

Not Sorry Works

Hot & Bothered, Live from Pemberley

Most Gentlemanlike Appearance (Chapters 15 + 16)

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Vanessa: [00:00:01] Before we start today's episode, a little note. We recorded this episode a few weeks ago before Roe versus Wade was officially repealed. You will hear us talk about topics that relate to the repeal, but we do not name it specifically yet because while it was a foregone conclusion at the time of recording, it was not yet official. Over the course of discussing *Jane Eyre* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Lauren and I have at times celebrated how far feminism has brought us since Brontë and Austen's time. I have liked to think that they would take delight in me and all of my freedoms. But on June 24th of this year, the right to a safe and legal abortion in the United States was taken away from people with uteruses. 209 years after *Pride and Prejudice* was published, its commentary on the ways laws are designed to control women is more apt than Austen would still want it to be. We know the numbers. Abortion access saves more lives than it ends. And we, as readers of Austen, know well about the kinds of spurious arguments that advocate for saving the lives of fetuses but imprison more people per capita than any other country on Earth. These are the arguments made by the kinds of hypocrites that Austen loved to eviscerate. I have loved making this podcast in part because it is a delight to imagine myself in conversation with Jane Austen. I am sad that not having the right to control my own body is now something that Austen and I could talk about because we have it in common. And now for today's episode.

[Soft guitar begins playing.]

Vanessa: Chapter 15. Mr. Collins, it turns out, came to Longbourn looking for a wife. It is very magnanimous of him – just ask him! – to look among the Bennet sisters. In a conversation that he has with Mrs. Bennet, asking if Jane is available for a marriage, Mrs. Bennet tells him that Jane is all but engaged but, she informs him, all of her other daughters are available. He quickly decides that the next in age and beauty, Lizzy, will do. This, in theory, comes from a good place. Here is Professor Aisha Ramachandran on how a marriage with Mr. Collins would be advantageous for the Bennets.

[Music fades away as Aisha Ramachandran speaks.]

Ramachandran: [00:03:31] Mr. Collins – marrying Mr. Collins means, of course, keeping the land of the family. It means that the Bennets can stay in the house, potentially. It means that the girls will not be destitute. It means that there will be a provider within the family that allows them to stay where they are. Otherwise, it basically means that they will be evicted and have to go be somewhere else when Mr. Bennet dies. So this is not just a matter of making a good marriage. It's also about securing the futures of Mrs. Bennet, who will have no other options, and the other girls who may or may not be married, right? So it's about just securing the family as a whole.

Vanessa: [00:04:04] Collins is now wealthy and it's kind of all of a sudden. He has a rich patroness in Lady Catherine and a steady job. And now that his father recently died, Collins is

going to inherit Longbourn. Lady Catherine has told him that he should get married, so fine. Granted, it is sort of thoughtful that he wants to secure the affection in the hand of one of his cousins. But the line, quote, "He meant to choose one of the daughters if he found them as handsome and amiable as they were represented by Common Report," is where his magnanimity ends for me.

[Low bass music begins, later joined by piano and percussion.]

Vanessa: He is ready to do the right thing as long as one of the Bennet girls is hot. And it's not exactly like sitting in a living room reading aloud from a book of sermons is a genuine attempt to get to know his potential wife. This is something else masquerading as virtue, in my opinion. The chapter continues with all of the Bennet sisters except Mary walking to Meryton with Mr. Collins. They will visit their Aunt Philips, and while doing so they are introduced to a handsome man, soon to be made more handsome once he gets his red coat. A Mr. Wickham. He isn't just handsome. He's elegant and charming. Everyone is impressed by Wickham and Lizzy is smitten. But within just a moment of meeting Wickham, Miss Bingley and Mr. Darcy approach the party on the road. Bingley was on his way to check in on Jane's health at Longbourn, and Darcy was accompanying him. And while Bingley and Jane are making eyes at each other, Lizzy notices that Darcy and Wickham clearly know and hate one another, even though the two barely acknowledge one another. They all part ways, Aunt Philips agreed to host a party the following night with games and some food, and she will invite some of the regimentals, including Mr. Wickham. All in all, it was a very successful outing. Chapter 16 is the party at Aunt Phillips's house. We watch Lydia gamble more than she should. We watch Collins do the same. Collins and Lydia actually kind of have a lot in common. They both talk too much and just are too much, although in very different ways. But the real drama, the real meat of this scene is a conversation between Wickham and Lizzy. I've known that Wickham is the bad guy since I was 16 years old and read this book for the first time. So I don't remember how Wickham lands for first time readers.

