Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Teaching notes prepared by Karen Lynch

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Introduction

Jane Austen's most famous work was, initially, and now famously, overlooked. The young Austen was the same age as Elizabeth Bennet ('not one and twenty' p. 162) when *First Impressions*, a novel in epistolary form was completed. Her proud and supportive father, the Rev. Mr. Austen, recommended his daughter's work via a submission to the publisher Cadell and Davies in 1797; the manuscript was returned unopened; it did not even make the dreaded slush pile of the publisher's desk. So, the project was shelved and several years later in 1811, *Sense and Sensibility*, proceeded it into publication and public notice. Such was the success from this novel that Austen 'lopped and cropped' at *First Impressions* and the revamped and retitled *Pride and Prejudice* was published in three volumes in early 1813; its immediate success proved by the necessity of a second edition in September of the same year. Jane Austen's publisher, Thomas Egerton, paid her 110 pounds for the copyright. Mr. Egerton probably hadn't realised he had just invested in one of the era's most profound 'start-ups'—the Romantic Comedy. Austen would never receive a penny more for the publication.

What will be most challenging for teachers, and perhaps frustrating for our students, is the sheer familiarity of all the tropes of *Pride and Prejudice*. With a tweak here and there, Jane Austen invented the modern romantic comedy drama. If it were possible to travel back in time, for example, to the year 1812, we would not find the character of the materially vulnerable, socially progressive, witty and worthy female protagonist whose 'courage always rises' (p. 170) with every attempt at intimidation, as a common character trope. And we would actually be surprised that the dark, brooding, distant, but wealthy and sexy, male antagonist—whom she hates—turns out to be her absolute crush, and in the end, a worthy suitor after all. We would not knowingly read into the heated confrontations and what Vivien Jones notably points out as 'highly articulate' (p. ix) conversations between the pair as mere foreplay to serious attachment and we certainly would not anticipate that the antagonism and disapproval of a superior entity would expedite the couple's match. Centuries of iterations of the *Pride and Prejudice* template make it almost impossible to enjoy the novel without our own interactions and experiences of the genre in subsequent literature and popular culture media. To acknowledge this is a starting point.

Pre-reading activities

- 'Dear Jane...': after doing a little bit of research into Jane Austen's life, write a letter to her. Talk about your life, your loves, the fact that you're studying *Pride and Prejudice*—or just ask her for some life advice! What do you think she would say?
- Discuss the epistolary novel with the class, noting that this was a dominant form of the novel in Austen's youth. Why might Austen have moved away from the epistolary form?
- Look up and read the Rev. Mr. Austen's introductory letter to Jane's first publisher. Discuss reasons why Jane Austen, a legal adult, needed her father to interact on her behalf with the publisher.
- What does 'Romantic Comedy' mean to you? Who watches this type of film? Who are your favourite characters and why? What are some of the basic plot lines?

- Jane Austen wrote constantly, but only had seven novels published. But there is an entire Jane Austen universe out there with literally thousands of mashups, blogs, prequels, sequels—you name it, a Jane Austen fan has done it. How many mashups of *Pride and Prejudice* can you find?
- Have you heard of Mills and Boon? Read more about it here. After reading, create a list of similarities and differences to *Pride and Prejudice.*

Ways into the text

An engaging way into the text is to start with the famous first lines. For most Austen fans, it's now bordering on a clichéd quote, but we must remember how fresh this is for our students. So, without apologies, here it is:

> It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering the neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters. (p. 5).

Every other Austen novel begins with introducing the heroine. This one begins with its famous aphorism – or rather a 'fake' aphorism that is debunked as soon as it is uttered. We learn such a great deal here. The omniscient narrator's arch satirical comment sets the tone of the novel as primarily a social comedy; we are immediately located in the world of the text – the 'universe' shrunk down into a neighborhood of 'surrounding families' – and the central theme of marriage and money is introduced. While Jane Austen may have glossed over major historical events of the time (the Napoleonic wars reduced to the social excitement of a military encampment of redcoats), she focused on the small picture, delivering to us a detailed depiction of shifting social class and attitudes with realism and humour. The first line of the novel not only presents readers with the general consensus of the neighborhood, but it introduces what Raymond Williams (1973) has termed the 'knowable communities' of the Austen world; communities that are minutely described in terms of wealth, social background and marital status. The opening line is filled with the information the neighborhood already has of Bingley before his arrival at Netherfield. He is of good fortune, he is single, his very income of 5,000 pounds per year and the fact that his family fortune is derived from trade, is soon afterwards a matter of general knowledge. Even the presumption of 'must be in want of a wife' is eventually proven true, as Bingley does court and eventually marry a girl from the neighborhood. And the fact that Bingley readily follows the plans the neighborhood has for him perhaps signifies more in term of his easy and pliable temperament. Bingley is only too willing and able to comply with the neighborhood's designs. Only Darcy's intervention prevents the wishes of the neighborhood from being expediently fulfilled. In contrast, when Wickham comes to Meryton there is little prior knowledge of him, other than what he tells people himself. Unlike Bingley, Wickham is an unknown, alluring and ultimately dangerous entity. When Elizabeth later learns the true nature of his character toward the end of Volume 2, his lack of connections and history are emphasised:

> She had never heard of him before his entrance into the -shire Militia, in which he had engaged at the persuasion of the young man, who, on meeting him accidentally in town, had there renewed a slight acquaintance. (p. 199).

In the 'knowable community', Wickham rests essentially on the 'outside', without solid connections or foundations. His ability to impose on the community rests solely on his charm: 'His countenance, voice, and manner, had established him at once in the possession of every virtue.' (p. 200).

For students to further understand Austen's world, it is important to realise that the neighborhoods of Austen are very selective. Few tradespeople, farmers, servants or labourers, that is, all those outside of the middle and upper classes, are seen or heard in *Pride and Prejudice.* Such people exist in the margins of the novel, however when they do appear it is only in connection to one of the main characters for whom they are serving, or working. The character of Mrs. Reynolds, the housekeeper of Pemberley is a rare exception and she functions as the 'voice of the people' whose praise and commendation resurrects Darcy's reputation for Elizabeth (and for the reader). Once she has performed this function, Mrs. Reynolds' role is over, she disappears from the text. Here is Raymond Williams on this point:

> Neighbors in Jane Austen are not the people actually living nearby; they are the people living a little less nearby who, in social recognition, can be visited. What she sees across the land is a network of properties, houses and families, and through the holes of this tightly drawn mesh most actual people are simply not seen. To be face-to-face in this world is already to belong to a class. (Williams, p. 166).

Suggested classroom activities

- Ask students to draw up a social mind-map of the five principal houses and three minor houses of the novel—Longbourn, Netherfield, Hunsford Cottage, Rosings and Pemberley and Lucas Lodge, The Gardiners in London, Aunt Phillips. What do we know about the incomes, class and occupations of their occupants?
- Encourage students to place the afore-mentioned houses on a social ladder from the highest to lowest. Ask them to justify their rankings.
- How many instances can you find of servants, farmers, tradespeople etc. in the novel? What role do they perform in terms of the plot?

Inquiry questions for ways into the text

Closed and open questions about text and context

Ask students to prepare four question for homework. Explain to the students that they will be asking four very different kinds of questions. These questions should foster rich and sustained classroom discussion, led by the students and facilitated by the teacher.

- A **closed question** about the **text**. In these sorts of questions, students are seeking factual knowledge about the text. There are usually 'right' answers to these types of questions and they usually require lower-order thinking. However, such questions can be crucial to clearing up confusion.

  Examples of **closed questions** about the **text**:
  - What is the time frame for the entire events of the novel?
  - What steps were taken, and by whom, to prevent Bingley from marrying Jane?
  - Why doesn't Mr. Bingley have an estate of his own?
- A **closed question** about the **context**. Again, this type of question invites students to seek factual information, but this time, the focus is the 'real world' or the historical setting of the novel. Once again, there are usually 'right' answers to such questions and they require lower-order thinking. Nonetheless, these sorts of questions can help to clarify factual historical details for students.

  Examples of **closed questions** about **context**.
  - How is the presence of the militia in Meryton related to the Napoleonic wars? How long did these wars go on? Who was involved? Did England feel threatened?
  - What was the 'Regency' period? Who was on the throne?
  - What does 'landed gentry' mean? What is the difference between landed gentry and the aristocracy?
- An **open-ended** question about the **text**. This type of question requires an opinion in relation to the text. These questions have many possible answers and it is crucial that students can understand and respect differing viewpoints. These questions tend to be higher-order questions and can help build student confidence in forming opinions and framing arguments.

  Examples of **open-ended** questions about the **text**:
  - What sort of parents are Mr. and Mrs. Bennet?
  - What are the differences between Elizabeth and Jane?
  - Why is it significant that Netherfield is rented by Bingley rather than owned?
- An **open-ended** question about the **context**. These questions require an opinion about the 'real world' events that the text is based upon. These sorts of questions will help build students' capacity to understand and engage with the historical context of the novel.
  - Why is gaining money through 'trade' frowned upon by Darcy and the Bingley sisters? What is Austen's view of trade?
  - Why is Lady Catherine de Bourgh's snobbery made so prominent and caricatured by Austen? What point was she making?
  - Does the narrator, Austen herself, approve or disapprove of Charlotte's marriage. Justify your response.

Perspective on the text

The huge body of Jane Austen criticism in general and of *Pride and Prejudice* in particular is too vast to be canvassed here. However, it would be useful to acknowledge and understand what academic Marilyn Butler has identified as a 'critical divide' in approaching novels of the Regency era, and of Austen, in particular. On the one hand, a school of thought places Austen in the service of social conservatism maintaining all the trappings of the rigid social order. In the context of *Pride and Prejudice* then, one could argue that the hierarchical order of class, with Pemberley at the apex, is preserved, and Elizabeth's Cinderella-like entrance into this is merely enacting a fantasy of the middle class. In a slightly different reading, one could argue Pemberley is in danger of becoming as anachronistic as Rosings—an old-fashioned, outdated and unneeded institution that

actually requires a healthy injection of middle class individualism—represented by Elizabeth and the Gardiners—in order to remain relevant. On either reading, the hierarchy of class itself is preserved. On the other hand, progressive or 'quasi' revolutionary readings argue that Austen invokes a liberal sense of individualism that questions or even defies the established social order. Elizabeth's initial refusal of Darcy's proposal and her famous take down of Lady Catherine could be read, in this view, as a more aggressive assertion of the liberalism best represented and invoked by the middle class. Both schools of thought however divergent, do consider the political implications of Austen's work.

A deeper, more historical critical dichotomy occurs between readings that could be roughly divided into 'apolitical' versus the 'political' Austen. Criticism that maintains a more apolitical stance argues that Austen worked and confined her interest in the domestic and the personal—often referencing the author's own quip that her topic was 'human nature in the midland counties' (Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 160) and that 'three of four families in a country village is the very thing to work on.'[1] Advocates of this approach are often concerned with the realism of Austen's social universe, and the humanist truisms that emerge from such a fine study. George Steiner, one critic in this vein, argued that it was precisely Austen's indifference to the 'fierce, historical, social crises' (quoted in Christie, p. 134) of her era that allowed her to focus on her art with such 'imaginative penetration'. Austen herself likened her work to a miniature painting: 'the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush, as to produce little effect, after much labour.'[2]

However, the apolitical reading of Austen is very much a marginal position in this era. Most critics now are concerned with the ways in which Austen's work is overtly political, tapping into the larger social questions of her day; the growth and upward mobility of the middle class, the question of 'new money' as a result of a booming merchant class, the question of female education, rights, autonomy and identity, the rights of the individual, the role of marriage. It is only right to acknowledge the vital reappraisal of Austen by second wave feminism in the 1970s and 80s that backed the political reading of Austen. The Second Wave motto 'the personal is political' was a useful starting point and has ongoing relevancy in a new wave of criticism that places Austen in a political context. It is now not really possible to discuss Jane Austen's writing independently of the urgent political issues that occupied her more historically minded contemporaries. Most critics now read her novels in a context of historical awareness that is no less acute, and no less earnestly engaged with contemporary political issues, than Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Christie, p. 134).

To date, various critical theoretical schools have adopted diverse positions on Jane Austen's work; queer, post-colonial, eco-criticism, feminist, Marxist, new historicist, and so on. Just as we all have our favourite Austen heroine or hero, I suspect we have our favourite Austen lens.

Characters

Longbourn

Elizabeth Bennet: The protagonist and, according to Austen 'as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print' (Austen, 1995, p. 201). Second eldest of the Bennet girls, her father's favourite and her mother's least favourite. The close third person rests with Elizabeth so that readers experience the vast amount of the narrative through Elizabeth's eyes. Elizabeth is witty, lively and energetic. She 'dearly loves a laugh' (p. 56) and prides herself on her accurate observations of human nature. Elizabeth will be humbled later on, but for her own betterment, when she understands how inaccurate her ideas have been in relation to her family's social respectability and her misreading of both Darcy and Wickham.

Jane Bennet: The eldest of the Bennet girls, the family beauty and Elizabeth's confidant. Jane is a less acute observer of human nature than Elizabeth, wanting at all times to see the very best in people; as Elizabeth says 'With *your* good sense, to be so blind to the follies and nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough;—one meets it everywhere. But to be candid without ostentation or design—to take the good of every body's character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad—belongs to you alone'. (pp. 16-17). This trait allows Jane to be duped, at least initially by Caroline Bingley.

