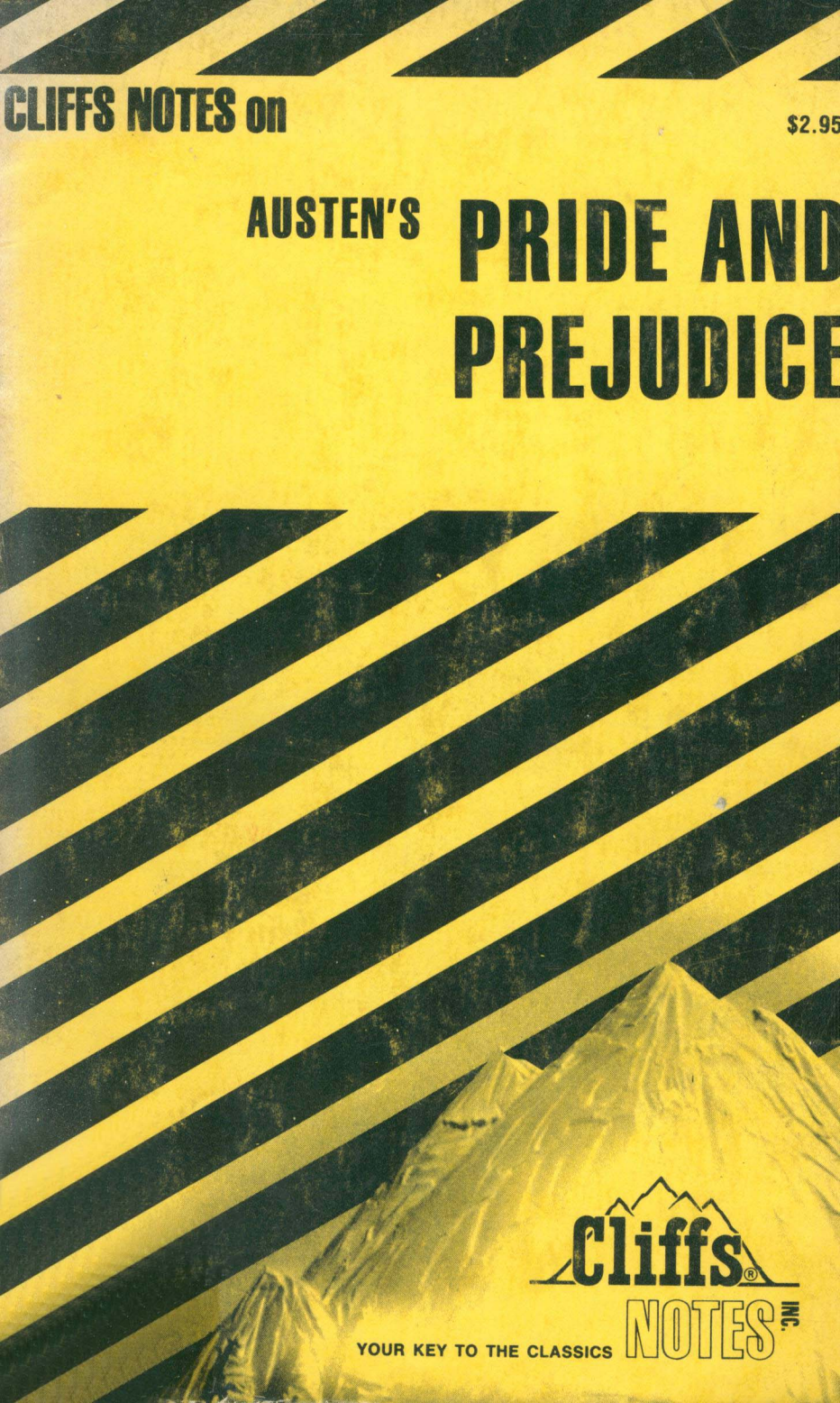


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# Pride and Prejudice Notes

## LIFE OF THE AUTHOR

Jane Austen's lively intelligence and keen interest in human relationships appears to have been shared by all her family. She was born in 1775, the daughter of a country minister in Steventon, a small Hampshire town in south-central England. The Austens had a great deal of family feeling and read many novels together from the local circulating library. It was for the family circle that Austen first wrote high-spirited satires—some of which later became novels after numerous and careful rewritings.