[Music ends.]

Vanessa: His name is Wickham, like 'wicked-him'. So that's not great. But we are watching this guy, who we can sense is probably no good, charm the heck out of Lizzy. And if we are clued in to what's going to happen, it's painful to watch. Wickham in this private conversation that happens in the middle of a public setting is telling Lizzy why he doesn't like Darcy. The story that Wickham tells Lizzy is this:

[Dramatic piano music begins, akin to music from the silent film era.]

Vanessa: Darcy and Wickham grew up together. Wickham's father worked on Darcy's father's estate, and Darcy's father adored young Wickham, Darcy the Elder promised Wickham the Junior a good living as the curate to his estate when the position became available. Darcy Senior died before the living became available, and the Darcy we know denied Wickham the living despite his father's wishes. Lizzy is aghast. Darcy's behavior is abominable and Wickham is a charming storyteller. Here is Professor Tim Fulford on how he reads this dynamic between Lizzy and Wickham.

[Music ends.]

Fulford: [00:08:36] I mean, a lot of the novel is that sense of waiting for Elizabeth to catch up with what we, the readers, can see. But she can't because she feels herself to be witty and clever and likes to jump to conclusions because she considers herself to be clever. Well, she doesn't think she's jumping to conclusions, she thinks she's making clever interpretations, but she clearly doesn't really have the right amount of evidence. So Austen gives us some dramatic irony about Lizzy that she is so completely put off by Darcy's austere manner that she believes Wickham. But we have little illusions and perspectives that make us not quite so sure about Wickham before she quite gets to that point.

Vanessa: [00:09:23] I'm not sure that when I first read this scene 25 years ago that I knew that Wickham was the bad guy. But I think that Professor Fulford is right to a large extent. It is weird that Wickham is willing to share this story so early in their friendship. It's also interesting that Wickham tells us that Darcy cut him off because of, quote, 'extravagance and imprudence.' And Lizzy doesn't ask any follow up questions about that. She's completely credulous to Wickham's point of view. I want to think that Austen is showing us some real folly here in Lizzy. We know that Austen said in one of her letters that, quote, "I think Lizzy as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print." I love the idea that Austen would still find me delightful, even if I was an idiot sometimes. But what's still unclear to me is this.

[Synth intro music begins.]

Vanessa: To what extent is a bad man leading Lizzy astray in this chapter, and to what extent is she leading herself astray because of her own pride and Prejudice? I'm Vanessa Zoltan.

Lauren: [00:10:43] And I'm Lauren Sandler.

Vanessa: [00:10:44] And this is Live from Pemberley from Hot and Bothered.

[Music intensifies with added percussion before fading out.]

Vanessa: So Lauren, in my opening essay, I summarized this complicated backstory with Darcy Senior and Darcy Junior and Wickham Senior and Wickham Junior. And it's hard to summarize something where everyone has the same names, but also it's complicated. So, Lauren, I know that you did some research that could help us understand the relationship between the Darcys and the Wickhams.

Lauren: [00:11:23] I did. It is true. But let me warn you, this is not the sexiest topic. [Laughs.]

Vanessa: I don't know, man!

Lauren: However! However, I will say, you know, in the same way that you need to understand feudalism to understand Tolstoy, you have to understand land ownership and management to understand Austen. This is the economic world that she writes about. And in writing about romance, she writes about economics. These things are entwined. So let's not do what I have done every time I've read this book, which is just be like, "Oh, yes, land steward. Of course. I will pretend to myself that I know what that means," but let's actually break it down. So, okay. We know that Wickham, Wickham senior, was Darcy's father's land

steward. What that means is that Pemberley, the Darcy estate, is this vast, vast expanse of land. And so land needed to be farmed. It was rented out. There was rent that needed collecting. You know, there was a huge amount of upkeep involved. And obviously it wasn't going to be the man in the velvet waistcoat, whose portrait is hanging on the wall, who is managing his own land. And it was initially that it was usually a poorer, less fortunate relative who was appointed to be the steward so that they would have some paid position. So it wasn't just like you would have gazillionaire Darcy and then a destitute brother or first cousin or something. But over time, it became a career. And we know that this goes back to at least the medieval period, because there were men jockeying for land steward careers back in the medieval time. But by the late 18th century, and this really surprised me, land stewards were actually the most highly paid of all professional men. So the professions included barristers, solicitors, surgeons, physicians, apothecaries, clergy, and also stewards, and stewards at that point were better paid than anyone else. And so on the one hand, you know, it seems like, "Oh, he's a land steward. That must mean that he's sort of a caretaker in a way that seems sort of low class." At least that is what I assumed, having never looked this up before in all of the readings in which I pretended to myself to know what this meant. But it turns out it's actually a pretty high class position. So Wickham was someone who wasn't, you know, gentry like Darcy was, but he was absolutely a respected and well paid professional man.

