Pride and Prejudice

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**Book Basics**

**AUTHOR**
Jane Austen

**YEAR PUBLISHED**
1813

**GENRE**
Romance

**PERSPECTIVE AND NARRATOR**

*Pride and Prejudice* has a third-person omniscient narrator. Austen often employs a narrative technique called free indirect discourse, in which the line between the narrator's and the characters' voices seems to blur, giving deep insight into characters' inner thoughts.

**TENSE**

*Pride and Prejudice* is told primarily in the past tense.

**ABOUT THE TITLE**

The title alludes to two traits demonstrated by the main characters, Fitzwilliam Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet. Darcy's superior manner and Elizabeth's initial judgments about his character lead to misunderstandings, open conflict, and, eventually, reconciliation.

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**In Context**

**Historical Content**

Jane Austen wrote *Pride and Prejudice* in England's Georgian era, named for a series of kings named George, including George III, familiar to Americans as the reigning king during the American Revolution. Austen revised the novel during the Regency era, which began in 1811, the year George III was deemed insane and his son, the eventual George IV, began ruling as regent.

During the Regency era, the French military leader Napoleon Bonaparte seemed determined to rule the world, and the English worried that his troops might cross the English Channel. As a result, militias formed throughout England. The temporary posting of the militia in Meryton, the town where much of *Pride and Prejudice* takes place, reflects this concern about invasion.

The Regency era also marked the beginning of the industrial revolution. Changes in manufacturing processes would soon bring sweeping social and economic changes to England. Because of changes in the country's economic structure, more
people had the opportunity to become truly wealthy through manufacturing and trade. In fact, one of the main characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Bingley, comes from a family that inherited its wealth from their father's business in the north of England—the seat of heavily industrial cities like Manchester. Another character, Mr. Gardiner, Elizabeth's uncle, gains upper-middle-class status through business in London. But in the early stages of industrialization, England was still an agrarian, or farming, economy. In fact, until well into the 19th century, wealth accumulated through landownership and passed down through inheritance was considered the very best kind of wealth.

**Social Context**

Landownership was a true mark of status. Anyone who owned more than approximately 300 acres of land was a member of the landed gentry and thus highly respectable. The landed gentry weren't the top of the social heap by any means. In Austen's England, the social hierarchy can be likened to a five-level pyramid, with the following classes listed in descending order, from the top tier to the bottom:

1. Royalty (kings, queens, princes, and princesses)
2. Aristocracy or nobility (dukes, marquises, earls, viscounts, and barons)
3. Upper-class gentry, including landed gentry with large estates, high-level clergy and government officials, bankers, merchants, and barristers (lawyers)
4. Middle-class gentry, including landed gentry with smaller estates, various professionals, military officers, and lower-level clergy
5. Lower and working classes

For the most part, *Pride and Prejudice* represents the interactions of characters from the middle of the pyramid—the gentry.

Austen, like the Bennet family portrayed in *Pride and Prejudice*, belonged to the educated upper-middle-class gentry. Even though the members of this class often lacked the wealth and resources of the aristocracy, they were free to socialize with them. Because only the eldest son inherited land, other sons of the landed gentry might serve in the clergy (like Austen's father) or the military. These professions are specifically represented in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Women of the gentry in the Regency period did not have careers. They did not even have legal rights—though some were beginning to discuss the topic openly. Unless a gentlewoman became a governess (a live-in tutor of wealthy children), her only acceptable role was as a wife. To attract a husband, women of the gentry were expected to accumulate a list of “accomplishments,” including being skilled in needlework, music, foreign languages, and art. To prepare for her role as wife, mother, and hostess, a gentlewoman was expected to master intricate rules of etiquette, including detailed rules for making social calls and accepting guests.

With the exception of women who were fortunate to inherit some wealth from their parents, marriage was also the only way for a woman to determine her financial destiny. By law, women had little control over their finances; money was controlled by the men of the family. Women who did not marry did not have a clear role in society. Called spinsters, they might at best be relegated to running the household of an unmarried brother. Austen herself never married. When her father died, she lived off money provided by her brothers. (Though some of her novels sold well, the cost she bore in having them published ate up her profits.)

**Literary Context**

Unlike her literary peers, Austen gave her novels everyday settings and characters who lead relatively normal lives. Her protagonists struggle with real problems—usually involving courtship and marriage—through trial and error. Her genius lay in her use of satire to ridicule the follies and vices of early 19th-century English society. The lively dialogue, sharply drawn characters, and observations in *Pride and Prejudice* have entertained generations of readers, and Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy remain among the most beloved couples in literature.