[1] Letter to Anna Austen, 9 September, 1814.
[2] Letter to J. Edward Austen, 16 December, 1816.

Mr. Bennet: Mr. Bennet 'relished domestic felicity in [the] unusual form' (p. 364) by taking amusement in his wife's silliness. He often absents himself from his large and loud family finding comfort in his books, but he is also crucially absent as an effective and active head of the household. His failure to rein in Lydia is noted by Elizabeth, and is the probable root cause of Lydia's indiscretion. With the entailment of Longbourn looming over the entire family, it is also noted that he has been unable to economise for the future. Despite his failings, Mr. Bennet's wit, humour and acute observations allow him to remain a favourite with readers and, also, Elizabeth. The fact that Mr. Bennet is a frequent visitor in 'all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley' (p. 363) confirms the narrator's overall approval, on balance, as well.

Mrs. Bennet: The mother of five daughters is treated as a figure of fun, and parodied throughout the novel. She is described in chapter one as 'a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.' (p. 7). Her favourite daughter is Lydia—most likely because Lydia reminds her of her own younger self. Mrs. Bennet's vulgarity is further underlined by her indelicate discussion about Jane's prospects in marrying Bingley: 'such a promising thing for her younger daughters, as Jane's marrying so greatly must throw them in the way of other rich men' (p. 97). However, Mrs. Bennet's concern for her daughters' economic futures, which could only be realistically attained by marrying well, is a real one, given the future entailment of the Longbourn estate. Perhaps for this reason, some subsequent film adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* tend to treat Mrs. Bennet more sympathetically.

Mary Bennet: Mary, the plainest Bennet girl, strives to single herself out through learning and accomplishments. The rare times that she does speak in the novel she is invariably conveying a form of learned, and rather stolid pronouncement. A keen musician, we are told that Mary 'was always impatient for display' (p. 25) but though 'vanity had given her application, it had given her likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner' (p. 25)—she is rarely listened to with pleasure. Her ill-advised performance at the Netherfield ball was perhaps the most painful incident for Elizabeth who felt that her family 'made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening...' (p. 99). By the end of the novel Mary is the single remaining daughter at Longbourn:

> ... and she was necessarily drawn from the pursuit of accomplishments by Mrs. Bennet's being quite unable to sit alone. Mary was obliged to mix more with the world, but she could still moralize over every morning visit; and as she was no longer mortified by comparisons between her sisters' beauty and her own, it was suspected by her father that she submitted to the change without much reluctance. (p. 365).

Kitty Bennet: The second youngest of the Bennet girls who follows in her youngest sister's footsteps. She is aggrieved when Lydia receives the invitation to Brighton, and has apparently more private news, related to her sister, via letters regarding the entire Wickham affair. Like Mary, Kitty is allowed some measure of reform by the novel's ending. We are told that:

> Kitty, to her very material advantage, spent the chief of her time with her two elder sisters. In society so superior to what she had generally know, her improvement was great. She was not of so ungovernable a temper as Lydia, and removed from the influence of Lydia's example, she became, by proper attention and management, less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid. (pp. 364-5).

Lydia Bennet: The youngest of the Bennet girls. Lydia's wildness, her 'animal spirits', her propensity to flirt, her inability to give any attention to serious subjects is not checked by either father or mother. Thus, her eventual indiscretion, which threatens to bring disgrace on the entire family, is not entirely the sixteen-year-old's fault, but also the fault of the parents. Austen is careful to make this point, and this has been examined in the close study section. Unlike the other Bennet girls, however, Lydia does not change for the better by the novel's ending. She remains conceited, arrogant and ill-mannered.

Hill: The only working servant to be mentioned by name, Hill's significance is in the fact that despite the Bennets' best efforts to conceal the truth about Lydia, it's common knowledge amongst the servants. Hill participates on the edge of the Lydia ordeal when she asks Jane, 'I beg your pardon, madam, for interrupting you, but I was in hopes you might have got some good news from town, so I took the liberty of coming to ask.' (p. 285).

Pemberley

Fitzwilliam Darcy: Despite the testimony of his housekeeper that he is the 'best landlord, and the best master .... that ever lived' (p. 239), Darcy himself confesses to have 'been spoilt by my parents ... allowed, encouraged, almost taught ... to be selfish and overbearing ... to think meanly of all the rest of the world.' (p. 349). When Darcy is 'properly humbled' (p. 349) by Elizabeth, this leads to his own self-growth, along with the painful knowledge that the woman who had expected the good manners that should have come with his good breeding is the most fitting partner for him. Darcy, of course, will change his manners, and so Elizabeth will indeed change her mind.

Georgiana Darcy: Much younger sister of Darcy by about ten years. The death of the parents has placed her only brother on the footing of a parent and guardian. Georgiana is musically talented, very genteel and well-mannered, but painfully shy. She is nearly ruined by an elopement with Wickham, who had a double motive of securing Georgiana's marriage portion, as well as avenging himself on Darcy.

Mrs. Reynolds: The faithful housekeeper of Pemberley who has known Darcy since he was a boy. It is Mrs. Reynold's testimony that first shifts Elizabeth's perspective on Darcy, reframing him in a positive light, aligning the man with his beautiful house and grounds. Mrs. Reynolds' name may have been a deliberate pun. The foremost British painter Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) was known for his 'Grand style' of portraiture. The 'Grand Style' promoted the idea of idealising the imperfect—a form of painterly airbrushing that must have been pleasing for those who commissioned his portraits. Of course, it is Mrs. Reynolds who points out the portraits of both Wickham and Darcy, and it is in the larger portrait of Darcy that Elizabeth (along with the reader) sees a more idealised depiction of the man.

Netherfield

Mr. Bingley: Mr. Darcy's best friend, presumably of longstanding from school and/or university. Bingley's family money has been acquired through trade; a fact that puts Bingley and his family decidedly below the Darcys in the social hierarchy. The Bingleys, also, are yet to 'purchase an estate'—an important step in acquiring social status and by distancing the family's connection with trade. Bingley's good manners, pliancy of temper and a propensity to be pleased sets him at odds with his friend. Darcy also manipulates Bingley's pliancy and modesty when he takes the steps he does to separate Bingley from Jane. Once Darcy realises he misunderstood Jane's feelings for Bingley and, of course, with the added motive of winning Elizabeth's good opinion, he again steps in to ensure that the alliance between Jane and Bingley actually takes place.

Caroline Bingley: The scheming 'mean girl' of the story, Caroline Bingley aspires to marry Mr. Darcy—a reasonable aspiration given that she has a sizeable dowry and that he is her brother's best friend. Caroline quickly recognises Elizabeth as her romantic rival and takes every opportunity of reminding Darcy and Bingley of the Bennet family's shortcomings. At Lucas Lodge, Caroline comes to Darcy to commiserate with him at 'the nothingness and yet self-importance of these people!' (p. 27) but is told that Darcy has instead been meditating on 'the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow.' (p. 28). The comic timing of the narrative description that follows is nothing short of brilliant: 'Miss Bingley immediately fixed her eyes on his face, and desired he would tell her what lady had the credit of inspiring such reflections.' (p. 28). The mortifying answer 'Miss Elizabeth Bennet' astonishes Caroline and draws the first of many barbs 'You will have a charming mother-in-law, indeed, and of course she will always be at Pemberley with you.' (p. 28). As it turns out, the closing chapters describing life at Pemberley firmly and silently omits any mention of Mrs. Bennet, but we are told that Caroline, while mortified at Darcy's marriage, keeps up this socially advantageous acquaintance with the Darcys, but suffers the mean-girl comeuppance of paying off 'every arrear of civility to Elizabeth.' (p. 366).

Mrs. Hurst: Caroline and Mrs. Hurst are introduced 'fine women, with a decided air of fashion.' (p. 12). Fine relates to the women's pleasing physical features, but inference of 'decided' air of fashion is the first hint that these ladies think a little too well of themselves. The very term 'fashion' is a pejorative term in Austen's world. Also, Mrs. Hurst has 'married a man of more fashion than fortune' (p. 18)—again, the term 'fashion' inferring a range of negative associations. Mrs. Hurst will echo all of her sister's sentiments regarding the Bennets and Elizabeth in particular.

Mr. Hurst: The man of fashion rather than fortune is rarely mentioned in the narrative. He is described only as 'an indolent man, who lived only to eat, drink, and play at cards.' (p. 35)—a caricature of the fashionable London gentleman.

Rosings

Lady Catherine De Bourgh: Darcy's aunt and the family matriarch. Lady Catherine acts as a gatekeeper of the upper classes. Austen uses Lady Catherine to brutally caricature all the anachronisms of this older class which refuses to move with the times. The stultified state of Rosings represents a time of the past. Lady Catherine's moral panic at the prospect of Darcy's marriage to the upper-middle class is dismissed not only as snobbish, but also ridiculously old fashioned.

Anne De Bourgh: The perennially ill daughter of Lady Catherine. She is variously described as 'sickly and cross', 'thin and small' (p. 156) and 'pale and sickly' (p. 159). She 'spoke very little, except in a low voice' (p. 159) and is not given a single line in the entire narrative. The near erasure of this character ties in with Austen's attitude towards a dying upper class that desperately requires 'new blood' to enliven and invigorate their families.

Colonel Fitzwilliam: The gentleman-like cousin of Darcy. He is joint guardian of Georgiana. He alone is privy to Georgiana's near elopement with Wickham and Darcy refers to him as a witness to his version of events in his letter to Elizabeth. The Colonel is a potential admirer of Elizabeth, but he makes his circumstances known to her. As a younger son, he must look to fortune in marriage.

Mrs. Jenkinson: Perhaps one-time governess, and now companion to, Anne De Bourgh.

Hunsford

Mr. Collins: The cousin of Mr. Bennet to whom the Longbourn estate is entailed. He travels to Longbourn with the intention of choosing a future wife to make some reparations for this, but is rejected by Elizabeth. A clergyman who enjoys the patronage of Lady Catherine, Mr. Collins' servile attitude towards the upper classes in general, and to Lady Catherine in particular, is satirised mercilessly by Austen. Collins' choice of Fordyce's Sermons and his attitude towards Lydia's elopement also mark him as a man with old fashioned values, particularly in relation to women. Austen lays out his character at the beginning of Chapter 15: 'Mr. Collins was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society ... his authority as a clergyman, and his rights as a rector, made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility.' (p. 69).

Charlotte Lucas: The sensible future wife of Mr. Collins. Charlotte, unlike Elizabeth and Jane, is not a romantic but a realist, and in this respect probably closely resembles those aspects of her author's personality. Charlotte quickly settles for Mr. Collins as the 'pleasantest preservative from want' (p. 120). Her arrangements as his wife allow Charlotte a good deal of time separate from her husband in her new home. Upon her visit to Hunsford it is observed that 'When Mr. Collins could be forgotten, there was really a great air of comfort throughout, and by Charlotte's evident enjoyment of it, Elizabeth supposed he must be often forgotten.' (p. 155).

Cheapside

Mr. Gardiner: The intelligent and gentleman-like brother of Mrs. Bennet. Mr. Gardiner has made his money in some form of trade and is one example of a thriving and increasing upwardly mobile middle class. The fact that he resides so close to his business in the unfashionable London borough of 'Cheapside' is one of the first indicators to Darcy and the Bingley sisters that such relations 'must very materially lessen their chance of marrying men of any consideration in the world.' (p. 37). Darcy will later be forced to revise his snobbery when he receives the Gardiners as his guests at Pemberley. It is during his first encounter that Elizabeth rejoices in her uncle's good manners and sense: 'It was consoling, that he should know she had some relations for whom there was no need to blush ... and gloried in every expression, every sentence of her uncle, which marked his intelligence, his taste, or his good manners.' (p. 244). Austen uses the Gardiners to champion the cause of the middle classes, and rewards the Gardiners, at the close of the novel, as being one of the most frequent visitors at Pemberley.

Mrs. Gardiner: Equal to her husband in manners, good sense and good breeding, Mrs. Gardiner also acts in the role of mother to Elizabeth. She counsels Elizabeth to be cautious in forming attachment to Wickham. She watches Darcy's behavior closely and knowingly, in relation to Elizabeth at Pemberley; however, she is too delicate to bring up the subject—a delicacy which Elizabeth's own mother would not have exercised. The Gardiners' 'parenting' extends beyond Elizabeth. Aunt Gardiner invites Jane to London to try to lift her spirits after Bingley's defection, and both the Aunt and Uncle take decisive action during Lydia's elopement.

Lucas Lodge

Sir William Lucas: After having made his money in trade in Meryton, Sir William Lucas has 'risen to the honour of knighthood' (p. 19) and stepped beyond his original class. The narrator treats him with equal measures of disdain and indulgence.

> The distinction [of knighthood] had perhaps been felt too strongly. It had given him a disgust to his business and to his residence in a small market town; and quitting them both, he had removed with his family to a house about a mile from Meryton, denominated from that period Lucas Lodge, where he could think with pleasure of his own importance ... For though elated by his rank, it did not render him supercilious; on the contrary, he was all attention to every body. By nature inoffensive, friendly and obliging, his presentation at St. James had made him courteous. (p. 19).