Vanessa: [00:14:04] That's so interesting. One of the things that I'm thinking about is how interested Austen is in people on the margins, like the Bennet girls, their father is landed, and because they're girls, they will not be landed. And then Mr. Collins is, I would imagine, from how you described it, sort of like third class, but he's about to become second class. Like Darcy is the foil and, you know, he's represented by Pemberley and he's sort of this, like, big stone edifice in the background. But almost every other character is class jumping or falling in a really precarious way. Right? The Lucases, even though Sir William Lucas has been sort of promoted in class, Charlotte is afraid that she is going to be poor. There's just a lot of class precarity in this novel.

Lauren: [00:15:00] And I think that that's a function of a number of things. I think that that's a function of a legal system that pretends to keep England solid, but in fact keeps things shape shifting in a very anxious way. I also think that that sort of anxiety and that potential for change is what powers literature so often. And so what Austen has done is populate this novel. And it's not only this novel. I think there's something that she's interested in through all of her books – [Vanessa says, "Totally."] – with people who are in a state of change or have the threat of change. And that, of course, is the engine and the stakes of so much of – of this book, because it actually makes me wonder, thinking about Darcy in contrast to the rest of these characters, if it's part of why I tend to find him so uninteresting, is because he's so solid in this situation compared to so many of these other people.

Vanessa: [00:15:57] Yeah. There's something not interesting about someone who starts out rich and powerful and then ends rich and powerful, like, very little sort of happens to him on that level.

Lauren: [00:16:08] And yet that's why he needs to change for us to care about him.

Vanessa: [00:16:12] Right. The other reason that I think that it's possible that Austen is so interested in this is she lived this so profoundly, right, with all of her siblings. Some of them

were in the army, one of them got sort of sold off and became very wealthy, one of them had some sort of learning disability that prevented him from ever making a living in this society...she saw the class impact, I think, and how different it can be even within one family so viscerally, she lived her whole life, staying at one wealthy brother's house and then staying in a less wealthy brother's house.

Lauren: [00:16:51] Yeah. And, you know, her father was a clergyman, so he was one of these members of a profession whose demise left her in a similar position as Wickham, frankly. You know, there was no – no Darcy who was intended to take care of Jane Austen. There was just the fact that she was the daughter of a dead clergyman and had no land to inherit from him. And so I think that even though she's clearly writing Wickham as a very difficult character, that we have not seen the full extent of that yet, I think most of us know that this is coming, but I think that she's even imbuing this character with a circumstance that she can relate to because of how English class and finances are structured.

Vanessa: [00:17:37] And, Lauren, my last question is just...you are someone who has thought a lot about and written a lot about women experiencing homelessness. And when I think about *Jane Eyre* and *Pride and Prejudice* and sort of, you know, Regency and Victorian novels in general, you know, we think of balls and bonnets. And yet both of the novels that we've talked about in our romance novel podcast do have women either experiencing homelessness or in acute fear of it. And I'm just wondering if you have any reflections on that based on all of the other work that you've done?

Lauren: [00:18:15] Oh, I think that's a great observation. And I think that it's all about a system that does not allow women to have a measure of control. I think that that is – is something that is more of a crisis when there is a child involved.

Vanessa: [00:18:31] Right.

Lauren: [00:18:31] But I think that's also sort of the threat of sex as well, right? The whole fear of sex in England during this time is not just related to some generic moral code, but what it means if a girl finds herself with a child and without a home. I mean, it then gets into sort of a larger thought process for me about what it means to be born with a womb.

Vanessa: [00:19:00] Right.

Lauren: [00:19:01] Either to have desire or be desired or controlled by someone's desire. And what it means to imagine a – an equal world in which women are often left with the children that they have and how systemically we've always sort of done the opposite of what I think a logical and respectful and caring culture would do. But we just continue to. And I also just think the notion that these professions were all professions for men, that it's you know, there's precarity for men. But this sort of precarity, that ingenuity and work and connections and drive and education can shift into a very, very different place.

Vanessa: [00:19:45] Yeah.

Lauren: [00:19:46] You can also just kind of fail up as a guy if you have access to these professions as – as we see Collins has done here. And, you know, no matter how diligent you are, no matter how much of a Mary you are, and I mean that in terms of – [Laughs]

Vanessa: – In the best way. She's not even going on walks. She is staying home and probably practicing the piano.

