A Longman Cultural Edition

Pride and Prejudice

Jane Austen

Edited by

Claudia L. Johnson and Susan J. Wolfson

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Cover Photo: Chawton House, first built in 1588 and then added to and altered over the years, was owned by Jane Austen's brother, Edward Austen Knight, who was adopted by wealthy relations. Not nearly as fine as Edward's other estate—Godmersham, in Kent—and much less impressive than Darcy's Derbyshire estate in *Pride and Prejudice,* Chawton House is nevertheless a respectable country estate. Jane Austen, along with her mother and sister, lived in a small cottage on this property.

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About This Edition

The title of *Pride and Prejudice,* which Jane Austen initially called "First Impressions," introduces some of the attitudes that set the novel into motion: the pride of Fitzwilliam Darcy, a wealthy young gentleman with a prejudice against the middle classes, conflicts with his fascination by the vivacious Elizabeth Bennet, a young woman whose family has neither affluence nor prestige. In turn, her pride in her own acuteness and her prejudice against Darcy's arrogance lead her to misunderstand him, her own heart, and much else besides. Marriage is in the air for the five Bennet sisters, not just as a romantic possibility but as a necessity, for with no male heir, Mr. Bennet must bequeath his property and home to a distant male relative, leaving his daughters destitute. Darcy's friend Bingley shows interest in Elizabeth's sister Jane, and other suitors step forward in the form of officers, heirs, and gentlemen. Working out these plots provides the novel with excitement, comedy, and sharp insights into society.

The Longman Cultural Edition of *Pride and Prejudice* illuminates Austen's novel in several contexts. The first one is defined by Austen herself, in her letters to her family concerned with (among other things) her social life, the novel and its reception, and her sense of herself as a professional "author." One of the issues punctuating these letters is Austen's attention to what she might be paid for her work. While no one in *Pride and Prejudice* corresponds exactly to Austen's own circumstances, she enjoyed intimate contact with a world in which everyone seems to know what everyone else is, or will be, worth. To set some material coordinates for the novel's characters, their families, and their fortunes, we present a table on "Money" that details some aspects of the contemporary economy, itemizing the labor, services, and goods money may purchase, and

the income it may provide. Matters of inheritance—who could and could not inherit; what a system of inheritance promised and guarded against—were increasingly important in the 1790s, in the wake of the French Revolution, as our brief selection from Edmund Burke makes clear. Money, especially inherited money, is a key question in prospects of marriage—as important as, and in some cases more important than, love. The next contextual section is about the culture of marriage, how it is managed by the law and by systems of advice to young women, as well as the critiques it provoked in overt polemic and in literary imagination. Women especially were instructed in proper social behavior and moral conduct for their roles as wives and mothers. A unit on female character and conduct provides a framework, but not a necessary containment, for the marriage market of *Pride and Prejudice.* As often as not, and for better or worse, Austen presents women who evade, press against, or refute the advice of the conduct mentors. They may even, in effect, provide examples for Mary Wollstonecraft's critique, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* of female "finishing" for marriage. A complementary section on ideals of male character and conduct illuminates Austen's representation of a range of characters in *Pride and Prejudice*—from the admirable to the despicable, from the questionable to the ludicrous.

The era in which Austen wrote, revised, and published *Pride and Prejudice* was one in which landscape as much as conduct could reflect taste and values. A unit on one key aesthetic category, "the picturesque" and a privileged site of its cultivation, "the Great House" (the country home and lands of the wealthy), sets the various establishments in *Pride and Prejudice*—from the Bennets' Longbourn, to Lady Catherine's Rosings, to Darcy's Pemberley—in the context of this emerging view of home as a sign of character, both of its owner and of a nation that was coming to see "The Homes of England" (as Felicia Hemans's celebrated poem would put it) as its mirror. All these contexts frame the first reactions to and reviews of *Pride and Prejudice,* especially the challenge presented by its refreshing mode of social verisimilitude, of men and women in situations and crises that seemed not only probable, but familiar to the readers of the day. Our last unit tracks the terms by which Austen variously impressed, irritated, and captivated the first

generations of readers. A guide for further reading provides information about biography, editions, critical studies, and Web sites.

Our text of *Pride and Prejudice* is based on the first edition of 1813. We correct obvious printer's errors, but do not standardize nor modernize forms of spelling and punctuation acceptable in 1813. In several cases (as readers may note), these practices can even be internally inconsistent. One of the impressions this "cultural" edition makes is the difference between the mostly uniform conventions of punctuation and spelling today and the more various practices of the early nineteenth century. For terms and concerns recurring throughout the novel for which twenty-first-century readers may appreciate assistance—tyically matters of definition, usage, idiom, or of social calibration—we supply information in the first footnote only.

