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**So Odd a Mixture**  
**Along the Autistic Spectrum in**  
**'Pride and Prejudice'**

*Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer*

Forewords by Tony Attwood  
and Eileen Sutherland



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I dedicate this book with love to my parents,  
Ross Goodrich Ferguson and Joan Bunting Ferguson,  
and to my parents-in-law,  
Alan Robert Bottomer and Jean Stewart Wallace Bottomer

impressed by Darcy's build, looks and the reports of his wealth, the favourable opinion of the fine folk of Meryton soon falters as:

his manners turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend. (p.10)

The behaviour that makes the Merytonians change their minds about Mr Darcy consists of the facts that he:

danced only once with Mrs Hurst and once with Miss Bingley, declined being introduced to any other lady, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party. (p.10)

If a short, homely tradesman named Mr Dobbey had behaved in this way he would probably not even have been noticed by anyone, let alone given offence. If some village worthies or a neglected spinster had paid this other Mr D any attention, they would have likely labelled his actions as due to shyness or lack of confidence. All that either Mr D has done is stick with the people he knows and walk about without joining any other group. Many, many ruder things have been done at parties!

However, Mr Darcy cannot blend into the corners of the room as can the multitude of Mr Dobbey's of the world. Due to Darcy's 'fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien and...ten thousand a year' (p.10) others watch and comment on his every move. The same behaviour that might have been ignored or dismissed without comment in someone less richly endowed is observed and judged. Since his actions are interpreted by the onlookers as negative, unfriendly and snobby, they assume that he himself possesses those traits: 'His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world...' (p.10).

The citizens of Meryton have combined their observations of Darcy's behaviour with the deeply felt class consciousness of their society to reach this decision about his character. Their response partially reflects their own insecurities about both their physical appearance and their financial standing, as well as their awareness of their social status relative to his; they know that on all these grounds he has reason to feel superior and so assume that he does.

Close to two centuries after Austen described Darcy and the assumptions that others made about his character based on his behaviour, Tony Attwood noted that, 'The expressive body language of the person with Asperger's Syndrome can be misinterpreted... their manner be misperceived as aggressive, aloof or indifferent' (1998, p.63). Enlarging on this further in *The Profile of Friendship Skills in Asperger's Syndrome*, Attwood describes how 'they can also appear to be ill mannered or ungracious and somewhat autocratic' (2002, p.5).

Mr Bingley, who being 'lively and unreserved, danced every dance' (p.10), feels perturbed to see his usually competent friend 'standing about by [him]self in this stupid manner' (p.11). Obviously, in his experience, Darcy is usually more animated. Notice that Bingley does not express similar concern about his brother-in-law, Mr Hurst, whose dull-witted, alcoholic stupor is unchanging whatever the occasion! People on the spectrum 'can be relatively more relaxed and socially fluent with just one friend, but as with the saying "two's company and three is a crowd" they can become withdrawn and solitary when in a group' (Attwood 1998, p.48). Even more than for most of us, their social skills fluctuate depending on the company they keep.

In response to his friend's urging him to dance Mr Darcy replies, 'I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly well acquainted with my partner' (p.11). This is the first of several times when Darcy expresses a *strongly negative opinion about dancing*; an opinion that is highly unusual for his time and society, when dances and balls were generally regarded as fine entertainment. He has certainly been taught how to dance as, like riding, it would be considered a basic skill for someone of his social status. However, dancing, or moving rhythmically in time with others, does not seem to be pleasurable for him.

Nor is it for a number of those on the spectrum. Temple Grandin states that, 'I can keep rhythm moderately well by myself, but it is extremely difficult to synchronize my rhythmic motions with other people or with a musical accompaniment' (Grandin and Scariano 1986, p.26). She adds that she feels that many people on the spectrum have 'a right-left delay in body movements. Getting all the parts to work together is a monumental task' (1986, p.26). Similarly, Liane Holliday Willey, another author on the autistic spectrum, writes at length about her difficulties with ballet class as a six year old, when she reports that she 'could not for the life of me master the intricateness of it all; the coordination of bilateral movement it requires'