Jane Austen was always very close to her sister Cassandra. After two unsuccessful attempts to find a good boarding school for the Austen daughters, they returned home to educate themselves with extensive reading. Most accounts agree that they were pretty and enjoyed the slightly limited but interesting round of country parties described in Austen's novels. Several sources suggest that both Jane and Cassandra fell in love, but nothing came of it. Neither sister married. During this Steventon period, Austen wrote *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, but none was published until later.

When Mr. Austen retired, the family moved to Bath, a sea resort, and after his death they moved to Chawton, another country town where Austen's brother lent the family a house he owned. There, Austen wrote *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*, and during these years her novels were first printed. She was eager to know if her work were good, but wanted to avoid the notoriety of authorship; thus, none of the books carried her name. Evading all attention was impossible after their success, however, and Austen dedicated *Emma* to the Prince Regent at his request, though she politely rejected suggestions of subjects for her next novels.

She had built her life and was pleased with parts of it. She deliberately restricted what she wrote about, and her work gains intensity and beauty from its narrow focus. Her personal life also was limited

to family and a few close friends, and she prized being thought a warm and loving aunt as much as being thought a successful novelist. A sudden illness, possibly Addison's disease, made her stop work on the novel *Sanditon*, and she died in 1817.

## INTRODUCTION

*Pride and Prejudice*, probably the most popular of Austen's finished novels, was also, in a sense, the first to be composed. The original version, *First Impressions*, was completed by 1797. It was, however, rejected for publication and no copy has survived. The work was rewritten about 1812 and published in 1813 as *Pride and Prejudice*. The final form must be a thorough rewriting of the original effort, for it is patently representative of the mature Austen. Moreover, the story clearly takes place in the early nineteenth century rather than in the late eighteenth century.

After 1809, Austen revised her earlier attempts and composed her last novels. Her six novels were published in the following years: *Sense and Sensibility*, 1811; *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813; *Mansfield Park*, 1814; *Emma*, 1816; *Northanger Abbey*, 1818; *Persuasion*, 1818.

In her early writing, Austen began to define the limits of her fictional world. From the first, there was a steady emphasis on character. The novelist consciously elected to work within a restricted sphere made up of a few families of relatives with their friends and acquaintances. There is little connection between this middle-class world and the strata above or below it, or consciousness of events external to it. It is, in fact, the world in which typical middle-class country people lived. The family is the core of this milieu and thus the maneuverings that lead to marriage are all-important, since matrimony supplies stability, along with social and economic continuity.

It is often pointed out that Austen's fiction reveals no awareness of the international upheavals and consequent turmoil in England that took place during her lifetime. But such forces were indeed remote from the circumscribed world that she depicts. Tumultuous affairs, such as the Napoleonic wars, in her day did not intimately affect the daily lives of middle-class provincial families. The ranks of the military were then recruited from the lower orders of the populace. Gentlemen might purchase a commission and thereby become officers and social luminaries.

The advancement of technology had not yet disrupted the stately eighteenth-century patterns of rural life. The effects of the industrial revolution, with its economic and social repercussions, were still most sharply felt by the underprivileged laboring classes. Unrest was widespread, but the great reforms that would inaugurate a new era of English political life did not come until later.

The common fictional materials of tempestuous romance, stirring adventure, political intrigue, and the pageant of history are not employed in Austen's art. In the social drama, love is a determining force, but the author manages to circumvent the exposition of passion.

During Austen's career, Romanticism reached its zenith of acceptance and influence, but she designedly rejected the tenets of that movement. The romantics extolled the power of feeling, whereas Austen unbendingly upheld the supremacy of the rational faculty. Romanticism advocated the abandonment of restraint; Austen was a staunch exponent of the neo-classical belief in order and discipline. The romantics saw in nature a transcendental power to stimulate men to better the existing order of things, which they saw as essentially tragic in its existing state. Austen supported traditional values and the established norms. She viewed the human condition in the comic spirit. The romantics exuberantly celebrated natural beauty, but Austen's dramatic technique decreed sparse description of setting. The beauties of nature are seldom detailed in her work. Similarly, the development of Austen's plots is determined by character. Coincidence exerts a major influence; turns of action are precipitated by character. Although human weakness is a prominent element in her novels, outright evil is little in evidence. Austen maintains an attitude of good-humored irony toward her characters. Nevertheless, her comedy is charged with moral purpose. The foibles and absurdities of human behavior are viewed with amused detachment. However, ironical exposure of the ridiculous can be effected only against accepted patterns of behavior. As a comic writer, Austen depicted the outward aspects of social behavior. She did not probe deeply beneath the surface of her characters' conduct, where tragic nuances are likely to be encountered.