Lauren: [00:20:09] But, you know, Mary is someone who – who wants nothing but the ivory tower and a way to make an independent living in a world of ideas and sermons and lectures. And it's inconceivable for her instead – her path is only based on whether a man will deem her attractive enough to want to marry her. And that balance there between the two of them just feels especially heartbreaking to me.

Vanessa: [00:20:35] Yeah. I mean, with this question of ridiculousness, chapter 15 opens with, "Mr. Collins was not a sensible man." And what it says in the text is, "and though he belonged to one of the universities, he had merely kept the necessary terms without forming at it any useful acquaintance." And, you know, I think we have the same footnote that says, essentially, you could get a degree if you lived at your college [Laughs.] for long enough, they would just graduate you. And I think it is ridiculous, ridiculous to have access to classes and to never go. And I think that – the thing that I think we can pretty securely accuse Collins of at this point is being completely incurious. He doesn't ask questions. He monologues. He does not engage in conversation. He does not try to get to know any of these girls. He didn't even go to class. He's just so incurious, which I do think Austen finds condemning and deeply ridiculous.

Lauren: [00:21:42] Oh, her condemnation through the rest of this paragraph is so delicious to me. She writes about "the self conceit of a weak head living in retirement and the consequential feelings of early and unexpected prosperity, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman and his rights as a rector, which make him altogether a mixture," – And I love this – "of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility." It is such a precisely damning description. And I feel like, oh, we all know people like this. And I feel like she diagnoses him so perfectly.

Vanessa: [00:22:23] Yeah, maybe that's one of the things that is a pattern of ridiculousness, is an unwillingness to, like, look closely at other people. Because if Mrs. Bennet were to look at her own daughters, she would know that Mary would marry Mr. Collins, and she would know that Lizzy is going to fight this tooth and nail. And so if she's willing to say no to Jane, why not point him toward Mary? And we find out later that Mary would have said, yes, there's a reflection later. And so Mr. Collins and Mrs. Bennet are both...just so silly for not looking close, which is interesting because Lizzy is also not looking close, just in a different way, right? She is not seeing that Darcy is a good man and is buying everything that Wickham is selling, whole hog.

Lauren: [00:23:19] I mean, it's interesting. I know that in the introductory essay, you were definitely thinking about what Austen is indicating in terms of Lizzy's willingness to be fooled. But I actually find Lizzy to be incredibly logical through all of this. I mean, like, of course, she's being seduced by Wickham's charm and good looks and their rapport and how thrilling it is to have someone confide in you and just the intimacy that grows out of intimacies. But I also think that, you know, she has a lot of evidence that she is very intentionally going back to to

say, does this ring true to me? And she's thinking in the moment with Wickham about how Darcy has presented himself to her and to her family. But she also then reflects upon something that Darcy said, which was that he holds these resentments and that he's immovable when he feels them. And so, you know, I know that there is this question of prejudice, which is supposed to be up against Darcy's pride, right? It's the very title of the book. And yet I don't feel Lizzy being necessarily prejudiced in a way that feels illogical to me here.

Vanessa: [00:24:35] I don't think it's illogical. I think she's outright eager to believe this story. Right? I do think her prejudice is, at least a little bit, at play and we see it insofar as she starts the shit-talking. Right? Like she really lobs up this opportunity to Wickham. She's like, Oh, do you know Mr. Darcy? I don't like him. And so it seems to me a little bit like Lizzy's talking to a fortune teller and doesn't see the clues she's giving to the person. And then it's like, "Wow, uncanny that you were able to read that!" And I think that Austen is really smartly writing that. Wickham is clearly someone who is able to say to people exactly what they want to hear. And Lizzy is sort of leading him along and telling him what she wants to hear. She wants to hear insulting things about Darcy. He's going to tell her insulting things about Darcy and brilliantly make her feel like she's a confidant and that it's a sign of their intimacy and not as though he's using her to spread more bad words about Darcy. It's also just this question I have of, like, how big of a baddie is Wickham? Is he like – this, like, dopey guy who likes having fun and is, you know, 23 years old and ruins his whole life by being a dummy when he's young? Or is he – is he like a narcissist who is willing to do whatever and hurt whomever to get what he wants?

