PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

The Cambridge
JANE AUSTEN

VOLUMES IN THIS SERIES

1. Childhood Writings
2. Northanger Abbey
3. Sense and Sensibility
4. Pride and Prejudice
5. Mansfield Park
6. Emma
7. Persuasion
8. Later Manuscripts

With prefaces and notes by Janet Todd

JANE AUSTEN

Pride and Prejudice

The Collector's Edition

With preface and notes by
JANET TODD

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009432580

DOI: 10.1017/9781009432603

First published 2025

Cover design, illustration and frontispieces by Lauren Downing
Text design by Lyn Davies Design

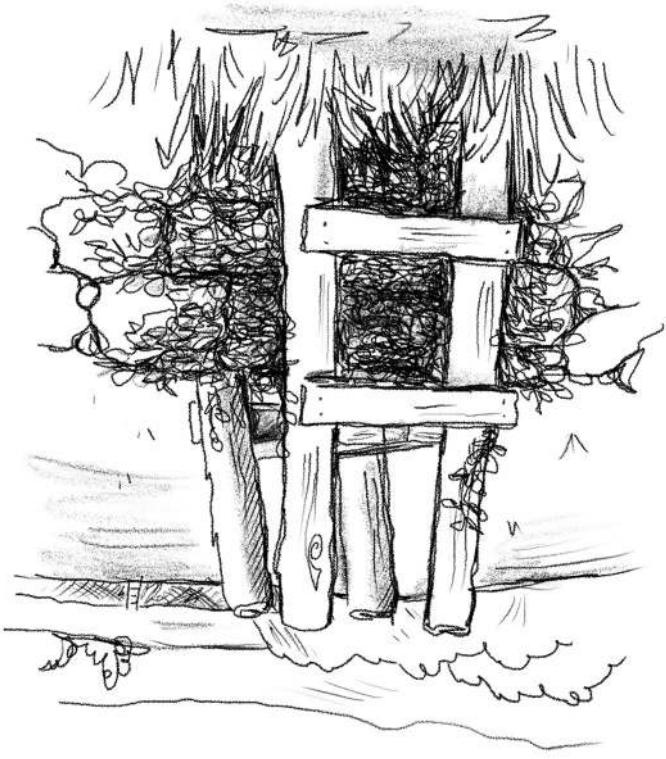
Printed in the United Kingdom by CPI Group Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Austen, Jane, 1775–1817, author. | Todd, Janet, 1942– editor.
Title: Pride and prejudice / Jane Austen ; with preface and notes by Janet Todd.
Description: The collector's edition. | Cambridge ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2025. | Series: The Cambridge Jane Austen | Includes bibliographical references.
Identifiers: LCCN 2024000026 | ISBN 9781009432580 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009432603 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Young women – England – Fiction. | Social classes – England – Fiction. | Courtship – Fiction. | England – Social life and customs – 19th century – Fiction. | LCGFT: Novels of manners. | Romance fiction. | Novels.
Classification: LCC PR4034 .P7 2025 | DDC 823/.7–dc23/eng/20240104
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2024000026

ISBN 978-1-009-43258-0 Hardback

The texts in this edition are based on The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen (2005–8), with grateful acknowledgement. Readers interested in a more detailed textual account and in further exploration of the novels and their publication history should consult those volumes. The present edition contains explanatory endnotes: under thematic headings, they provide information on a cultural, historical and literary context that might be unfamiliar to a modern reader. A few footnotes indicate words that have changed meaning between Austen's time and our own.



PREFACE

Second daughter of a clever indolent father and trivial garrulous mother, young Elizabeth Bennet of Longbourn is prepared to fall in love with the charming young ne'er-do-well, Wickham. With increased awareness of her family's social and moral shortcomings, she then learns to esteem, appreciate – and rationally love – a reserved, good man (who, fortunately, is also young, handsome and rich). Despite this rational amorous trajectory, *Pride and Prejudice*, the most popular of Austen's six remarkable novels, has become one of the great love stories of English literature. It has spawned countless media events, films, fantasies, fancies, frantic eulogies and bric-a-brac. A brilliant balance of psychological observation and social comedy, the original novel easily survives its global exploitation.

Pride and Prejudice is the nearest Austen wrote to a fairy story, a sophisticated *Cinderella* with a tested and reformed prince. Although Darcy's smouldering sexy magnetism is the construction of cinema, his forced confession of love – 'In vain have I struggled … You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you' – has thrilled generations of readers. Other Austen heroines marry clergymen, sailors or gentlemen farmers; only Darcy comes with so much to offer in wealth, estate and near aristocratic status. If there is no great passion – or passionate moment – on the lady's side, there's enough on the man's for both, and it is this intensity that, despite initial rudeness and vanity, makes Darcy worthy to share his social power and riches with this special woman. Beyond the novel's seductive romance, there is a serious moral point: that judging by first impressions may lead to pain and shame, and that

an instinctive attraction to beauty and charm in other people is natural but may mislead. While not renouncing the independence, quickness and self-esteem that win the reader's affection, Elizabeth comes to understand her frequent cluelessness about individuals and society.

