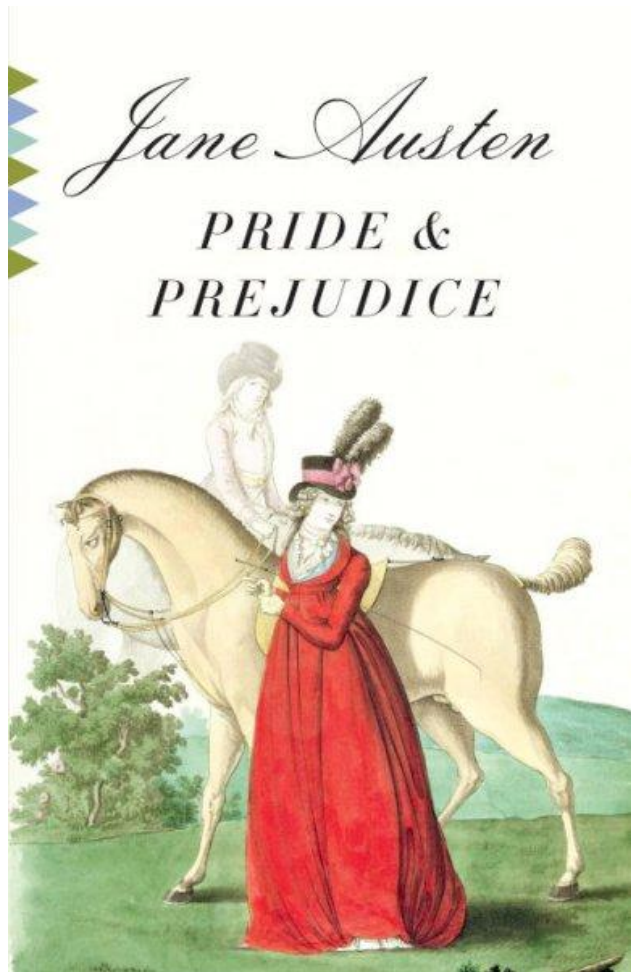


Ann Arbor District Library: Book Club to Go Discussion Guide

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1308859>

About the Book



For over 150 years, *Pride And Prejudice* has remained one of the most popular novels in the English language. Jane Austen herself called this brilliant work her "own darling child." *Pride And Prejudice*, the story of Mrs. Bennet's attempts to marry off her five daughters is one of the best-loved and most enduring classics in English literature. Excitement fizzes through the Bennet household at Longbourn in Hertfordshire when young, eligible Mr. Charles Bingley rents the fine house nearby. He may have sisters, but he also has male friends, and one of these -- the haughty, and even wealthier, Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy -- irks the vivacious Elizabeth Bennet, the second of the Bennet girls. She annoys him. Which is how we know they must one day marry. The romantic clash between the opinionated Elizabeth and Darcy is a splendid rendition of civilized sparring. As the characters dance a delicate quadrille of flirtation and intrigue, Jane Austen's radiantly caustic wit and keen observation sparkle.

Source: The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature

A novel by Jane Austen, published anonymously in three volumes in 1813. The narrative, which Austen initially titled "First Impressions," describes the clash between Elizabeth Bennet, the daughter of a country gentleman, and Fitzwilliam Darcy, a rich and aristocratic landowner. Austen reverses the convention of first impressions: "pride" of rank and fortune, and "prejudice" against Elizabeth's inferiority of family, hold Darcy aloof; while Elizabeth is equally fired both by the pride of self-respect and by prejudice against Darcy's snobbery. Ultimately, they come together in love and self-understanding.

About the Author Source: *Literature Resource Center*

<http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books>

Jane Austen is one of the few novelists in world literature who is regarded as a “classic” and yet is widely read. Austen is the only novelist before Charles Dickens who still has a significant popular readership, and her fictional world—seen as an idyllic bygone time and place unlike and preferable to, the present—has entered into popular literacy culture.

Jane Austen was born into the rural professional middle class. Her father, George Austen (1731-1805), was a country clergyman at Steventon; her mother, Cassandra Leigh Austen (1739-1827), was from a higher social rank, minor gentry related distantly to titled people. There was a great deal of reading aloud in the Austen household. Reading aloud was considered a highly valuable professional and social skill. Jane Austen was helped by her father to select from his five-hundred-volume library. It was not surprising in such a family for Jane Austen to take to writing before she was even in her teens.

