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Opening extract from

Pride and Prejudice

Written by

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Published by

Real Reads

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Published by Real Reads Ltd
Stroud, Gloucestershire, UK
www.realreads.co.uk

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First published in 2008

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ISBN 978-1-906230-06-7

Printed in China by Imago Ltd
Designed by Lucy Guenot
Typeset by Bookcraft Ltd, Stroud, Gloucestershire

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THE CHARACTERS



Elizabeth Bennet

Elizabeth is lively, clever and proud of her ability to judge other people. Is she right to dislike Mr Darcy, or has she made a terrible mistake?



Jane Bennet

Jane, Elizabeth's elder sister, is beautiful, gentle, and in love. Will Mr Bingley ever offer her the happiness she deserves?



Mr Darcy

Wealthy and good-looking, Mr Darcy is surely a perfect husband for any young lady. Will he win Elizabeth's love, or will his pride always offend her?

Mr Bingley

Mr Bingley is handsome, rich and easy-going. Will he take Mr Darcy's advice, or follow his own heart in his search for happiness?





Lydia Bennet

Lydia is Jane and Elizabeth's younger sister. Will her foolish actions ruin the reputation and happiness of her entire family?

Mr Wickham

The gallant, charming Mr Wickham tells a sad story. Should Elizabeth believe him? Can *anybody* trust him?





Mr and Mrs Bennet

Mrs Bennet is desperate for her daughters to marry well, but her judgement is somewhat lacking. Will her long-suffering husband offer his family any guidance?



PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

THE PROPOSAL

Mr Darcy paced awkwardly around the room. Elizabeth, sitting and watching him, observed his fine, tall figure, and was surprised to sense uncertainty in his arrogant features. He sat down, cleared his throat as though to speak, said nothing, and stood up again. Why had this man, the last person in the world she wanted to see, come to disturb her peaceful evening?

Mr Darcy sat down again. 'It is no good,' he began, 'I have fought hard against my feelings, but it has been in vain. I must tell you how ardently I admire and love you. I should like you to be my wife.'

Elizabeth stared at him in astonishment, blushed, and remained silent.

Taking her silence as encouragement, Mr Darcy continued. 'Your mother is vulgar

and embarrassing, your younger sister's behaviour is objectionable, and your father stubbornly fails to correct her. You and your elder sister somehow rise above your family with honour and good sense.' He smiled at Elizabeth. 'In spite of them all, you have earned my respect, admiration and love.' He awaited her grateful response.

Elizabeth struggled to control her voice. 'Mr Darcy, I cannot thank you for your proposal when you so freely offend me. You like me against your judgement and against your will. You will therefore be more relieved than disappointed by my refusal. Had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner, I might at least have felt some compassion for you, but I do not.'

Mr Darcy stared in astonishment, but said nothing.

Elizabeth continued with feeling. 'I learned this afternoon that you were responsible for

separating my dear sister Jane from your friend Mr Bingley, thus spoiling the happiness of two good people.'

Mr Darcy turned pale. 'Such a marriage would have brought shame to my friend. I have been kinder to him than I have been to myself.'

Now trembling, Elizabeth continued. 'Even if I had been able to overcome this scruple in my response to your proposal, I cannot forget your dishonourable treatment of poor Mr Wickham, whose life you have ruined.'

'Is this your opinion of me?' asked Mr Darcy, the quietness of his voice barely hiding his disappointment and anger.

'Yes. You are the last man in the world I would marry.'

Without another word Mr Darcy left the room. Watching from the window as his upright figure retreated along the garden path, Elizabeth was left in a terrible flutter. In spite of her dislike for him, it was flattering that the

great Mr Darcy, one of the most eligible men in England, should love her.

They had parted in mutual disappointment, surprise and anger. It would be several hours before either was able to reflect dispassionately upon the events of the past few months. What could have led to Mr Darcy's extraordinary proposal? What had led to Elizabeth's firm rejection of his love?



BEFORE THE PROPOSAL

Like many mothers, Mrs Bennet was firmly of the belief that any single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. As she had several daughters to dispose of, she was delighted to hear that such a gentleman was to move into the grand house at nearby Netherfield. 'What a fine thing this is for our girls,' she told her long-suffering husband.