Lauren: [00:26:12] And is there an aspect of it in which he believes the story that he's telling Lizzy and that he does feel hurt. He does feel passed over. He feels the injustice. There's pain in that. He's told himself this narrative of what he deserved and how he was so wronged by this cold, proud man whose father loved him. I don't know. I do wonder in this scene if we are not getting the most devious Wickham, but one that might actually be connecting with someone on some level.

Vanessa: [00:26:51] Yeah. Well, let's look closely at one of the things that – that Wickham says, and I'm interested to see how we both read the sentence differently. One of the things that he says to Lizzy about Darcy is, "I've known him too long and too well to be a fair judge", and I'm calling con artist on this line! He has a line he wants to sell about Darcy, and that is that he is a completely unfair jerk and he knows differently. It's not that Wickham has known Darcy too long and too well to judge him. He's playing her!

Lauren: [00:27:30] I don't know. I have a hard time ruling firmly that he's just playing her. I think that this is one of these situations where Wickham has much more of a relationship with Darcy than Darcy has with Wickham. And, you know, Darcy is the person who has had power and access and ease and esteem forever, whereas Wickham has just been scraping by and hoping to get that sort of paternal love and hoping to get some sort of financial stability. And I imagine he's sort of obsessed with Darcy in certain ways, especially in the ways that someone who you feel has wronged you, whether you're right or not, can be obsessed with someone. I also think that people who have these sort of sibling relationships – I am not someone who has siblings myself so I don't know what it is like to have an actual sibling relationship, but I have a lot of non-biological sibling relationships. I have a lot of people in my life who I've been really, really close to for a really, really long time, who I love, who I also judge, talk shit about,

you know, [Vanessa laughs] like they're the people in my life who I am probably most likely to be brutal about. Because I think that what Wickham is saying here is true. When you know someone too long and too well, it is really hard to be a fair judge. You come with your own resentments, you come with your own histories and all of these different, complicated years of defining yourself alongside and against someone. And I think it's an incredibly wise line.

Vanessa: [00:29:07] I think it's true, and that's what makes him a good con artist. I think that this is part of him curating a narrative to Lizzy, and we know for a fact that he's definitely curating a narrative because we'll find out later how the plot of this story that he has told Lizzy is missing some key plot points. This is also very early on in the conversation where he is not yet totally sure how far Lizzy is going to be willing to go in shit-talking Darcy. And so he is like playing footsie with the possibility. He's not saying, "Oh no, I've known him for years, he's an upstanding guy," and nor is he, like, totally showing his hand and being like, "Look, he screwed me over, we have personal beef." This is very much dipping a toe in the water and seeing how warm and receptive Lizzy is going to be to this.

Lauren: [00:30:03] And then this is one of these moments in which I think, isn't it interesting that he can be read as someone who may be speaking from a place of real pain and also can be read as someone who is villainously spinning a tale to try to hoodwink Lizzy and anyone else who can listen? And maybe, maybe those things aren't necessarily entirely separate.

Vanessa: [00:30:33] Which I – and I think that that's true. I think it is rare that people are just villains, right, all the way down. And so I think it is possible – probable that Darcy really did hurt Wickham's feelings, but Wickham is someone who doesn't care about who he hurts while he is going after what he wants. And that is villainous, right? Like he's slandering Darcy. He is prejudicing Lizzy against Darcy. He might think of this as, like, a harmless lie, but it's not a harmless lie. He potentially ruins Lizzy's life from this, right? Like Lizzy is going to say no to Darcy in a proposal because of this story and, like...it works out in the end but it could very well have not done so. And so I don't want to write him off just as a villain and yet the fact he doesn't care about his actions and how they impact the women in his life is just so troubling to me.

Lauren: [00:31:42] In a good part of the scholarship of Austen that I have read so far, many people bring up the point that Wickham is the most villainous character she's ever written, that she tends to write people who are far more complicated than Wickham is when it comes to the relationship between bad and good. And so I do think that as we meet him, a little bit of this sneaks in. But, yes, I think that you're absolutely right that as we learn more and more about Wickham, we learn how high the stakes are of his consequences and how little regard he has for his consequence on other people. And that, I think, is Austen's true – true ruling on him.

Vanessa: [00:32:28] And I think that I read Wickham very differently in a post-#MeToo world. Before I – you know, at the end of the day, everyone gets sort of their just desserts in this novel and a certain kind of logic. But in a post-#MeToo world, I just read this as another guy lying to women in order to get what they want and this type of deception being endemic to the kind of oppression that we were talking about at the top of the episode.

Lauren: [00:33:04] And of course, we're going to see how this sort of behavior in this scene connects with far more extreme grooming and possible abuse much later on in the book.