The education of Austen and her sister was not nearly as thorough and systematic as that offered their brothers. While the men would have to prepare for a profession and therefore spend their formative years accumulating intellectual and moral capital for the future, the only career open to women of the Austens’ class was that of wife and mother. The sisters were prepared accordingly with some training in “accomplishments,” that is, “elegant” skills such as music, drawing, dancing, and comportment. Jane Austen acquired a good knowledge of the literature and culture that were thought valuable at the time, she had a modest talent for music and she loved dancing.

Until 1801 Austen lived in her family home at Steventon, reading the literature of the day, rereading her favorite authors, maintaining her local visiting network, discussing the characters and vicissitudes of new acquaintances and old friends, visiting her brother Edward and his family in Kent, dancing at balls given by the local gentry, accompanying her family to Bath for the recreations and social life of an elegant spa town, and keeping up with issues of the day.

In December 1795 she fell in love herself, with Thomas Langlois Lefroy, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, who was visiting his uncle and aunt. Recognizing that the young man would be disinherited if he married the daughter of a penniless clergyman, Madam Lefroy cut short the courtship by sending her nephew away.

Austen began several novels in the latter half of the 1790’s, though they were not published for some years, and then they were much altered. In 1795 she wrote a story titled “Elinor and Marianne,” and began to revise it two years later in third-person narrative form as the novel that would be published in 1811 as *Sense and Sensibility*. In 1796 and 1797 she worked on a novel titled “First Impressions,” later revised and published in 1813 as *Pride and Prejudice*. In June 1813, five months after *Pride and Prejudice* was published, Austen completed a new novel, begun in February 1811, *Mansfield Park: A Novel*. Late in January 1814, four months before *Mansfield*

Park came out, Austen began work on *Emma*, and she completed it fourteen months later in March 1815, and which was published in December of 1815. A few months after she finished *Emma*, Austen began *Persuasion* and finished it a year later. In January 1817 Austen began drafting a new novel and worked on it until March, when she was too ill to continue. Extracts were published in 1871 by her nephew who called it *Sandition*.

Austen fell seriously ill in March 1817, and in May she was taken to consult a surgeon in Winchester. Attended by her faithful sister, Cassandra, she rallied from time to time, and even wrote a comic poem to mark St. Swithin's Day, July 15, but she died three days later, early in the morning. She was buried in Winchester Cathedral on the 24th of July.

Review

Jane Austen's perfect comedy of manners--one of the most popular novels of all time--features splendidly civilized sparring between the proud Mr. Darcy and the prejudiced Elizabeth Bennet as they play out their spirited courtship in a series of eighteenth-century drawing-room intrigues. "*Pride and Prejudice* seems as vital today as ever," writes Anna Quindlen in her introduction to the Modern Library edition. "It is a pure joy to read." Eudora Welty agrees: "The gaiety is unextinguished, the irony has kept its bite, the reasoning is still sweet, the sparkle undiminished. [It is] irresistible and as nearly flawless as any fiction could be."

Amazon.com

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

Next to the exhortation at the beginning of *Moby-Dick*, "Call me Ishmael," the first sentence of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* must be among the most quoted in literature. And certainly what Melville did for whaling Austen does for marriage--tracing the intricacies (not to mention the economics) of 19th-century British mating rituals with a sure hand and an unblinking eye. As usual, Austen trains her sights on a country village and a few families--in this case, the Bennets, the Philips, and the Lucases. Into their midst comes Mr. Bingley, a single man of good fortune, and his friend, Mr. Darcy, who is even richer. Mrs. Bennet, who married above her station, sees their arrival as an opportunity to marry off at least one of her five daughters. Bingley is complaisant and easily charmed by the eldest Bennet girl, Jane; Darcy, however, is harder to please. Put off by Mrs. Bennet's vulgarity and the untoward behavior of the three younger daughters, he is unable to see the true worth of the older girls, Jane and Elizabeth. His excessive pride offends Lizzy, who is more than willing to believe the worst that other people have to say of him; when George Wickham, a soldier stationed in the village, does indeed have a discreditable tale to tell, his words fall on fertile ground.