Lady Lucas: Lady Lucas was 'not too clever to be a valuable neighbor to Mrs. Bennet.' (p. 19). As we've earlier been told that Mrs. Bennet's solace in life was 'visiting and news' (p. 7), one can imagine that each supplies the other with these pleasures. As Lady Lucas and Mrs. Bennet both have single girls to marry, there is covert competition at play, but usually overtly revealed by Mrs. Bennet's less delicate remarks. Of course, it is to Mrs. Bennet's utter chagrin, and perhaps Lady Lucas' smug triumph, that Charlotte will eventually supplant her as mistress of Longbourn.

Maria Lucas: The younger sister of Charlotte who joins her father and Elizabeth on the visit to Kent. Like her father, Maria is quickly over-awed by Rosings and Lady Catherine.

Militia encampment at Meryton

George Wickham: As with all Austen villains, George Wickham is superficially charming, handsome and a rival love interest for the heroine. His brief flirtation with Elizabeth is ended by his pursual of Mary King, who has recently come into a sizeable dowry. This is, of course, not the first time Wickham has attempted to marry a woman for her money; the business with Georgiana, only fifteen, revealing the true motives of the man. Once Elizabeth learns the truth about Wickham's character, she asks Jane's advice; should they let everyone know that this charming man is a blackguard? They agree nothing can be gained from it, as Wickham has since moved on to the encampment at Brighton. She later sorely regrets this decision, explaining to Darcy:

> When *my* eyes were opened to his real character.— Oh! had I known what I ought, what I dared to do! But I knew not—I was afraid of doing too much. Wretched, wretched mistake. (p. 264).

Darcy also blames himself and his pride for not opening Wickham's character to the world. Through his intervention, Wickham marries Lydia, thereby allowing Darcy to pursue Elizabeth. Wickham, like Lydia, remains unchastened by the entire affair. After his honeymoon visit to Longbourn, Mr. Bennet sums up his character nicely:

> He is as fine a fellow ... as ever I saw. He simpers, and smirks, and makes love to us all ... I defy even Sir William himself, to produce a more valuable son-in-law. (p. 312).

Denny: A friend of Wickham's and another favorite with the girls of Meryton.

Colonel Foster: The Colonel of the Militia. Wickham and Denny are commissioned officers and under his direct command. The Colonel is a sensible man and feels somewhat responsible for Lydia's flight with one of his officers while she was his wife's personal guest.

Mrs. Foster: A young woman very recently married to Colonel Foster. 'A resemblance in good humour and good spirits had recommended her and Lydia to each other' (p. 222). It is Mrs. Foster who invites Lydia to Brighton.

Meryton

Aunt Philips: Mrs. Bennet's sister and fellow confidant. Like her sister, she enjoys parties, especially those where officers can be invited. It is at one of her gatherings that Elizabeth has her first long conversation with Wickham.

Mr. Philips: As a mere attorney-at-law, without much family money, Mr. Phillips is decidedly beneath the society of the upper classes. Along with her snarky remarks about 'Cheapside', the jealous Caroline Bingley teases Darcy on his possible future relations:

> Do let the portraits of your uncle and aunt Philips be placed in the gallery at Pemberley. Put them next to your great uncle the judge. They are in the same profession, you know; only in different lines. (p. 51).

Issues and themes

Communities

As referred to above in the section **Ways into the text**, the communities or neighborhoods compose the world of the novel. This extends even to depictions of landscape which are almost entirely tied in with their economic significance. In this way, Austen's writing sits bluntly against the Romantic genre which foregrounded wild and sublime depictions of landscape. Here is Charlotte Brontë's famous complaint about Austen's landscape:

> Why do you like Miss Austen so very much? I am puzzled on that point ... I had not seen *Pride and Prejudice* till I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And what did I find? An accurate daguerreotype portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses.[3]

When Elizabeth travels across the country, as she does when she goes to visit Charlotte Lucas in Kent, or travels with her aunt and uncle through Derbyshire, we get very little description of the countryside. As the narrator says, 'It is not the object of this work to give a description of Derbyshire, nor any of the remarkable places through which their route thither lay; Oxford, Blenheim, Warwick, Kenelworth, Birmingham &c. are sufficiently known.' (p. 231). Instead our attention is drawn to 'A small part of Derbyshire' (p. 231) and Pemberley estate's carefully cultivated and handsome grounds and building. It is the social and economic aspects of land that prove the major concern of the text, each location representing defined social spaces. However, as we will see, these social spaces were in flux, at least in relation to the middle and upper classes.

The five principal houses of the novel—Longbourn, Netherfield, Hunsford, Rosings and Pemberley—act as plot devices and social reference points as the reader visits each in turn with Elizabeth. It is also important to note that by the end of the novel, these reference points—or the social space they represent—become more intimately connected, primarily through marriage. Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy will bring some of the inhabitants of Longbourn into contact with the family party at Pemberley; Mr. Collin's marriage to Charlotte Lucas brings Elizabeth, and therefore the patronage of Pemberley, to Hunsford[4]; due to entailment, Hunsford and Longbourn will soon both belong to Mr. Collins; and Bingley's marriage to Jane and the subsequent purchase of estate in a neighbouring county to Pemberley, bring the sisters and their families, further together. The end of the novel presents a domestic paradise of refined family comfort. The destabilisation of domestic harmony threatened either by the discord of Longbourn or the snobbery of Rosings will, in the end, be ameliorated by the domestic paradise of Pemberley as presented in the closing scene. The last pages of the novel describe family and social connections radiating from the focal point of Pemberley. Let's step through the representation of each of these houses.

Longbourn, the Bennet estate, is initially introduced through the means of dialogue. Mr. Bennet's derision, Mrs. Bennet's excesses, Kitty's coughing and Lydia's 'animal spirits' (p. 45) give the reader a general impression of a house in a constant state of flux. The working farm of the estate, while barely mentioned, appears to be a rather minimal affair, with farm horses doubling as carriage horses on occasion. The straitened circumstances of this 'gentleman's' family is laid out in no uncertain terms:

> Mr. Bennet's property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year, which, unfortunately for his daughters, was entailed in default of heirs male, on a distant relation; and their mother's fortune, though ample for her situation in life, could but ill supply the deficiency of his. Her father had been an attorney in Meryton, and had left her four thousand pounds. (p. 29).

The economic instability and social discord of Longbourn meant that the daughters' only possible route of escape was marriage. Although the Bennet

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[3] Brontë's letter to Lewes, <https://www.janeausten.co.uk/all-the-worlds-a-critic/>

[4] The benefit of Hunsford as a result of Elizabeth's union with Darcy is twice outlined in the novel. Charlotte Lucas meditates on the relative worth of Colonel Fitzwilliam and Mr. Darcy as potential suitors for her friend, concluding that while the former 'was beyond comparison the pleasantest man', however, 'to counterbalance these advantages, Mr. Darcy had considerable patronage in the church, and his cousin could have none at all.' (p. 177). Upon receiving a letter of warning from Mr. Collins, advising that Lady Catherine would not approve of the nuptials between Elizabeth and Darcy, Mr. Bennet gleefully replies: 'Console Lady Catherine as well as you can. But, if I were you, I would stand by the nephew. He has more to give.' (p. 162).

girls belong to the propertied upper-middle class at present, their future status is uncertain. Let's return to the social world as introduced in the opening lines. As noted earlier, Austen deviates from her usual mode of introduction which invariably set out the groundwork of the heroine's age, rank, character and history. Instead, *Pride and Prejudice* describes in detail the world of its community, a community which turns out to be flawed in so many of its universal 'truths'—or views. It's Elizabeth's role to participate in these flawed views—the disgust in Darcy, the favour of Wickham; views from which she must painfully uncouple in her own journey towards self-knowledge. The communal expectation and preoccupations with marriage and money, on the other hand, whilst drawing frequent comic barbs from Austen and her protagonist, turns out, in the end, to be an uncomfortable and inescapable economic fact. The young ladies of the said neighborhood, primarily the Bennets, the Lucases, must 'secure' a husband to avoid future privation. To remain 'gentlewomen' they must marry well—an imperative that creates a real tension in the novel between the importance of love and the importance of security.

Netherfield further illustrates this possibility early in the novel, through the depiction of the significant qualifications in terms of desirability, in relation to the position of a secondary male, Bingley. Bingley's income is good, but has been acquired through trade. The house is substantial, but on lease. At this point in the novel, Bingley's pliancy of temper is linked with the very real possibility that he, like his father before him, will not live to purchase an estate. Bingley's wavering in his relationship—also a result of his easy and modest temper—is further symbolised by the fate of the house. As a leased house, the estate has an air of impermanence; Bingley can easily give it up and move on. It is only after his marriage to Jane that Bingley purchases a house. The new, unnamed estate, of course secondary to Pemberley, signifies the social and economic stability lacking at both Longbourn and Netherfield.

Charlotte Lucas, in the similar precarious position of the unportioned gentlewoman, cuts her losses quickly, in order to make the advantageous marriage to an odious man. The vast compromise Charlotte has made for economic security is treated with sympathetic irony by the narrator, and the reader shares Elizabeth's curiosity in seeing how she would cope at Hunsford. The narration treats us here with a great amount of detail about the domestic arrangements at Hunsford:

> Charlotte took her sister and friend over the house, extremely well pleased, probably, to have the opportunity of shewing it without her husband's help. It was rather small, but well built and convenient; and everything was fitted up and arranged with a neatness and consistency of which Elizabeth gave Charlotte all the credit. When Mr. Collins could be forgotten, there really was an air of comfort throughout, and by Charlotte's evident enjoyment of it, Elizabeth supposed he must be often forgotten. (pp. 154-5).

Both the reader and Elizabeth are encouraged by these details to consider the lot which Charlotte has chosen. The pleasant but confining domestic arrangements are later reviewed by Elizabeth, who gradually becomes reconciled to Charlotte's decision. Economically precarious as her own life was as a single woman living with a family of diminishing income, Austen would have felt highly interested in this subject. The Hunsford chapters list the domestic items of 'compensation' for Charlotte—'home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry' (p. 209) and while these may not outweigh the odiousness of her husband, they are, however, as the clear headed Charlotte Lucas thinks of them 'pleasantest preservative from want.' (p. 120). It is not a fitting outcome for any potential heroine, but an unpalatable reality for all women. The scope of life for the character who chooses such a marriage may be 'rather small' but, yes, 'convenient'.

The three houses discussed so far each have an overriding characteristic, symbolic of the economic viability of each: Longbourn is in a state of flux and disharmony, a symptom of the future calamity of entailment, but also an embodiment of marital discord. Netherfield is grand but rented and has an air of impermanence, as does Bingley's attentions to Jane and his failure to properly ape the upper class and purchase an estate. Hunsford is described in all its minutiae which lends it the confined, overly domesticated sphere mimicking the suffocating atmosphere of a marriage of convenience. Rosings and Pemberley, the estates of the true upper class, stand loftily apart from these others and also mirror each other as alternate performances of the upper class privilege. Both the reader and Elizabeth are well-prepared to reject the grandeur of Rosings; its large fireplace, numbers of carriages and plentiful windows have been long in our view in the form of the pompous boastings of Mr. Collins. Elizabeth's summations are endorsed by the narrator and we can quickly dismiss Lady Catherine and reject her rigid hierarchical notions that like to see 'the distinction

of rank preserved'. (p. 158). Later, Elizabeth favorably compares Pemberley to Rosings, noting that its rooms were 'neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less of splendor, and more real elegance, than the furnishing of Rosings'. (p. 236). Darcy is reported to be 'the best landlord, and the best master ... that ever lived' (p. 239). Elizabeth reflects on his benign reign as 'a brother, a landlord, a master ... how many people's happiness were in his guardianship'. (p. 240). Lady Catherine, by contrast, is seen as an inveterate meddler, who will silence the poor on her estate by 'scold[ing] them into harmony and plenty.' (p. 165). Rosings carries the overriding air of authoritarianism on the mere basis of rank—an authoritarianism that Elizabeth, the narrator, and therefore the reader, will reject. Pemberley's authority is softened by an approved sense of paternalism—a form of upper class rule that is deemed not only palatable, but as desirable. This leads to the second theme: the rise of the upper middle class.

The rise of the middle class

Austen's audience, much like those inhabitants of Meryton, were in the main, part of a swelling educated middle class—an emerging primary class in England that certainly outnumbered the gentry and carried far more economic heft, in part due to fortunes made in trade, than any other class. *Pride and Prejudice* asserts the power of this class and the demand that they be treated with respect and dignity by those who they still thought of as 'their betters'. Darcy is first rejected by the middle classes of Meryton because of his pride, and his initial behavior is too close to that of Lady Catherine's, which enforces the 'dignity of rank'—'... he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased' (p. 12).

