

Not Sorry Works

Hot & Bothered, Live from Pemberley

Little Elegant Compliments (Chapters 13 + 14)

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Vanessa: [00:00:01] Hey everyone. Before we start today's episode, I wanted to let you know that my book, *Praying with Jane Eyre*, is now available in paperback. My book is about treating *Jane Eyre* as a sacred text. It is a collection of sermons using snippets of *Jane Eyre* as the lectionary instead of traditional Bible quotes. It is also me being in conversation with my parents and grandparents about the ways that trauma has impacted my family and what *Jane Eyre* can teach me about that family trauma. If you are interested at all, *Praying with Jane Eyre* is now available wherever it is that you buy your books and the new paperback edition, if I do say so myself, is beautiful. So I hope that you join me in that conversation by buying my book, *Praying with Jane Eyre*.

[Percussive music begins]

Vanessa: In chapters 13 and 14, we meet Mr. Collins. He is the cousin of the Bennets who will inherit Longbourn because he is a man and the Bennets didn't have the good sense to have a son. The house is under what is called an entail, a concept that pisses off Mrs. Bennet, who expresses her anger through willfully not understanding what it means. Mr. Bennet informs us about Mr. Collins's impending arrival by telling us that he's known about it for a month. He has not managed to mention this to his wife somehow, even though Collins is arriving today and Mrs. Bennet will be responsible for feeding him. And Mr. Bennet tells us about Collins by reading the letter that Collins sent – let me say this one more time – a month ago. The dish is this: Mr. Collins has recently lost his father and, even more recently, become a parish priest on the estate of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. He talks a lot about how great Lady Catherine is. Now that he has lost his father, who did not get along with the Bennets, Collins wants to come and make amends. He knows that he is meant to inherit the house when Mr. Bennet dies and wants to have a good relationship with them, especially with the girls. Wink, wink. Mrs. Bennet is very triggered by the idea of this visit. She cannot wrap her head around the fact that the house that she and her daughters live in is entailed to a man they don't even know. She is flabbergasted that this stranger is going to inherit the house and that she and the girls will be evicted the day Mr. Bennet dies. So this visit is very high stakes. This relationship matters. And then Mr. Collins shows up and he is...well, he's ridiculous. He is obsequious and pretentious and preachy and somehow also sort of pathetic. Here is Elsie Michie on one of the ways that Austen writes Collins.

[Music fades out.]

Elsie Michie: But Collins's speech is, I mean, the mockery of Collins, right? I mean, they're brilliantly written and she loves them. And – and again, you know, he's stupid like Mrs. Bennet, right? But he shows you a whole lot about the way in which his society continued to practice deference, right, for people who were of higher classes. I mean, he's like, he's like a test case of somebody who is entirely driven by apology and deference, right? And that's a commentary on her social structure, I think.

Vanessa: Collins is, in theory, a man doing the right thing. He's trying to connect with the Bennets so that he can marry one of the daughters so the family can stay in the house. He's morally kind of good, or at least trying to be. And yet Austen's arguing that goodness isn't enough because Collins is so unpleasant to be around, which seems to, in Austen's point of view, cancel out his goodness.

[Percussive music begins again.]

Vanessa: The chapter ends with Collins asking about which of his cousins helped cook dinner. Mrs. Bennet is outraged. They are wealthy enough to keep a cook. Collins apologizes. Mrs. Bennet says it's fine. Collins apologizes for another 15 minutes anyway. Class, money, manners. Attempts at good manners. Failing at good manners. This dinner is fraught. Chapter 14 is the after dinner conversation. One of the key exchanges is between Collins and Mrs. Bennet about the de Bourgh's, Collins's patrons. Collins's obsession with them becomes clearer and clearer. He repeats everything Lady Catherine has seemingly ever said to him. He showers compliments on Lady Catherine's daughter, Anne. He relishes that Lady Catherine recommended that he put a shelf in a certain closet. Collins offers to read to the ladies. Once he realizes that they mostly only have novels sitting around, he sputters that he cannot read those. So he finds a book of sermons about how young women should comport themselves. This particular book of sermons, though only mentioned briefly, was a real one at the time and would have been familiar to Austen's readers. One of its particular arguments is about how modern novels have dangerous effects on young women. I think it's safe to say what Austen thinks of the only clergyman we meet in her novel. And as a reminder, Austen's genuinely beloved father was a clergyman. Here is Miriam Burstein about Collins as a representation of religion in *Pride and Prejudice*.

