Yes, because his mistery helps to increase his desirability, the readers want to know what he hides, why he behaves like that.
- It's adds an air of mystery to him.
- Absolutely.
- However, after realising he is a better person than he pretends to be, I praise him as opposite to the need of showing off of Wickham.
- Yes, it's very common to feel more attracted to someone introverted and mysterious rather than an open, extroverted man. This sense of mistery is attractive.
- He is not interesting at all, in fact, at the beginning of the novel I thought he was a real asshole.
- Bingley doesn't feel as attractive as him because he is more sociable since the beginning and it doesn't have a mystery atmosphere.
- Of course. It is an absolute contraposition regarding the other characters. So we see Darcy, in his introverted moments, as being a shy person and at the same time a 'normal' one. He is not showing off around in order to gain Elizabeth's sympathy. Hence, the reader sees Darcy as being sincere and representing himself as he is. Which kind of women does not 'want' a man who is authentic and genuine?
- Of course! If it worked for Heathcliff and Dracula... why not him?

- It really depends. Reserved and introvertedness are not things that I particularly like if they come off as rudeness which is Darcy's case. I actually prefer Bingley that even if he is very influenciable, he is kind and nice above all (even if in the movies he is usually portrayed as rather foolish). However, I think that that Darcy is reserved and introverted makes easier to forgive him for past rudeness.
- Absolutely.
- When someone is misterious you want to know his secrets and thoughts. The less we know about him, the more interesting he looks.
- He appears to be a mistery for everyone and that fact may attract some women.
- Oh, yes, the idiotic myth of the silent type - we women always fall for the stupid idea that a silent man has deep things to say -and only to us!! Make a male character talkative and the ladies will not be interested.
- Because of that, he is more misterious and at the same time, more attractive.

***Q9: Does the fact that Darcy is so different from other characters (such as Mr Bingley, who—though undoubtedly a very good person is basically uninteresting—or Mr Wickham, who eventually turns out to be bad) enhance your interest in him?***

- There is a big difference between Darcy and the other actors. That contributes to feel more interested in him.
- (No) Every character is different.
- (No) However, he is the one that Elizabeth wants, even if she doesn't want to admit first.
- Yes because the other characters different personalities enhance the unique personality of Darcy.

- He has more depth , so to speak, than Bingley, and of course he is more honest than Wickham, and all these qualities are desirable in a (ideal) man.
- I say yes because it makes him more attractive since he does not seem so desperate to get a woman like the other two. For him, it just arrives, he is not looking for it.
- Darcy has many good qualities, which even Elizabeth can't make fun of as she perceives that he has a certain greatness of character that sets him apart from other men. From the beginning you realise that he is not just interested in a pretty wife (he is clearly uninterested in Caroline Bingley, which I think increases the interest in him), his ideal woman also cultivates her mind. Obviously, when he explains this in Netherfield he manages to make himself an ass and fairly get Elizabeth's anger, but overall his difference in character is very attracting.
- His inner qualities are what enhance my interest.
- It happens to us the same that happens to Lizzie. She doesn't pay attention to Bingley from the beginning, she knows he is for her sister, so we discard him as well. And when we are completely against Darcy for the revelations we know from him and we are in favour of Wickham, we find out that Wickham is completely the opposite of what we thought, and that perhaps Darcy is not as bad. It's in this moment, when Lizzie understands how blind she has been, the reader turns to Darcy and finds him even better than before. Not only because of the good things he has done, but also because there is no other man to turn to, and the fact that he stands alone make his virtues stand out.
- (No) I was not curious for Mr. Darcy at all. For me the female characters have a lot of power in this novel, that's the reason why I focus on The Bennet's sisters.
- The difference between Darcy and the rest accentuates the interest we have in him, since his qualities are accentuated too.