Later Elizabeth will twice deploy the term 'gentleman' as an assertion of her own status, but with a middle class qualification of the term. She humiliates Darcy during his proposal by declaring that his conduct has only spared her concern in refusing him—'had you behaved in a more gentlemen-like manner.' (p. 188). In the context where Darcy is outlining his objections to Elizabeth's own class and connections, Elizabeth's use of the term 'gentleman' asserts her own standing as a gentlewoman and further underlines precisely those qualities of being a gentleman that Meryton found lacking in Darcy: 'manners'. Through Elizabeth, Darcy will learn that the true title of gentleman is not merely fixed by rank, but is bestowed on an individual in response to their conduct in the world; a form of meritocracy promoted by the middle classes. Later, Elizabeth defends her status in front of Lady Catherine de Bourgh and her 'right' to marry Darcy: 'In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal' (p. 337). The term gentleman breaches a large gap in status and income here. However, Elizabeth's outcry could be read as the cry from the middle classes demanding acknowledgement and greater equality. The broad entitlement of the term 'gentleman' is earlier rejected by Darcy in his own prejudice against the middle classes. Darcy is at one with the Bingley sisters when he reminds Bingley, and himself, that young women with relations in trade in Cheapside will 'very materially lessen their chance of marrying men of any consideration in the world'. (p. 37). It is his ability to overcome this prejudicial assumption of class that will make him the better man worthy of marrying Elizabeth. The trade classes are triumphant, as ultimately this Uncle and Aunt from Cheapside will form the nexus of the intimate and elegant family party at Pemberley in the closing lines.

This is not to say that *Pride and Prejudice* rejects the position of the upper class—rather it is a broad assertion from the middle classes of its right to enter/marry into it and remake it, in part, after its own, more egalitarian image. This is metaphorically embodied in the change in Darcy himself. The Pemberley estate prepares the way for this change in functioning as a metonym for Darcy as well as an exposition of his better self. Elizabeth encounters it as 'a large, handsome, stone building standing well on rising ground' (p. 235) belonging to the man who is first noticed by 'his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien.' (p. 12). After Elizabeth has admired the well-proportioned rooms and tasteful furnishings she stands herself in front of Darcy's portrait in 'earnest contemplation' with 'a more gentle sensation towards the original, than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance.' (p. 240). Hence, Elizabeth, along with the reader, re-envisions the upper class with a softer gloss, for at this very moment, we can imagine being part of it, for 'to be mistress of Pemberley might be something.' (p. 235) and 'of this place ... I might have been mistress.' (p. 236). When Elizabeth finally achieves this, she brings her spirited individualism and assertion of ambitious self-hood into a harmonious blend with an ideal patriarchal order of regulation and accommodation. The social idea of landed gentry can persist because it will allow a moderate amount of

rejuvenation from the entry of worthy and, perhaps, exceptional beings from the middle class. Just as outsider Fanny Price from Mansfield Park came to embody the 'elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony' (Mansfield Park, p. 234) of Sir Thomas Bertram's estate, Elizabeth, the new mistress of Darcy's estate, will enjoy the regulation of Pemberley's social governance which admits and tolerates Lady Catherine, but embraces with the 'warmest gratitude' the Gardiners from Cheapside.

First impressions

Tony Tanner has famously summarised the story of *Pride and Prejudice* as one where 'a man changes his manners and a young lady changes her mind'. (p. 103). Working with romantic comedy's central plot device, misunderstandings and misrepresentations, the novel drives home the didactic note of caution about the dangers of first impressions. Sometimes considered one of Austen's more romantic novels, *Pride and Prejudice* foregrounds the importance of reason over passion, of due deliberation over emotion, reflection over perception. The work to be done here is the lot of Elizabeth who, as previously discussed, stands in as proxy for the reader. Elizabeth first experiences Darcy's ungentlemanly behavior in a personal way, being pronounced 'tolerable ... but not handsome enough to tempt *me*.' (p. 13). The resentment and hurt pride leading from this snub leads her to give far too much credence to Wickham, an experience that is reinforced by the general approbation of the neighborhood. In fact, in sharing and reaffirming the community's emotional and enthusiastic embracement of Wickham and rejection of Darcy, Elizabeth has proved herself very much a part of that community's small mindedness. William Deresiewicz has examined the thinking behind this community as it is linguistically expressed in the novel, tracing a collective consciousness behind such utterances as these: 'He was discovered to be proud'; 'His character was decided'; 'a report soon followed'; 'the gentlemen pronounced'; 'the ladies declared'—arguing that it is this informal circulation of information and opinion that is the very essence of communal life. (Deresiewicz, p. 504). Placed within this community and participating in these very claims, Elizabeth appears far less of an individualist, and if this is true, then the arc of the story could be seen as a struggle to leave the confines of this community. Elizabeth will rise above her community because of her simple recognition of this shortcoming—'I, who have valued myself on my abilities ... had I been in love I could not have been more wretchedly blind.' (p. 202)—and her ability to quit her habits of easy assumptions by cautiously applying reason to judgment, a trait that distinguishes her from the more emotional, reactive and dramatic young woman in the first half of the novel. Applying caution and reflection in the latter half of the novel, Elizabeth's eventual attachment to Darcy is therefore realised through a slow and steady process of thinking and reflection. This stands in direct opposition to her earlier feelings for Wickham which are expressed in hackneyed phrases such as: 'Elizabeth went away with her head full of him' (p. 82); 'She could think of nothing but Wickham' (p. 82). Austen describes in careful detail, the unromantic origins of Elizabeth's feelings for Darcy:

> If gratitude and esteem are good foundations for affection, Elizabeth's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty. But if otherwise, if the regard springing from such sources is unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often described as arising on a first interview with its object, and even before two words have been exchanged, nothing can be said in her defense, except that she had given somewhat of a trial to the latter method, in her partiality for Wickham, and that its ill-success might perhaps authorize her to seek the other less interesting mode of attachment. (pp. 265-6).

Jane Austen leaves us with the last impression that **first impressions** are merely based on feeling and perceptions. Feelings, devoid of the function of reason, are not to be trusted.

The gaze

The novel subtly undercuts its arguments for 'reason' in its focus on the visual, and its repeated use of the gaze—of who is looking at whom—as a sign of physical attraction. Enmeshed within communities and the various houses, bound by social rules of etiquette and propriety, repressed states of emotion are visually evident and enacted through the visual realm. This realm is associated with the body and its involuntary actions—stares, expressions, blushes; also the realm of passion and instinctive actions. For a novel that does not show one ounce of flesh, the act **of looking and being looked at** returns the drama of the text to the 'natural' sphere of bodily desire, a realm largely outside, or on the margins of culture.

Elizabeth's first encounter with Darcy is after he viewed her negatively. However, he soon afterwards reappraises her as to find her face 'uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes.' (p. 24). And although his 'critical eye' will find further faults in the 'perfect symmetry in her form', he finds further attractions in her 'figure' and the 'easy

playfulness' of her manners. (p. 24). He acts on this attraction by drawing close to Elizabeth and soon afterwards, requesting a dance. This becomes the pattern for each subsequent encounter in Volume One. Each request to dance follows an intense period of watching. Darcy's 'regard' becomes the defining feature of his interaction with Elizabeth, more than a clue to the readers that there is some pretty heated emotion running through the ballrooms and drawing rooms of the novel. Of course, this continued and pointed regard is unwelcome for Elizabeth who fails (and one wonders if Austen is asking her readers to be a little disingenuous about this) to notice these looks as interest and instead sees them, in an equally hot-blooded way, as a challenge to her person. At Lucas Lodge she says to Charlotte, 'He has a very satirical eye, and if I do begin to be impertinent myself, I shall soon grow **afraid** of him.' (p. 25). And of course her impertinence follows in the Netherfield visit where she challenges Darcy's behaviour. It is at this point of time that Darcy finds that he had 'never been so **bewitched** by any woman as he was by her' (p. 51) and after a series of intense exchanges attempts to withdraw fearing 'the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention' (p. 57) and towards the end of her stay 'steady to his purpose ... would not even look at her.' (p. 59). Fear, bewitchment, **danger**—here is the erotic language of fleshy romance, and the physical body.

It is only after Darcy withdraws fully after the rejection of his proposal that Elizabeth will voluntarily seek to be, once more, under his gaze. On her tour of Pemberley, already attracted by the beauty of the place and the praise of the housekeeper, Elizabeth seeks out Darcy's portrait:

> In the gallery there were many family portraits, but they could have little to fix the attention of a stranger. Elizabeth walked on in quest of the only face whose features would be known to her. At last it arrested her—and she beheld a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face, as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her. (p. 240).

This is new information—up until now, Darcy's gazes had perplexed and annoyed Elizabeth; smiles, if they had occurred, were not dwelt upon as they are here. As late as the Hunsford-Rosings chapters, Charlotte Lucas had watched Darcy watching Elizabeth attempting to detect signs of romantic attachment:

> He certainly looked at her friend a great deal, but the expression of that look was disputable. It was an earnest, steadfast gaze, but she often doubted whether there was much admiration in it, and sometimes it seemed nothing but absence of mind. (p. 176).

Back at Pemberley, standing in front of the smiling portrait, Elizabeth inverts the relation between subject and object as she deliberately 'fixes' the portrait's eyes upon herself and thinks of his 'regard' with 'a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it ever raised before.' (p. 240). This would suggest a tacit acceptance of Darcy's affection and a wish, one that will soon be fulfilled, to invite his gaze and 'regard' and attentions once more. The confusion of subject-object here, where Elizabeth is both the subject who is doing the looking and appraising, whilst also attempting to place herself under the gaze of the portrait, a form of objectification, metaphorically represents Elizabeth's confusion in relation to Darcy; the radical reappraisal that will soon lead her to love. Her willingness to place herself beneath the gaze of the absent Darcy, in the form of his portrait, could also indicate a subconscious desire for Darcy that had been awakened by 'first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley.' (p. 353).

The fallen woman

A popular trope of the 18th and 19th centuries, Austen treats the theme of the fallen woman with far less drama and far more pragmatism than her literary forebears and contemporaries, exploring the real social repercussions of Lydia's elopement. Returning to the theme of 'knowable communities' examined earlier, Austen makes explicit the threats that lay beyond these communities. The principal houses that act as nodes or reference points across Austen's landscape is this community. London is another key feature of Jane Austen's landscape. Despite the Gardiners' residence in the city, London is represented as essentially unknowable and therefore dangerous. In smaller towns and villages of the novel, the actions and connections of most people are intimately known; the prior knowledge of Bingley's income and marital status is one good example, as is the general rumor of Elizabeth's engagement to Darcy. Moreover, the distinction of class and rank is more likely to be preserved as everyone knows who is who; Wickham can impose on Meryton, but he does not escape his rank in life as 'the son of Mr. Darcy's steward.' (p. 93) The threat of a large city is in both the lack of knowledge of its inhabitants, and its ability to destabilise class positions. As Williams has observed, cities allow an intermix of classes, and class itself can become more indeterminate, with people from vastly different backgrounds co-habiting the same spaces—streets, squares, shops and so on.

The country/city binary of innocence/corruption has a long standing association with the trope of the fallen woman. In Richardson's *Clarissa*, for example, the eponymous heroine escapes to London to avoid an undesirable marriage, but finds herself, through the machinations of her tormentor, Lovelace, in a house of prostitutes. She is later raped. Although blameless, Clarissa's position as a woman of good breeding and family is severely compromised in a society that believes, to quote Mary Bennet, 'that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable—that one false step involves her in endless ruin' (pp. 274-5). The fact that Lydia and Wickham travel to London rather than Gretna Green quickly communicates ill intentions; if Gretna Green is the 19th century elopement destination, London carries with it the possibility of licentiousness, corruption, concealment and immorality. Like Clarissa, Lydia has temporarily severed herself from her community, 'has left all her friends' (p. 263) to live, unmarried, with Wickham in London. She is shoe-horned back into her community, because of Darcy's ability to wield his social and economic clout. Once married to Wickham, Lydia's visit to Longbourn is symbolically important to this act of reclaiming. While Mr. Bennet initially refuses to acknowledge the couple, Elizabeth and Jane's pleading win him over. All know that what is at stake is appearances—neighbors would notice the snub, and read it, correctly as sign of a 'patched-up business' (p. 338).

Lydia is a very different type of fallen woman from the literary trope. The Clarissas of the Georgian literary world were victim-heroines, sacrificed by male lust and held forth as martyrs after their inevitable death. Later, Victorian fiction would become crowded with the redemptive portrayals of fallen women—Charles Dickens' character of Little Emily in *David Copperfield* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Agnes*, are two famous examples. These betrayed, fallen and golden-hearted women would not be killed off by these Victorian authors, but rather live on in the world of the text, with the authorial message being one of tolerance and social progress. Straddled between these two eras, Austen approached the topic differently. Lydia is present as 'fallen' from the outset. With her 'wild animal spirits' Lydia merely acts in a way that is consistent with her nature; it is, in part, Lydia's own appetites that are to blame for her state, not the machinations of a powerful male or the indifference and cruelty of the social order. Yet, had she not married, Lydia would have been sunk, and with her, all the future fortunes of the Bennet girls. Here Austen, once again, signals her distrust of desire. Lydia's grasping desire threatens to sink the social order and leads her to violate cultural norms. She willingly leaves the protection of her community (and the protection of Colonel Foster at Brighton) on a whim. In relating the London scenes, Austen turns to the epistolary form so that the scenes of social indiscretion, sex outside of marriage, is once removed from the narrative and decidedly off stage.

Lydia will be doomed to live in a loveless marriage, on the brink of financial ruin; such is her punishment. However, Austen's world could still harbor one such as Lydia, even after the scandal, and bring her back into the social order. The closing chapter relates the fact that Lydia was an occasional visitor to Pemberley, and that Darcy helped further Wickham in his profession. The social threat posed by the pair has been subsumed and neutralised by the preeminent community of Pemberley.