[As Miriam speaks, the music fades out.]

Miriam Burstein: [00:06:27] Much of the conversation about religion in this novel that is explicit, right, is negative conversation in the sense that we see Mr. Collins, who is in many ways a very punctilious clergyman, in the sense that he is doing his job, but he doesn't really exemplify what you would call any kind of evangelical moral virtue or any particularly elevated spirituality, right? He tends to use 'can't' a lot. He's very invested in a certain kind of elevated, pedantic speech, right, in the letters he writes. But he's very much in the – at the end of the day, approaching his position as a job and as a stepping stone to gentility. And it is important to remember that at the time Austen is writing, being a clergyman is a job. Right? It is one of the, quote unquote, genteel professions that a man can follow. It's not necessarily associated with any particular degree of devout-ness beyond, well, kind of the average.

Vanessa: Austen's depiction of Collins in these chapters is a dagger in the heart of the Anglican Church and society. You can follow all of the rules, all of them, and none of them are worth anything if you don't have any charm.

[Synth intro music begins.]

Vanessa: You can follow each and every rule and be, to Miriam Bernstein's point, kind of the average. I'm Vanessa Zoltan.

Lauren: [00:08:07] And I'm Lauren Sandler.

Vanessa: [00:08:08] And this is Live from Pemberley, from Hot and Bothered.

[Music intensifies with added percussion before fading out.]

Vanessa: Lauren, Mr. Collins has entered from stage left! [Both laugh.] What do you have to teach us before we jump in?

Lauren: [00:08:30] Okay, let's do some very kind of nuts and bolts information about the church and patronage before we start actually getting to have fun with this incredibly fun character. Like, how does a Collins come to be? Okay, so as Miriam Burstein just told us, this is as much a career in Austen's time as any other workaday career. And yes, it is one that we attach spiritual weight to. But that doesn't necessarily mean that that was the process of how to get there and what it meant to have that role, right? It was a job and it was a job that depended on patronage. So the way that it worked is you, as someone who was hoping to make a living in the church, would graduate from university, and there was no system, no church system that would then appoint you somewhere or – or keep you solvent or have some sort of larger apparatus. You would have a church under the auspices of an estate, and the person who owned that estate would pay you money and would give you a house to live in. And that was that. And it was a decent living. You know, it's estimated that Collins would have made about 500 a year from Lady Catherine in addition to 10%, you know, that tithe number of whatever the fields on her estate would produce in terms of farming. But once he was no longer going to be practicing, he would lose all of that and he would lose the house. And this is something that was very personal to Austen as the daughter of clergy. Her father died in 1805, you know, five years into her writing this book and almost a decade before it was published. And during that time, she really encountered firsthand what it means to go from living in a parsonage and having an income in your family to not having it anymore. So it was a way to make a living, but a very insecure one, and particularly an insecure one within the English system of having some sort of inherited wealth. He's got none of that until, of course, he's given this house. But clearly, this is a totally messed up system. It's a system that just exists on the peccadilloes and the will of one patron to one vicar. And it also is something that has very little to do with what one's spiritual relationship is. You know, we find out as long as he keeps flattering his patron, that's pretty much all he needs to maintain this employment. And so this does sort of speak to the brokenness of this system on every possible level. And yet it's something that...it's not like Austen is necessarily proposing changes to. She's more, as she does in so many cases, revealing how ridiculous the system is and how ridiculous England is, the England of Austen's time, to all be participating in it.

Vanessa: [00:11:39] I mean, and I just have to state the obvious, which this is a way in which Charlotte Brontë and Jane Austen are so similar, right? They are both daughters of clergymen who they loved and respected a great deal and yet wrote novels in which they thrash the church.

Lauren: [00:11:57] No, I mean, I, too, was really thinking about St. John reading these chapters and this introduction to Collins because it's almost like he's an inverse of St. John, right? St. John is all there for some sort of purpose and zeal whereas Collins is so absent of zeal, so

absent of what the Evangelical Church might represent, especially in this era that, you know, I feel like they're just all looking at different sides of failure when it comes to the church.