Having set up the central misunderstanding of the novel, Austen then brings in her cast of fascinating secondary characters: Mr. Collins, the sycophantic clergyman who aspires to Lizzy's hand but settles for her best friend, Charlotte, instead; Lady

Catherine de Bourgh, Mr. Darcy's insufferably snobbish aunt; and the Gardiners, Jane and Elizabeth's low-born but noble-hearted aunt and uncle. Some of Austen's best comedy comes from mixing and matching these representatives of different classes and economic strata, demonstrating the hypocrisy at the heart of so many social interactions. And though the novel is rife with romantic misunderstandings, rejected proposals, disastrous elopements, and a requisite happy ending for those who deserve one, Austen never gets so carried away with the romance that she loses sight of the hard economic realities of 19th-century matrimonial maneuvering. Good marriages for penniless girls such as the Bennets are hard to come by, and even Lizzy, who comes to sincerely value Mr. Darcy, remarks when asked when she first began to love him: "It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley." She may be joking, but there's more than a little truth to her sentiment, as well. Jane Austen considered Elizabeth Bennet "as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print". Readers of *Pride and Prejudice* would be hard-pressed to disagree.

Literary Criticism

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "ambivalence" as "the coexistence in one person of the emotional attitudes of love and hate, or other opposite feelings, towards the same object or situation," and this concept would seem to apply precisely to *Pride and Prejudice*. During the first half of the novel, the central couple, Elizabeth and Darcy, are held together by just such contradictory feelings. Like Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*, each is the one the other loves to hate--and hates to love. And, like Beatrice and Benedick, the two lovers are matched in every way, including disdain for the other, and each finds the other a fascinating and inescapable object of attention. Yet that unwilling attraction to the other makes each hate the other as a threat to his or her pride and emotional independence. But one lover's expression of this hatred only increases the other's fascination; the power of the fascination increases the threat, which intensifies the expressions of hatred. This vicious circle can only be broken when the lovers fully accept their love and dismiss their hatred--that is, when their feelings for each other are no longer ambivalent.

Yet "ambivalence" is a word which entered the language only in this century, so it is well to be cautious in applying it to *Pride and Prejudice*. Not only was Jane Austen's novel composed almost 200 years ago, but in it she seems to attack love-as-attraction, a notion presupposed in the idea of emotional ambivalence. We know that the first version of *Pride and Prejudice*, written in 1796-97, was called "First Impressions"; though Jane Austen dropped the title before her novel was published in 1813 (another novel with that title had been published in 1801), she suggests why she chose the original title late in the novel, after Elizabeth has seen the change in Darcy's manners at Pemberley and feels it can only be due to her influence: "If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of 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 defence, 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." Like *Sense and Sensibility*, the one novel that precedes it in Jane Austen's career, *Pride and Prejudice* seems designed to discredit romantic love, or love at first sight, and to elevate instead "a less interesting mode of attachment": love grounded in a knowledge of the other's character.

Apart from the question of authorial intention, there is another reason for caution: many of Austen's most persuasive critics see no such ambivalence in the attitudes of Elizabeth and Darcy towards each other. True, many readers have clearly delighted in the lovers' ambivalence, whether or not the term was in existence to describe it. The anonymous reviewer of the novel in *The British Critic* for March, 1813, for instance, says of Elizabeth, "She is in fact the Beatrice of the tale; and falls in love on much the same principles of contrariety." Writing in 1917, Reginald Farrer argued that, as in *Emma*, the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice* is "subconsciously ... in love with" the hero from the start--but that in the earlier novel the author failed to make her heroine's real feelings clear. And several modern critics consider Darcy's and Elizabeth's feelings towards each other as ambivalent, though none, to my knowledge, uses the term; David Monaghan, for example, notes that Elizabeth's acts of rudeness to Darcy "derive from an unconscious need to deny that, for all his faults, she finds Darcy attractive."⁵ On the other hand, many acute modern commentators find no such depth psychology in *Pride and Prejudice*. Susan Morgan, for example, says, "For much of the story, Mr. Darcy cares for Elizabeth in spite of herself, and she does not care for him at all."⁶ And Joseph Wiesenfarth says much the same: "Darcy comes to think that Elizabeth loves him whereas she could not care less for him because of the way she feels about his treatment of Jane and of Wickham." Howard S. Babb says of Elizabeth that "the opposition of her whole nature to Darcy" brings about "the chief dramatic effect of the story: overwhelming surprise at his first proposal." And Marilyn Butler, in her convincing account of Jane Austen's moral thinking, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, suggests that Jane Austen meant to ridicule the whole notion of love at first sight by offering hate at first sight: "It is clear that to her love at first sight and hate at first sight are essentially the same. Both are emotional responses, built on insufficient or wrong evidence, and fostered by pride or complacency toward the unreliable subjective consciousness." Thus, she believes, the second half of the novel is necessarily drawn out: "Jane Austen has to allow time ... for Elizabeth to change her emotional antipathy to Darcy into a predisposition to love him."