Suggested classroom activities

- Draw a mind map to show ways in which the themes are interlinked.
- Assign chapters 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 18, 31, 32 to small groups. These chapters have been selected because they all include Elizabeth and Darcy encounters. Ask students to find all quotes related to who is looking at whom. How is attraction expressed through the gaze in these chapters?
- Have students explore the concept of the 'Fallen Woman'. What are the biblical connotations? Why do you think it was a popular literary motif?
- Explore Jane Austen's own class position. What were her social and financial circumstances?
- Class debate: *Pride and Prejudice* is a rejection of 'love at first sight.'

Language, style and structure

The novel is organized in three volumes. The first volume introduces the principal characters, covers Bingley's courtship with Jane and Darcy's growing attraction to Elizabeth as rising action. However, the first volume closes with the defection of Bingley and the marriage of Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins. True love is thwarted; a seeming impossibility, and the first volume ends on a decidedly dying note. Volume Two sees the defection of the second potential suitor, Wickham, and the death of romance is witnessed in Charlotte's life at Hunsford. Further encounters with Darcy at Rosings and Hunsford lead to the rising action of the proposal, the rejection, Darcy's explanatory letter and Elizabeth's new understanding of herself and her family. After her emotional turmoil, Elizabeth embarks on a tour of Derbyshire with Aunt and Uncle Gardiner and Volume Two ends with the

exciting prospect 'To Pemberley, therefore, they were to go.' (p. 232). Much of Volume Three is dedicated to Pemberley, the probable romance between Darcy and Elizabeth, the complication of Lydia's elopement and the happy resolution for Jane and Bingley and shortly afterwards, Elizabeth and Darcy. Love will prevail. The novel ends in triumph as Elizabeth presides over Pemberley, combining her new-found status with the worthy members of her own family.

This structure, however, is inseparable to Austen's use of close third person, and the conflation of Elizabeth with the narrative voice.

Close third person

One of the overriding features of Austen's style is her frequent use of close third person, where omniscient narration blends in with the internal consciousness of a character. Details of this narrative device are further canvassed in a latter section, **Teaching advice for Creative Outcomes**, where extensive advice is given on how to achieve close third person. Austen's writing always relied on this device but, more so than any other Austen novel, *Pride and Prejudice* uses the device to such an extent that the narrative voice frequently blends with the heroine's views, so much so that it often becomes difficult to separate the two.

The brilliance of this strategy is, of course, being completely 'drawn in' to Elizabeth's world view, which, on a first read, we may often (and sometimes rightly) conflate with the author's. However, because there remains, for the first half of the novel, such a small discernable gap between narrator and character, Elizabeth's epiphany becomes our own. Like the heroine, we shake our heads and 'wake up' to the alarming idea that Elizabeth, our charming favourite who is such an accurate observer of human nature and who has 'prided herself on her discernment', has been woefully wrong and both proud and prejudiced. The one piece of knowledge that the reader has had, prior to this, is the knowledge of Darcy's attachment. His explanatory letter, the Pemberley chapter, and his subsequent change in manners allow both the reader (and the heroine) to now earnestly hope for a romantic resolution.

The tone of the novel and its narrative is lively, quick and witty in Volume One and Volume Two, up to the point of Elizabeth's epiphany. Volume Three is more reflective and subdued, with close and careful examination of Elizabeth's changing state of consciousness, reflecting Elizabeth's new understanding of herself, and her ability to check herself of her prior 'impertinence'. The 'old Elizabeth' only emerges to defend herself against the insults of Lady Catherine; however, by this time, the reader understands that Elizabeth has learnt her lesson and will not be so quick to judge others on the 'whims and inconsistencies' (p. 56).

It is worth taking time to compare the biting wit and irony of some of the novel's most famous, humorous epigrams and to consider carefully the significance of the way that the line between the narrator's voice and Elizabeth's seamlessly blends at times.

Narrator

'To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love'. (p. 11).

'Lady Lucas was a very good kind of woman, not too clever to be a valuable neighbor to Mrs. Bennet.' (p. 19).

'Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic, humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character.' (p. 7).

'It was the last of the regiment's stay in Meryton, and all the young ladies in the neighborhood were drooping apace. The dejection was almost universal.' (p. 221).

'Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs. Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters' (p. 364)

Elizabeth

'There is a fine old saying, which every body here is of course familiar with—"Keep your breath to cool your porridge"—and I shall keep mine to swell my song.' (p. 25).

'I wonder who first discovered the efficacy of poetry in driving away love.' (p. 44).

'I always delight in … cheating a person of their premeditated contempt.' (p. 50).

'Mr. Darcy may perhaps have *heard* of such a place as Gracechurch Street, but he would hardly think a month's ablution enough to cleanse him from its impurities, were he once to enter it;' (p. 139).

The novelist and her heroine, the self-confessed 'studier of character' (p. 42) share the eloquent phrasing containing pithy ironic observations about society in general or about a character in particular. Following Elizabeth's point of view for the majority of the story, the identical form of tone and style will inevitably lead to a conflation or confusion between narrator and protagonist.

Interestingly, there is one other character who will, at times, come very close to Austen's narration: Mr. Bennet. A flawed father, but one who at least shows his good judgement in his preference for his cleverest daughter, sharing her joy of 'whims and inconsistencies.' (p. 56). Mr. Bennet sounds very Austen-like when he responds to the complaints of his wife: 'I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least.' (p. 7).

Or when he leads on Mr. Collins with wicked relish: '... it is happy for you that you possess the talent of flattering with delicacy. May I ask whether these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse of the moment, or are the result of previous study?' (p. 67).

And this last statement could sum up a large portion of the novel itself: 'For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbors, and laugh at them in our turn?' (pp. 343-4).

Mr. Bennet's flaws as a father are more than ameliorated by his affinity with Austen and Elizabeth; he is, after all, preserved as a family member at Pemberley, and his quirkiness is preserved in his coming, 'especially when he was least expected.' (p. 365). However, as heroine, Elizabeth must grow from her love of a laugh and develop more serious, considered views of the world. In this way, she will outstrip her father. Darcy and her place at Pemberley will tone down her propensity to form quick judgements, and temper her habits 'bordering on conceit and impertinence' (p. 51)—as Caroline Bingley puts it. An earlier exchange between Elizabeth and Darcy foreshadows the necessary transformation:

> "... The wisest and the best of men, nay, the wisest and best of their actions, may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke."
>
> "Certainly," replied Elizabeth— "there are such people, but I hope I am not one of *them*. I hope I never ridicule what is wise and good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies, *do* divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can.— But these, I suppose, are precisely what you are without." (p. 56).

Due to the near synthesis between narrator and protagonist at this stage, a first-time reader will fail to see the dramatic irony here. Elizabeth does ridicule what is 'wise and good' in her assumptions about Darcy. At this point in the novel, the reader is given no other information, other than Darcy's measured and fair response, to caution us into a more critical appraisal of Elizabeth.

Burlesque

As with Austen's other novels, *Pride and Prejudice* presents us with a comedy of manners, with the author calling out hypocrisy, artifice and the inanity of social conventions. Despite Elizabeth's lessons about laughter, the novel retains discreet and particular characters for pure burlesque. One-dimensional caricatures, rather than characters, the narrative unapologetically and unabatedly mocks Lydia Bennet, Mrs. Bennet, Bingley's sister, Mr. Hurst, the entire Rosings estate together with Lady Catherine and, of course, Mr. Collins.

This section considers Austen's treatment of Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins and Caroline Bingley.

Burlesque is a form of parody that can undermine socially accepted views or positions and thus often carries with it counter political or social messages. The message regarding Lady Catherine as a gatekeeper of the upper class has been dealt with in an earlier section. What was Austen's intention behind her portrayal of Mrs. Bennet? Is she merely an example of a weak-minded woman, uneducated, self-indulged and ridiculously girlish? Or is there something more going on than just this? One possible view is to read Mrs. Bennet as an hysterical hypochondriac. Austen remained fascinated with hypochondria in her writings. It is a principal topic in *Sanditon*, the unfinished novel, but attitudes to health—the stoic sufferers versus those with 'nervous ailments'—become a shorthand for reading strength of character. Think of Mr. Woodhouse's whining preoccupation with his health in *Emma*, or the cheerful resignation of Mrs. Smith to her illness in *Persuasion*. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen seems to be taking aim at the hysteric. Mrs. Bennet's ailments, her 'nerves', are mentioned repeatedly in Chapters One and Two. We know she has long complained of her nerves and this latest upset is the result of Mr. Bennet refusing (or pretending to refuse) to visit Mr. Bingley. Her condition is quickly dismissed when it revealed that Mr. Bennet has in fact made the visit, and Kitty, whose cough was vexing Mrs. Bennet, can now 'cough as much as [she] chooses.' (p. 10). The Lydia-Wickham affair is another, more extreme example. After complaining of 'such tremblings, such flutterings, all over me, such spasms in my side and pains in my head, and such beatings at heart' (p. 274), Mrs. Bennet's quick recovery after news of Lydia's pending marriage is such that she leaves her bed for a triumphant visit to her neighbors in Meryton.

Mr. Collins' pomposity and cringeworthy toadying to Lady Catherine clearly mark him as a figure of

fun. Yet, Austen manipulates the reader's disgust at this character to subtly encourage a rejection of his most cherished beliefs. The first, of course, is his slavish observance of social hierarchy; a hierarchy which, as argued earlier, Austen wanted to challenge, albeit limiting this in favouring upward mobility of a deserving middle class. Another is his attitude to women. One of the earliest understandings of Mr. Collins' very conservative views is dropped by Austen in the form of an intertextual clue. During his first night at Longbourn he is invited to read for the family's entertainment and rejecting the offer of a novel, chooses Fordyce's Sermons. Fordyce wrote advice on female virtue and behavior, and while the sermons were first published in 1766 they were still reprinted and in popular circulation in Austen's day. The radical 18th century feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft, attacked Fordyce's sermons in her A *Vindication of the Rights of Women*,[5] for the sermons treat women as unequal, as prone to passions and lacking in reason. One of the more well-known excerpts from Fordyce's sermons reads:

> Remember how tender a thing a woman's reputation is, how hard to preserve and when lost how impossible to recover… (Fordyce)

Austen seems to have taken direct inspiration from this for Mary Bennet's words after Lydia's elopement:

> Unhappy as this event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson; that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable—that one false step involves her in endless ruin.' (pp. 274-5).

Elizabeth's reaction was to 'lift up her eyes in amazement' (p. 275) reflecting what Austen would condone as the readers' reaction to the piousness of such 'moral extractions.' (p. 275).

The subsequent letter where Mr. Collins writes 'The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison to this.' (p. 281) is left to speak for itself, and of course, as discussed earlier, Austen will nevertheless flout the literary convention of either killing off or lauding the fallen Lydia.

When Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins' proposal, he falls back on the sort of assumptions propounded by Fordyce, reading her rejection as a 'wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females.' (p. 106). Elizabeth's firm rebuff echoes Wollstonecraft's own sentiments that strongly argued that women's rational capacity was equal to men: 'Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart.' (p. 106).

Rejecting elegance and asserting rationality, Elizabeth is rejecting both Fordyce and an entire tradition which spurned female intellect and focused, instead on propriety, elegance and in its most degraded state, as shown with Mrs. Bennet, the female body wracked with irrationality.

The calculating, snobbish and ambitious Caroline Bingley and her sister Mrs. Hurst also serve to comment on the notion of elegant females. They first appear at the Longbourn assembly as 'fine women, with an air of decided fashion' (p. 12) and we are soon guided by Elizabeth's 'quickness of observation' to not approve of them:

> They were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of being agreeable where they chose it; but proud and conceited. They were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in town, had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank; and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others. (p. 17).

While she poses no real threat as a potential foil for Elizabeth, the reader is nevertheless delighted each and every time the narrative dishes Caroline her due comeuppance, the literary fate of the socially superior 'mean girl'. And just like the Hollywood treatment of mean girls today, the world of the text rejects the social prescriptions of femininity espoused by the sisters and embraces the more 'natural' values represented by Elizabeth. Elizabeth's famous walk from Longbourn to Netherfield is a case in point, and will be discussed in more detail in the **Close Study** section. This episode leads the reader to celebrate the freedom, spiritedness and independence this walk symbolises, and reject the sisters' ridicule of Elizabeth's defiance of social convention. In fact, it is this very defiance that is celebrated. Later, in her stay

[5] Wollstonecraft writes: 'DR. FORDYCE'S sermons have long made a part of a young woman's library; nay, girls at school are allowed to read them; but I should instantly dismiss them from my pupil's, if I wished to strengthen her understanding, by leading her to form sound principles on a broad basis; or, were I only anxious to cultivate her taste; though they must be allowed to contain many sensible observations.' (p. 207). This is treated in Chapter Five which is directly titled 'Animaderversions of some of the writers who have rendered women objects of pity, bordering on contempt.'

at Netherfield, Caroline lectures Elizabeth and Bingley on the attributes of the Accomplished Woman:

> A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expression, or the word will be but half deserved. (p. 39).

After Darcy cheekily inserts the quality of 'extensive reading', Elizabeth echoes what surely must be the readers' sentiments: 'I am no longer surprised at your knowing *only* six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing *any*'. (p. 39).