**Author Biography**

Jane Austen was born in Steventon, Hampshire, England, on December 16, 1775. She was the seventh child and second daughter of Cassandra and George Austen. Though her father was orphaned at a young age, a well-to-do uncle paid for his education at Oxford, allowing him to pursue a respectable position in society as a member of the clergy. The Austens were a close-knit family who fostered an environment of
creativity and learning. As a youth, Jane read books from their father's well-stocked library, and the siblings wrote and performed their own plays.

When Austen was in her early 20s, she wrote a novel called *First Impressions*. This was the basis for the book that eventually became *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen's father submitted *First Impressions* to a publisher, but it was rejected. Austen later revised the manuscript and changed the title. The English publisher, T. Egerton, released the book in three volumes in 1813—without identifying her as its author. The first printing of the book sold out. That year, a second edition was published, followed by a third in 1817.

*Pride and Prejudice* is Austen's most popular novel, and her personal favorite. In fact, she called it "my own darling child" and talked about its characters as real people. Through her lively protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet, and the family, friends, and social acquaintances in her orbit, Austen's novel explores themes of class, reputation, and love. Many of Austen's novels received critical recognition during her lifetime. However, it was only upon her death that her brother Henry revealed her authorship.

That death occurred on July 18, 1817, when Austen was 41. She is buried at Winchester Cathedral. Despite the enormous and continuing popularity of her books, her tombstone makes no mention of her role as a writer.

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**Characters**

### Elizabeth Bennet

Elizabeth is the second oldest of the Bennet daughters. She is highly intelligent and witty. Elizabeth is the protagonist of the novel, and many of the observations captured in the book are from her point of view. She has many positive qualities, including her bright intellect and poise in social interactions. Much of the novel is presented through her witty and insightful dialogue with other characters. Elizabeth's honest reflection on the society she inhabits enables her to see through the silly and sometimes cruel behavior of the people around her. However, she sometimes makes snap judgments about the people and situations she encounters. Because she is the protagonist of *Pride and Prejudice*, the story follows the changes in her feelings and attitudes on her road to romantic happiness.

### Fitzwilliam Darcy

Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy is a member of an aristocratic family and the master of the Pemberley estate. Like Elizabeth, Darcy is intelligent, though judgmental and proud. Also like Elizabeth, he proves himself able and willing to change. Initially, his snobbishness leads him to awkwardly propose to Elizabeth; he tells her he is doing so against his better judgment. Her rejection of his first proposal leads to a series of events that help him reevaluate the situation and become more humble. Darcy has to overcome the negative attitude of his snobbish aunt, Lady Catherine, in pursuing a marriage with Elizabeth, whose means are substantially less than his own. He also finds himself in the role of protector and hero when Lydia, the youngest Bennet sister, gets into trouble. As the novel progresses and Darcy becomes more self-aware, he also becomes more likable and sympathetic. This mirrors the change in heart demonstrated by Elizabeth as their relationship deepens and they become more open with each other.

### Jane Bennet

Jane is the eldest of the five sisters. Considered the prettiest, she is also a kind and gentle person. She and Elizabeth are very close and complement each other in certain ways. Elizabeth tends to be judgmental and analytical, while Jane is more trusting and less critical of others. It takes her time to accept that people are not always as sincere as they appear. For example, it takes her most of the novel to realize that Caroline Bingley, the sister of the man Jane loves, behaves falsely toward Jane. Jane and Charles Bingley (who is the wealthy best friend of Mr. Darcy) first meet early in the novel at the ball in Meryton, and there is an immediate attraction. Jane and Charles are similar in their cheerful, optimistic, and pleasant natures. In comparison to their best friends (Elizabeth and Darcy), Jane and Charles have a less complex relationship. Jane ultimately forms a simple and happy marriage with Charles and is satisfied with their relationship.
Mr. Bennet

Mr. Bennet, the father of five daughters, is a rather passive presence throughout the novel. He seems to be disengaged from his immediate family and prefers to amuse himself by reading and making fun of the absurdity of others. He is frequently sarcastic to his wife, for whom he appears to have little love or respect, but is genuinely fond of Elizabeth. Mr. Bennet's estate is "entailed" to his relative, Mr. Collins. This arrangement was made because the custom of the time usually required land to pass to a male heir, and Mr. and Mrs. Bennet did not produce one. Mr. Bennet has mismanaged the income, and the family's precarious financial situation puts his five daughters in the position of needing to marry well. Nonetheless, Mr. Bennet doesn't seem interested in the details of these arrangements. In his passivity, Mr. Bennet is happy to accept help from others, including his brother-in-law and Mr. Darcy, who remedy the crisis that Lydia created by eloping with Wickham. He is glad to have others intervene and not to have to deal directly with the messy business.