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Introduction

Jane Austen (1775–1817)

Jane Austen was one of two daughters among eight siblings. Her father was an Anglican clergyman in a village in Hampshire, where she lived until she was twenty-six. With the exception of four years in Bath and numerous trips to London, Kent, and elsewhere, she passed her entire life in this county of England. Her formal education (like most girls') ended at age ten; but her father continued to tutor her, and by her teens, she was writing in earnest. She began an irreverent and hilarious "History of England," and over the 1790s drafted numerous sketches and parodies, along with three novels. Initially, she had trouble getting a publisher, issuing *Sense and Sensibility* in 1811 at her own expense (a common practice at the time) and receiving respectable but still modest sums for her novels thereafter—between £110 and £150, when acclaimed writers such as Byron, Edgeworth, and Radcliffe were earning in the thousands. Aware of the social strictures on women writers, Austen remained anonymous. The title page of *Sense and Sensibility* properly said "By a Lady"; *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) a little more pridefully advertised itself as a work by "the Author of 'Sense and Sensibility,'" and both *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1816) were signed more proudly yet, "By the Author of 'Pride and Prejudice,' &c. &c." After her death, Austen's brother Henry published *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* in 1818, with a memoir of the author. Despite the prior stance of anonymity, people in the know knew that Austen was the author. When the Prince Regent declared his admiration for her novels and hinted broadly that he would appreciate a dedication, his librarian knew whom to ask, and the result was the dedication of *Emma* to "His Royal Highness, the Prince Regent."

As the first dates of publication show, Austen's career was compressed into less than a decade. Although she was always admired by connoisseurs, she did not achieve real acclaim until well after death, in the Victorian era and early twentieth century. The appeal has proved durable. Two hundred years after their initial drafting, Austen's novels enjoy international readership and new audiences through television and film. Such popularity might have astonished Austen, whose idiom, by her own admission, is rather confined: "the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush" is "3 or 4 families in a Country Village . . . the very thing to work on," as she put it, ironically but still aptly, to her nephew and niece (both aspiring novelists).

This "thing" may seem otherworldly today. Its villages, townhouses, and great estates run on gossip and finely calibrated social codes punctuated by dinners, teas, and suppers; dances and recitals; evenings of backgammon and quadrille; afternoons of reading, letter writing, needlework; outings in chaises and barouche landaus. Its preoccupations are social status and display, land, property, and money (debts, prospects, incomes, and dowries). Its residents are given to leisure pursuits or are only slightly busy. Servants and laborers are nearly invisible and never complain. Austen's provincial idiom and its conventions are only deceptively narrow, however, for the deeper themes—coming of age; anticipating marriage; adjusting relations to parents, siblings, and friends; learning social protocols and testing boundaries; developing moral and intellectual maturity—are not confined to young women of Austen's era. These mark the basic pulse of emerging from adolescence to adulthood. Surrounding these heroines, moreover, is Austen's perdurably keen observation of their world (especially patriarchal society in its domestic and civic forms), given to a critical, at times satirical, scrutiny—beyond what her characters may see.

Pride and Prejudice (1813)

No small part of Austen's skill is the immediacy with which she establishes her characters in broad social outlines and subtly revealing traits; the terms of the world in which they move, act, and desire; and the pressure points from which dramatic tensions and key developments will emerge. The famous first sentence of *Pride and*

Prejudice, its twenty-three words shaped, like a poetic stanza, as a single paragraph, bristles with deftly compacted signals: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." The concise wit and memorable phrasing are not only a wonderfully artful turn but also the seedbed of future events.

That Austen makes good on this bravely ironic claim to universal truth is an extraordinary effect in the England of 1813. The England of Austen's novel was hardly universal in material circumstances. In 1800, at the end of the decade in which she first drafted her novel, just eleven years after the French Revolution, only five percent of British men even had the vote (that is, the right to elect representatives to Parliament). No one but a male member of the Church of England could hold office, and the politically powerful part of Parliament, the upper house of Lords, was not elective but hereditary. The system sustained other inequities. Parliamentary districts were dominated by conservative landowners (like Mr. Darcy), whose boroughs might have had populations of a few hundred, consisting of the principal families, their employees, and the tradespeople dependent on their patronage. The new manufacturing towns such as Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool (peripheral locations in Austen's novels) had no representatives, even as their populations were exploding with abjectly exploited workers. The gentry populating Austen's novels constitutes less than two percent of England's population. They are serviced and defended by teams of unnamed or only briefly named workers—noncommissioned soldiers, servants, carriagemen, tenant farmers, maids, cooks, housekeepers—whose labor Austen describes mostly in passive constructions and by effaced agency: horses were brought; dinners were served; tables were cleared; girls were dressed.