As with the rejection of Fordyce's sermons, Austen here is taking aim at a whole range of conduct books that remained popular during the 18th and 19th centuries. The tendency of such books was to prescribe advice to women on education or 'accomplishments' as well as general conduct.[6]

Social realism

Austen balances her use of parody and burlesque with a considerable amount of social realism. As with all her other novels, *Pride and Prejudice* provides the reader with a wealth of information of the customs, habits and socio-economic situations of the middle and upper classes. The focus on the minutiae of incomes, houses and social hierarchy have been discussed elsewhere in the **Themes** section. Other aspects of Austen's realism include psychological realism and the portrayal of social customs. Both aspects are in evidence in the following example, where Elizabeth and Mrs. Gardiner visit Georgiana and Bingley's sisters at Pemberley:

> Elizabeth soon saw that she was herself closely watched by Miss Bingley, and that she could not speak a word, especially to Miss Darcy, without calling her attention. This observation would not have prevented her from trying to talk to the latter, had they not been seated at an inconvenient distance; but she was not sorry to be spared the necessity of saying much. Her own thoughts were employing her. She expected every moment that some of the gentlemen would enter the room. She wished, she feared that the master of the house might be amongst them; and whether she wished or feared it most, she could scarcely determine. After sitting in this manner a quarter of an hour, without hearing Miss Bingley's voice, Elizabeth was roused by receiving from her a cold enquiry after the health of her family. She answered with equal indifference and brevity, and the other said no more.
>
> The next variation which their visit afforded was produced by the entrance of servants with cold meat, cake, a variety of all the finest fruits in season; but this did not take place till after many a significant look and smile from Mrs. Annesley to Miss Darcy had been given, to remind her of her post. There was now employment for the whole party; for though they could not all talk, the could all eat; and the beautiful pyramids of grapes, nectarines, and peaches, soon collected them around the table. (p. 256).

The passage allows the reader detailed insights into Elizabeth's thoughts, the uncivil behavior of Miss Bingley, the shyness of Georgiana, and the overall awkwardness of the visit. But it also details, with stage-direction-like precision, the placement of characters relative to each other, the length of time passing, and who is speaking and when. The mounting tension is broken by the arrival of food and we are beholden to Austen to understand that a morning call, at an estate such as Pemberley, would be accompanied by lavish amounts of (what was then considered) exotic fruits, and the interesting collation of other foods that include both cake and cold meat!

Epistolary form

As mentioned earlier, *Pride and Prejudice's* first incarnation, *First Impressions*, was in the form of an epistolary novel. *Lady Susan* remains the one complete short work of Austen in this genre. Made popular by Samuel Richardson, and his hugely popular *Clarissa* and *Pamela*, the epistolary form, is simply a series of letters from one character to another. What it lacks in the form of narration is gleaned from the obvious emergence of the moral worth of each character as expressed in the letters. In choosing to preserve some letters, Austen adds a

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[6] Such conduct books that Austen also may have encountered include *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* by John Gregory (1774), *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* by Hester Chapone (1773) and *The Whole Duty of Woman* (1753). There is evidence that Austen read some conduct books and some with approval. A letter exists where Austen discusses Thomas Gisborne's *An Enquiry in the Duties of the Female Sex* (1805). She writes to her sister 'I am glad you recommended Gisborne, for having begun, I am pleased with it, and I had quite determined not to read it.' What probably attracted Austen to this book is Gisborne's more forward-thinking approach that distinguishes him from many of his contemporaries; Gisborne praises women's 'quickness of perception' and 'fertility of invention'.

further layer to characters whose writing echoes, or underlines what we already know of them. Lydia's letter to Mrs. Foster at the time of her supposed elopement is intemperate and thoughtless; Mr. Collins' letters are pompous and ridiculous; Mrs. Gardiner's are thoughtful and considerate; and Elizabeth's letters, particularly her last, are witty and full of mirth.

The epistolary form also allowed Austen to construct the plot so that Lydia's sin is one step removed, off stage in Brighton and later London. The letters that fly back and forth at this point of the novel's crisis, therefore, have the added effect of creating a buffer or barrier from immorality, preserving the overall social propriety of the novel.

Close study

Elizabeth's walk to Netherfield (chapter 7, p. 33)

> In Meryton they parted; the two youngest repaired to the lodgings of one of the officers' wives, and Elizabeth continued her walk alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ancles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise.
>
> She was shewn into the breakfast-parlour, where all but Jane were assembled, and where her appearance created a great deal of surprise.—That she should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by herself, was almost incredible to Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and Elizabeth was convinced that they held her in contempt for it. She was received, however, very politely by them; and in their brother's manners there was something better than politeness; there was good humour and kindness.—Mr. Darcy said very little, and Mr. Hurst nothing at all. The former was divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the occasion's justifying her coming so far alone. The latter was thinking only of his breakfast.

In a novel in which the primary action takes place indoors, where social custom and etiquette dictate and, of course, restrict much of the behavior of the characters, Elizabeth's lone trip to Netherfield is highly important. Firstly, it symbolises Elizabeth's ability to step, literally, outside of social conventions when she feels it is right to do so; and in this case, the urgency to see her ill sister, for Elizabeth, outweighs the social impropriety of an unannounced visit on foot. The spirit of her activity and independence has certainly marked out Elizabeth as one of Austen's most celebrated 'proto-feminist' characters.

Secondly, this passage aligns Elizabeth with the natural world and the physicality of the natural world. Of all the characters in the novel, it is Elizabeth who is most frequently seen alone in nature, or, at least in the cultivated parks and grounds of Rosings and Pemberley, and the paths and environs of Longbourn. Elizabeth's own healthful physicality is emphasised in this chapter, her 'jumping' and 'springing' brings a natural glow to her face that creates the first tension in Darcy between physical attraction and social repulsion. This social repulsion is not related to class in this instance, but in Elizabeth's unconventional conduct. There are only three characters to whom Austen ascribes the negative pejorative term 'wild' in the novel: Lydia, Wickham and, at least in the early chapters, Elizabeth. Wildness in all three is associated with convention breaking, but also hints at untamed sexuality; the 'high animal spirits' (p. 45) and 'wild giddiness' (p. 206) of Lydia hints at licentiousness, as does the fact that Wickham, according to Mrs. Reynolds, 'has turned out very wild' (p. 237). After her walk, Bingley's sisters exclaim that Elizabeth 'really looked almost wild.' (p. 36) criticizing her appearance 'her hair, so untidy, so blowsy' and 'her petticoat, six inches deep in mud.' (p. 36) While the reader is led to reject this negative judgement of the sisters, there is indeed some truth to the negative ascription. Shortly afterwards, when Mrs. Bennet makes her ill-advised visit to Netherfield she scolds Elizabeth's witticisms, warning her 'not [to] run on in that wild manner that you are suffered to do at home' (p. 42). Again, while the reader is now taught to reject any and all of Mrs. Bennet's pronouncements, there is some truth here. Throughout the course of the novel, Elizabeth will tame her 'wildness'—her lively independent spirit, whilst championed by her author, will nevertheless be given the valuable gifts of regulation and proportion.

Finally, this scene is significant as it presents, in microcosm, the intermixing of the middle classes and the spirit of enterprise, independence and energy with the upper classes. The drawing room scenes at Netherfield are portrayed as highly formal, somewhat stilted. The rhythms of the house are dictated by well-worn traditions. Elizabeth's uninvited entry literally stirs everyone up; she will go on to question their opinions on certain subjects and directly challenge Darcy's view of the world. Elizabeth is thus portrayed as an outsider who can and will question the upper

class, feeling able to do so as the term ‘gentleman’s daughter’—so far as Elizabeth and her creator are concerned—allows her to feel their equals. Elizabeth’s spirited independence offers Darcy, the Pemberley estate and, by extension, the aristocracy, the chance to modernise and legitimise its place in the world without threatening to detract from its position on the top of the social hierarchy. Elizabeth, as an individual of newer values—and the middle classes as a whole— can offer what could be crudely described as ‘hybrid vigour’. In the real world of Austen, this ‘vigour’ often came in the form of money—families who had made their money in trade marrying into an aristocratic family in declining fortunes. For Austen, the vigour is moral, intellectual and physical. Had Darcy married the choice of his mother and aunt, Anne de Bourgh, the strong implication is one of physical degeneracy of the upper class. Anne, who is ‘thin and small’, ‘sickly and cross’, ‘pale and sickly’, chronically enervated, untalented and a mere cypher of her mother, is a savage caricature of the upper class. Austen may well have been influenced by Jonathon Swift who, in *Gulliver’s Travels*, jested that ‘the true Marks of noble Blood’ are ‘a weak diseased Body, a meager countenance, and sallow Complexion’ (quoted by William Christie, p. 146). Elizabeth’s physical beauty and strength are thus a valuable commodity—perhaps, somewhat helped by Mr. Bennet’s own choice of a neighborhood beauty somewhat lower down on the social pecking order. Furthermore, Darcy needs the independent, questioning and spirit of Elizabeth to grow as a person. He later explains himself: ‘As a child I was taught what was *right*, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit.’ (p. 349).

Had Darcy married a Caroline Bingley, these worst faults would only be encouraged. But being challenged by Elizabeth allows Darcy to better himself: ‘By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions …’ (p. 349).

Suggested classroom activities

- Underline all of the verbs in the passage above (p. 33). How do these verbs contribute to our understanding of Elizabeth’s character?
- What is the significance of Elizabeth arriving at Netherfield in an untidy and dirty state? • How is each character revealed in this scene through their behaviour and words?
- Describe the contrast Austen sets up between Elizabeth and Bingley’s sisters in this scene?
- Would Elizabeth’s walk make a good front cover for the novel? Explain your reasoning.
- Discuss the term ‘proto-feminist.’ In what ways does this scene contribute to a reading of Elizabeth as a ‘proto-feminist’ character?
- In this scene, Jane is so ill she is bedridden, while Elizabeth is, by contrast robustly healthy. Describe the differences between Jane and Elizabeth.
- Which other of the Bennet sisters would have made the walk to Netherfield? What does this say about their characters?
- Some critics ascribe hidden motives for Elizabeth’s walk, arguing it reveals a subconscious attraction to Darcy. Do you agree with this reading? Why or why not?
- Explain why neither Anne de Bourgh nor Caroline Bingley would have made a suitable match for Mr. Darcy.

Darcy and Elizabeth at Rosings (chapter 31, pp. 170-1)

“Pray let me hear what you have to accuse him of” cried Colonel Fitzwilliam. “I should like to know how he behaves among strangers.”

“You shall hear then—but prepare yourself for something very dreadful. The first time of my ever seeing him in Hertfordshire, you must know, was at a ball—and at this ball, what do you think he did? He danced only four dances! I’m sorry to pain you—but so it was. He danced only four dances, though gentlemen were scarce; and, to my certain knowledge, more than one young lady was sitting down in want of a partner. Mr. Darcy, you cannot deny the fact.”

“I had not at that time the honour of knowing any lady in the assembly beyond my own party.”

“True; and nobody can ever be introduced in a ball-room. Well, Colonel Fitzwilliam, what do I play next? My fingers await your orders.”

“Perhaps,” said Darcy, “I should have judged better, had I sought an introduction, but I am ill qualified to recommend myself to strangers.”

“Shall we ask your cousin the reason of this?” said Elizabeth, still addressing Colonel Fitzwilliam. “Shall we ask him why a man of sense and education, and who has lived in the world, is ill-qualified to recommend himself to strangers?”

“I can answer your question,” said Fitzwilliam, “without applying to him. It is because he will not give himself the trouble.”

> "I certainly have not the talent which some people possess," said Darcy, "of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns, as I often see done."
>
> "My fingers," said Elizabeth, "do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women's do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault—because I would not take the trouble of practising. It is not that I do not believe my fingers as capable as any other woman's of superior execution."
>
> Darcy smiled and said. "You are perfectly right. You have employed your time much better. No one admitted to the privilege of hearing you, can think anything wanting. We neither of us perform to strangers."