Austen's highly polished novels are the studied productions of a perfectionist. In all of her published work there is little descent from her highest levels of achievement. The total output of her consum-



mate artistry is small and, at forty-two, she died at the height of her powers. Yet, recognition of her talents was slow in coming.

During the nineteenth-century romantic period, Austen was often looked upon with begrudging admiration. Her elevation of intelligence over feeling was ungenial to the romantic temperament. Toward the end of the century, however, Austen's reputation had risen conspicuously. She gradually came to attract an enthusiastic cult of admirers who were known as the "Janeites." They were often accused of seeing in Austen's work support for narrow attitudes, such as snobbish views, adherence to obsolete conventions, and belief in a class system.

Austen was little known in America before 1900, but by mid-century she was receiving more critical attention in America than in England.

## LIST OF CHARACTERS

### *Elizabeth Bennet*

The intelligent and spirited heroine of the story.

### *Fitzwilliam Darcy*

The proud and rich man who falls in love with Elizabeth, and after a time, makes her fall in love with him.

### *Mr. Bennet*

The ironic and somewhat irresponsible father.

### *Mrs. Bennet*

The foolish and unrestrained mother.

### *Jane Bennet*

The oldest Bennet daughter, gentle and serene.

### *Mary Bennet*

The pompous and silly third daughter.

### *Lydia Bennet*

The youngest daughter and favorite of Mrs. Bennet, giddy and stupid.

*Catherine (Kitty) Bennet*

A soldier-chasing daughter much like Lydia, but peevish.

*Charles Bingley*

The man who falls in love with Jane, and Darcy's good friend.

*George Wickham*

The handsome and personable, but unprincipled man who elopes with Lydia.

*Caroline Bingley*

Charles's cold and selfish sister, who desires Mr. Darcy.

*Lady Catherine de Bourgh*

Darcy's insolent aunt.

*Miss de Bourgh*

Lady Catherine's insipid daughter.

*Colonel Fitzwilliam*

Darcy's pleasant cousin, who is infatuated with Elizabeth.

*Georgiana Darcy*

Darcy's shy but warm-hearted sister.

*Mr. Collins*

Mr. Bennet's ridiculous cousin, who will inherit Longbourn after Mr. Bennet's death.

*Charlotte Lucas*

Elizabeth's sensible and intelligent friend, who disappoints Elizabeth by marrying Mr. Collins for money.

*Sir William and Lady Lucas*

Charlotte's parents and the Bennets' neighbors.

*Mr. and Mrs. Phillips*

A county attorney and his vulgar wife, who is Mrs. Bennet's sister.

*Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner*

Mrs. Bennet's intelligent and cultivated brother and sister-in-law.

*Mr. and Mrs. Hurst*

Bingley's snobbish sister and indolent brother-in-law.

## BRIEF SYNOPSIS

Mrs. Bennet is anxious to have her five daughters marry well. When a rich single man, Charles Bingley, arrives at nearby Netherfield, she urges her husband to visit Bingley and form an acquaintance. A ball at Meryton introduces the Bingley party to the neighborhood with mixed results. Everyone likes openhearted Mr. Bingley, but his friend Fitzwilliam Darcy is found to be disdainful and arrogant. Mr. Darcy won't speak or dance with anyone outside his own group, and he says within Elizabeth Bennet's hearing that "she is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*." As for the heroine's older sister, Jane Bennet, Mr. Darcy says that she smiles too much.

Mr. Bingley's affection for Jane Bennet deepens, to the concern of his sisters and Mr. Darcy. They are repelled by her lower status and embarrassing family. Mr. Darcy, however, becomes interested in Elizabeth in spite of himself. Her spirited wit and expressive eyes capture his notice, and Miss Bingley's jealous criticisms of Elizabeth do nothing to lessen Mr. Darcy's admiration.