Vanessa: [00:12:27] But the other comparison I was thinking of is Mr. Brocklehurst. Brocklehurst and Collins both come into this house and start preaching from a book of sermons that they didn't write and they are both kind of preaching a kind of hellfire and damnation about women, right? [Laughs] It's – with Brocklehurst, it is about little girls who go to hell because they talk back and in this one, it's about women who are immoral because they read novels. And this is not something I know about the time other than from mostly your research [Laughs] and reading these books. But apparently these books of sermons were just laying around all of England instructing women how they have to behave. And we think, at least I think, of controlling women as being something that happens economically and socially and in terms of doctrine. But this is another pernicious way that women are constantly being told about the way they have to behave in just the books that are lying around.

Lauren: [00:13:31] And in the book that Austen chooses to have Collins reading from...I mean, there are so many people publishing these sermons, but Fordyce in particular is one who Mary Wollstonecraft pillories in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* for writing in such an affected style as she wrote it. Much of Collins is presented here, as he is condemning modern novels and their dangerous effects on young women. And of course, this is one such modern novel. Also, after this time is *Frankenstein*, which is written by Wollstonecraft's own daughter, Mary Shelley. And I just love thinking about the fruit of Austen's criticism of Fordyce here and Wollstonecraft's and that, you know, we can just follow the history of women novelists from this point.

Vanessa: [00:14:20] Ugh, I love women novelists. [Laughs] Thank God for all of them.

Lauren: [00:14:24] What would we do? Who would we be?

Vanessa: [00:14:26] I know, I wouldn't have any ideas. I wouldn't be dangerous at all. Okay. Lauren, I know I've been leading up to this, so I don't know why it surprised me, but I find Mrs. Bennet totally redeemed in this chapter. In these opening paragraphs, the way that Austen writes about Mrs. Bennet is that she does not understand what an entail is. And there's a line that...Jane and Lizzy keep trying to explain it to her, but that she's just so outraged she can't understand it. The reason I would argue that she can't understand the entail is because it doesn't make sense. This is her saying, "No, no, no, I get that it is a law. But *how* can it be a law that on the day of the death of my beloved husband, not only will I have to deal with the grief of losing him, I will be evicted. And the only way for me to potentially get out of it is to marry off one of my daughters to this man." And I think that there is something powerful about the refusal to understand this, to say, "No, I'm going to keep resisting and saying, 'I don't frickin get it.'"

Lauren: [00:15:44] Also, I think it's hard to understand. I mean, it's definitely something that we should ask someone about at the end of this episode, because I have to say, I've spent some time reading about it and I find my eyes glazing over. I mean, you know, good for Jane and Lizzy for understanding it and being able to explain it to us. They're certainly not explaining it in the text. Austen is not explaining it in the text. She's leaving us in the same

place that Mrs. Bennet is in, which is, "What is this? How can this exist and how can we be in this position?" And then – and then we meet Collins. And this is the great inheritor? [Vanessa laughs.] This is the person who gets to win out against this mother and these five daughters? And *then* we have Mr. Bennet, who's just playing it all for his own amusement! It's a game to him! I mean, I agree with you. Like I have really had a hard time stomaching Mrs. Bennet in the past, as you know, and I have been charmed at times by Mr. Bennet. But this is – these are the pages in which that entirely flips for me. And I feel a lot of rage, honestly. As I read these pages, I feel this weird mix of rage and amusement, which I think is something that Austen is so uniquely brilliant at pulling out of me. You know, it isn't that sort of unbridled political passion that one might expect for material like this, nor does it feel, like, sort of light dancing satire. It is really this...this mix of feeling the absurdity of the world and the absurdity of these circumstances and still having fun with it, which is a mentality that I would like to cultivate in myself.

Vanessa: [00:17:31] I mean, and I do think Austen is intentionally poking at Mr. Bennet here. Mr. Bennet has a line, "I got the letter a month ago, and it seemed so urgent that I responded to it two weeks ago." And this *is* urgent. This is urgent. It's not just about the dinner, like this is the man who could, in theory, save his family. Right? And Mrs. Bennet says, "I am sure that if I had been able to do something, I would have done more than you have done, Mr. Bennet, about this situation." And we don't know what happened between Mr. Bennet and what seems to either be Mr. Bennet's first cousin or his brother, Mr. Collins's father, who the Bennets didn't get along with, but I think Mrs. Bennet is right. Right? Like I would have *done* more to try to form some sort of alliance to arrange a situation in which the girls could have rented the house from him for a small sum every year. *Something*. Mr. Bennet is just, like, taking two weeks to respond to these letters and forgetting to mention to his wife that this man is coming.

