

Pre-Intermediate



B1+ (Threshold)

R A I N B O W S

Pride and Prejudice

Jane Austen



edisco



R A I N B O W S

Jane Austen

Pride and Prejudice

Adaptation, dossiers and activities by
Manuela Barbero



edisco

Pride and Prejudice

Project editor: Raffaele Polichetti

Revisor: Annabel Pope

Cover: Mauro Borgarello

Design: Manuela Piacenti

Quality controller: Lunella Luzi

Page layout: Costantino Seminara

Printing: La Grafica, Boves (Cn), Italy



All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.

Every effort has been made to acknowledge and contact the source and/or copyright holder of material used in this book. The publisher apologizes for any unintentional errors or omissions and will be pleased to make corrections in future editions. All lyrics, music and films quoted are for review, study or critical purposes.

We would be happy to receive your comments and suggestions and give you any other information concerning our material.

Our email address: info@edisco.it

Our website address: <http://www.edisco.it>

Copyright © Edisco Editrice

Via Pastrengo 28

10128 Torino (Italy)

Tel. (+39) 011.54.78.80

Fax (+39) 011.51.75.396

Reprint

5 4 3 2 1 0

2020 2019 2018 2017 2016 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

• Jane Austen	4
Chapter 1 – New acquaintances	7
• Extension: <i>Jane Austen's times</i>	20
Chapter 2 – Nice and bad surprises	23
• Extension: <i>Good manners in the Victorian Age</i>	36
Chapter 3 – Tough choices	39
• Extension: <i>The life of a young woman in Jane Austen's time</i>	52
Chapter 4 – Explanations and changes	55
• Extension: <i>The Novel of Manners</i>	67
Chapter 5 – Love always wins	70
• Extension: <i>Jane Austen's success</i>	84
• SUMMING-UP ACTIVITIES	86
• GLOSSARY	90



The Bennet family

The Author

Jane Austen



Jane Austen was born in 1775, in Hampshire, England, to an Anglican priest and his wife. She and her six siblings¹ grew up in a well-respected and loving family, who encouraged learning and creative thinking. Jane and her elder sister, Cassandra, even had the chance to study at a boarding school², from where, however, they had to leave a few years later because of some financial and health problems.

Jane had always been fascinated by and encouraged to write works of her imagination and, together with her brothers and sisters, she often put on plays. The three volumes of *Juvenilia* now include all the works of her youth, and already show her love for irony, parody and the observation of society in several works of different lengths and genres – letters, short stories, plays, history essays³ and verses.

Jane spent much of her early adulthood at home, helping in its management, going to church, playing the piano and socialising with neighbours. Meanwhile, she continued to write, and by the end of the 18th century she had already completed three of her major future works, though with different titles: *Elinor and Marianne* (which would then become *Sense and Sensibility*), *Impressions* (the future *Pride and Prejudice*) and *Susan* (*Northanger Abbey*).

In 1805, her father died and she and her sisters were forced to move from house to house, staying with relatives, until finally they were able to settle at one of her brother's cottages in Hampshire.

At about that time, she started publishing her works under a pseudonym: *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. The first novel tells the life and love stories of two sisters and deals with the difficult task of balancing sense and sensibility in one's life. *Pride and Prejudice* examines the behaviour of men and women of different social classes who meet up. *Mansfield Park*'s protagonist

1. siblings: brothers and sisters.

2. boarding school: a school where children can live during the school year.

3. essay: short piece of writing on a particular subject.

helps Jane Austen depict her society ironically and yet with a critical eye, and *Emma* gives its author the chance to examine the rules that govern social relationships.

In 1816, Jane fell ill with Addison's disease, and, notwithstanding⁴ all the efforts she put into trying to live a normal life where she could work on her creations, she had to stop writing and finally died a year later.

Her other two masterpieces, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, came out posthumously, the first being a parody of the then-so-popular Gothic fiction, and the second being a complicated love story, put to the test by time and, of course, the forces of persuasion.

Jane Austen's style is characterised by a subtle analysis of a microcosm of three or four families in the English country-side, which, she believed, could well represent the whole of society. She was interested in people and their character and conduct⁵ and her main themes are reputation, love, marriage, morality, the conflict between feelings and reason, and the difficulties brought about⁶ by the social codes⁷ of behaviour of the time.

She received little money and attention for her works while she was alive, and it was only after her death, when one of her brothers published her works, that she was recognised as an author. Her popularity has greatly increased since the beginning of the 20th century and she is now considered to be one of the greatest writers in English history.