Vanessa: [00:33:17] Yeah. Yeah, what is the line between, like, lying to someone and conning them or grooming them, right? Like, now it seems to be one of the questions of the novel, right? Like...what do we blame Wickham for? Do we blame him for this conversation? We're going to objectively blame him for other things that we learn about later. But in looking back, are we like, this was one of the early sins?

Lauren: [00:33:43] It makes me think about the conversation we just had about class as this element of English life that seems so clearly delineated, but in fact exists in these far more porous ways. I think that, you know, moralism in England is quite similar, right? We have these sermons, we have these – this conduct literature. We have this sort of regulated way of determining what is appropriate behavior in relationships and what badness is. And I think that one of the things that Austen is showing us is how porous that can seem as well.

Vanessa: [00:34:21] On how porous consent is, how porous libel is. What's the difference between lying about your age and lying about your profession versus lying about your identity? And like, where does your identity begin? Like, Wickham isn't technically lying about his identity, but to some extent he is. And I certainly don't know where the lines are. But Wickham in this one, and I think why this conversation is so interesting is because this is a bright light to me on the ambiguity of this lie, right? And, like, this is the moment that it's like this could not go to court, but he's showing us something about himself here. This is not a crime. And if it turns out that this is a good guy at the end and he was just not telling you the whole truth, then I'd be like, "Oh, you don't owe someone the whole truth in the first conversation." But because he ends up being a bad guy, it's – right? – like it's just one of those moments that is only clear in hindsight.

Lauren: [00:35:22] And bad guys are so much easier to deal with, right, when they are very evidently bad in the beginning. [Vanessa says, "Right."] And it's interesting because we're introduced to Darcy as being a bit of a bad guy. And Lizzy's response to that is to develop her case against him and eventually deliver it to him, but determine very actively what role she's willing to have him play in her life despite things that she might feel about him. That is what she thinks about him. With someone like Wickham who doesn't come on that way, he's much, much more difficult to manage in a relationship because how do you know and what do you do? And do we just keep ourselves from having relationships, period, out of fear that someone might con you, that someone might play you? There are plenty of people who live their lives that way, and it doesn't – it doesn't lead to a lot of closeness or intimacy. And when a country's entire economic structure is based on partnership and the birthing of heirs, it's pretty hard to build fondness and family that way.

Vanessa: [00:36:35] Well, I think that that leads us to a conversation about love, because I think one of the things that the Wickham relationship, as far as Lizzy is concerned, is sort of illuminated as again and again is a crush but not love. And, like, I think Lizzy's essentially going to keep repeating that, right, as like, "I don't love him. I don't love him. I can talk myself out of it." But what we see in these chapters is she's smitten, he's handsome, and they run into him and he's paying her attention more than Lydia. And that feels good. And he's witty and he's fun to talk to. And by the way, did she mention he's handsome? Oh, by the way, he's

handsome. And it's just making me wonder. I'm like – because that's true. I feel like you can often have a crush on someone without ever really being interested in dating them or, like, feeling at actual risk for loving them. I'm just wondering what you think Lizzy's, like, sort of like eyelash-fluttering about Wickham says.

Lauren: [00:37:41] Yeah. I mean, I do think that – that it's a crush, and I think that it's a crush that is going to exist just as a really important foil. You know, it's a crush that develops, obviously, in contrast to Collins, right? We have like all of this beauty and all this effortless charm compared to this incredible lack of beauty and utter charmlessness, despite its deep attempts to be charming, which, of course, is the worst way to ever be charming. But also, we have something that feels, you know – she's hot for him! You know, a crush is very, very different than love, which is something that can deepen and grow and change and has legs. And I think that we are going to feel quite acutely the difference between what it felt like to be smitten with Wickham in this scene, which again I enjoy very much, and what it will feel like when she actually feels deep, true and frankly adult love much later on. It's part of how I think it's such an effective coming of age story. And it's – it's to me, this perfect hybrid of a coming of age tale and a romance in that Lizzy is maturing as someone who loves and desires is how she comes of age in so many ways. And we get to feel it in these pages with her.

Vanessa: [00:39:02] Yeah. Well, Lauren, we are off to the Netherfield Ball. Enough white soup has been made. [Lauren laughs.] Jane is feeling better. The invitations have gone out. You and I were not on the invitation list. I am very excited.

Lauren: [00:39:19] I am also excited. I'm also excited to have the experience of being really excited for a big party that ends up not being nearly as fabulous as you want it to be, which is something else that I think Austen knew very deeply. [Laughs.]