Lauren: [00:18:37] Or *intentionally* withholding that information. [Vanessa interjects with "Yes!"] It feels like he's playing it for his own amusement. After she has been able to shop, you know, for dinner, after she's been able to decide whether or not there is fish available or not, it is only at that point – can you imagine? – It's like you're making dinner for your family at the end of a workday and it is only then that your husband waltzes into the kitchen and says, "By the way, the king is coming." [Laughs]

Vanessa: [00:19:05] Right. I don't know if it's Austen's internalized misogyny or Jane's and Lizzy's that we still are the ones finding Mrs. Bennet annoying. And I don't want to undercut how annoying she is. She's so annoying. We find out in these pages there's a line where she says, "Has Anne de Bourgh been presented at St. James's because I haven't read her name." Which leads us to believe that when someone gets presented to the Queen as a debutante and is available to be married, Mrs. Bennet is following this like a sport and she has, like, kept a log of every person's name, right? Like she's a silly woman. There's no reason for her to follow this. Her daughters aren't going to be presented at court. Like, she has these hobbies that I find distasteful and I would not want to spend one dinner with her. And yet, I just, I respect her priorities so much.

Lauren: [00:20:05] I must say I read that line in a similar way to you, but this is a great moment of role reversal for us. I also think that her being on top of everyone being presented at court is more than just a hobby. I think it's coming from a place of pain and of

powerlessness where she wants to know what it is like out there. She wants to know what it means to have power and options, what it means to have access to something that her daughters have now been denied. You know, I think that we all have our own version of that. You know, when you find some element of jealousy in your field, when you have that moment of sort of pressing on the bruises, it's from a very personal place and it's usually about power. And in this situation, we know that it's power that she did not have the right to attain for herself. I think that these – these habits are ones that Austen is just such a keen observer of. And there are different ways that she, in these little tiny clauses or phrases, will just drop us in to...to deep reserves of character. And that one certainly rings true for Mrs. Bennet.

Vanessa: [00:21:24] Yeah, I. Oh, I'm completely compelled by that. And one of the things that I love that Austen is saying is you can be a good person and insufferable to be around at dinner. Like, essentially being boring and unpleasant is a sin. And Austen certainly thinks that, right? Like, this book is about Darcy, who's always good but could be more fun. But it's also, right, like Wickham is fun but evil. I don't know. I'm wondering what you make of what Austen's overall argument is, because I think Collins is such an interesting exemplar of it.

Lauren: [00:22:00] So I think that this gets back to the old drawing room versus battlefield discussion about gender and literature. When you're on the battlefield, I don't know how much it matters that someone is charming. But in the reality of life for women in England, and frankly, most people in England, most of the time, all you have are the people who you were stuck in that drawing room with. And Austen has made us feel this so acutely already. Right? All you have is who's in that room in Netherfield with you. Who's in that room at Longbourne with you. What it's like to while away the endless hours of life with the people in your family or in your chosen family and if they are deadly, if they are lecturing, if they are judgmental, if they are not fun, then what is that life? Right? I think that the stakes of personality are so high in Austen's world and frankly, in the world that is the reality of most people. What is life but who you spend your time with? And so I think that she's actually letting us know how much this matters. The thing that perplexes me is we feel Mr. Bennet desiring Collins to be undesirable. We feel him and even hear him say that he's hoping that Collins will be ridiculous. And I can't help but wonder, why would he not want Collins to be completely charming and magnanimous? Why would we not want him to want at least one daughter to fall in love with the person who was going to inherit his estate and be happily married to him? I just wonder, what is Mr. Bennet's game here?

Vanessa: [00:23:46] He doesn't have a game. He finds this more entertaining. He loves to hate people, which I understand. I love to hate certain people. Right? It's a little bit delicious to hate people and to find them insufferable. And he gets to leave the room whenever he's annoyed. So, like, this is just more entertaining for him.