Butler, Babb, Wiesenfarth, and Morgan are all primarily concerned with tracing the moral changes within Austen's protagonists; they analyze moral patterns embedded within Austen's plot, characters, and authorial commentary and show little interest in psychological analysis. But *Pride and Prejudice* is comic, and comedy has a both/and rather than an either/or vision. The novel invites us to see in its protagonists both a moral pattern and a psychological state, just as its plot shows Elizabeth and Darcy each combining, by the end, the apparent opposites of pride and humility, just as Elizabeth learns to combine her sister's charity with her own judgment, just as the marriage of Darcy and Elizabeth unites the unalloyed calculation embodied in the hasty and furtive union of Collins and Charlotte with the unalloyed impulse embodied in the equally hasty and furtive union of Wickham and Lydia. This harmonizing, inclusive vision has irony as its technical instrument. What is stated is less important

than what is implied. Jane Austen was speaking of *Pride and Prejudice* when, in a letter to her sister, she adapted a couplet from Scott to describe her style: "I do not write for such dull elves / As have not a great deal of ingenuity themselves." Thus any one act or speech in the novel may carry both a moral and a psychological sense, and each sense will then support the other. Elizabeth, for instance, tells Jane at the start of Volume Two that "There are few people whom I really love, and fewer still of whom I think well" (p. 135). Morally, Elizabeth is engaged in protecting herself from her own sharp intelligence: she has been humiliated by Charlotte's defection, but rather than asking why she has been so mistaken about Charlotte's character, she considers Charlotte's choice of Collins unaccountable and the world unsatisfactory. At the same time, she reminds us of her psychological predicament: she cannot think well of the people (Darcy included) whom she loves. The moral and psychological implications do not conflict, but illuminate and enrich each other.

Therefore, the question of authorial intention should be approached with this sense of the novel's comic and ironic inclusiveness in mind. Jane Austen may well be presenting in Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship both an ideal form of love, one grounded in a well-tested respect for each other's character, and a more immediate and magnetic attraction. If we think about the passage in which she defends Elizabeth's "less interesting mode of attachment," several counterbalancing implications emerge. For one thing, the novel shows that Bingley and Jane loved each other deeply and truly from their first meeting. "Oh! she is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld," the smitten Bingley says of Jane at the Meryton assembly (p. 11). Furthermore, Elizabeth did not actually give romantic love much of a trial in her partiality for Wickham, since he appeals to Elizabeth, not in himself, but as a weapon she can use in her merry war against Darcy. When we are told, "Elizabeth thought with pleasure of dancing a great deal with Wickham," the sentence continues, "and of seeing a confirmation of everything in Mr. Darcy's looks and behaviour" (p. 86). If her response to Wickham shows the unreliability of immediate physical attraction as a basis for love, it also shows the strength of the unacknowledged attraction that binds Elizabeth to Darcy. And if Jane Austen's defence of "the other less interesting mode of attachment" insists that the rational love between her central pair possesses dignity, serenity, and security, that does not preclude their having reached this plateau in Volume Three by a less than smooth and straightforward path during Volumes One and Two. Their attainment of rational love is all the more impressive when we realize the deeply irrational impulses from which it has grown.

In fact, virtually all of Jane Austen's pronouncements on Elizabeth's feelings towards Darcy occur in the second half of the novel: once his letter has been received, Darcy himself is largely absent--but Elizabeth's need to define her attitude towards him is pressing, and so we follow Elizabeth as she reviews "the whole of their acquaintance, so full of contradictions and contrarities" (p. 279) and moves from credence to respect to approval to esteem to gratitude to affection and the realization that "he was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her" (p. 312). But in the first half of the novel, Darcy, with all his dispositions and talents, is before Elizabeth, at least for the most part, and there is no occasion for her to define her feelings about him, since those feelings are of no real interest to her. If she notices during her stay at Netherfield that Mr. Darcy looks at her frequently, she assumes it

must be caused by marked disapproval, and decides, "She liked him too little to care for his approbation" (p. 51). Apart from this one ironic summary--ironic because Elizabeth cannot see how much she does like Darcy, how much she does care for his approbation--the novel's hero remains during these scenes, to the heroine, simply "that abominable Mr. Darcy" (p. 144).