Caroline Bingley asks Jane to Netherfield. On the way there, Jane catches cold and is forced to stay, much to the delight of Mrs. Bennet, who will use any means to push her daughter on Mr. Bingley. Jane's condition worsens, and Elizabeth goes to Netherfield. Her concern for her sister and her strength of mind appeal to Mr. Darcy, but he is afraid of falling in love with someone who is so much poorer, and the Bennet sisters' eventual departure relieves nearly everyone.

Mr. Bennet's estate at Longbourn is entailed to Mr. Collins, a clergyman, because Bennet has no son; thus, his entailed property will go after his death to Mr. Collins as the nearest male relative. Mr. Bennet receives a pompous and silly letter from Mr. Collins, apologizing for the entail and hinting at the possibility of marriage with one of the Bennet daughters. Mr. Collins arrives for a stay at

Longbourn, where his officious stupidity delights Mr. Bennet's keen satiric sense, disgusts Elizabeth, and endears him to Mrs. Bennet.

Mr. Bennet, however, soon tires of Collins's long-winded and ill-judging praise of his patron, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and he sends his cousin on an errand to Meryton with his daughters. There, they meet George Wickham, a handsome and personable militia officer. All are disposed to like Wickham very much, and Elizabeth's interest grows when Wickham and Darcy, who apparently know each other, meet on the street to their mutual discomfort. At an evening party, Wickham volunteers his life story to Elizabeth. He claims that Darcy disobeyed his own father's bequest of a clergyman's revenue to Wickham out of selfish resentment. Wickham's tale makes Darcy look not only proud but cruel, and Elizabeth's eager acceptance of the biased account shows how anxious she is to confirm her own prejudice against Mr. Darcy.

In her infatuation with Wickham, Elizabeth resents his absence from a ball at Netherfield, rightly attributing it to the dispute between Wickham and Darcy, but mistaking whose fault it is. Elizabeth annoys Darcy by bringing up the subject, and she is puzzled by his persistence in approaching her, as she does not know of his attraction. Elizabeth is mortified by her family's behavior the same evening. Mrs. Bennet persists in publicly rejoicing at an excellent match between Jane and Mr. Bingley, which she sees as a certain thing; and Mary Bennet, Elizabeth's solemnly foolish sister, insists on boring the company with her mediocre piano playing. Elizabeth is further embarrassed by Mr. Collins's selfish proposal of marriage the next morning. She cannot convince him that her refusal is earnest, and only her father's support makes him and her mother see the truth.

The whole Bingley party unexpectedly leaves Netherfield for London. Caroline Bingley writes to Jane that they do not intend to return all winter, and she callously projects a match between Mr. Bingley and Georgiana Darcy while pretending not to know of Jane's affection for him. Elizabeth rightly discerns that Bingley's sisters and friend are trying to keep him from Jane by distracting him in London.

Mr. Collins, rebuffed by Elizabeth, is consoled by Charlotte Lucas, her best friend. To Elizabeth's great surprise and chagrin, Charlotte puts aside better considerations to marry Mr. Collins from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment."

Elizabeth accepts Charlotte's invitation to visit her in her new home. It becomes apparent that the new Mrs. Collins has effaced herself there, choosing not to react to her husband's stupidity or her patron's insolence. Lady Catherine de Bourgh is a tyrant who tells everybody what to do and doesn't like to be contradicted. She hopes to unite the family estates by marrying her insipid daughter to Mr. Darcy, who is due to arrive at Rosings for Easter.

Elizabeth continues to be puzzled by Darcy's behavior. He seems to seek her company, but never says much. She discovers the reason one night when Darcy declares his love and asks her to marry him. He asks uncourteously, stressing his superiority to her family, and he adds that he has not been able to conquer his imprudent affection. Elizabeth is as angry as she is astonished. His pride is unbearable to her, and she takes pleasure in refusing him. She accuses him of breaking up Jane and Mr. Bingley and of ruining Wickham. Darcy acknowledges both charges without remorse or explanation and leaves with cold anger.