George Wickham

George Wickham is a lieutenant in the local militia, newly arrived in Meryton. Initially, his good looks and charming personality attract Elizabeth. Early on, Wickham tells Elizabeth that Mr. Darcy is a cruel and unfair man who has taken advantage of him. He claims that Mr. Darcy's father was kind to him, but the son has cheated him out of his inheritance. This account fits in nicely with Elizabeth's initial inclination to dislike Darcy. In the course of the novel, Elizabeth learns that Wickham has misrepresented both himself and Mr. Darcy. Indeed, Wickham is the one who has taken advantage of others, acquiring a great deal of debt. Despite his attempt to climb socially, he ends up being forced into marrying Lydia Bennet in order to prevent her social disgrace.

Charles Bingley

Charles Bingley is affable, attractive, and wealthy. His good manners make him attractive to Jane Bennet, who is equally well-mannered. However, he is easily swayed by others, especially Darcy, which leads to complications in his courtship of Jane.

Lydia Bennet

Lydia is the most undisciplined of the Bennet daughters. She is impulsive and immature. Her main interests seem to be flirtations and frivolous pursuits. Her parents do not seem interested in or inclined to discipline, and she is ever eager to find adventure and attention. She occupies as much time as possible flirting with the men of the local militia. Kitty, her sister, is happy to accompany Lydia, but it is Lydia who leads the way. Her impulsiveness leads her ultimately into an improper relationship with George Wickham. It takes the intervention of Mr. Darcy to rescue Lydia's reputation—and that of her family.
Character Map

Elizabeth Bennet
Quick-witted, lively 20-year-old

Fitzwilliam Darcy
Proud but sincere 28-year-old aristocrat

Lydia Bennet
Impulsive teenaged girl; the youngest Bennet

Jane Bennet
Kindhearted, trusting 22-year-old

Mr. Bennet
Father of five daughters; master of Longbourn

Charles Bingley
Wealthy young gentleman; rents Netherfield Park

George Wickham
Charming militia lieutenant

- Main Character
- Other Major Character
- Minor Character
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Bennet</td>
<td>Elizabeth, also known as Lizzy, is the second oldest of the five Bennet sisters and a keen observer of the personalities that interact in her social circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzwilliam Darcy</td>
<td>Darcy, or Mr. Darcy, is a wealthy and proud man who initially seems aloof and snobbish but is ultimately proven to be an honorable and generous person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Bennet</td>
<td>Jane Bennet, Elizabeth's confidante, is the eldest and loveliest of the five Bennet girls and also the most kind-hearted and trusting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Bennet</td>
<td>Mr. Bennet is a member of the lesser gentry. He has a biting wit and little interest in the emotional needs of his wife and five unmarried daughters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Bingley</td>
<td>Charles Bingley, the son of a wealthy industrialist, is Mr. Darcy's best friend. When he leases the estate of Netherfield, he sets the novel's plot in motion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia Bennet</td>
<td>Lydia, the youngest Bennet daughter, is immature, self-absorbed, and irresponsible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Wickham</td>
<td>George Wickham is a militia officer, a handsome gold digger who ends up running off with and marrying Lydia Bennet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Bennet</td>
<td>Mrs. Bennet is the frivolous wife of Mr. Bennet. The mother of five daughters, her primary concern is to find suitable—that is, wealthy—husbands for her children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Lucas</td>
<td>Charlotte is Elizabeth's dear friend. She is more pragmatic than romantic and is willing to marry for security rather than love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine Bennet</td>
<td>Catherine, also known as Kitty, is the fourth Bennet daughter. She especially enjoys joining her younger sister in flirting with soldiers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Bennet</td>
<td>Mary Bennet, the middle daughter, is less lively than her sisters and prefers to distinguish herself through accomplishments, like reading and practicing piano.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline Bingley</td>
<td>Miss Bingley is Charles's sister, a social climber who is jealous of Elizabeth's hold on Darcy and unenthusiastic about her brother's attraction to Jane, a member of the lower end of the gentry class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Collins</td>
<td>Mr. Collins, a clergyman and the Bennet cousin destined to inherit Longbourn, behaves like a pompous fool around everyone except aristocrats, whom he fawns over.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lady Catherine de Bourgh</td>
<td>Lady Catherine is a haughty noblewoman, Mr. Darcy's aunt, and the patron of Mr. Collins, having granted him the parish that provides his living.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Gardiner</td>
<td>A well-mannered example of the rising merchant class, Mr. Gardiner is Mrs. Bennet's brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Gardiner</td>
<td>Mrs. Gardiner is Mrs. Bennet's sister-in-law and is very attentive to her five Bennet nieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgiana Darcy</td>
<td>Georgiana, Mr. Darcy's sister and twelve years his junior, is a shy teenager and an accomplished musician.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir William Lucas</td>
<td>Sir William Lucas is a friend of the Bennet family, Charlotte Lucas's father, and resident of Lucas Lodge. He is an affable neighbor though a bit vain about his knighthood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Hurst</td>
<td>Mrs. Hurst is Charles Bingley's sister. She is arrogant, conceited, and married to Mr. Hurst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Hurst</td>
<td>Mr. Hurst is Charles Bingley's brother-in-law. He looks like a gentleman but is in fact only interested in eating.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Colonel Fitzwilliam

Darcy's cousin and the younger son of an earl, Colonel Fitzwilliam is a congenial character who is evidently charmed by Elizabeth Bennet.