4. *notwithstanding*: despite, in spite of.

5. *conduct*: a person's behaviour in a particular situation.

6. *brought* (bring-brought-brought) about:

caused, created.

7. *code*: a set of moral principles or rules of behaviour that are generally accepted by society.





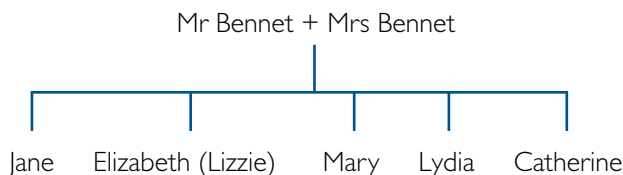
BEFORE READING

- 1 Make predictions about the text you are going to read from its title.
 - a. This book is an essay about the virtues and defects of man.
 - b. This book tells the story of some arrogant protagonists.
 - c. This book is a novel that celebrates love which wins over pride and prejudice.
 - d. This book has two protagonists: one who is very proud and one who has a lot of prejudice.
 - e. This book is a philosophical discussion on racism.
- 2 Put the following qualities and faults of man in the appropriate column. Use the monolingual dictionary to look up any words you don't know.

pride • kindness • reliability • shyness • honesty • arrogance • generosity • selfishness • rudeness • servility

QUALITIES	FAULTS
	<i>pride</i>

- 3 Look at the Bennet's family tree and write their relationship to each other.



- a. Mrs Bennet is Mr Bennet's wife.
- b. Jane is Mr and Mrs Bennet's
- c. Elizabeth is Jane's
- d. Mr Bennet is Mrs Bennet's
- e. Mr Bennet is Mary's
- f. Mrs Bennet is Lydia's
- g. Jane, Lizzie, Mary, Lydia and Catherine are Mr and Mrs Bennet's
.....

Pride and Prejudice

New acquaintances

BEFORE READING

Chapter 1

As you obviously know, any single – and rich – man is always looking for a wife, and that is why every mother considers it her duty to help him find a good one among her daughters. Mrs Bennet, with her five daughters, was no exception.

“Did you know,” she said to her husband one day, “that Netherfield Park has finally found a tenant¹?”

Mr Bennet didn’t answer.

“Don’t you want to know who has taken it?” said his wife impatiently.

“Since *you* want to tell me, I don’t think I have any choice”, replied her husband.

“Well, Mr Bennet, Mrs Long has told me that it is a young man from the north of England with five or six thousand pounds a year!”

“Is he married or single?”

“What a stupid question! Of course he’s single! Can you imagine what an opportunity this is for our daughters?”

“What does this have to do with our daughters, my dear?” asked Mr Bennet.

“How tiring you are, my dear Mr Bennet... Of course this has to do with our daughters! You must know that he will certainly fall in love with and marry one of them.”

“Is this the reason why he has rented Netherfield? He is looking for a wife?”

“Nonsense, Mr Bennet... How can you talk like that? But it is very *probable* that he will fall in love with one of them, so you must go and visit him as soon as he arrives.”

“Why don’t *you* go there and visit him on your own with the girls? I’m sure he will certainly appreciate that.”

1. tenant: a person who pays rent for the use of land or a building.

“But, my dear, *you* must go! You know it will be impossible for us to visit him if you don’t!” exclaimed a worried Mrs Bennet.

“Oh! Then I’ll write and give him my consent to the marriage to the daughter he prefers – though I hope he’ll choose Lizzie... she’s so much better than her sisters who are so silly like all the other girls...”

“Mr Bennet, I will not allow you to insult our children this way! Lizzie is *not* better than the others and you are really going too far now... You have no compassion on my poor nerves!”

“You’re wrong, my dear, your nerves are very important to me, they’ve been my best friends these last twenty years”, replied Mr Bennet.

“Arghhhh!” answered Mrs Bennet, frustrated.

A couple of days later, Mr Bennet surprised his desperate wife and daughters by telling them that he had already paid a visit to the much-desired Mr Bingley, and that it was therefore possible for them to meet and dance with him at the next ball². The most imaginative comments and gossip about his person followed for several days.

At last, their long and curious waiting was put to an end the night of the ball, when he finally made his appearance with his sister and a friend.

Mr Bingley’s elegant figure, happy character and polite manners conquered everybody, and he was soon engaged in a dance with the eldest Miss Bennet. However, it was his friend Mr Darcy who immediately attracted both the looks of all the young ladies in the room for his height and his beauty, and the attention of their mothers for his income of ten thousand a year. What a disappointment³ for them to find out that he was not as civil nor as pleasant as he looked!