The morning after Elizabeth's refusal, Darcy finds her and gives her a letter in which he tries to answer her reproaches. Darcy intervened in Bingley's romance because he wanted his friend to marry rich—and because he did not think Jane was particularly in love with Bingley. Jane's serene nature never revealed how deep her feelings were. Darcy says his objection to the Bennet family was not so much their low status as the inappropriate behavior of Mrs. Bennet, her three youngest daughters, and even Mr. Bennet—but never Jane or Elizabeth. He reveals Wickham to be a man without principle, a man whose greed and desire for revenge made him attempt to elope with Darcy's own sister. Elizabeth, at first, resists the truth of these revelations, but after reflection, she decides that they are probably true. Her prejudice has been badly shaken.

Elizabeth and her uncle and aunt Gardiner tour Derbyshire, which is her aunt's and Darcy's home county. Since they are near Pemberley, Darcy's estate, Mrs. Gardiner wants to visit it. Elizabeth does not object after she hears that the owner is away. She finds Pemberley very pleasing—the house is more tasteful than Lady Catherine's, and the park is large and very beautiful, without any of the artificiality of Rosings. Elizabeth reflects whimsically that, once, she might have spent time here as Mr. Darcy's wife. She is intrigued by the housekeeper's glowing description of Darcy as generous and

good-natured to his servants, his family, and the poor. Darcy suddenly appears a day early, and both he and Elizabeth are disconcerted. In spite of his discomfort and confusion, however, Darcy is gracious and attentive, and he is sincerely cordial to Elizabeth's uncle and aunt.

Darcy, his sister Georgiana, and his friend Bingley call at the inn where Elizabeth and the Gardiners are staying. The formidable Miss Darcy turns out to be not proud, but shy. Fearful of making a bad impression, Elizabeth actually pleases everyone. Darcy is as deeply in love as ever, and Elizabeth begins to feel a return for his regard. The Gardiners see all of this but wait for Elizabeth to talk about it. When Mrs. Gardiner and Elizabeth go to Pemberley for a return visit, Miss Bingley tries to disparage Elizabeth in her presence and behind her back, but she fails completely.

In this promising situation, Elizabeth receives two hurried and anguished letters from Jane: Lydia has eloped with Wickham. They left Brighton for London, and it is unlikely they have gotten married. Elizabeth fears that Lydia is permanently disgraced, and that her own new-discovered love for Darcy is hopeless. She and the Gardiners leave for home immediately.

The eloped pair are not located for some days, and Mr. Bennet returns home, leaving the whole thing in Mr. Gardiner's hands. When Mr. Gardiner writes that Wickham has been found and agrees to be married to Lydia, the family's response is mixed. Mrs. Bennet is overjoyed and indulges herself as excessively in glee as she did in hysterics when she thought Lydia was ruined. Mr. Bennet, Jane, and Elizabeth suspect that Mr. Gardiner must have laid down a great deal of his own money to get Lydia married, and they are grateful for his help and ashamed that it had to be given. Actually, it is Mr. Darcy, and not Mr. Gardiner, who located Wickham, bribed him into marrying Lydia, and bought him a commission in the army—all through his love for Elizabeth and his sense of responsibility for Wickham. Lydia and Wickham visit Longbourn as a married couple. She triumphs in her marriage, and she is entirely unashamed at what has passed. Elizabeth learns of Darcy's involvement from one of her stray remarks, and she gets the whole story when she writes Mrs. Gardiner about it.

Bingley returns to Netherfield to make himself fall in love with Jane again. He soon asks her to marry him, and she, of course,

accepts. Mrs. Bennet's exultation is only lessened by her irritation at Darcy's occasional presence. Lady Catherine de Bourgh comes to Longbourn after hearing an idle rumor that Darcy and Elizabeth are engaged. She shrilly lectures Elizabeth on the imprudence of the match, then she demands that Elizabeth promise not to accept any proposal from Darcy. Elizabeth's refusal is perfect—pert and cool—and Lady Catherine is so enraged that she runs to give her nephew the story of Elizabeth's imprudence. This only lets Darcy know that Elizabeth has had a change of heart, and he renews his proposal with great and tender success.

## Summaries and Commentaries

### VOLUME ONE

#### CHAPTERS I-IV

##### *Summary*

The news that an eligible young man with an income of four or five thousand pounds a year has moved into Netherfield arouses high hopes in the mothers of the neighborhood: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." Mrs. Bennet, with five marriageable daughters, tells her husband that it is his duty to visit Bingley as soon as possible. He makes a mock resistance and then startles the family by doing just what she asks.