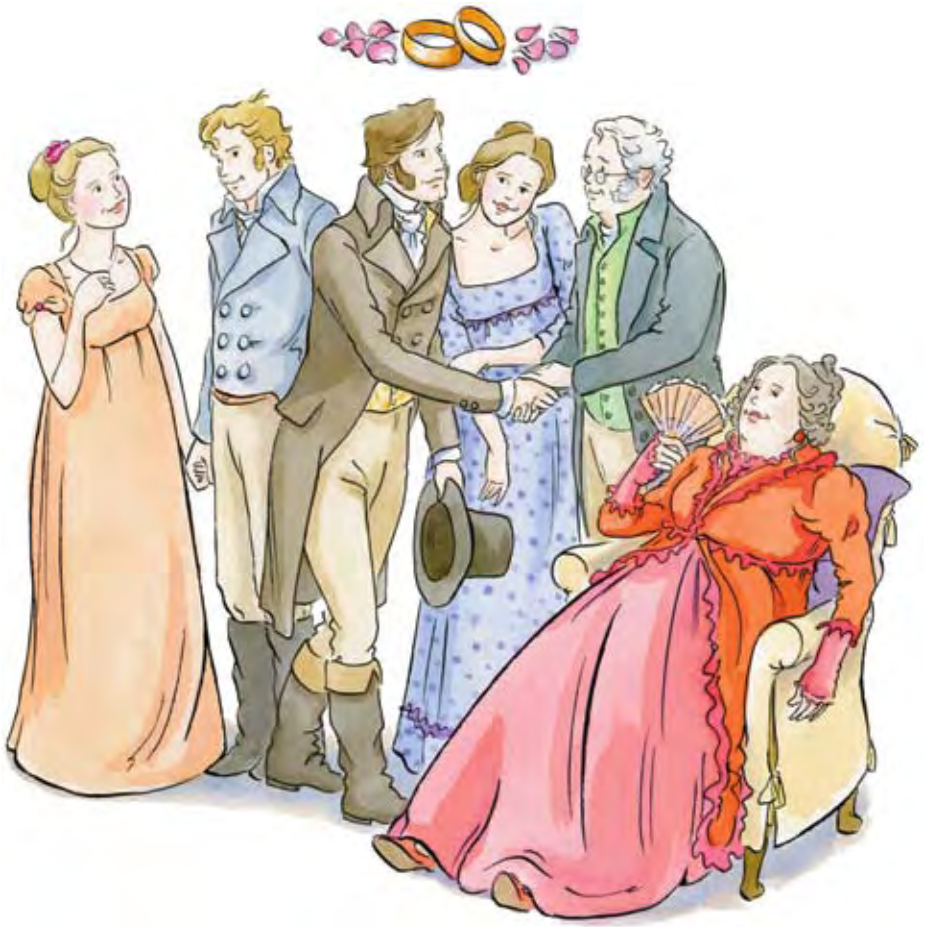
Without lowering his newspaper, Mr Bennet rolled his eyes to the ceiling and sighed. His attempts to continue reading were in vain.
'I do so hope our new neighbour – he's called Mr Bingley, you know – will host a ball. I'm sure he will want to marry one of our girls.'

Mrs Bennet was anxious that her girls should all benefit from the security of wealthy husbands.

Mrs Bennet's wish for a ball was soon fulfilled. Invitations were received and promptly accepted, and several days of anticipation were endured before the great day finally arrived. The Bennet sisters looked beautiful, of course, and the gentlemen were all handsome.



warmly congratulated both gentlemen. For a rare moment Mrs Bennet was silent, then her emotions overcame her, 'Good gracious! Bless me! Three daughters married! Mr Darcy and Mr Bingley! Girls, didn't I always say that every single man in possession of a fortune must be in want of a wife?'



TAKING THINGS FURTHER

The real read

This *Real Read* version of *Pride and Prejudice* is a retelling of Jane Austen's magnificent work. If you would like to read the full novel in all its original splendour, many complete editions are available, from bargain paperbacks to beautifully-bound hardbacks. You may well find a copy in your local charity shop.

Filling in the spaces

The loss of so many of Jane Austen's original words is a sad but necessary part of the shortening process. We have had to make some difficult decisions, omitting subplots and details, some important, some less so, but all interesting. We have also, at times, taken the liberty of combining two events into one, or of giving a character words or actions that originally belong to another. The points below will fill in some of the gaps, but nothing can beat the original.

- In this *Real Reads* version of *Pride and Prejudice*, we have changed the order in which the story is told. Jane Austen tells the story in the order in which events happen, and so Mr Darcy's proposal is in the middle of the book.

- Jane Austen only tells us the truth about Mr Wickham, in Mr Darcy's letter, after the proposal.

- Mr and Mrs Bennet actually have two more daughters. Kitty is similar to Lydia, whereas Mary is very serious and tends to moralise.

- Because he has no son, Mr Bennet's estate will eventually be inherited by a male cousin, Mr Collins, rather than by his daughters. Mrs Bennet is therefore understandably anxious for her daughters to marry well before she and Mr Bennet die.

- Mr Collins is a foolish clergyman. He offers to marry Elizabeth, who refuses. Soon after, he proposes to Elizabeth's friend, Charlotte Lucas.