Lauren: [00:39:36] Well, I'm excited to go to a ball and not have a risk of it becoming a superspreader event.

[Fluttery music with percussion and horns plays and fades out.]

Lauren: [00:40:00] So one thing we have not talked about in this episode, though we've certainly talked about it plenty when we haven't been recording, is all of this cousin marriage that we now think of as incest? I mean, so we have Collins showing up, right, with the intention of marrying not just like a third cousin, but a first cousin. And as we'll find out later on in the book, this is something that is – is hanging over Darcy as well. So it really did get us thinking, what was the deal with incest? And of course, there's a perfect person to ask about this, Mary Jean Corbett, who is the distinguished professor of English at Miami University and just happened to have written a book called *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf*. So let's get her on the phone.

[Skype dial-up sounds play.]

Lauren: [00:40:58] Hi, Mary Jean, thank you so much for joining us to talk incest. [Laughs.]

Corbett: [00:41:03] Hi, Lauren. How are you?

Lauren: [00:41:06] I'm great. So, Mary Jean, as we are reflecting on what it means for Collins to consider which of his first cousins he should take as a bride, which is something that would just be unthinkable at this moment within at least my culture, I wonder if you can enlighten us about what marriage practices would have been unthinkable then, if this was something that was so normative to marry one's first cousin?

Corbett: [00:41:33] So marriage law was ambiguous and complicated – complex in the 19th century, but in the earlier part of the 19th century, marriage law was almost entirely governed by the Church of England. So in any English church and maybe they're still there even today, you could go in and see a table of prohibited relatives you may not marry. And it usually only said you may not marry various women, right? Daughter, sister, stepdaughter. But the implication was that women could not marry the parallel male figures, so that within the church this understanding developed out of biblical precedent in some ways. Certainly there's a longer history of who you can and can't marry based on questions of political power. But the basic idea was that you couldn't marry anyone who was considered too close. We in the United States think of first cousins as two close, whereas a different sense of things operated in the U.K. So marrying a cousin actually was understood as like, okay, because they didn't have the same sense of biology as we have now. And there certainly was a premium on extending your family connections and consolidating family power, particularly among the upper classes.

Lauren: [00:42:56] When did the research emerge and get popularized that, you know, reproducing with your first cousin wasn't really the best plan for biological reproduction?

Corbett: [00:43:06] Well, that research emerged – began to emerge in the 1860s. Francis Galton, who was a close ally and cousin of our friend Charles Darwin, whom himself married a first cousin, Galton's work and the work of others in his family began to express a certain kind of concern about some cousins marrying other cousins. It wasn't necessarily the case, though, however, in England, as opposed to the United States, that cousin marriage was understood as necessarily bad or dangerous. But starting around 1860s, seventies, up to and including the rise of eugenics as a genetically inflected anxiety about who had sex with whom and who reproduced with whom, that's kind of the heyday of the whole incest scare around cousin marriage. I should say that as someone who has in my family, first cousins were married to one another, it's not necessarily the case that in the UK or in Ireland that cousin marriage was conceived of as bad, wrong or dangerous in the way that it is in the United States.

Lauren: [00:44:14] And I love that you mentioned eugenics, because it does seem that it was essentially a form of eugenics before this period of research. In Austen's day, it was not about polluting a bloodline, but about protecting it. The idea of marrying a first cousin is sort of the perfect way to protect both capital and race.

Corbett: [00:44:35] Yes, that's entirely right, particularly for those in the upper classes. As I say in my book, the preferred strategy for marriage within the family for middle class people would have been marrying your dead wife's sister. Long story there. Sounds kind of odd. Whereas in the upper classes to which, say, really Catherine de Bourgh belongs, marrying a cousin was a way of keeping, as you say, capital within the family.

Lauren: [00:45:00] It's really fun to read your book because there's the acronym MDWS throughout the whole thing, which is Marrying Dead Wife's Sister. [Laughs]

Corbett: [00:45:09] Yes, yes. And of course, you know, that happened within Austen's own family. Before around 1835, there was no prohibition on doing that. In fact, there was a kind of incentive to do that, but that was construed as incest. Having sex with the sibling of someone you had had sex with, that's what constituted incest, not a mixing of bloodlines. Certainly there was no genetics to argue against cousin marriage at that historical moment.

Lauren: [00:45:40] One of the things that I find so interesting in your writing is about how Lizzy is going to reject a first cousin proposal and eventually Darcy is going to find himself in similar straits. And so, you know, this notion of – of *Pride and Prejudice* as being this seminal text, no pun intended here, around rejecting normative couplings within a certain class, you know, rejecting the notion that love doesn't matter as state bloodlines, these are the only things that matter, is this question of marrying within the family, reproducing within the family, and Austen rejecting that...is that central to what this text is about to you?