Jane Austen wryly called her masterpiece 'light & bright & sparkling'. Its narrative brilliance often allows us to enjoy the comic dialogue before worrying about serious implications. Throughout, but especially in the first half of the novel, Mr Bennet's sardonic wit is given full rein, and his unfortunate family is anatomised through his amused, detached eyes. He regards his wife and sillier children as if they were characters in a comic novel, which is why readers, and his cleverest daughter Elizabeth, so easily identify with him. Like father and child, we delight in the spectacle of the awkward heir Mr Collins, as well as in the mockery of Mrs Bennet and her younger daughters (less so when his mockery includes the eldest ones, however). But, as the novel progresses, with Elizabeth we come to realise that this entertaining patriarchal figure is largely to blame for the precarious state of his dependent family and to learn that irony may mask irresponsibility.

Swift comic dialogue is also the mode of flirtatious Elizabeth in her dealings with ponderous Darcy as they move together through a series of encounters in which they are confronted with the most indecorous members of the families they will marry into: Mrs Bennet and Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Elizabeth's irrepressible mother is as trivial as indulged fifteen-year-old Lydia, while Lady Catherine cows her sickly daughter, then with her excess energy seeks to run the parish through Mr Collins and control any young woman who comes within her orbit. She meets her match in Elizabeth, when her forceful robustness crumples against the younger woman's self-possession; neither has any compassion for the other.

In the first half of the novel, the Bennet family displays are both embarrassing and entertaining for the reader and for Mr Bennet. They are less so in the second, where Elizabeth learns the harsh lesson that the lack of training and proper upbringing, of which in her more unaware days she boasts to Lady Catherine, may be

harmful. With too much of that 'conceit and impertinence' which young Caroline Bingley detects in her, Elizabeth learns that she has been loose-tongued and loose-eared, a fact borne in on her when she contemplates her unruly sisters unchaperoned in a local inn. Had Elizabeth and Jane not achieved the desirable matches that so delight their mother, both brought about by fortunate coincidences, the future of the five Bennet girls might almost have justified the parade of Mrs Bennet's famous 'nerves'.

All Austen novels reveal a society dominated by male financial and legal power. Master of his social world, Darcy is a fine representative of patriarchal authority in his easy influence over other people's lives; on the one hand he prevents the marriages of his sister and of his friend Bingley, on the other he organises Lydia's as well as his own. After his first insulting proposal, Elizabeth subdues him with her lashing tongue but, although both are humbled by the other's spoken words, it is Darcy's letter that proves most potent. Elizabeth learns to read it closely, in the process understanding more of her suitor's social power. If her seduction and reformation begin here, it is Pemberley that seals the business, as she (playfully) admits to Jane. Indeed, long before she sees it, she is struck by the idea of the great house, and it is the house, when she visits it, that decisively modifies her understanding of its owner. At Pemberley the rude and crude Darcy of the Meryton Assembly is a more mannerly and gentlemanly being.

The underlying reality of female social constraint and of woman as 'property' in marriage is largely hidden as the man learns good behaviour from his contact with an intelligent woman. It is also humorously obscured by the comic opening, where rich males are 'considered as the rightful property' of marriageable daughters. To be 'mistress of Pemberley' may not be to master it, but in this restrictive society it is the next best thing. In his review of *Emma*, Walter Scott, the most popular novelist of Austen's day, naughtily summarised *Pride and Prejudice*: 'They chance to meet exactly as her prudence has begun to subdue her prejudice' and she has seen his 'very handsome seat and grounds', and come to regret her earlier foolishness.

PREFACE

Of all Jane Austen's novels, *Pride and Prejudice* achieves the finest balance of comedy and reflection, liveliness and seriousness, and of 'playfulness & Epigrammatism', to borrow the words Austen used in a letter to her sister Cassandra a few days after publication. It portrays energetic youth maturing into civility – that most useful of qualities in this small social world – without losing its spontaneity and charm. The least literary in terms of specific allusions, the book is perhaps the closest to poetry of Austen's works: so much has been 'lopt and cropt' that there remains a potent sense of underground meaning. *Pride and Prejudice* was devised and (most likely) largely written when the author was close to her heroine's age of twenty, then revised by the older woman who, when she received her first printed copy, called it her 'own darling Child'. The professional writer embraces the young person she once was and still is at heart. The novels Austen conceived and wrote later would be deeper and more serious, more complex and allusive, but none would be as vivacious and 'sparkling' as *Pride and Prejudice*.