In short, despite the novel's original title and the author's comment upon the nature of love, nothing in the novel invalidates, and much encourages, the view that Jane Austen invites us to contemplate a hero and heroine who get to know each other by loving to hate and hating to love. When, halfway through the novel, Elizabeth is forced by Darcy's letter to look back over her thoughts and actions, she castigates herself in very suggestive terms: "How humiliating is this discovery!--Yet, how just a humiliation!--Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly" (p. 208). Elizabeth, it would seem, even in her great moment of self-recognition, is still protecting herself from full self-knowledge. A further clue to the presence of irony here lies in Elizabeth's self-accusation of vanity, and not pride. In the fifth chapter, Mary Bennet proudly distinguishes between these two apparent synonyms: "Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us" (p. 20); Darcy continues this distinction six chapters later, replying, when Elizabeth obliquely accuses him of vanity and pride: "Yes, vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride--where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will always be under good regulation" (p. 57). In short, Elizabeth should accuse herself of pride in her own superiority of mind, not vanity. Like Darcy, she is proud to be vain--and too proud to admit, at least yet, that she has been so wretchedly blind just because she has been in love.¹¹ Love, not vanity, has been her folly, but this fool will persist in her folly and become wise.

Elizabeth and Darcy, then, neither love nor hate at first sight, but fall quickly into a love/hate relationship which they do not recognize as such. Elizabeth admits something of the sort when Jane asks her at the end of the novel how long she has loved Darcy: "It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began" (p. 373). Darcy, by the way, makes the same confession to Elizabeth: "I was in the middle, before I knew I had begun" (p. 380). This ambivalence is highlighted by the symmetrical way in which each lover's feelings mirror the other's during the three main sections of the novel: the episodes leading up to Darcy's proposal; the proposal scene and ensuing letter (which together form the novel's center); and the whole second half of the novel, which follows from this central episode.

During the first section of the novel, the two lovers seem to be in different predicaments: Darcy is aware that he loves, and makes conscious advances toward Elizabeth; she is unaware of the love she feels for him, and her advances toward him are unintentional. At the same time, though, the lovers, as lovers, are mirror images of each other: each loves and yet struggles to conquer that love. If Darcy finds, after spending two days in Elizabeth's company at Netherfield, that "She attracted him more than he liked" (p. 60), Elizabeth has exactly the same divided response to him, although she does not realize it. And so she flirts with Darcy: she teases him, taunts him, quarrels with his statements, throws his past words in his face, points out his character defects, criticizes his treatment of his friends and his enemies, takes delight

in vexing him--all without realizing that her assumption of easy freedom and intimate concern encourages him to believe that she sees his love and welcomes it. Like Emma with Mr. Elton, Elizabeth must make the humiliating discovery that she has led her suitor on to propose: "I believed you to be wishing, expecting my addresses," Darcy tells her at the novel's end (p. 396). There is ironic accuracy, then, in Darcy's statement to her at Rosings: "I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance long enough to know, that you find great enjoyment in expressing opinions which in fact are not your own" (p. 174). Jane Austen leaves Elizabeth's viewpoint frequently during Volume One to give us glimpses of Darcy's growing love and of his struggle against that love; these glimpses force us to see Elizabeth's comic ignorance, not only of Darcy's inner conflict, but, by implication, of her own as well.¹²

Darcy's proposal culminates and epitomizes this ambivalent courtship. His offer of marriage is meant to express his love, but unintentionally expresses hatred: he confesses that he proposes against his will, against his reason, and even against his character (p. 169). Elizabeth, on the other hand, is vehement in her anger and intends to wound, yet her very vehemence is a sign that she feels more than she realizes. This is part of the point in Austen's careful paralleling of Mr. Collins' proposal to Elizabeth with Darcy's. Elizabeth feels no anger towards Collins, no matter how insulting he becomes (and he does tell her that she is unlikely ever to receive another offer of marriage, since her expectations only amount to one thousand pounds in the four per cents). Collins is a fool, and Elizabeth knows that "His regard for her was quite imaginary" (p. 112). On the other hand, she realizes that Darcy is more worthy of her and does, in his way, love her, but with a love that undervalues her own, and this is why she is so hurt and vindictive in their great confrontation.