The dramatic tension of *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on those with choices, particularly young women. Austen pioneered a technique that has been termed "free indirect discourse" (an anticipation of "stream of consciousness," but still maintaining the access to narrative distance) to convey the pulse and flow of a heroine's reflections, thoughts, and self-examination. This kind of heroine, to be known by the quality of her moral self-reflection ("moral" in the sense of being rationally and self-critically informed) is a testing in

literary imagination of the arguments of Mary Wollstonecraft and other progressive thinkers for a reform, even a revolution, in the culture of female education. The national good was to be served, they proposed, by more rationally mature women, able to exercise better-informed, more perspicuous judgment in their culturally esteemed work as wives and mothers. Austen's novels present young women in a world where they have choices to make, and where their own rational discernments seem to have a high degree of liberty. The turning points of *Pride and Prejudice* pivot on Elizabeth's deliberated choices: her refusal of Mr. Collins's proposal of marriage; her refusal of Mr. Darcy's first proposal; her reevaluation of the basis of this decision; then her reconsideration, with her heart in agreement.

Although men in *Pride and Prejudice* enjoy choice, this is relatively unremarkable. Most of the men who make choices about marriage—Mr. Darcy, Mr. Bingley, Mr. Collins, even Mr. Wickham—have two things in common: they are first or only sons, and their parents are dead. With the exception of Colonel Fitzwilliam, who cannot marry as he likes, there is no one to challenge their decisions, to disinherit them, or to curtail income. Moreover, all these men control their money once it is theirs. Mr. Collins, it is true, has to please his patroness, the formidable Lady Catherine De Bourgh; and Mr. Wickham's chief ambition is to leverage his charm into a lucrative marriage. In the usual order of family fortunes, second or third sons—or those of lesser means—had to seek professions. Two favorites for men were the Church and the military, where family and connections could secure a living or a commission. Elizabeth has little patience for Colonel Fitzwilliam's complaints about being the younger son of an earl, but even the sons of earls need professions. And in the gentry (that two percent or so) there is some fluidity: tradesman William Lucas can be knighted; a small landowner like Mr. Bennet is unquestionably a "gentleman"; Mr. Gardiner can win from Mr. Darcy the compliment of a "gentlemanlike" character, based on his good sense and good manners (and Mr. Darcy, in Elizabeth's estimation, did not always deserve the adjective, his "breeding" notwithstanding). A gentleman's daughters, such as Elizabeth and Jane, may marry up.

Yet notwithstanding Elizabeth's and Jane's particular good fortune, what is it, in general, to be a woman in this world? The

Austenian heroine is typically a woman of rational sense who ultimately achieves a very pleasant, very traditional marriage. Darcy, almost ten years Elizabeth's senior, is from a higher social class and may expect her to defer to his judgment (even if she has a teasing allowance, should he revert to stuffiness). And if in contemporary codes of "feminine delicacy" women are not supposed to know about money, in Austen's novels, women know about it, talk about it, and some even obsess about it. Moral worth may be misjudged, but not financial worth: everyone knows what everyone is, or will be, worth economically. This may not be ladylike, but it is a decidedly female course of study in the world of Austen's novels. In *Pride and Prejudice* the real edge on the woman question is simultaneously honed and blunted by a cast of equivocal female characters: the frivolous, hysteric, marriage-obsessed Mrs. Bennet; the unromantic pragmatist on the marriage market, Charlotte Lucas; the imperious tyrant, that wealthy widow, Lady Catherine De Bourgh.