Mrs. Philips

Mrs. Philips, Mrs. Bennet's sister and every bit as frivolous, lives in the town of Meryton, where the Bennet girls frequently visit her.

Mrs. Annesley

Mrs. Annesley is companion to Georgiana, Darcy's younger sister.

Plot Summary

A New Tenant at Netherfield

*Pride and Prejudice* opens with the news that a wealthy young man, Charles Bingley, is arriving at Netherfield Park, a large estate. The news is met with great excitement by the members of the Bennet family, who live in the neighboring estate of Longbourn, in a village of the same name. To Mrs. Bennet, the news is especially welcome. As the mother of five unmarried daughters, her most pressing goal is to see each of her offspring married. The sisters—Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Catherine (Kitty), and Lydia—are intrigued by this new arrival and thrilled when the family is invited to attend a ball where Mr. Bingley will appear.

At the ball, Jane, the eldest Bennet daughter, and Mr. Bingley form a mutual attraction. One of Mr. Bingley's friends, Fitzwilliam Darcy, also attends the ball. His aloofness and his insulting behavior toward Elizabeth, the second oldest Bennet sister, stand in contrast to Mr. Bingley's gracious and cheerful manner.

As the weeks unfold, at various events, Mr. Darcy is intrigued by Elizabeth, but she maintains a poor impression of him based on his earlier behavior. However, a courtship between Jane and Charles Bingley seems to be developing, and the Bingley sisters invite Jane to visit Netherfield. On her way there, she is caught in a rainstorm and subsequently falls ill. Elizabeth sets out for Netherfield to tend to her sister. Her appearance and stay at Netherfield creates some tension for Mr. Bingley's sister Caroline, who jealously notices Mr. Darcy's growing interest in Elizabeth. Caroline considers herself a better match for the wealthy gentleman.

Courtship and Complications

One of Mr. Bennet's cousins, Mr. Collins, visits the Bennet home. Mr. Collins, a clergyman from Hunsford, stands to inherit the Bennet estate, Longbourn. This arrangement, called an entail, is the result of laws requiring estates to be passed down to male relatives. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mr. Collins's patroness—the person who has helped him achieve his position as a clergyman—has instructed him to marry one of the Bennet daughters. He proposes to Elizabeth. She finds him pompous and obnoxious and flatly turns him down, against her own mother's wishes. Deeply offended, Mr. Collins next proposes to Elizabeth's friend Charlotte Lucas. She accepts his proposal.

The Bennet sisters meet a group of militia officers who are stationed near their home. Elizabeth becomes interested in a handsome soldier, George Wickham, who tells her about his past relationship with Mr. Darcy. Wickham explains how cruel Darcy was to him, even cheating him out of money. This information confirms Elizabeth's bad impressions of Mr. Darcy.

Mr. Darcy and the Bingleys leave Netherfield unexpectedly to go to London. Jane is upset because she had hoped her relationship with Mr. Bingley would blossom. When Jane travels to London shortly thereafter, Caroline Bingley treats her rudely, and Jane fails to see Mr. Bingley at all.

Journeys

Elizabeth travels to visit her friend Charlotte, who is now married to Mr. Collins. While visiting her friend, Elizabeth sees Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mr. Collins's patroness, who is also Mr. Darcy's aunt. During Elizabeth's visit to the Collins' home, Darcy makes several appearances. During one of his visits, he shocks Elizabeth with a clumsy marriage proposal. She refuses him, telling him that she finds his superior attitude and his intervention in Jane's affair intolerable. She also accuses him of conspiring to keep Jane and Mr. Bingley apart. Finally, she scolds him for his cruel behavior to Wickham.

After Elizabeth's refusal, Darcy reappears with a letter that explains everything. He tells her that he did encourage Bingley
to separate from Jane because he did not think they were truly serious about each other. He also reveals Wickham as a scoundrel.

Elizabeth begins to rethink her feelings about Darcy. When she arrives home, she snubs Wickham. At this time, the local militia is to relocate to Brighton. Lydia, particularly consumed by flirtation with the officers, is upset. She successfully begs her father to allow her to stay with a family friend in Brighton for the summer.