Lauren: [00:24:04] And so I think that one thing that Austen is telling us here is that the measure of these two different men's morality is how they interact with women, how they treat women. Mr. Bennet treats his entire domestic life as a game, as his opportunity to just sort of play with dolls that happen to be his wife and his daughters, whereas Mr. Collins is making his best effort. But all he actually knows of actual human women is what he has read in all of this sermonizing and how he has determined women want to receive him, which, as we know, he gets horribly wrong.

Vanessa: [00:24:47] [Laughs] The great example of this, right, is this sentence that we want to look closely at today, which is Collins keeps complimenting everyone, including Anne de Bourgh, who's super not in the room. And Mr. Bennet says to Collins, "Oh, you're so good at offering compliments. Do you practice them ahead of time or are you able to improvise them?" And Collins's response is that the "compliments, they arise chiefly from what is passing at the time. And though I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions, I always wish to give them as unstudied an air as possible." And this is Mr. Collins saying, right, "I do sometimes practice my compliments." But again, right, like, it's so patronizing to the women. Right? It's admitting a kind of trying to game women and look down on them and they're going to be fooled by this compliment if I give it an unstudied air. And it's also just a really pathetic admission that he doesn't know how to have an extemporaneous conversation. And he isn't only an ass-kissing, obsequious, butt off the cuff? But he literally practices it at home.

Lauren: [00:26:10] But I do love, just before, he says that they're – they're delicate and they're always acceptable to ladies. He's the product of this conduct literature, right? He's the product of this whole industry of sermons, of, you know, what we now would look at as the worst of self-help? Like this is like Dale Carnegie gone wrong. And this notion that, like, if you want to win influence with the ladies, here is how you compliment them. And he's studied this, like he's – he's a figure of study, which, of course, is also what's, I'm sure, missing in the heart of his spiritual practice, right? He's studied the things. He can check the box, but there's absolutely no – no heartbeat in it. There's no passion. There's no ability to actually have a spontaneous interchange with anyone. There's nothing that animates him except for ticking the boxes, following the guidance. And this is the sort of literature that he is preaching women should be following instead of following things that are connected to narrative, desire, hope, characterization, instead of having the sort of interchanges that Lizzy has had with Darcy, which are self-propelling and have some sort of momentum to them, it's this momentum-free life. It's literally a parody of Englishness as we see it, which is, let – let us have manners and nothing else.

Vanessa: [00:27:41] It's studied but unthinking. And I do think that Collins as a foil to Darcy is so interesting because Lizzy gets insulted by Darcy the first time she meets him. And now we're meeting someone who's going to offer her a lot of compliments. And the insult stung her but the compliments are annoying, too. And I think what Austen is arguing is essentially just for trying to actually get to know and actually see someone, and that that is the way to respect someone. Darcy dismisses her without really seeing her or knowing her. Collins is going to compliment her without really seeing her or knowing her. And Austen wants men to not see women as pawns but as people and that the highest praise is to take their ideas seriously and – and listen to them. Not just preach at them.

[Antiquated string music akin to a lute or mandolin plays before fading out.]

Vanessa: Can we talk about our favorite moment in the second chapter, which is Lydia interrupting Collins. [Laughs] I'm just speaking on your behalf here.

Lauren: [00:29:00] How did you even know that that was my favorite moment? I love it. I love it.

Vanessa: [00:29:04] It's so good. I did have, like, a horrible thought, though. She blows up the whole thing. Right? So Collins is sitting there. He's preaching this horrible sermon. Everyone is just, like, bored out of their minds. And Lydia just interrupts, right? And it's so rude. It's so rude. It's what, like a four year old would do. I mean, or a teenager, she's 15, and she just starts talking about her own thing. But what it made me think about was how easy it is to be disruptive and how hard it is to be productive. And I know that this thought is only in my head because of Trumpian politics and because of the way that this country is evolving right now. And I'm not trying to put Lydia in that, but it's really hard to build a wheel and it's really easy to throw a rock or a pebble into that wheel. And that, I think, is what we see the power of in this. And that is going to be Lydia's power again and again is...she's just willing to blow things up. And there's something beautiful about that when done strategically, and Lydia doesn't use it strategically, she isn't doing this on purpose as, like, a form of rebellion against Collins. She's just bored. But yeah, I was just thinking in general about the power to interrupt or to ruin. Right? 300 guests at a wedding can make it beautiful. One drunk asshole throwing a fit and it'll be the only thing people remember at the wedding. And that's – that is Lydia's power.