Elizabeth's accusations instigate Darcy to write his long letter to her. It is this letter and not Darcy's proposal which constitutes "the chief dramatic effect of the story" (to use the words of Babb quoted above): Elizabeth may feel overwhelming surprise when Darcy proposes, but we hardly do, since Jane Austen has prepared us for it by the narrative shifts to Darcy's viewpoint during Volume One and by an increasingly obvious series of hints during the scenes at Rosings (a series something like those signs of Elton's intentions which Emma resolutely ignores). The letter, however, is completely unexpected, and creates a decisive change in the relationship of Elizabeth and Darcy. And, like the proposal, the letter epitomizes the ambivalent feelings of both the speaker and his auditor. Darcy begins in bitter hauteur--"Be not alarmed, Madam, on receiving this letter, by the apprehension of its containing any repetition of those sentiments, or renewal of those offers, which were last night so disgusting to you" (p. 197)--and the tone of wounded pride, of vindicating himself at her expense, is clear when he appeals to her justice and refers to the letter as "the explanation which is due to myself" (p. 197). But, despite appearances, Darcy's letter is really a love letter, as his candor, his scrupulous fairness, his respect for Elizabeth's judgment, the care with which he accounts for his actions, and the confidential revelation about Wickham's attempted seduction of his sister all confess. The letter ends with a sentence, "I will only add, God bless you," which Elizabeth considers to be "charity itself" (p. 368). If the letter is written out of divided feelings, Elizabeth responds to it with "a contrariety of emotion ... Her feelings as she read were scarcely to be defined" (p. 204). At a first reading, "It was all insolence and pride" (p. 204); she is then

indignant, incredulous, ashamed, humiliated in turn. After two hours of wandering in the Hunsford lane, "giving way to every variety of thought," she returns home, fatigued by "a change so sudden and so important" (p. 209). That change is summarized by Elizabeth's reflections after she meets Darcy again at Pemberley some four months later: "She lay awake two whole hours trying to make [her feelings] out. She certainly did not hate him. Hatred had vanished long ago, and she had almost as long been ashamed of ever feeling a dislike against him, that could be so called" (p. 265).

These last words suggest the change which occurs within both Elizabeth and Darcy during the second half of the novel: not only does hatred of the other vanish, but its place is taken by shame and humiliation, hatred turned inward. Elizabeth cries, "How despicably have I acted!" (p. 208), about her treatment of Darcy, and he says of his proposal to her, "I cannot think of it without abhorrence" (p. 367). In the first half of the novel, each directed hatred outward in order to protect a love turned inward, a self-love: what Darcy says in the closing pages is equally true of Elizabeth: "I was ... allowed, encouraged, almost taught ... to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to wish at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own" (p. 369). In the second half, each of them, by a painful act of will caused by the need to love and be loved, reverses this emotional balance, and loves outwardly and hates inwardly. Each finds that mutual love is preferable to self-love enjoyed in isolation. By an elegant homeopathy of the emotions, the expression of hatred has driven out hatred in each case. "How you must have hated me after that evening?" Elizabeth asks Darcy at the novel's end, and he replies, "Hate you! I was angry at first, but my anger soon began to take a proper direction" (p. 369). And Darcy says that his letter contained "some expressions which might justly make you hate me" (p. 368)--but, of course, Elizabeth learns Darcy's letter by heart, studies every sentence of it, reveals it to no one, and "her anger was soon turned toward herself" (p. 189). This inner redirection causes a change in behavior, and each lover moves, tentatively and indirectly, toward the other. Darcy's manners are transformed, and he rescues the Bennet family from disgrace, even becoming best man at Wickham's marriage to Lydia; Elizabeth allows herself to be taken to Pemberley and, after meeting Darcy there, instinctively seeks his sympathy and help by telling him of Lydia's elopement (a confession which parallels and answers his unprovoked confession about his sister's relations with Wickham). And, amusingly, as love replaces ambivalence in Elizabeth and Darcy, humility and diffidence supplant pride and prejudice, so that their sparkling duels of wit give way to tongue-tied, blushing, floor-scrutinizing encounters that would make Bingley and Jane seem brash and poised by comparison. At the novel's end, the two of them, and all of us, can be grateful, not only to Lady Catherine's attempts to separate them, but to the ambivalence which drew them together.