Darcy and Elizabeth's acquaintance has been characterised by intense conversations—the subject of which is the character of the other. The intensity and interest is of course the clue that they are destined to become a couple and the barbed, but insightful conversations are now the hallmark of every pair, in every romantic comedy, since Austen cast the mold of the genre. This exchange at Rosings works as a progression of previous sustained conversations about where each has commented on the other's character. In the first conversation, in the evening at Netherfield, the conversation heats up into the exclamation points of accusation. Elizabeth accuses Darcy of 'a propensity to hate everybody' (p. 57) and Darcy accuses Elizabeth of 'wilfully ... misunderstand[ing] them.' There is truth in both statements and until each can understand the veracity of these accusations, the plot will not be resolved. In the Rosings conversation above, while the tone takes the form of banter, helped along by the good-natured Colonel Fitzwilliam, there are obvious clues that show deeper progression in their relationship. Elizabeth reviews the awkward beginnings of their first encounter at the Meryton assembly, turning the insult of Darcy's slight, as she has already done with others, into a humorous anecdote. Darcy, as he has done on former occasions, shows a willingness to reflect on or explain his behavior—of not having the talent of easily conversing with others—an explanation which, at this stage, Elizabeth is unable to acknowledge. She rejoins with a witty metaphor on practising the piano. Darcy, she claims, could have the talent of recommending himself to strangers, if he practised the art—and we will later see Darcy attempting this in earnest in their encounter at Pemberley, and his good manners towards both Elizabeth and the formerly despised Gardiners. At the same time, Elizabeth, at Pemberley is reviewing the 'wilful misunderstanding' she had of this man, and the plot would have moved to a quick conclusion of a proposal, and marriage, were it not for the complication of the Lydia-Wickham affair. Returning to this conversation at Rosings, Darcy is ignorant of Elizabeth's disdain and dislike and is, at this point of time, resolving on whether he should propose to the lady he so admires, despite her inferior rank. Austen had previously said of Elizabeth that 'there was a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody' (p. 51) and, reading over this encounter, one could see why Darcy would be encouraged. Austen characterises Elizabeth's rebukes as amusing and indeed playful, thus, a reader can conclude that in assuming a flirtation, Darcy is not being completely obtuse. Choosing to discuss Darcy's character in a lighthearted manner is the stuff of flirtation. Darcy is encouraged. His intimate 'we neither of us perform to strangers' carries the obvious message that she is performing (and here he means talking) to him, who is no longer a stranger to him, nor he to her. Just as their first intense exchange at Netherfield is broken up by Caroline Bingley, who rightly senses that an inordinate amount of interest lies behind the insults, so too this conversation is abruptly ended by Lady Catherine, 'who called out to know what they were talking of.' (p. 171). The gatekeepers to class, Caroline Bingley and Lady Catherine, are both thereby deliberately used by Austen to signify their wish to disrupt Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship.

Questions

- Why do you think that Austen chose to write this scene almost entirely in dialogue?
- Looking at this passage, how does a character's dialogue reveal essential parts of their nature?
- Ask the class to rewrite this scene in close third person. Divide into groups so that some write from Elizabeth's perspective, some from Darcy's, and some from Colonel Fitzwilliam's. What further information do we get about the characters and their feelings after this exercise?
- Compare the Rosings exchange to Elizabeth and Darcy's first 'intense' conversation at Netherfield. What are the similarities in terms of language used, characters' feelings, etc? What are the differences?
- Compare the Rosings exchange to the proposal scene in Chapter 34. There are marked differences in language and style. What are they?

Elizabeth advising her father (chapter 41, pp. 222-3)

As for Elizabeth herself, this invitation was so far from exciting in her the same feelings as in her mother and Lydia, that she considered it as the death-warrant of all possibility of common sense for the latter; and detestable as such a step must make her were it known, she could not help secretly advising her father not to let her go. She represented to him all the improprieties of Lydia's general behavior, the little advantage she could derive from the friendship of such a woman as Mrs. Forster, and the probability of her being yet more imprudent with such a companion at Brighton, where the temptations must be greater than at home. He heard her attentively and then said,

"Lydia will never be easy till she has exposed herself in some public place or other, and we can never expect her to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to her family as under the present circumstances."

"If you were aware," said Elizabeth, "of the very great disadvantage to us all, which must arise from the public notice of Lydia's unguarded and imprudent manner; nay which has already arisen from it, I am sure you would judge differently in the affair."

"Already arisen!" repeated Mr. Bennet. "What, has she frightened away some of your lovers? Poor little Lizzy! But do not be cast down. Such squeamish youths as cannot bear to be connected with a little absurdity, are not worth a regret. Come, let me see the list of the pitiful fellows who have been kept aloof by Lydia's folly."

"Indeed you are mistaken. I have no such injuries to resent. It is not of peculiar, but of general evils, which I am now complaining. Our importance, our respectability in the world, must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character. Excuse me—for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her character will be fixed, and she will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made herself and her family ridiculous. A flirt too, in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person; and from the ignorance and emptiness of her mind, wholly unable to ward off any portion of that universal contempt which her rage for admiration will excite. In this danger Kitty is also comprehended. She will follow wherever Lydia leads. Vain, ignorant, idle and absolutely uncontrouled! Oh! my dear father, can you suppose it possible that they will not be censured and despised wherever they are known, and that their sisters will not be often involved in the disgrace?"

Even as a favourite daughter who has enjoyed some element of understanding and intellectual sympathy with her father, Elizabeth's actions here are unusual and extraordinarily bold for the times. It was not the place of daughters to advise their fathers in any matters, but particularly matters of proper conduct, in Regency England. However, Elizabeth's frank language—'I must speak plainly' as he 'will not take the trouble of checking her'—borders on a stinging reprimand for the negligent, absent father. Nor is she put off by her father's attempt to temper the matter with a little humour, in fact she redoubles her efforts after her father's intervention. Moreover, Mr. Bennet's humour, 'a few squeamish youths' being put off by Lydia's actions, is uncomfortably accurate. Darcy's intervention between the probable engagement between Bingley and Jane is driven, not so much by the lack of family connection, but by a general lack of impropriety of the majority of the family. In his letter he writes: 'The situation of your mother's family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison of that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father.—Pardon me.—It pains me to offend you.' (p. 193).

It is clear that Elizabeth would not have intervened were it not for her acknowledgement of the truth behind Darcy's observations: 'When she came to that part of the letter, in which her family were mentioned, in terms of such mortifying, yet merited reproach, her sense of shame was severe. The justice of the charge struck her too forcibly for denial ...' (p. 202).

So it is the newly awakened Elizabeth, who 'never knew herself' until she read Darcy's letter, who is now also awakened to the faults of her beloved father, and of course, Darcy's 'merited reproach' are subtextually present in Elizabeth's own reproach in her advice to her father.

The passage also shows Elizabeth assuming leadership of Longbourn, a house which will be later described as 'a family so deranged' (p. 266) and also promotes the idea that the two more deserving Bennet girls must escape such derangement to establish domestic felicity elsewhere.

Questions and activities

- Read further on in the passage where Mr. Bennet says 'Do not make yourself uneasy, my love. Whenever you and Jane are known, you must be respected and valued' (p. 223) and compare this to Mr. Darcy's commendation of Elizabeth and Jane apart from their family. What is the similarity? The differences?
- Why does Mr. Bennet refuse to listen to Elizabeth's advice? What does this reveal about his character?
- Find the section where Mr. Bennet acknowledges that Elizabeth was right, and that he should have followed her advice. What does this further reveal about Mr. Bennet's character?
- Kitty and Mary Bennet are 'improved' by the end of the novel. Find the section where their future fates are mentioned. What are the reasons for their 'improvement'?
- Apart from recognising the truth behind Mr. Darcy's 'merited approach' about her family, what other reasons does Elizabeth have to advise her father against Lydia's going to Brighton?
- Examine Elizabeth's summary of Lydia's character. How does Lydia's subsequent behavior, both in London and then once married in Longbourn, bear out Elizabeth's sentiments about her youngest sister?
- Draw up a table of the Bennet family. List the family members' weaknesses and strengths.
- How were Elizabeth and her sisters very nearly 'involved in the disgrace'? What personal and economic impacts does Lydia's disgrace entail?
- Re-examine the passage and underline all the negative adjectives ascribed to Lydia and Kitty. Make a list of these words. Do any of these words apply to other members of the Bennet family?
- How does this passage force us to reassess the character of Mr. Bennet; to what extent should Mr. and Mrs. Bennet also be blamed for Lydia's behavior?

Further activities

Having taught themes, style, structure and characterisation, teachers might want to try one or more of the following activities to reinforce and test students' knowledge leading up to the analytic response.

Class debates

Students love hearing from other students and obviously can engage in the text further by staging informal class debates. Some possible topics include:

- Elizabeth shows all the traits of being a 'proto-feminist' heroine.
- Mr. Bennet is a bad father.
- Darcy bosses Bingley around because he is his social superior.
- Mrs. Bennet's concerns are legitimate and are given unfair treatment by the narrator.
- Elizabeth only marries Darcy for his money.

Group work

Divide the class into six groups that represent the six houses of the novel: Longbourn, Netherfield, Hunsford, Cheapside, Rosings, Pemberley.

- Students find a Google image they think best represents the house. Why choose this image? Around this image students should insert quotes from the novel.
- What key ideas are represented with the house, e.g. landed gentry, trade, etc?
- Each group presents their ideas and image to the class—ideally the images will be printed off. If that's not possible, have the image projected on screen.
- Each group to send one member to the front of the class with their house (or just the name of the house written on a piece of paper.)
- Students to order themselves in terms of financial hierarchy, highest to lowest. There will be some interesting disputes. Is Rosings a richer estate than Pemberley? (It is probably highest in status as Lady Catherine is a titled aristocrat whereas the Darcys are not.)

In small groups create:

- A timeline of the events covered in the novel
- A relationship tree of the main characters using the principle houses.

Book cover activity

In pairs, students explore the many versions of book covers of *Pride and Prejudice.* Each pair to select two covers and paste them onto a word document or Google Doc to be shared with the class. There are stunning and amusing variations so try to ensure that a fair sample is chosen. Students should answer the following questions when presenting their book covers to the class.

- Why do you think this cover was chosen by the publisher?
- What theme/characters/ideas are given prominence?
- Judging the book by the cover, what do you think the story would be about? And would you read it?
- What images would you recommend go on the cover of *Pride and Prejudice?* Justify your response.

After the presentations, a general class reflection could consider questions concerning the most common theme of the covers, the different representations of Elizabeth (and Darcy).

As an extension activity, students could create/design their own book covers and present their rationale for their choice in a short written explanation.

Think, pair, share - quotation resource

Distribute key characters to different students in class. At least two students should have the same character, but initially work alone. Ask students to find five key quotes for that character and, on the basis of these, think of five key adjectives to describe the character. They should work alone on a Word document as this will be later pasted onto one Google Doc that the teacher will create. Students then come together in pairs to share the work, first together, and then onto the Google Doc for the benefit of the whole class.

Characters	Five quotes	Five adjectives
Elizabeth		
Darcy		
Mrs. Bennet		
Mr. Bennet, etc...		

Quote bank class exercise

Students create and memorise their own quote bank on a Google Doc or any form that can be accessed, edited and projected to the whole class. The class then discuss, either as a whole cohort, in a group or individually, the following: the context of the quote (what, where, who); the theme/world view that could be paired with the quote; the language of the quote (ironic, serious, humorous, hyperbolic). A chart is supplied below with some examples.

Quote	Context	Theme/World view	Language
'Till this moment, I never knew myself.' (p. 202)	Elizabeth after reading Darcy's letter understands she has been very wrong about both Darcy and Wickham	First impressions, pride	Earnest, ardent
'Mary wished to say something ... but knew not how.' (p. 9)	Mr. Bennet asks for his daughter's opinion as 'a lady of deep reflection'	The unideal family life at Longbourn – (wider theme of community)	Ironic, humorous
'Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?' (p. 338)	Lady Catherine visits Elizabeth to demand an end to a supposed engagement between Elizabeth and Darcy	Upper class bias/ privilege	Hyperbolic, parodic, burlesque, humorous

Teaching advice for the Creative Outcome

Teachers can help students understand close third person by using the following activity that moves from nearly purely omniscient to close third person. This activity is taken from John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction*.

1. It was winter of 1853. A large man stepped out of a doorway.
2. Henry J. Warburton had never much cared for snowstorms.
3. Henry hated snowstorms.
4. God, how he hated these damn snowstorms.
5. Snow. Under your collar, down inside your shoes, freezing, and plugging up your miserable soul.

Gardner explains that in order to get to level five, authors have to take readers through levels 1 or 2; a reader can then understand that while the author is still narrating, they are pretty much in the hearts and minds of their character. This is what the above exercise would look like in Austen's words:

1. 'Elizabeth Bennet had been obliged, by the scarcity of gentlemen, to sit down for two dances' (p. 13).
2. 'Mr. Darcy walked off; and Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feelings towards him.' (p. 14).
3. 'She told the story however with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous.' (p. 14)
4. In vain did Elizabeth endeavor to check the rapidity of her mother's words ... for to her inexpressible vexation, she could perceive that the chief of it was overheard by Mr. Darcy, who sat opposite them. (p. 97).
5. 'Elizabeth's mind was too full for conversation ... She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty been so little counteracted with awkward taste.' (p. 235).

At level 1 we view Elizabeth objectively. At level two her feelings are reported on. By level 3 we get a more intimate description of Elizabeth's feelings paired with a greater description of her actions. By level 4 the narrator is taking us into a withheld utterance, getting closer to Elizabeth's consciousness. And by level 5 we are wholly within Elizabeth's consciousness, and this consciousness is merged with the narrator.

Peer edit – writing in the style of Austen

Teachers may want to use a peer review checklist for initial writing:

- Are there examples of language typical of the period? If so, what are they?
- Is free indirect discourse used, where the language of the omniscient narrator 'echoes' that of a character? If so give an example.
- Is there any 'indirect reporting' of a character's speech? (Another aspect of, sometimes identical with, free indirect discourse). For example, Mr. Collins on pages 64 and 163 (as discussed in the **Language and style** section) or Mrs. Bennet and Lady Catherine on page 333.
- Are character traits displayed through both behaviours and dialogue? Give examples (show, don't tell).
- Are social conventions and attitudes gently mocked by the narrator? E.g. 'For a single man, in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.'
- Is there evidence of irony in the text (where the **literal** meaning is different to an **implied** or **actual** meaning)—as when the narrator tells us 'he [Mr. Bennet] thought it time to have some conversation with his guest, and therefore started a subject in which he expected him [Mr. Collins] to shine, by observing that he seemed very fortunate in his patroness.' (p. 65). Mr. Collins clearly does **not shine** but is rather verbose and longwinded on the subject. Find other examples.
- Is there some humour (Austen is meant to be, at times, very funny). This is usually provided by the irony or parody. Give examples.
- Are the characters 'behaving' in ways that are consistent to the novel? Explain why or why not this is the case.
- Is there a fair balance of dialogue with narration? Is the narrative too 'dialogue driven' (i.e. completely dominated by dialogue?)
- If set in the period, is their evidence of further historical accuracy in details such as dress, furnishings, dances, food, etc?