Lauren: [00:30:43] And I mean, to clarify, I find rudeness incredibly uncomfortable and very difficult to forgive. So I am not feeling like Lydia's rudeness is something that I thrill to. But I do think that there's this element of, like...he has come into their house and sucked all the air out of it. He is there lecturing them on the books that they own. And then he's holding forth in this way where it's like, "Who is this even for? Our home has its own energy. You, though you will own this home soon, do not own it yet, sir. And if I am thinking about the things that I want to talk about, God damn it, I'm going to talk about them!" And I do find something thrilling about her insistence, even if what she's talking about feels, like, so gossipy and teenage-y. It feels like, yeah, but you know what? It is her home and her life. And this is what they talk about in this house. And God damn it, part of why they talk about this is because you are going to come and take it all away. And I do. I find some element of that to just be liberating. But this is going to be the crux with Lydia, right, is how do you modulate that liberation? How do you have some level of freedom and desire and risk-taking in your life while not ruining everything for everyone else? And as we're going to find out, of course, she has not figured it out yet. But also when I was 15, neither the hell had I.

Vanessa: [00:32:20] I mean, one of the very funny lines in the book is that Lydia has not found anything interesting that's outside of a red coat. Right? Like Lydia is obsessed with something and we expect 15 year olds to become obsessed with things and we expect those things to rotate and change. And what she's obsessed with right now are militiamen. And yet it just mortifies Jane and Lizzy and I think that – that the rudeness to Mr. Collins, and again I love this moment, but the rudeness to Mr. Collins is one thing. But she's also making her sisters' lives harder, which I know is what you're talking about with this, you know, inability to modulate where exactly this advocating for one's own desire begins and ends. But the lack – the lack of thought of how her actions impact others, right, I think is the biggest thing that Austen is going to judge her for.

Lauren: [00:33:14] I will say I don't think that Lydia would find the answer in *Fordyce's Sermons*.

Vanessa: [00:33:20] And who is speaking to her? Right. These sermons on Sunday mornings are either going to be preached by Mr. Collins from *Fordyce's Sermons* or in theory, from Mr.

Wickham, who is not going to preach a good sermon either. She's not supposed to read novels. We judge her for being obsessed with the militia, even though she's not presented at St James's...like there is nothing that she is allowed to do. She is supposed to sit there and wait for an appropriate man to notice her while making sure to not make herself noticeable. It is actually impossible. It is impossible to be a woman in this time.

Lauren: [00:34:00] Of course, the real power in these chapters does come from a woman. You know, this massive, massive power that lords over Collins's life is the power of Lady Catherine de Bourg, and it is the power of a woman who has inherited an estate. And so I also think it's really interesting that that is a choice that Austen makes, is not to put Collins under the auspices of a man who Collins would probably also have no idea how to deal with. You know, Collins's power that he's trying to get in the world is through complimenting a woman who, through feeling like he knows how to kiss up to her because of whatever he has been told women want to do in here, which of course she can completely see through and thinks is ridiculous, I am sure. But his slavish adoration of her and the power that she claims, not just in his life, but through many, many chapters to come, is incredibly significant. She is the wealthiest person we will meet in this book, and as we all know, power and wealth are synonymous here. And yet we are going to find the only competition for power to be love, to be both romantic love and love of one's children. And we're going to figure out what that means later on. But thinking about her power as we meet her just through Collins's adoration and doting and obsequiousness, it's such a fantastic introduction to a female character during this era.

Vanessa: [00:35:42] I also think we are still going to find out with Lady Catherine about the limitations that she feels on her life, that her gender is still very much at play and the realities of how she loves her life. But another thing that I think is so interesting about Lady Catherine is there's a line where Colin says, "Some people have spoken about her as being very proud, but I have never seen that in her." And again, we're seeing that word pride that you've taught us about, right, the equating of the sinfulness of the pride, and yet the minister, who does not see the sin in this woman because he likes her attention. And we're just seeing hypocrisy again and again and again.