This psychology of ambivalence is not evident in *Sense and Sensibility*¹³ or any of the obvious models for *Pride and Prejudice*, such as Fanny Burney's *Evelina*. Where did Jane Austen discover this new and rich conception? We will never know, of course, but it is interesting to speculate. The idea is consistent with the thinking of Samuel Johnson, Jane Austen's particular authority on moral and religious questions: "Inconsistencies," Imlac points out in Chapter Eight of Johnson's *Rasselas*, "cannot be

right, but, imputed to man, they may both be true." Richardson's self-divided and self-contradictory lovers--particularly Lovelace and Clarissa--may have contributed something to Jane Austen's psychology of love. Perhaps the literary precursors of Elizabeth and Darcy are the wilful heroes and heroines of stage comedy: Shakespeare's Beatrice and Benedick, but also their progeny on the Restoration and eighteenth-century stage, such as Congreve's Mirabell and Millamant. The real source for Elizabeth and Darcy, however, was probably Jane Austen's observation of actual people. Just as many, perhaps most, readers of *Pride and Prejudice* are reminded of real-life counterparts of Mr. Bennet (whose character also lacks a clear literary precedent), so versions of the Elizabeth-Darcy mating dance abound in everyday life. It is a striking fact that the Beatrice-Benedick plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* is the one story in all of Shakespeare's plays that has no known literary source. Similarly, Jane Austen might well have said of Elizabeth Bennet's contrariety of emotion what she says about her heroine at the end of *Northanger Abbey*. After explaining that Henry Tilney came to love Catherine Morland simply because he could see that she loved him, Jane Austen adds, "It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own."

Source: Stovel, Bruce. "A Contrariety of Emotion': Jane Austen's Ambivalent Lovers in Pride and Prejudice." The International Fiction Review 14.1 (Winter 1987): 27-33. Rpt. in Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism. Ed. Russel Whitaker. Vol. 150. Detroit: Gale, 2005. Literature Resource Center. <http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books>

Discussion Questions *Source: ReadingGroupGuides.com*

1. Scholars have described this book as a very conservative text. Did you find it so? What sort of position do you see it taking on the class system? It has also been described as Austen's most idealistic book. What do you suppose is meant by that?
2. Would you have liked the book as well if Jane were its heroine? Have you ever seen a movie version in which the woman playing Jane was, as Austen imaged her, truly more beautiful than the woman playing Elizabeth?
3. In *Pride and Prejudice* marriage serves many functions. It is a romantic union, a financial merger, and a vehicle for social regulation. Scholar and writer Mary Poovey said that Austen's goal "is to make propriety and romantic desire absolutely congruent." Think about all the marriages in the book with respect to how well they are filling those functions. Is marriage today still an institution of social regulation?
4. Austen suggests that in order to marry well a woman must be pretty, respectable, and have money. In the world of *Pride and Prejudice*, which of these is most important? Spare a thought for some of the unmarried women in the book, Mary and Kitty Bennet, Miss de Bourgh, Miss Georgiana Darcy, poor, disappointed Caroline Bingley. Which of them do you picture marrying some day? Which of them do you picture marrying well?

5. Was Charlotte Lucas right to marry Reverend Collins?
6. What are your feelings about Mr. Bennet? Is he a good father? A good husband? A good man?
7. Darcy says that one of Wickham's motivations in his attempted elopement with Georgiana was revenge. What motivations might he have had for running off with Lydia? (Besides the obvious...)
8. Elizabeth Bennet says, "...people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be observed in them for ever." Do any of the characters in the book change substantially? Or do they, as Elizabeth says of Darcy, "in essentials" remain much as they ever were?
9. Elizabeth is furious with Darcy for breaking up the match between Jane and Mr. Bingley. Although he initially defends himself, she changes his mind. Later when Lady Catherine attempts to interfere in his own courtship, he describes this as unjustifiable. Should you tell a friend if you think they're about to make a big mistake romantically?