During the summer, Elizabeth goes on holiday as well, this time with her uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner. They travel to the north of England, in the neighborhood of Pemberley, Mr. Darcy's estate. Once reassured that Darcy is not anywhere nearby, Elizabeth feels free to explore Pemberley and its exquisite buildings and grounds. Just as her attitude about him becomes even more favorable, Darcy shows up unexpectedly. He treats Elizabeth and the Gardiners graciously and encourages Elizabeth to spend time with his sister, Georgiana. During the course of this visit, Elizabeth receives shocking news from home. Her youngest sister, Lydia, has apparently eloped with Wickham. Knowing that Lydia's actions could potentially disgrace the Bennet family, Elizabeth confides her news to Darcy, then rushes home.

A Scandal

Mr. Gardiner and Mr. Bennet search for Lydia and Wickham. Eventually, Gardiner locates them and reports that a benefactor has arranged for Wickham to marry Lydia in exchange for receiving an annual income, thus saving the Bennet family from scandal. The family is relieved. Elizabeth later learns that Mr. Darcy is the source of the money that will be paid to Wickham. She is mortified that her family has caused such a scandal but also touched by Darcy's intervention.

After a brief return to Longbourn, George and Lydia Wickham leave for the north of England, where Wickham is now stationed. Soon after, Mr. Bingley returns to Netherfield and seeks out Jane once again. He proposes to her, and the family is thrilled. Darcy has also reappeared and seems uncomfortable around Elizabeth. Lady Catherine de Bourgh comes to Longbourn and, to Elizabeth's astonishment, tries to extract a promise from her to refuse any proposal from her nephew. Elizabeth does not agree to this, even though no proposal has been made. A short time later, Darcy tells Elizabeth that his feelings for her have not changed, and he asks her to marry him. She gladly accepts. The two older Bennet sisters are married to the two friends and settle near each other, making a happy ending to the novel.
Introduction

1. The Bennets learn of a wealthy new neighbor, Mr. Bingley.

Rising Action

2. The Bennets attend a ball. Bingley dances with Jane.
3. Bingley's friend Darcy behaves snobbishly to Elizabeth.
4. Mr. Collins visits Longbourn in order to find a wife.
5. Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth, but she refuses him.
6. Mr. Collins proposes to Charlotte and they marry.
7. The Bingleys and Darcy depart for London. Jane is upset.
8. Elizabeth goes on holiday with the Gardiners.

Climax

9. Darcy proposes to Elizabeth, but she refuses him.

Falling Action

10. A letter from Darcy makes Elizabeth rethink prejudices.
11. Lydia runs off with Wickham. Darcy pays him to marry her.

Resolution

12. Darcy marries Elizabeth, Bingley weds Jane.
Timeline of Events

Late September
Bingley and Darcy arrive at Netherfield; Wickham arrives in Meryton.

A few days later
The Bingleys and Darcy leave Netherfield for London.

Late December
Jane goes to London with the Gardiners, hoping to see Bingley.

Late March
Elizabeth visits the Collinses, meets Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and runs into her nephew, Darcy.

Late April
After Darcy's unsuccessful proposal to Elizabeth, he writes to her about Wickham's villainy.

Late July
Elizabeth and the Gardiners go on holiday to Derbyshire, where Elizabeth encounters Darcy.

Early August
Wickham and Lydia create scandal by eloping, but Darcy bribes Wickham to marry her.

Late September
Bingley and Jane become engaged; Lady Catherine tries to ensure that Elizabeth and Darcy do not.

Early October
Darcy proposes again to Elizabeth, and she accepts.
Chapter Summaries

Any edition of Pride and Prejudice follows one of two systems for numbering chapters. Some number the chapters continuously from 1 through 60; others divide the book into three parts, beginning each part at Chapter 1.

Chapter 1

Summary

The novel opens with one of the most-quoted lines in English literature: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” The chapter then introduces the reader to the Bennet family of Longbourn, which includes Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and their five daughters, Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Catherine (Kitty), and Lydia. Mrs. Bennet announces the news that a wealthy gentleman named Charles Bingley has moved into the neighborhood, to the grand estate of Netherfield Park. Mr. Bingley is unmarried; Mrs. Bennet asks her husband to call on Mr. Bingley so that his daughters can be properly introduced to the eligible bachelor.

Analysis

With her opening line, Austen identifies the impetus for many of the events to come. Through the dialogue that follows, readers come to know Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. They learn Mrs. Bennet is singularly driven to get her daughters married, while Mr. Bennet is a more nuanced character. His “humor, reserve, and caprice” have undoubtedly served him well in dealing with his less intelligent wife. Even after 23 years of marriage, Mrs. Bennet seems oblivious to her spouse’s sarcasm.