Lauren: [00:36:22] Yeah, I totally agree. And I think that it's telling that Collins can only see her as a woman, albeit a very wealthy woman, a woman to accept delicate compliments. And, yes, that he can be blinded by this – this cardinal sin of pride if it is a woman who is giving him what he needs.

Vanessa: [00:36:44] And we still see that today, right? I worked in the nonprofit industry for ten years. And, you know, you bend over backwards to take money from bad people in order to try to do good, right? Like this is also just mocking capitalism and the idea that the accumulation of wealth is going to be able to solve anything. And I feel like these chapters are commentary on top of commentary. So Lauren, we're going to meet Wickham. We're gonna meet Wickham right after we meet Collins, which I had never noticed until this time. What are you excited for in these next two chapters, which are going to be reading next week?

Lauren: [00:37:23] I'm excited to get fooled by Wickham, which I do every time I read the book. [Vanessa laughs.] I crush out on him every time, no matter what. And I like, to use

parlance of my 14 year old, I just ship the hell out of Lizzy and Wickham no matter what I know is coming so that I'm excited for.

Vanessa: Oh, absolutely.

Lauren: How about you?

Vanessa: Wickham's hot!

Lauren: Totally hot.

Vanessa: [00:37:52] Yeah. I mean, things are getting interesting, right? It's like more and more men. You know, we got Bingley and Darcy, and now we have Collins, and now we have Wickham and it's just going to get more and more complicated and I love it.

Lauren: [00:38:04] That's livin', baby.

[Soft, upbeat music begins to play with strings and percussion and fades out as Lauren speaks.]

Lauren: So every professor we talk to about the entail has said, "You really need to talk to Sandra McPherson," who's a professor at Ohio State University who specializes in 18th century British literature and feminist theory. She's speaking to us from home, where she's joined by her dog, Vega, who you might hear in the background. It's like the voice of Pilot from Jane Eyre has found its way into Pride and Prejudice. Let's get Sandra on the phone.

[Skype dialing sounds.]

Vanessa: [00:39:01] Sandra, welcome.

Sandra: Oh, thank you so much for having me. I'm very excited about this.

Lauren: So first, I would love you to just, nuts and bolts, explain the entail, and then we can get into why it is such an important part of this book.

Sandra: [00:39:19] Yeah, so the entail is a rather convoluted property conveyance mode from the English Common Law, and it is a way of controlling the inheritance of an estate through generations so that the original donor, if he donated an estate entail, it meant that he could stipulate who those heirs were. And it didn't necessarily have to follow patrilineal or biological lines of succession. And it was often used as a way to make sure that the estate descended intact across different heirs that might be, for example, profligate, or they might be disposed to mortgage the estate. And this was a way of controlling heirs so that they couldn't vitiate the value of an estate.

Lauren: So how was the entail experienced as oppression for Jane Austen and her readers in that era of England?

Sandra: Well, I mean, the most obvious form of oppression, which Lady Catherine makes explicit in *Pride and Prejudice*, is that the entail was often a male transmission of property that was able to bypass female heirs in order to descend to more distant male heirs. So women were often disinherited or disenfranchised through the use of the entail male. And that's obviously the originating crisis for and of *Pride and Prejudice*. The other way is just that heirs in general could no longer, after the 14th century and from the 14th century, you know, until the abolition of the entail, biological heirs could not presume upon their inheritance because the entail made it possible to interrupt biological lines of succession. And so, many heirs would find themselves to be, you know, de facto disinherited. Right? They – if they were born to someone who had an entail, then they were no longer – they could no longer, even if they were the firstborn son, presume that they were going to get anything from their position as the de facto heir.

Lauren: [00:41:43] Like Mr. Bennet?

Sandra: Yes.

Lauren: So what happened? What happened with Mr. Bennet? How – why is it that Mr. Bennet would be able to have nothing to do about it? And why do we think he was disinherited in this way in the first place?