In 1792, well before there was anything like a women's movement, Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* identified a "prevailing opinion of a sexual character" (an ideology, rather than a natural destiny of gender). In this prevalent view, women are disdained for irrationality and passion-driven behavior, and valued for docility, obedience, a high regard for male authority, and a general attractiveness to men in terms of youth, beauty, and sweetness of disposition (no independent opinions, no inclination to disagree, to disobey, or to rebel). The detractions correspond: first and foremost, age. By age twenty-eight (Elizabeth Bennet's friend Charlotte Lucas is twenty-seven), unmarried women were deemed "spinsters," that is, unlikely to marry and likely (if they had no independent endowment) to rely on fathers or brothers for maintenance. Men of means received a university education, and before that, a good schooling or private tuition. Women's intellectual education tended to cease around age eight, unless they had progressive parents who provided modest schooling or home tutoring. And as often as not, the female curriculum became a "finishing" by "accomplishments": singing, dancing, conversation in the modern languages, flower cultivation and arranging, sketching (portraits, puppies, flowers, and picturesque landscapes preferred), embroidery, and decorative sewing (what is called "work"—that is, needlework). Cultivation of a properly "feminine" character and the

corresponding accomplishments was for advantage on the "marriage market," the vital project of securing the best husband within the realm of social expectations and opportunities.

Pride and Prejudice is devoted to this culture, but also punctuated by satires of it, a double regard for which Elizabeth Bennet's casual compliance is a key indicator. Swirling around Elizabeth is a world of women, each of whom could be a case in point for Wollstonecraft's critique: Mrs. Bennet, the faded beauty with little rational sense; her boy-crazy, ill-judging, fashion-obsessed daughters Lydia and Kitty; Wickham's mother, who bankrupts his father; the gossipy, scheming, snobbish Bingley sisters, calculating degrees of "accomplishment" and social standing—every one of them devoted to a lifestyle of conspicuous consumption and display. Yet what does it mean that Mary Bennet, seemingly destined for spinsterhood, is a young woman in some respects most like Jane Austen? However ineptly and foolishly, she wishes to improve her mind by studying, and apparently without support from her parents or her elder sisters. Her efforts are not only not taken seriously, but shape a derisive cartoon, her eclectic autodidacticism producing only arid maxims, irritating and even heartless moralism, and obtuse showing off—of a piece with antifeminist satires. (Of course she wears glasses in the Laurence Olivier–Greer Garson film of *Pride and Prejudice.*)

In the world reflected in *Pride and Prejudice,* marriage is the chief business of a young woman's and her mother's life. Mrs. Bennet may seem only foolish, vulgar, myopic, and hysteric, but she knows that an unmarried woman is a social abject, and that even marriage is no guarantee of happiness. She was married for her youthful beauty, and once that was past, she had nothing else to interest her husband, who prefers evenings withdrawn in his library or outings to shoot small birds with such agreeable company as Mr. Wickham. In the 1790s, and well into the nineteenth century, most women had no legal standing (this is the reason that a marriage is contracted between a young man and his intended's father, the reason the father gives his daughter away in marriage). They could not form contracts, be sued, conduct business. Unless they were entirely free of men (like the widow Lady Catherine), they could not own property. Obedience to men was not only expected, it was legally enforced and sanctioned by religious precept. A rebellious daughter (for example,

one who eloped or who refused her father's determination of her husband) could be cast out, even disinherited. Mr. Collins's sermonizing insistence on this treatment of Lydia, or barring such extreme, that she never again be received in the Bennet home, is not a singular meanness; he is representing a social consensus. And if, in the world forecast at the close of *Pride and Prejudice*, Lydia ever senses that Wickham may be good for nothing beyond gambling away their meager income from her settlement and her sisters' occasional gifts, she could not initiate a divorce action. This would be entirely Wickham's call, and if he divorced her, he would keep any money she brought to the marriage and any property she acquired during it, and would have custody of any of their children (and thus access, through them, to his in-laws' providence).

Wollstonecraft and other progressive women were urging what we would now see as a decidedly modest, but at the time revolutionary, set of reforms. The first was education: women should not be consigned to the rule of passion (what sentimental novels taught them); they should have interests beyond clothes, gossip, flirtation, and rivalry with other women; they should develop capacities of rational judgment, based on wide knowledge. Men should do their part by valuing them, especially as wives and mothers, for intellectual strength and physical vigor rather than prized ignorance and "delicacy." The system that aggrieved Wollstonecraft is more than evident throughout *Pride and Prejudice*. Even Elizabeth is valued as a "beautiful creature." What tells Darcy that she is "uncommonly intelligent" is not her conversation but "the beautiful expression of her dark eyes"; it is he who has "a critical eye" (I.6). Mr. Bingley's sisters taunt him on this seduction, and they are right. Mrs. Bennet, an attorney's daughter, was married for her charm, beauty, and fortune of £4,000 (Mr. Bennet, apparently a man of leisure, has an estate that brings in £2,000 a year). Now that Mrs. Bennet has failed to produce a male heir and is in a panic about getting her daughters established in good marriages, she is an irksome joke. But twenty-five years earlier, she was the belle of the ball. Lady Catherine is the novel's designated villainess, the ultimate social gatekeeper, officious, rude, meddlesome. Yet, contained by this marking, she is also a singular voice of feminist critique: "I see no occasion for entailing estates from the female line," she proclaims to Elizabeth, whose family of women suffers exactly from

