Using Janus to Make Transitions in Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*

The contemporary movie-adaptation of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* by director Joe Wright features an allusion to the lesser-known Roman god Janus. Although no "smoking gun" is available to indicate the director's intentions in utilizing a Janus sculpture, the prop's obvious presence and enhancement of the plot show the director's forethought. This mythological shorthand of the Janus myth signals a crucial point in Elizabeth Bennett's character development as she has a change of heart toward Mr. Darcy.

After alluding to Darcy as an Achilles figure in the previous scene, Wright goes on to feature another classical reference in the form of a Janus head sculpture. Its inclusion in the scene is subtle yet explicit; as Elizabeth strolls through one of Pemberley's many ornate rooms, the camera gets a close-up of some of the items on a desk. The camera follows her as she brushes her hand along these various items, which includes the Janus head. Although nothing in the scene overtly names the bust as that of Janus, the prominence of its position in the shot gives the audience time to recognize the unique symbolism of the god's double-faced head. If the director meant to merely display the wealth and education of the Darcy family through trinkets and works of art, the sculpture on the desk could have been that of any man. However, in choosing to use Janus as a prop, Wright demonstrates an understanding of the myth and the significance it lends to this particular point in the plot.

---

Janus, in Roman mythology, represents "gates and doorways and...the New Year and beginnings in general"\(^3\), making him a kind of **god of transitions**. At the time that the god is referenced in the movie, Elizabeth is undergoing a transition in her perception of Mr. Darcy. Having rejected his proposal of marriage, she receives a letter from Darcy that "address[es] the two offenses...[she] laid against [him]"\(^4\). Elizabeth, now knowing Darcy to have acted with the best of intentions, begins to soften her hatred toward and rebuild her impression of him. This change of heart is accomplished primarily during her visit to Darcy’s home of Pemberley in which the script is lacking in dialogue. Without verbal cues, the **visual allusion to Janus becomes a valuable tool for the audience’s understanding of this plot development**.

The Janus sculpture heralds the shift in the story from pride and prejudice, to humility and love. This transition began with Darcy’s admission of love for Elizabeth, and Wright’s allusion to the weakening of Darcy’s Achillean armor. It continues as Elizabeth explores Darcy’s home and her new feelings toward him. From the introduction of Janus on, the plot focuses less on the tension and animosity between these characters and more on the positive interaction that comes from mutual understanding.

In alluding to the Janus myth, Wright uses mythology to indicate to the audience a new direction in the movie’s plot. The sculpture of the double-faced Janus head symbolizes the beginning of a different kind of relationship between Darcy and Elizabeth, one that leads to love rather than ill will. Janus’s presence in the movie at this crucial junction physically marks a turning point in the movie.

---


4 *Pride and Prejudice*, dir. by Joe Wright (2005; Focus Features, 2005 dvd).
Still image from Joe Wright’s 2005 adaptation of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Left: bust of Janus. Right: Elizabeth Bennett, played by Keira Knightley