Sandra: Well, so we don't know – we *never* know what the terms of this entail are, right? And we actually also don't know how far back it goes. So it could have been that – that Longbourne was entailed, you know, three generations earlier. And he's only the most recent person to occupy that position of having only, you know, a life interest in the estate and, you know, being unable to alienate it unless he happens to have a son, right? So we don't know when the entail originated, how far back it goes in the sort of estate laws surrounding Longbourn. We don't know how it came to Mr. Collins. There's this one article from 1980 in *Notes and Queries*, which is this great journal that has really, really short examples of what my partner calls, like, egad historicism, like, "Egad!" [Lauren laughs.] "Here's this little factoid that I discovered, right? And I'm going to write a two page article about this historical factoid." So this – this guy argues that Mr. Bennet must have agreed to the life interest in Longbourn through the Collins line, that Mr. Bennet must actually be a Collins and has agreed to it, but agreed to change his name because Longbourn was an estate that was in the Bennet family. And like, I don't know, that's the only place I've ever found that particular account of the entail. There's no real historical data behind it. It's just a speculation about how entail sometimes worked that they stipulated that the family name had to go along with the entail. And so if you were – were the person that, you know, then came to have the life interest, you had to change your name. And people did do that, including one of Jane Austen's brothers, Edward, who changed his name from Austen to Knight because he – he became the heir of property that came from the Knight family.

Lauren: And I would imagine that her readers would also be deeply mired in what the entail means, that this is something that would touch people's lives, that would really draw the entire shape of their families, their incomes and their futures.

Sandra: Oh, yeah, absolutely. It was not just a legal vehicle for the high aristocracy. It was, you know, part of a state law. It was a form of estate planning, actually, right? It's like, how do I –

how do I make sure that my estate is preserved for future generations? And that is important. Whether your estate is Rosings or whether your estate is a home that you possess or a business that you possess. And, you know, this is a world as, you know, the world continues to be, a world in which the threat of debt and indebtedness, right, and loss is pervasive. Like it's like you're born into – these girls were born into a situation of indebtedness and – that they cannot dig themselves out of, right, except through marriage and that – that debt, indebtedness is something that many, many minor characters in the novel experience as well or that we get glimpses of that experience.

Lauren: Ugh, it's so anxiety provoking and also feels so contemporary, right?

Sandra: Absolutely. Yeah. Except that, you know, now, I mean, yay for, you know, feminism, but it's not like marriage is a way out of, you know, financial risk any more. I mean, the law is such a fascinating history because, you know, coverture, the thing, the legal thing that made it impossible for women to enter – *wives* to enter into contract because they were like a legal nullity, they had no existence in law once they were married. Coverture is also, you know, is obviously bad, has a bad politics because it turns married women into invisible legal subjects. On the other hand, the coverture made it so that married women could not be held responsible for their husbands' debts. So they were unable to be – you know, they were protected from debt. So when you get the Married Women's Separate Property Act in the mid-19th century, the first thing that happens to married women is that they can become, you know, liable for the debts that, as a married couple, might be accumulated. So this thing that has a really obviously transparently bad politics actually has some features that protect women and that, you know, that – that has been taken away through more progressive legislation that makes women, of course, and wives full legal subjects, but also means like, oops, all of a sudden, like if you marry this man or woman who is not good with money, you are responsible for – for their debts.

Lauren: Sandra, thank you so much for joining us. It's such a pleasure to talk to you. I have a hunch we will want to do it again.

Sandra: Well, I would be delighted. This has been the most fun I've had in years, and I'm delighted to have met you and talked to you. And I'm so, as I said, grateful for what you're doing with and for the novel.

[Synth and percussive music begins.]

Vanessa: [00:47:39] You've been listening to *Live from Pemberley*. We're a small show so we need your support to run. If you can, please consider supporting us on Patreon at patreon.com/hotandbotheredrompod. If you love the show, please leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you are listening to my beautiful voice right now. We are Not Sorry Productions. Our executive producer is Ariana Nedelman and we are distributed by A Cast. Thanks as always to our Jane-level patrons. Viscount Elise Kanagaratnam of Unicorn Villa, Baroness Gretchen Sneegass of Breakfast Carbston, Knight Molly Reel of Worcestershire Sauce – I'll never be able to say that, we should just rename you, Molly – the Countess of Kristen Hall, Dame Leia B of Pickles Shire. Dame Becky Boo of Tiara India. And Duchess Bidy Higgins of Bubble Bath. We would like to offer a special thanks this week to Professor Sandra

MacPherson, to Aisha Ramachandran and Tara Menin for talking to us, Lara Glass, Gaby Awori, AJ Aramos, Julia Argy, Nicki Zoltan, Stephanie Paulsell, and all of our patrons.

[Music continues, then fades.]