Lizzie herself had the chance to witness⁴ his rudeness when she overheard⁵ a conversation between the two gentlemen.

2. ball: event where a lot of people meet to dance together.

3. disappointment: sadness because something is not as you have imagined.

4. witness: to see something in person.

5. overheard (overhear – overheard – overheard): heard a conversation between other people by accident.



A stage performance of the novel. Theatre at UBC, Vancouver (CDN), 2013
(photo by T. Matheson)

“Come on, Darcy, I hate to see you standing there that way. Dance!” suggested an excited Mr Bingley.

“No way! You know I hate dancing, especially if I don’t know my partner well. And there is no woman here tonight I would like to know... You’re dancing with the only pretty girl in the room,” answered an overtly⁶ bored and irritated Mr Darcy.

“Oh! She is the most beautiful creature I’ve ever seen, don’t you think? Well, I could ask her to introduce you to her sister. She’s quite nice too, look!”

At Bingley’s nod⁷, Darcy shot⁸ a quick look at Lizzie and then replied,

“She is tolerable, but not beautiful enough to tempt me. Don’t waste your time on me, go and enjoy your partner’s smiles.”

When they got back home, Mr Bennet was still up and waiting to hear about the evening which had created so many expectations, and he wasn’t disappointed. On the contrary, he had to stop his wife from relating⁹ all that had happened at the ball.

“Mr Bingley was such a gentleman, my dear, and he’s so handsome and kind... and he danced twice with our Jane. Twice, did you hear? And he asked about her and she was the only girl he danced twice with. And his sister was so good-looking, and charming, and her dress was so elegant...”

“Please, my dear, spare¹⁰ me the details about her dress, at least”, interrupted Mr Bennet.

“But that Mr Darcy! Oh, he was so rude, he is a horrid man; he thought himself so great... Oh, how I detest him!”

Upstairs, Jane and Lizzie were equally commenting the evening and Mr Bingley in particular...

“He has such gentle manners, and he’s good-humoured too. I did not expect him to ask me to dance twice, it was such a compliment! And his sister was so kind and pleasant, too!” Jane said.

“Why shouldn’t he ask you twice? You were by far¹¹ the prettiest girl in the room – but you don’t realise it, do you? You’re too

6. overtly: excessively.

7. nod: small, quick movement of the head.

8. shot (shoot – shot – shot): directed.

9. relating: reporting, telling.

10. spare: to save somebody from an unpleasant experience.

11. by far: definitely, absolutely, without a doubt.



modest”, answered Lizzie before going on, thinking, ‘But I’m not so sure his sister shares his candid nature...’

As you all know too, it is necessary to discuss such an event with one’s neighbours, and that is precisely what the Miss Bennets did the morning after with Lizzie’s friend, Miss Charlotte Lucas.

“Mr Bingley did certainly like Jane, didn’t he? And he was so pleasant to listen to... but his friend wasn’t, was he? Poor Eliza, to be just *tolerable*...”, provoked Charlotte.

“Well, don’t worry, he won’t have any chance of dancing with *me*!”, replied Lizzie, not angry at all.

“Well, I think I can excuse his pride, after all if you’re used to fortune, family and all the rest, the only thing you can do is to think highly of yourself.”

“Yes, Charlotte, I could easily forgive his pride too, only... he has humiliated mine, you know.”

It was again Charlotte who, talking to Lizzie a few days later, made her realise that Jane should perhaps make herself clearer as to her interest in Mr Bingley, because, according to her, “love should be encouraged”. Lizzie said that it was easy for her to see that her sister was falling in love with him, but also agreed that she was so reserved that it might be difficult for others to understand it.

However, it was not so easy for Lizzie to notice that she had become the object of some attention, too. After convincing himself and his friends that she was absolutely plain¹², in fact, Mr Darcy had begun to notice that her eyes were bright and intelligent and that her personality was easy and playful. And his interest in her grew when, at the next ball, she gracefully refused to dance with him and left him meditating on her fine eyes.

A few days later, Mr and Mrs Bennet were disagreeing on the foolishness of their youngest daughters who, according to their father, always talked only about the military regiment that had just arrived in the nearby village, Meryton. At that moment, a servant arrived with a note for Jane from Miss Bingley,

*Will you please be so kind as to dine with me tonight? The gentlemen will be with the officers, and I would gladly appreciate your company.
Yours ever,
Caroline Bingley*

Strategic plans were soon made by an excited Mrs Bennet.