Individual or group activities

- Teacher to prepare a list of quotes from the novel. Students to identify which quotes are in the form of close third person.
- Teacher to test students' understanding of close third person by preparing a series of first-person quotes and then asking student to rewrite these in third person. Some examples below
  - I was mortified by Darcy's rude behavior towards me at the Meryton Ball.
  - I was never so bewitched by any woman as I was by her.
  - I parted from him convinced, that whether married or single, he would always by my model for the amiable and pleasing.
  - In seeing Bingley, my thoughts naturally flew to Jane, and oh! how ardently did I long to know, whether any of his were directed in a like manner.
  - I was convinced now that Miss Bingley's original dislike of me had originated in jealousy, and I could not help feeling how unwelcome my appearance at Pemberley must be to her.

Key quotes

> **Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honorable provision for well-educated women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. (p. 120).**

The dark realism behind Charlotte's decision reflects a bitter truth that surely Austen herself, as a well-educated woman of small fortune canvasses fully in many of her novels.[7] For Charlotte Lucas, like the Bennet daughters, the threat of looming spinsterhood, and attendant poverty is very real. Charlotte chooses the expedient option of a comfortable home and secure financial future even knowing that her husband 'was neither sensible nor agreeable' and that 'his society was irksome, and his attachment to her ... imaginary' (p. 120). Austen's straightforward tone in explaining Charlotte's choice reflects Charlotte's own business-like attitude, but moreover, Austen's sober treatment of this character—she is not a figure of fun, although her husband is—does lead the reader to respect her decision. Elizabeth's initial disapproval and disgust is therefore initially out of step with both the narrator and the reader.

> **There are very few people whom I really love, and still fewer of whom I think well. The more I see of the world the more I am dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistencies of all human characters. (p. 133).**

Elizabeth is speaking to Jane after the shock announcement of Charlotte Lucas' engagement to Mr. Collins, and Mr. Bingley's defection to London. However, it also acts a presentiment for the bigger revelation about Wickham's character and even more so, Elizabeth's re-evaluation of both herself and Mr. Darcy. This is just one of many examples of the tête-à-têtes between the two sisters who, despite their significant difference, remain close and turn to each other for guidance throughout the novel. Here Elizabeth is also reflecting on Jane's 'sweetness and disinterestedness' (p. 132) in her attempts to grapple with, and rationally understand, Mr. Bingley's actions. Elizabeth, of course, will later learn that Bingley's inconsistency has been the result of Mr. Darcy's intervention.

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[7] There is the looming prospect of spinsterhood for the twenty-seven year old Anne Elliot in *Persuasion;* the potential future of the spinster-governess hangs over Jane Fairfax in *Emma*, and the poverty of her aunt, the Miss Bates, shows a bleak potential future. Jane Austen herself wrote 'Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor—which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony.' (Letter to Fanny Knight, 23 March 1817.)

> **... what delight! What felicity! You give me fresh life and vigour. Adieu to disappointment and spleen. What are men to rocks and mountains? (p. 152).**

Elizabeth is reacting with relish at the prospect of a tour of the Lakes District with her uncle and aunt; a tour which, of course, will be later curtailed to Derbyshire and the all-important visit to Pemberley. Elizabeth's natural liveliness of spirit is on show here. She has just been romantically disappointed by Wickham, who has turned his attentions to Miss King and her ten thousand pounds. However, Elizabeth's readiness to rationalise his choice— 'handsome young men must have something to live on, as well as the plain' (p. 148)—does indicate that her partiality to Wickham was rather fleeting. The more grievous disappointment is Elizabeth's concerns for Jane and her ongoing hurt at Bingley's defection. As her aunt wisely puts it, 'Poor Jane'! I am sorry for her, because, with her disposition, she may not get over it immediately. It had better have happened to *you*, Lizzy; you would have laughed yourself out of it sooner.' (p. 139). It is this very ability of Elizabeth's to rouse herself that is on display in the above quote.

> **You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner. (p. 188).**

In the celebrated proposal scene, Darcy is led through his ritual-like abasement. 'He *spoke* of apprehension and anxiety, but his countenance expressed real security.' (p. 188). To add to the insult of his smug assurance, Darcy has just confessed his determination to separate Bingley from Jane: 'Towards *him* I have been kinder than towards myself.' (p. 187) because the Bennet family's 'condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own' (p. 188). Elizabeth retaliates with the verbal slap-down quoted above, followed with the knock-out blow that 'I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry.' (p. 188) The reader cheers Elizabeth on, because Darcy really has behaved exactly like the snobbish prat most of the world had thought him to be. Of course, this will begin Darcy's journey towards a reinvention of self. His subsequent letter of explanation which casts a softer rationalisation over his feelings, and adds to it the entire history of the sordid Wickham affair, crucially awakens Elizabeth from her own vanity and pride.

> **Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted? (p. 338).**

Lady Catherine comes calling to stamp out 'The upstart pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or fortune.' (p. 337). Pemberley will be tainted not only with a mistress of lower rank, but with connections to the villainous Wickham. Just as in her spirited defense of herself in the proposal scene, Elizabeth rises to the occasion and leaves Lady Catherine with no reassurances and will not shrink beneath the intimidation of rank. As discussed earlier, the spiritedness of Elizabeth's defense, her assertion that as a 'gentleman's daughter' (p. 337) she is as eligible to marry Mr. Darcy, represents the aspirations of the middle classes promoted by the text. Lady Catherine is seen as anachronistic and marginal to a new and commendable spirit of the age, embodied in the independently minded and energetic Elizabeth and also in her Aunt and Uncle—whose enterprise in trade has not tainted their good manners and good sense. Lady Catherine's shrill insistence upon the authority of rank, is quite clearly about the preservation of that rank in the face of a threatened attenuation of its power. If Darcy marries Anne de Bourgh, the upper class can circle its wagons around its exclusive perimeter for a little longer. However, as discussed elsewhere, the ongoing relevance and very existence of the upper class did require the influx of new families—primarily in terms of money gained from trade—and in this case, in the new and free spirit of independence of the middle classes that Elizabeth embodies.

Analytical text response

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to produce an analytical interpretation in a sustained essay. Some of the key skills required are an understanding of the world of the text and the explicit and implied values it expresses, and the way authors create meaning and build the world of the text through structure, conventions and language. Students also need to use textual evidence appropriately to justify analytical responses. Below are some suggested essay topics. The **Further activities** section above outlines some strategies for teachers to use with students when working towards this outcome.

- 'One of the central themes of *Pride and Prejudice* is love and marriage, and yet, passion and desire are absent in the novel.' Discuss.
- Was it inevitable that Elizabeth would eventually re-evaluate her feelings towards Darcy?
- 'Although Mrs. Bennet is a figure of fun, her concerns for her daughters and their futures are very real.' To what extent do you agree?
- How does Austen use place to illuminate her central characters?
- "Till this moment, I never knew myself."

  Is the impact of a lack of self- knowledge at the heart of this novel?
- Discuss the representation of marriage in the novel.
- 'While they are friends, Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy have a very unequal relationship.' Do you agree?
- 'Ultimately, Darcy and Elizabeth are a perfect match.' Do you agree?
- How does *Pride and Prejudice* illuminate the changing nature of the class system in the society described within this novel?

Creative text response

The Study Design allows the Creative text response in Outcome 1 to be presented in written or oral form. It also requires a written explanation of the decisions involved in creating the response. On completion of this Unit, students should be able to respond creatively to a text and comment on the connections between the text and the response. Students develop an understanding of the various ways in which authors craft texts. They reflect critically upon their own responses as they relate to the text and discuss the purpose and context of their creations. The suggested word length for written responses is 800-1000 words although this is a guideline only. As the Statement of Intention is worth one quarter of the total of 30 marks, teacher guidelines as to word length (which is 300-500 words) and timing of this element of assessment should be developed accordingly. The following suggestions allow students to fulfil the Outcome within a manageable timeframe. These prompts have been arranged in order of difficulty and challenge. I would not recommend 5 or 6 for struggling students. The **Further activities** section above outlines some strategies for teachers to use with students when working towards this Outcome.

- **Write a key scene from another character's perspective utilising close third person.** For example, students may wish to explore Darcy's first impressions of the neighborhood at the Meryton Assembly, or, for that matter, those of Caroline Bingley. Students could explore Caroline's growing jealousy by revisiting Elizabeth's first visit to Netherfield through Caroline's eyes, using close third person. Students could have great fun writing Mr. Collins' first introduction at Longbourn as he sizes up one of the Bennet girls for his future wife. The possibilities are endless.
- **Elaborate on a character and work into a selected scene from the text.** Here a few possible examples. Students remain fascinated with the decision of Charlotte Lucas. Students could use close third person to further explore a scene from Charlotte's point of view. This may be her own perspective of Mr. Collins' proposal to her, or her first days at Hunsford, or her observations on Darcy and Elizabeth.

- **Create an additional scene or add to an existing one.** For example, the celebrated 1995 BBC miniseries (adapted by Andrew Davies) adds additional scenes to the Pemberley chapter to both humanise Darcy and to heat up the impending encounter between Elizabeth and Darcy. The famous 'Darcy in the duckpond' scene remains close to the hearts and minds of fans of this series. Teachers may want to show this section of the series to show how authors or directors can take liberties with texts in order to emphasise certain elements. Other potential scenes could be the ones that take place 'off stage'—Lydia's elopement with Wickham is one possibility.
- **Rewrite a scene in epistolary form.** *Pride and Prejudice* was originally an epistolary novel and key elements of this genre exist in Austen's final version. This creative option will allow students to explore the difference between prose narration and the epistolary form. Examples of scenes that could be reworked in epistolary form include: Mr. Collins' proposal to Elizabeth and her reply (and perhaps his counter reply); letters between Charlotte and Elizabeth when Charlotte first goes into Kent; Elizabeth may well have replied to Darcy's letter or explanation with a letter of her own.
- **Reframe a character: For example, rewrite a particular character casting them in a more positive light.** For example, the 2005 film (dir. Joe White, but otherwise known as the Keira Knightley version) does much to reform the character of Mrs. Bennet. The text of this film takes Mrs. Bennet's concerns seriously and much of Austen's original caricature of an hysterical and shallow woman is simply omitted. Similarly, this film version makes some attempts to cast a sympathetic light on Mary Bennet. Once again, most of the comical absurdities Austen writes into this character are omitted, and Mary's striving intellectualism is taken more seriously and considered more worthy.
- **Create an original piece of writing, presented in a manner consistent with the style and context of the original text.** This may take students entirely away from both the period and the genre. However, students may use their interest and understanding of the romantic comedy genre to create a scene that is both a parody and a tribute to this genre.

Oral creative options

While the above options could be adapted to an oral form, here are four further options designed specifically for an Oral creative. These options may well suit students who enjoy acting, drama and theatre studies

- **Elizabeth's epiphany scene.** Students could create a soliloquy based on Elizabeth's epiphany scene. There are, of course, a few key quotes that could be worked into an original dialogue ('But vanity, not love, has been my folly.' or 'Till this moment, I never knew myself.' (p. 202).
- **Elizabeth's Pemberley scene.** Students could create a soliloquy based on Elizabeth's first views of Pemberley. As with the above option, a few key quotes could be worked into the student's original work, for example, 'And of this place ... I might have been mistress!' (p. 236).
- **Mr. Bennet introduces his family.** An opportunity to emulate Austen's irony and satire, students could create a monologue where Mr. Bennet introduces his family to an imagined and impartial audience (as in a play). Mr. Bennet could frankly canvass his opinions of his wife, his five daughters, but also his own state in life and his own shortcomings.
- **Lady Catherine de Bourgh continues her rant.** Frustrated and infuriated after her interview with Elizabeth, Lady Catherine returns to Rosings to vent her fury. Perhaps her audience is her daughter, or poor Mrs. Jenkinson, or maybe it is a soliloquy. Students not only have the opportunity to ruthlessly parody Lady Catherine's snobbery, but they will also be able to explore the threat Darcy's marriage to a lowly Bennet poses to this gatekeeper of aristocratic privilege.

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Further reading

Free access to Tony Tanner's essay here: <http://oldemc.english.ucsb.edu/emc-courses/JaneAusten-2011/Articles/TannerPP.pdf>

An interesting blog in relation to Tanner's essay can be found here: <http://sesquipadalianmusings.blogspot.com/2011/02/tony-tanner-on-pride-and-prejudice.html>

Extracts from Fordyce's *Sermons for Young Women* can be found here: <http://individual.utoronto.ca/dftaylor/Fordyce_Sermons.pdf >

Extracts from Wollstonecraft's treatment of Fordyce in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* can be found here: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eccodemo/K046614.0001.001/1:7.5.2?rgn=div3;view=fulltext>

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