Chapter 2

Summary

Mr. Bennet teases his family but ultimately reveals that he has indeed already called on their new neighbor. Mrs. Bennet begins her daughters engage in some light bantering about which of the sisters will be Bingley’s favorite. Mrs. Bennet begins excitedly plotting Mr. Bingley’s future visits to Longbourn.

Analysis

The conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet confirms that he enjoys being an irritant, pretending he hasn’t visited Mr. Bingley when he has. This chapter, like the last one, also reflects the importance Mrs. Bennet places on following the rules of etiquette. Now that Mr. Bennet has introduced himself to Mr. Bingley, the daughters are one step closer to an introduction as well—a key step in Mrs. Bennet’s master plan to marry one of her daughters to him.

Chapter 3

Summary

Mrs. Bennet continues to plot how to introduce her daughters to Mr. Bingley. When the young man does call on Mr. Bennet, the sisters glimpse him from a window but do not actually meet him. Bingley declines to stay for dinner that night. Mrs. Lucas, a neighbor of the Bennets, reports that Bingley is on his way to London but will be present at a ball that will soon take place in the neighborhood.

Mr. Bingley attends the Meryton ball with his unmarried sister, Caroline Bingley, as well as with his married sister and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Hurst. A friend of his, Mr. Darcy, accompanies him. The charming Mr. Bingley makes an immediate good impression on the Bennets. He seeks out Jane and dances with her twice. In contrast, Mr. Darcy seems aloof and disagreeable. Bingley encourages his friend to dance because male partners are in short supply at the ball. When Bingley urges him to dance with Elizabeth in particular, she overhears Darcy describe her as “tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me.” Mr. and Mrs. Bennet discuss Darcy’s rudeness and proceed to solidify their negative impression of him.
Analysis

The ball at Meryton brings together for the first time some of the key couples that readers will follow through the course of the novel. Elizabeth and Darcy have their first encounter, and their first impressions establish one of the main threads of the plot. Readers will note Darcy's snobbery as he speaks insultingly of the guests in general and Elizabeth in particular. She is immediately prejudiced against Darcy, both for his superior attitude and aloofness.

Charles Bingley and Jane Bennet's first encounter is much more pleasant. However, as the plot unfolds, they will have misunderstandings paralleling those between Elizabeth and Darcy.

Chapter 4

Summary

Jane and Elizabeth discuss the ball, especially Mr. Bingley's attention to Jane. Elizabeth points out how she and her sister are different in temperament. Jane is much more accepting and open to other people, perhaps blinding her to their faults. Elizabeth tends to be less open-minded and accepting of others, and she does not hesitate to express her opinions.

Simultaneously, Mr. Bingley, his sisters, and Mr. Darcy discuss the ball. Mr. Bingley found the women who attended to be lovely and charming, especially Jane Bennet. Mr. Darcy is far less complimentary, finding little beauty or fashion among the attendees. All of them, including Mr. Bingley's sisters, consider Jane to be very pretty and perhaps worth knowing.

Analysis

The aftermath of the Meryton ball provides more character insights. Elizabeth considers herself less kind and generous than her sister. She teasingly accuses Jane of being oblivious to the flaws and attitudes of others. Ironically, the criticism of obliviousness will later apply to Elizabeth as her initial impressions of Mr. Darcy and other characters evolve.

Elizabeth's reflection on the Bingley sisters illustrates attitudes about class and social mobility at the time. The narrator points out that the sisters "had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds; were in the habit of ... associating with people of rank; and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others." The Bingleys inherited their considerable wealth from their father, who earned it through "trade," or business. As members of the newly rich, they are less respected by the traditional landed gentry. This fact makes their snobbery more pronounced and, as Austen emphasizes, more irritating.

Chapter 5

Summary

During a social call, the Lucas family and the Bennets discuss the ball, especially the rude behavior of Mr. Darcy. Charlotte Lucas, a good friend of Elizabeth's, sympathizes with Elizabeth's annoyance at Darcy's behavior. However, she points out that Darcy's pride may be explained by his status. It might be understandable, she says, that a man who has such a large fortune exudes such pride. Elizabeth acknowledges this possibility and admits that she was hurt by Darcy's treatment.

Analysis

Throughout the novel, Charlotte Lucas will represent a realist's point of view about women, men, and class. Here, she gives Darcy some latitude for his seemingly superior attitude, pointing to his status as a possible excuse. Later, we will see her capitulating to a marriage of security that also reflects her acceptance of the social structure. Her own father, Sir William Lucas, has been knighted—a great honor and, until the industrial revolution, one of the only ways for a commoner to move up in the world. Although Austen paints Sir William Lucas as being a bit vain about his knighthood, her ridicule is gentle.