“Jane, you will not go by carriage, but by horse. Since it’s going to rain soon, you’ll certainly get a cold and they’ll therefore ask you to stay there a little longer. That way you’ll be able to see Mr Bingley when he comes back from his dinner. Isn’t that a good idea?”

When it indeed started to rain hard and Jane was not seen coming back, Mrs Bennet started rejoicing¹³. When a small note by Jane arrived for Lizzie saying that she had, actually, caught a cold and that they had, indeed, invited her to stay at Netherfield until she felt better, her joy was complete.

However, Lizzie was a little worried and decided to go and visit her. In a few minutes she left, without considering how dirty she would get as she had to walk three miles across the fields.

Someone, instead, did consider it. On her arrival at Netherfield, Mr Bingley was very kind and Mr Darcy was more surprised at the

12. *plain: not attractive.*

13. *rejoicing: expressing great happiness.*

brilliant colour of her complexion¹⁴ due to the exercise than worried about her wild state. Instead, Miss Bingley was unpleasantly aware of the dirty clothes which touched the floor of her breakfast room and Lizzie's lack¹⁵ of decency.

She found her rather inappropriate, but she took her to her sister and was very kind to Jane the whole day. Moreover, she even asked her to stay there for the night as Jane was still not feeling well.

When her sister fell asleep finally, Lizzie was able to meet her hosts in the drawing room. It was not very easy for Elizabeth to fit into¹⁶ the conversation: while Miss Bingley kept trying to obtain Darcy's attention, and Mr Darcy was fighting¹⁷ his interest in Lizzie, Mr Bingley was the only one who showed any real kindness or interest towards her and her sister.

The morning after, called by a note from Lizzie, Mrs Bennet and her youngest daughters arrived at Netherfield to visit Jane.

"I am so grateful to you for asking Jane to recover¹⁸ here and for all your help. It's such a pity she is still not well and that she must disturb you a little longer. But my sweet daughter is like this, she always suffers patiently; she is the most patient and the sweetest girl in the neighbourhood, there is no one to be compared to her. Oh, what a nice view you have Mr Bingley! I hope you're not thinking of leaving very soon."



Greer Garson and Maureen O'Sullivan
in *Pride and Prejudice*, 1940

14. complexion: natural colour of the skin on a person's face.

15. lack: state of not having something.

16. fit into: to enter appropriately.

17. fighting: trying hard to stop.

18. recover: to get well again after an illness.

“Indeed madam, I am not, though when I choose to do something, all my decisions are generally immediate,” replied Mr Bingley kindly.

“Well, you must certainly appreciate that we are in the countryside... London does not have so many advantages besides the shops and public places, don’t you think?”

“In the country you meet a very limited kind of society, I dare say¹⁹”, added Mr Darcy, not realising how much he had offended Mrs Bennet with his remark²⁰.

“I assure you that many different characters are to be met in the country, too. You cannot think the country is nothing at all,” replied Mrs Bennet angrily.

“Mama, you must have got it wrong. Mr Darcy was just saying that in the country there is not quite the same variety of people as you can meet in town”, said Elizabeth, blushing²¹ for her mother.

“Certainly, my dear, of course. I didn’t say that was not true, but we certainly meet many people in this neighbourhood, too – we dine with twenty-four families, you know.”

Only Mr Bingley’s good manners prevented²² him from not commenting, but his sister was less delicate and smiled expressively towards Mr Darcy.

“Mama,” said Lizzie trying to divert²³ her mother’s attention from the conversation, “did Charlotte pay a visit yesterday?”

“She did, my dear, but she had to go back home early, she was needed to help prepare dinner. Oh, I choose my servants better, and my daughters are brought up²⁴ differently, you know. But all things considered, she is a good girl, plain, but good. Not half as beautiful as my daughters and just a little plain, but with a sweet character.”

“She seems a very pleasant young woman,” said Mr Bingley kindly.

Luckily for Elizabeth, her mother realised it was time to go and after many thanks was finally ready to leave. However, there

19. *dare say*: to believe.

20. *remark*: comment.

21. *blushing*: becoming red in the face because of embarrassment.

22. *prevented*: stopped somebody from

doing something.

23. *divert*: to distract.

24. *brought* (bring-brought-brought) up: raised.



"... Mrs Bennet and her youngest daughters arrived at Netherfield..."

was still time for Lydia, Lizzie's vivacious sister of fifteen, to be impertinent²⁵ enough to obtain from Mr Bingley the promise to organise a ball at Netherfield as soon as Jane recovered.