Multimedia

The Historical Context of 'Pride and Prejudice' (Radio Broadcast)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9185928>

A discussion of the novel on NPR.

Pride and Prejudice (Movie)

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1187669>

(Call number: DVD TV Pride)

The 1995 BBC adaptation. The story of lively and rebellious Elizabeth, one of five unmarried daughters living in the countryside of 19th century England, in a world where an advantageous marriage is a woman's sole occupation.

Pride and Prejudice (Movie)

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1231476>

(Call number: DVD Drama Pride)

The 1985 BBC production. The story of the lively, precocious and very eligible Bennet girls captures all the nuances of 19th century life among the English gentry, a society obsessed with profitable marriage contracts.

Pride and Prejudice (Movie)

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1263871>

(Call number: DVD Drama Pride)

The 2005 feature film. Mr. Bennet is an English gentleman living in Hertfordshire with his overbearing wife and 5 daughters. There is the beautiful Jane, the clever Elizabeth, the bookish Mary, the immature Kitty and the wild Lydia. Unfortunately, if Mr. Bennet dies their house will be inherited by a distant cousin whom they have never met. The

family's future happiness and security is dependent on the daughters making good marriages. Life is uneventful until the arrival in the neighbourhood of the rich gentleman Mr. Bingley, who rents a large house so he can spend the summer in the country. Mr Bingley brings with him his sister and the dashing, rich, but proud Mr. Darcy. Love is soon buds for one of the Bennet sisters, while another sister may have jumped to a hasty prejudgment. For the Bennet sisters many trials and tribulations stand between them and their happiness.

***Pride and Prejudice* (Movie)**

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1278134>

(Call number: DVD Drama Pride)

The 1940 feature film. Mr. Darcy sets all fair maidens' hearts aflutter, except for that of Elizabeth Bennett.

Further Reading

Jane Austen, obstinate heart: a biography by Valerie Grosvenor Myer

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1125397>

(Call number: 921 Austen)

A new biography of the English writer Austen (1775-1817) who has been afforded increased popularity with the recent filming of her novels. Drawing on her letters and those of friends and contemporaries, explores how a spinster daughter of a poor country clergyman could write so eloquently about love that she seems never to have experienced.

A Jane Austen education: how six novels taught me about love, friendship, and the things that really matter by William Deresiewicz

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1381561>

(Call number: 823.7 De)

Examinations of *Emma*: everyday matters -- *Pride and prejudice*: growing up -- *Northanger Abbey*: learning to learn -- *Mansfield Park*: being good -- *Persuasion*: true friends -- *Sense and sensibility*: falling in love -- The end of the story.

Ghosts of the gothic: Austen, Eliot, & Lawrence by Judith Wilt

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1071596>

(Call number: 823.07 Wi)

Critical examinations of renowned writers of the gothic era.

Read-Alikes *Source: NoveList*

Jane Fairfax: The Secret Story of the Second Heroine in Jane Austen's Emma
by Joan Aiken

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1005362>

(Call number: Fiction Aiken)

Jane Austen's *Emma* has been a favorite novel for Austenites since 1816. In the mid-1990s it became a favorite movie for millions of new admirers. A key reason for *Emma's* success is that the story has two heroines-Emma Woodhouse and Jane Fairfax. In Austen's novel, Jane's background is left obscure, and the turmoil

underlying her current reduced circumstances in mysterious. At last we learn her whole story in Joan Aiken's superb retelling of *Emma*-this time from Jane Fairfax's point of view.

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1012880>

(Call number: Fiction Bronte)

Based on the 1848 third edition of Bronte's classic. Presents the novel along with five critical essays from the feminist, psychoanalytic, deconstruction, cultural, and Marxist perspectives. Each essay is accompanied by a succinct introduction to the history, principles, and practice of the critical perspective, and the text and essays are complemented by an introduction providing biographical and historical contexts for Bronte and *Jane Eyre*.

Master and Commander by Patrick O'Brian

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1051069>

(Call number: Fiction O'Brian)

The beginning to the sweeping Aubrey/Maturin series and inspiration for the major new motion picture starring Russell Crowe. "The best sea story I have ever read."-Sir Francis Chichester.

Summaries from AADL.org Catalog

Extra!

Have background music from the Regency era playing in the background during the discussion—this is the era of Haydn, Beethoven, and Brahms--and be sure to serve tea!