- Darcy is defined by comparison. He alone has no interest. It is when we compare him to the other characters, as Elizabeth does, that we begin to think: oh, he is interesting, and handsome, and reserved, and mysterious, etc.
- Not really. I think that every character in Austen's novels is interesting and complex in their own way. Then I don't really see Darcy as an exception; I mean, we could say that Mr Bennet is interesting because he cares more about Eliza than about her other daughters in the same way.
- The fact that he is different makes him more interesting but is not the main reason of my interest in him.
- No because I think this difference is artificial. If you ask me, marriage to Charles Bingley is possibly more fun than marriage to Darcy. I always find him too stiff and reserved.

***Q10: The way that Darcy frequently gazes at Elizabeth uncovers his love for her and reveals that he is not as insensitive as it appeared. Does this indirect revelation of feelings heighten Darcy's desirability?***

- I don't know how I feel towards that. I actually did not think about it when seeing or reading the book. But, I do not think that makes me desire Darcy. I don't like the way he keeps trying to cover his love and when I realised he was actually in love with Elizabeth, I thought he was acting very weirdly and stupidly if he was so much into her.
- It shows that he's not as insensitive as he may appear to the other characters of the novel, but only we, as readers, know that, and this shared intimacy makes us more attached to him.

- (Yes) Because, actually he is an introverted man, so we discover his real nature for his actions, not for what he says or the way he talks.
- Smouldering eyes are extremely appealing and they show tender feelings. A man in love is really appealing.
- Yes, he is so different from the macho prototype who conquers women by his overt display of muscles and lots of confidence.
- This kind of characters that prove to be so indifferent to people are the ones who feel more and suffer more in general. The fact that the "sweet" part is hidden makes the character more attractive because we want to know how he is in reality.
- Yes, particularly the emphasis he puts on her eyes. The eyes are usually thought to represent a door to the soul/true nature of people, so it makes sense that he is captivated by them almost from the beginning.
- Watching Darcy gazing at Elizabeth without making anything makes me feel empathy to him.
- It's vulnerability in the end. A strong, introverted and tough man, but with a heart full with tenderness. It's a cliché, but it works.
- Not at all. It uncovers that the first things he finds appealing about Eliza is her beauty, which is not original or mention worthy. I prefer when he says that she is intelligent or witty than when she says she is pretty.
- He is very reserved and you never know what is he thinking of. It makes us want to talk to him and try to know what is in his mind.
- Even though we know that for him is difficult revealing his feelings for Elizabeth, he makes that effort for her and so I think this fact increases Darcy's desirability, because we all want to see that mystery man who falls in love and tells the woman he fell in love with.

- Obviously... but this is part of the romance tradition. In real life, it doesn't work like that: an insensitive man remains an insensitive man.

## 1.4 Instructions Text

As a student in my last year of the degree in English Studies I am writing my degree final project (TFG) on *Pride and Prejudice*, particularly about the character of Mr Darcy.

The main aim of this project is to determine why Mr Darcy is still so popular even today, and why he has become such a figure of desire despite his many negative traits. To ascertain where this attraction might come from I have prepared an online questionnaire (see links below). The first five questions (1-5) make reference to the screen adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* and the actors who have played the role of Mr Darcy. The last five questions (6-10) make reference to the novel and Jane Austen's construction of the character.

I would be very grateful if you could dedicate a few minutes to answer this survey, **but only if you have read *Pride and Prejudice***. If you have seen a film version but have not read Austen's text, please do not answer.

- Please do not take the questionnaire more than once, as this will invalidate your response.
- For the same reason if you receive this link from more than one course teacher, please do not answer the questionnaire twice.

The survey won't take you more than five minutes and is completely anonymous.

**The deadline for taking the questionnaire is Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> of April at 23:59.**

Thank you for your participation.

Begoña Sánchez Zaballos. Estudis Anglesos, UAB.

### Questionnaire Links:

If you are a woman under 25 please follow this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8ZRJNYW>

If you are a man under 25 please follow this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8ZSYCNF>

If you are a woman over 25, please follow this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8ZR8FBN>

If you are a man over 25, please follow this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8ZW2R2C>