The next day passed as the previous one, with Jane slowly recovering in bed; Mr Bingley constantly cheerful but worried about her; Mr Darcy attracted, against his desire, to Lizzie; Miss Bingley jealous of Darcy's attention to what she considered an unworthy²⁶ and uncivil young lady; and Elizabeth, amused at Bingley's, Darcy's and Miss Bingley's friendly remarks and unsure about what to think of Darcy's frequent looks in her direction.

Darcy was indeed starting to feel in danger of falling in love with her. His only hope was the jealous Miss Bingley, who never lost the opportunity to remind him about the inferiority of Lizzie's connections.

"I hope you will remember to ask her mother to keep silent on your wedding day, and also remind the younger girls to stop running after the officers for a couple of hours... and as for Elizabeth's portrait, what painter could do justice to her fine eyes?"

However, Miss Bingley's sarcastic remarks could do nothing to stop the growing interest of Darcy in Elizabeth, and their

25. *impertinent*: rude, not showing respect for someone who is older and more important.

26. *unworthy*: not having the necessary qualities to obtain respect.



Pride and Prejudice

stimulating conversations, in which they kept teasing²⁷ each other, greatly contributed to it.

When at last Lizzie and Jane decided to return home, nearly everyone was happy with the decision. Jane felt she did not want to disturb any longer and Miss Bingley's dislike of Lizzie surpassed her appreciation for her sister. Darcy had decided he would not show his interest in Elizabeth any longer for fear of creating false hopes in her and had therefore resolved not to speak to her unless necessary. Lizzie felt happy to escape the snobbish and jealous remarks of Miss Bingley and the shifting²⁸ humours of Mr Darcy. Mr Bennet too was glad that conversation at home could now have some sense again, since he had lost that pleasure with the departure of Jane and Elizabeth.

It was only Mr Bingley – who was sad about Jane's departure – and Mrs Bennet – who was angry at their too hasty²⁹ return – who were not happy with the decision, but the carriage left and brought the Miss Bennets back to Longbourn.

27. *teasing: laughing at and making jokes about someone in a friendly way.*

28. *shifting: moving, changing.*

29. *hasty: done very quickly, with possible bad results.*



WORKING ON THE TEXT

- 1 Complete the following table about the main characters that have appeared in the novel so far. Use the following adjectives to help you fill in the column about “description”.

sweet • ironic • proud • witty • boring • foolish • self-important • caring • intelligent • arrogant • snobbish • honourable • anxious • kind • naïve • superficial • reserved

NAME	SOCIAL CLASS	DESCRIPTION	RESIDENCE
MR BENNET	<i>middle class</i>		<i>Longbourn</i>
MRS BENNET			
JANE BENNET			
LIZZIE BENNET			
MARY, CATHERINE AND LYDIA BENNET			
CHARLES BINGLEY	<i>upper class</i>		<i>Netherfield</i>
MISS BINGLEY			

- 2 Order the main sequences of the chapter chronologically. The first one has already been done for you.

- a. Jane rides to Netherfield but falls ill. ☐
- b. Bingley, his sisters and Darcy arrive at Netherfield. ☐
- c. Mr Bennet visits Bingley and Bingley returns his visit. ☐
- d. Darcy starts to feel something for Lizzie. ☐
- e. The Bennets meet Bingley and Darcy at a ball. ☐
- f. Lizzie joins Jane at Netherfield and keeps her company. ☐
- g. A regiment arrives in the nearby village. ☐
- h. Jane and Lizzie go back home. ☐
- i. Mrs Bennet hopes Bingley will marry one of her daughters. ☒
- j. Jane and Lizzie comment on the ball with Charlotte Lucas. ☐
- k. Darcy defines Lizzie as “tolerable”. ☐

3 Match the following “feelings” and “situations” to some of the sequences in Activity 2.

Ex. → Bingley and Jane start liking each other: e

- Mr Bennet is patient and amused.
- Lizzie feels unwelcome and finds her hosts snobbish.
- The younger Miss Bennets are very excited.
- Miss Bingley is very jealous.
- Mrs Bennet is very satisfied with her plan.
- Lizzie feels angry and humiliated.

WORKING ON VOCABULARY

4 Match the following definitions to some of the adjectives in Activity 1.

Ex. → Feeling pleased about something that you are or have: proud

- innocent and credulous:
- having a high opinion of oneself:
- having intelligent humour:
- showing care and compassion:
- constantly worrying about something:
- silly:
- feeling superior:

WORKING ON GRAMMAR

5 *Linkers.* Use the following linkers to fill in the sentences.

nonetheless • whereas • when • therefore • since • while

Ex. → Whereas Bingley was very kind to Lizzie, his sister wasn't.