Chapter 6
Summary

The relationship between Jane and Elizabeth Bennet and the Bingley sisters progresses as the women of the two households make their customary visits. The Bingley sisters appear to approve of Jane, but they find Mrs. Bennet intolerable and the younger sisters dull.

At a party at Lucas Lodge, Sir William Lucas's estate, Charlotte and Elizabeth discuss Jane. While Elizabeth is pleased by Jane's modesty and discretion, Charlotte warns that Jane should make her feelings toward Bingley more obvious. After all, he needs some sign that his feelings are reciprocated.

Elizabeth does not change her initial impressions of Darcy. She does make an effort to speak with him at the party so that she does not "grow afraid of him." Later, she also performs some songs on the pianoforte, followed by her sister Mary. After the performance, when Darcy asks her to dance, she refuses, protesting that he is "all politeness." Darcy admits to Caroline that he finds Elizabeth attractive, and Caroline teases him about what a marriage to Elizabeth would entail—Mrs. Bennet as a mother-in-law.

Analysis

The conversation between Charlotte and Elizabeth about Jane highlights the fine line women of the day had to walk. They had to be discreet in courtship, protecting their ladylike reputation in order to remain marriageable, but they also had to somehow communicate their attraction to a prospective mate. As usual, Charlotte is the voice of practicality in this conversation; she is worried that Jane will lose her chance for an advantageous marriage. This discussion foreshadows a future conflict for Jane.

Elizabeth's refusal to dance with Darcy shows her self-control and her wit. She is not willing to jump at the first chance to dance with someone who had previously snubbed her, however wealthy he may be. Furthermore, she actively dislikes him. In calling Darcy "all politeness," she suggests playfully that he is only asking her out of a sense of propriety, not because of any real desire. In conversation with Caroline Bingley, Darcy reveals his changing attitude toward Elizabeth; he now finds her attractive. Caroline persists in denigrating the Bennets' lower status, probably because she is interested in the eligible Mr. Darcy for herself. Caroline Bingley's designs on Darcy will influence events to come.

Chapter 7

Summary

The chapter opens with details about Bennet's finances, including the entail of the estate to a male Bennet heir, which will prevent any of the Bennet's daughters from inheriting it. Mrs. Bennet's family had lived comfortably on her father's income as an attorney, but her money alone will not provide much for her grown children.

The latest news from the nearby town of Meryton is the arrival of the militia, whose presence fuels the excitement of the younger Bennet sisters.

Jane is invited to visit Netherfield, the Bingleys' home. Mrs. Bennet sends Jane on horseback rather than in a carriage. The weather turns rainy, which delights Mrs. Bennet. Her ulterior motive was to ensure that if the weather turned bad, Jane would have to stay longer at Netherfield. Then the Bennets receive a letter saying that Jane is ill. Elizabeth becomes worried about her sister and goes to Netherfield in order to check on her. Her three-mile trek results in Elizabeth arriving with muddy skirts. Although the Bingley sisters are polite, Elizabeth senses their disapproval of her appearance. Darcy, however, is struck by her bright complexion, the result of her vigorous walk.

Elizabeth finds Jane to be quite ill and makes arrangements to stay at Netherfield to take care of her.

Analysis

Details about Mrs. Bennet's family paint a fuller picture of the Bennets' status in society. Mr. Bennet is a member of the landed gentry, though not a very wealthy one. Mrs. Bennet's family is respectable but not landed gentry, which gives fuel to Caroline Bingley's disapproval of her—ironic, given that the Bingleys themselves, though wealthy, are not landed gentry either. In fact, they merely rent Netherfield and do not own an estate.

The arrival of the militia reflects the novel's setting at a time
when England feared a French invasion. These concerns are far from the minds of the Bennet daughters, however, who are more interested in the sudden supply of young men in town.

This chapter reveals the lengths to which Mrs. Bennet will go to ensure her daughters’ marriages. Mrs. Bennet likes the idea of Jane being stuck at Netherfield, in proximity to Charles Bingley.

Elizabeth is genuinely concerned about her sister. This reaction reveals the devotion and love that Elizabeth feels for Jane. Elizabeth’s appearance on the scene is not good news for Caroline Bingley, who is predisposed to not approve of Elizabeth because of her own growing jealousy in regard to Darcy.

Chapter 8

Summary

During dinner at Netherfield, the conversations are strained, and Elizabeth feels uncomfortable. Mr. Bingley and Darcy, however, express their admiration for Elizabeth, to Caroline’s irritation.

Analysis

The Bingley sisters continue to behave politely toward Elizabeth when in her presence, but she senses their true feelings about her; her willingness to bear an uncomfortable journey on foot may not be fitting for a proper lady. However, as the sisters make snide remarks behind Elizabeth’s back, Mr. Darcy is learning to appreciate Elizabeth in new ways. He admires her wit and conversational ability. He appreciates her ability to express her ideas clearly.