Corbett: [00:46:25] I do think it is. I don't want to make too many generalizations about Austen because there is a whole 'nother novel, *Mansfield Park*, in which our sort of sad, pathetic heroine – that's how people feel about her – Fanny Price falls in love with her first cousin and manages to marry him by the end of the book. So there are some novels in which Austen is in support of cousin marriage. In *Pride and Prejudice*, however, which is establishing – I mean, it's probably the text that does most to establish – a new norm for what constitutes romance in the early 19th century. The idea that you would reject the prudent marriage or the marriage of fortune, or even the marriage that's going to enable you and your family to survive, which is what Lizzy is doing by turning down Collins asserts, instead, a desire for something else, something more, something strange and unfamiliar, I think, helps to kind of create the paradigm that we see for much of the rest of the 19th century in which handsome stranger comes to town and then you don't like him, and by the end of the book you marry.

Lauren: [00:47:32] So it's a big takeaway for me that readers during Austen's days would not have been skeezed out at all by Collins showing up on the scene with the intention to claim a first cousin as a wife. That would have seemed like the most normative thing.

Corbett: [00:47:47] I mean, one of the things that's – I think that I argue in the book is that he gets the idea from Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who says, "Ah, you're going to visit your extended family. Oh, daughters! Oh, marry one of them!" Someone not brought up high, but is someone who will make a good wife for a clergyman who then presumably Lady Catherine can boss around. So it's an aristocratic strategy, right? Which she recommends. And Collins is so obsequious. Anything Lady Catherine recommends, he's extremely willing to do. So I don't know that it's his idea exactly, or that it would be one that he would understand as completely normative. But it's not – it's definitely not something that in England people would be skeezed out by. The U.S., it's a different story, although even in the U.S., cousin marriage was not banned until – it began to be banned sort of midway through the 19th century. But even today, lots of people marry their cousins. Lots of Jewish people in the 19th century married their cousins. Like today, lots of Pakistani people in the U.K. marry their cousins.

Lauren: [00:48:55] It's an interesting thing about Lady Catherine, because, of course, she's like such a boss CEO, right? She is the absolute definition of what it means to run a major business, i.e. the biggest estate around. And so she's no fool when it comes to thinking about consolidating and managing finance. So on the one hand, yeah, I see that she would want a nice little parsonage wife to boss around or have as a fourth unthreatening partner when she wants to play cards. But on the other hand, I think that she also may be giving Collins some advice about what it means to consolidate an estate and keep it within a family, something that clearly his father did not understand.

Corbett: [00:49:43] Yeah, yeah. No, that's – that's absolutely right. One of the things that's interesting about Lady Catherine, though, is that it's usually within the aristocratic cousin marriage strategy, as in, say, *Sense and Sensibility*. The idea is usually that brothers' children will marry one another. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Lady Catherine says it was his mother's dearest wish. So it's a woman asserting a kind of authority, exercising a sort of power, twisting that marriage strategy in order to consolidate her daughter's power, her daughter's position, as well as Darcy's. So that, you know, in many ways, Lady Catherine, again, often denigrated or despised, is someone who may be denigrated and despised in a kind of ironic way by Austen, in that she's appropriating strategies that we would typically associate with men.

Lauren: [00:50:36] Well. Thank you so much for joining us. Obviously, I love this book. You can tell. And I'm so thrilled that we – that we got to connect and talk today about cousins getting it on. Who knew?

Corbett: [00:50:49] It's been a real pleasure. Thank you, Lauren.

[Theme music with synth and percussion plays.]

Vanessa: [00:50:56] You've been listening to 'Live from Pemberley'. We are 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 tell other people about it or leave us a review wherever you listen to your podcasts. 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 Unicornia, Baroness Gretchen Sneegass of Breakfastcarbston. Knight Molly Reel of Worcester Sauce, the Countess of Kristen Hall, Dame Leia Bee of Pickleshire, Dame Becky Boo of Tiaralandia and Duchess Bidy Higgins of Bubble Bath. Bidy, who I was lucky enough to talk to earlier this week. Hi, Bidy. Special thanks this week to Mary Jean Corbett, Aisha Ramachandran and Tim Fulford for talking to us, Lara Glass, Gabby Iori, Asia Uramas, Julia Argy, Nicki Zoltan, Stephanie Paulsell, and all of our patrons.

[Music fades out.]