Mr. Bingley comes to Longbourn to return the compliment, but he does not meet the Bennet daughters until a ball at Meryton. Another person in Bingley's party, the even richer Mr. Darcy, attracts very favorable attention until his coldness and pride turn the tide of his popularity. Mr. Bingley, however, pleases people by his willingness to be pleased. He is attracted by Jane Bennet's beauty and sweet nature, and Jane is equally happy with him.

##### *Commentary*

The opening sentence of this novel is probably one of the most famous first sentences found in fiction. It sets the tone for the entire

novel, in that the whole work is a masterpiece of irony both structurally and verbally. The sentence begins as though the novel were going to be a great philosophical discourse. "It is a truth universally acknowledged" implies that the novel will deal with great truths, but the second half of the sentence reveals that the great universal truth is no more than a consideration of a common social situation. Thus there is an ironic difference between the formal manner of the statement and the ultimate meaning of the sentence. The "truth" spoken of is that a man in possession of a fortune must need a wife, whereas in reality the sentence means that a woman without a fortune needs a man with a fortune for a husband. We should realize, here, that the viewpoint of the first sentence is that of a woman with a darkly humorous point of view, and Austen is going to present the problems of the novel from this viewpoint.

In this first chapter, we should also be aware that the novel is dealing with a small section of society or as Austen called it, her "inch of ivory." The novel handles social relationships in a limited society and investigates them minutely. Note the contrast between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. This contrast is first shown by their manner of conversation. Mrs. Bennet just bubbles on while Mr. Bennet is more reserved in phrasing his mildly sarcastic statements. After showing the contrast through the dialogue, Austen ends the chapter with a general summary of the two parents' differing personalities.

Chapter two deals with seemingly insignificant and trivial events, but Austen wants to show how tremendously important it is to a provincial society when a person of distinction like Mr. Bingley moves into the county.

Chapter three presents the first of a series of important balls that occur during the novel. Here we first meet Mr. Bingley, who captivates everyone at the ball by his charming personality and friendly, outgoing manner. In contrast, Darcy is seen as an extremely reserved man. At first he, too, attracted attention because of his good looks, but soon everyone begins to think that Darcy is a proud and disagreeable man.

The first contrast of Darcy and Elizabeth takes place at this ball. Darcy refuses to dance with Elizabeth upon Bingley's request, saying that Elizabeth is not handsome enough to tempt him. Darcy's statement at this moment is characteristic of his speech in the first part of the novel; he always talks in terms of his superiority.



Note that in this chapter all the remarks are slanted against Darcy, and we see everything through the eyes of Elizabeth and the women. In these first chapters, we would in no way expect Darcy to become attracted to Elizabeth and, equally important, we have no indication that the author is planning to create a romance between these two apparently opposite people. Thus, this is not a traditionally romantic novel because the two main characters do not immediately fall in love with each other. In some ways, Austen is satirizing the traditional eighteenth-century romance where a man and woman fell in love with each other promptly. Instead, Austen presents every possible obstacle which would prevent a romance from developing between Elizabeth and Darcy. In other words, she takes a traditional literary type and reverses it. In the eighteenth-century traditional relationship, the hero is all-knowing, wonderful, and super-competent. The heroine is always grateful and admiring. But in this novel, the hero is not immediately captivating and the heroine challenges him at every turn.

Chapter four presents the aftermath of the ball. First, we see the reactions of Elizabeth and Jane, and then in contrast, the thoughts of Bingley and Darcy. This section establishes some important things about Elizabeth, who criticizes Jane for being "blind." Her accusation to Jane is ironic because Elizabeth will later be found to be blind about Darcy. But the point is that Elizabeth possesses a unique perceptive ability to see into the nature of all people when she herself is not intimately involved with them. In contrast, Bingley and Darcy express opposite views. Bingley had enjoyed himself and "had never met with pleasanter people or prettier girls in his life." But Darcy "had seen a collection of people in whom there was little beauty and no fashion."

## CHAPTERS V-IX

### *Summary*

Mrs. Bennet and her daughters visit the Lucas family the morning after the Meryton ball. Elizabeth's friend Charlotte Lucas talks of Jane's hopes for Mr. Bingley and defends artifice in a courtship. She says that a marriage is better when the partners don't know each other well, and her own marriage with Mr. Collins will be an exam-