this exclusion. Lady Catherine may be an antifeminist nightmare, but it is clear that she has a bit of the Wollstonecraft revolution in her: she speaks with unembarrassed authority and unfailing candor; she is pretty good at sarcasm; she is a good reader of situations—picks up on hints and cues—and is not shy about asking questions. Elizabeth, if socially unwelcome as her kin, is akin to her boldness. It is canny of Austen to have Elizabeth call Lady Catherine the "author" of her happiness (she means that Lady Catherine's preemptive strike against her betrothal to Mr. Darcy actually brought it about), but author Jane Austen may be implying, with oblique irony, that Lady Catherine is different only in degree and not in kind from what we admire in Elizabeth.

Elizabeth, too, manifests Wollstonecraftian possibilities. She enjoys her physical vigor and her capacities for independent judgment. She never seems particularly interested in new bonnets. She goes bounding three miles through dusty fields, springs over puddles and jumps over stiles, appalling Bingley's sisters with her muddy petticoat and ruddy complexion; she glows with the warmth of exercise and sports freckles and a tan from touring outdoors with the Gardiners; she happily walks five miles, even up to a low mountain, with Mr. Darcy. In the world of Austen's novel, Elizabeth's disdain of "feminine" frills not only marks her as a sensible woman but also radiates healthy sex appeal, distinct from the giddy libido of Lydia. If women such as Elizabeth can refuse the culture of "feminine" weakness in favor of mental strength and rationality, men default on a claim to esteem as "masculine," especially if their socio-economic life is determined by submission to authority and obedience to command. One of Wollstonecraft's most provocative arguments in her *Vindication* is that men like Mr. Collins and Mr. Wickham bear "feminine" marking in this way: Mr. Collins gains his establishment by servile flattery; Wickham uses flirtatious charms to seek a woman to support him, and he lives chiefly for pleasure; he's irresponsible, and unembarrassed about being bailed out by more socially capable men. Even amiable Mr. Bingley leads a life of pleasure; he seems to have little in his head, and is easily swayed by others; he seldom asks questions, and depends on Darcy's judgment. And then there's Mr. Bennet, who, whatever his propensities to satire, soberly recognizes himself as a failed patriarch—he hasn't educated or supervised his daughters responsibly. Lydia's

marriage to Wickham looks like the second generation of Mr. Bennet's own marriage—begun in passion and romance, but without a sound reading of character. Even Darcy, when he first proposes to Elizabeth, behaves like one of the unreasonable females that Wollstonecraft laments: helplessly acting on passion against judgment. There is a world of meaning in Austen's decision to have Elizabeth refuse him on Wollstonecraftian grounds: Elizabeth wants and knows she deserves a rationally passionate proposal, in which head and heart act in concert.

Austen's tacit trading in Wollstonecraftian themes is subtle and oblique, in no small part because the polemics for women's rights had pretty much disintegrated by 1813, a demise due in part to post–French Revolution anxieties about female insurrection and in part to the scandals of Wollstonecraft herself, aired by William Godwin's *Memoirs* of his wife, and then gleefully broadcast by the reactionary press. Austen's questions about the social fate of women thus abide at the periphery of a novel in which the dynamo is the marriage plot: love at first sight (Jane and Bingley); hate at first sight (Elizabeth and Darcy); the usual temporizing frustrations (separation, misunderstanding, potential obstacles) and male reticence (Darcy's sense of danger; Bingley's passivity); then an integrated happy resolution. "Uniting them" are the novel's last words, about Elizabeth and Darcy, and in the penultimate chapters we are assured that this is not just a rational union of companions capable of learning from and overcoming faults of judgment but also a union animated by respect, "affection," "happiness," and "violent love." This union, moreover, is not just of "them," but will radiate into their world: everyone is improved by their union. At Pemberley, the classes harmonize (upper class, the gentry, the trade, the tenant farmers—as if a microcosm of the perfect state), the future seems promising, and even foes such as Lady Catherine are won over.

If such closural unities are standard symbolic form in the genre of comic romance, the brilliance of what Austen called the "too light, bright, and sparkling" surface of *Pride and Prejudice* is the chiaroscuro of problems left unresolved. There are several little, provocative fissures: "It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both—by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved; and from his judgment,