- Mr Bennet loves his younger daughters, he believes them to be too foolish.
- Miss Bingley is jealous of Lizzie, she keeps showing her faults to Darcy.
- it starts raining, Mrs Bennet is happy to send Jane to Miss Bingley without a carriage to protect her.
- Jane doesn't feel well, they ask her to stay at Netherfield.
- Darcy was talking to Bingley at the ball, Lizzie overheard them.

WORKING ON SKILLS

Listening



Listen to Lizzie and Jane talking about the ball at which they met Mr Bingley. Say if the sentences are true (T), false (F) or not mentioned (NM).

- | | T | F | NM |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Jane thinks Bingley is a real gentleman. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Jane suggests that he is also very good looking. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Lizzie knew that Bingley would ask Jane to dance twice. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. There were many other girls at the ball who liked Bingley. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Lizzie thinks that Jane is too modest. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. Lizzie believes her sister speaks too ill of the people she meets. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. Lizzie says that Bingley is more polite than his sister. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h. Lizzie didn't talk to Miss Bingley at the ball. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i. Jane is not so sure that Miss Bingley will be a good friend. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Writing

- 7 Imagine you are Mr Bennet. Write a short letter to Mr Bingley welcoming him and offering him one of his daughters in marriage. Start like this.

Dear Mr Bingley,

I have heard that you have just rented Netherfield and I am pleased to welcome you to this neighbourhood. You may not know, but I have five...

Speaking

- 8 PAIR WORK. Work with a partner. Imagine you are Mr Bingley and his sister. Talk together about the Bennets. If necessary, use some of these ideas.

impertinent • low connections • looked pleasant • ill • sisters • dirty • kind and sweet • tolerable • country



The Bennet family,
Pride and Prejudice, 1995

JANE AUSTEN'S TIMES

Jane Austen lived her adult life in England during a period which is known as the 'Regency' era. Such a name was given to the time when George IV reigned in the place of his mad father, King George III, from 1811 to 1820, before he himself became king. However, the name is more generally used to indicate the first three decades of the 19th century, before Queen Victoria came to the throne.

It was a period rich in changes and developments. George IV favoured¹ the arts and the sciences and during Jane Austen's life there was a significant expansion of literacy² and print culture: at the beginning of the century almost everyone in the middle classes and above could read, and books became smaller, less expensive, easier to get thanks to circulating libraries, and more enjoyable. Novels became the main form of literature, though mainly among women.

Jane Austen also saw the beginning of industrialisation, with its economic advantages but also its devastating effects on the poorest part of the population, one third of which lived close to the limit of starvation³.

Moreover, her society was characterised by a constant fear of war with France or an invasion by Napoleon, and that's why in Austen's works troops of soldiers and regiments are always present, though in the background.

This period also saw the development of the new social class called the 'gentry', a large group of society that included both those who

1. *favoured: supported and helped the development of.*
2. *literacy: ability to read and write.*
3. *starvation: state of suffering and death caused by having no food.*



owned land, and members of the professional classes such as lawyers, doctors and the clergy⁴. Those who possessed land were considered superior and the objective of most families was that of keeping the family property (both capital and estates⁵) inside the family or enlarging it. That's why, on the one hand, property was inherited only by the nearest male relative: that way it would not be distributed and segmented among too many members.

On the other hand, marriages were the only other opportunity to increase one's fortune: it allowed families to link their property to a larger one thanks to an advantageous alliance⁶.

With such an objective, females started to acquire⁷ a certain role inside the family: they were one of the means by which the family could improve their wealth⁸ and social status.

Accordingly⁹, courtship¹⁰ became one of the main focal points of a young woman's life: her financial survival and her family's consequent well-being depended on it. However, thanks to Mary Wollenstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* – which came out in 1792 – women began to realise that they might aspire to be treated as equals of men, just like Jane Austen's heroine Lizzie does by defending her moral and intellectual independence.

4. clergy: the priests or ministers of a religion.
5. estate: large area of land, usually in the country, that is owned by one person or family.
6. alliance: an agreement between people in order to achieve something

that they want.

7. acquire: to gain something.
8. wealth: large amount of money and property that a person owns.
9. accordingly: therefore.
10. courtship: the process of attracting a possible partner.