Having no other prospect of marriage, Charlotte accepts. Charlotte and Mr Collins are the friends Elizabeth visits near to the home of Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

- Lady Catherine de Bourgh expects that Mr Darcy will marry her daughter, Anne. This helps to explain her opposition to his marrying Elizabeth.

- The aunt that Elizabeth travels with to Derbyshire is called Mrs Gardiner; she and her husband, Elizabeth's uncle, are very sensible people. They had offered to take Elizabeth to the Lake District, but had to cancel and decided instead that Elizabeth and her aunt should travel in Derbyshire. When they visit Pemberley, they have been assured that Mr Darcy is away from home. Had she known that he would be there, Elizabeth would not have agreed to visit.

- Mr Darcy's housekeeper speaks very warmly of her master. This is when Elizabeth begins to consider that her own opinion of him might be wrong.
- The story of Wickham and Lydia's elopement is more complex in the original version than in this *Real Read*.

Back in time

Pride and Prejudice is probably Jane Austen's most well-known and most popular novel, thanks to its sparkling wit, enduring subject matter and romantic plot.

In Jane Austen's time, the relationship between marriage and money was very important. Women were neither expected nor educated to work for a living. Furthermore, estates were usually inherited by the eldest son. If there was no son, they would be left to the nearest male relative. This is why Mr Bennet's estate will pass to Mr Collins.

Marrying a wealthy man was, for many women, the most respectable way to gain independence and achieve comfort.

The moral code governing relations between men and women was very strict. Lydia's flirting with the soldiers is inappropriate. By eloping with Wickham she could ruin her own reputation and respectability as well as that of her family. It is only through Mr Darcy's actions in making Wickham marry Lydia that the Bennet family's social standing is saved.

Jane Austen was writing at a time of major change. Although she would have been aware of the violent social conflicts of her time, she chose to concentrate on the minute details of everyday life. She once described her writing as 'this little bit of ivory upon which I work with so fine a brush to produce litle effect after much labour'. Her 'little bit of ivory' is human interaction, as fascinating today as it was to her. Thanks to Jane's talent, Mr Darcy still makes female hearts beat a little faster.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of Jane Austen's England:

Books

- Gill Hornby, *Who was Jane Austen? The Girl with the Magic Pen*, Short Books, 2005.
- Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen*, Hambledon Continuum, 2007.
- Josephine Ross, *Jane Austen's Guide to Good Manners: Compliments, Charades and Horrible Blunders*, Bloomsbury, 2006.
- Dominique Enwright, *The Wicked Wit of Jane Austen*, Michael O'Mara, 2007.
- Lauren Henderson, *Jane Austen's Guide to Romance: The Regency Rules*, Headline, 2007.
- Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*, Frances Lincoln, 2003.

- Brenda Sneathen Mattox, *Pride and Prejudice Paper Dolls*, Dover, 2000.

Websites

- www.janeausten.co.uk
Home of the Jane Austen Centre in Bath, England.
- www.janeaustensoci.freeuk.com
Home of the Jane Austen Society. Includes summaries of, and brief commentary on, her novels.
- www.bbc.co.uk/drama/prideandprejudice
Accessible information about the book, along with photographs and clips from the highly successful TV drama.
- www.pemberley.com
A very enthusiastic site for Jane Austen enthusiasts.
- www.literaryhistory.com/19thC/AUSTEN
A selective and helpful guide to links to other Jane Austen sites.

Film

- *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), adapted by Andrew Davies, BBC Films.

Food for thought

Here are some things to think about if you are reading *Pride and Prejudice* alone, or ideas for discussion if you are reading it with friends.

In retelling *Pride and Prejudice* we have tried to recreate, as accurately as possible, Jane Austen's original plot and characters. We have also tried to imitate aspects of her style. Remember, however, that this is not the original work; thinking about the points below, therefore, can help you begin to understand Jane Austen's craft. To move forward from here, turn to the full-length version of *Pride and Prejudice* and lose yourself in her wonderful portrayals of human nature.

Starting points

- Which character interests you the most? Why?
- Do you have more sympathy for Elizabeth or Mr Darcy? Why? Did your feelings change as you read the book?
- How did your feelings about Mr Wickham change while you read the book?
- What do you think about Miss Bingley?
- Look up 'pride' and 'prejudice' in a dictionary. See if you can find examples of characters' actions resulting from their pride or prejudice.
- Which character do you think learns the most? What does he or she learn?

Themes

What do you think Jane Austen is saying about the following themes in *Pride and Prejudice*?

- pride
- prejudice
- love and marriage
- politeness and good manners
- choices for young women

Style

Can you find paragraphs containing examples of the following?

- a person exposing their true character through something they say
- humour
- gentle irony, where the writer makes the reader think one thing whilst saying something different; this is often a way of gently mocking one of the characters

Look closely at how these paragraphs are written. What do you notice? Can you write a paragraph in the same style?