In discussions about what makes a woman accomplished, Darcy is struck by Elizabeth’s intelligence. Caroline Bingley is too ready to agree with anything he says. Against her intentions, Caroline Bingley may be helping to bring Darcy and Elizabeth together. This chapter reveals that Darcy is not one to just accept what is expected or usual—directly contrary to Elizabeth’s initial impression of him. He clearly appreciates Elizabeth, who does not seem impressed by his wealth.

Chapter 9

Summary

As Jane’s health has not improved, Mrs. Bennet decides to check on her. She, Kitty, and Lydia make the trip to Netherfield. During the visit, Elizabeth is embarrassed by her family’s behavior. Mrs. Bennet chatters incessantly, and Lydia boldly asks Bingley when he intends to host a ball. Mr. Bingley is polite about this query and answers that once Jane is well, he will.

Analysis

Here, the interaction of the Bingleys and the Bennets provides an opportunity for closer observation of the two families. Elizabeth converses with Darcy as an intellectual equal, but Mrs. Bennet overdoes things with strong opinions and her naked attempts to promote Jane over Charlotte Lucas. Lydia is rude. Elizabeth is embarrassed by her family’s behavior, but Caroline Bingley does herself no favors either, revealing her snobbishness at every turn. These developments allow Darcy to see Elizabeth more clearly. As Caroline Bingley continues to harp on her own status and express disdain for others, whether based on appearance or fortune, Elizabeth’s intelligence and grace come into focus.

Chapter 10

Summary

Elizabeth remains at Netherfield while Jane recuperates. She notes that Caroline Bingley flirts with Mr. Darcy, but he appears uninterested in her. In fact, he seems increasingly intrigued by Elizabeth’s personality and her ideas. He admits to himself his growing interest in her but is aware that his interest is limited because of her family’s lower social status.
Analysis

In this chapter, Caroline’s aggressive pursuit of Darcy becomes almost comic in its desperation. Her scheming and snobbishness serve only to cast Elizabeth as a refreshing presence for Darcy. His appreciation for Elizabeth also serves to make Darcy a more likable and sympathetic character. He is not fooled by Caroline Bingley’s self-serving comments; instead, he admires Elizabeth’s original personality and independent spirit. Once again, through her calculated actions, Caroline has perhaps caused the opposite of what she intended.

Chapter 11

Summary

At last, Jane’s health begins to improve, and she is able to join the others downstairs. Bingley seeks out her attention. Caroline asks Elizabeth to walk around the drawing room with her, presumably to get Mr. Darcy’s attention. Elizabeth and Darcy engage in an energetic and far-ranging discussion, which ends with the pair exchanging insults. Elizabeth says to Darcy, "Your defect is to hate everybody," and he responds by pointing out hers is to "willfully ... misunderstand them."

Analysis

Darcy becomes more intrigued with Elizabeth. While he seems conscious of this attraction, Elizabeth seems not to be. A telling line of dialogue occurs when Darcy says, "My good opinion once lost, is lost forever"—a self-assessment that will be put to the test in future chapters. Elizabeth, for her part, speaks bluntly to Darcy, but Darcy appears not to take offense. He is flirtatious, while Elizabeth is openly disdainful.

Chapter 12

Summary

Soon after Jane and Elizabeth arrive back home, they learn that a cousin, Mr. Collins, will be visiting. According to a legal arrangement called an entail, Mr. Collins will inherit Longbourn when Mr. Bennet dies. Because of some past disagreements, Collins wrote in a letter that he wants to make a personal visit to try to repair the relationship. He also explains that he was recently ordained as a rector in the parish of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who is his patroness. Mrs. Bennet does not completely understand the entailment and reluctantly prepares herself for the arrival of their houseguest. Mr. Collins’s arrival is
awkward. He behaves pompously and manages to insult Mrs. Bennet by mistakenly assuming that she cannot afford a cook.

Analysis

Mr. Collins is the closest male relative that Mr. Bennet has and is thus the heir to Longbourn. Entailment was a common legal arrangement meant to make sure that estates remained within the family and would not go to outsiders. This arrangement offers little comfort to the Bennet women, however, who stand to gain nothing from the arrangement. Furthermore, in the tone and substance of his letter—wordy, and full of pomposity and clichés—it's clear that Mr. Collins is an arrogant fool.

As Mr. Collins looks around the house and notices its furnishings, the reader can see that he is imagining himself among them as the future master of the home. His insult to Mrs. Bennet touches on one of her points of pride—her family's ability to employ a cook.

Chapter 14

Summary

Over dinner, Mr. Collins spends a great deal of time describing the woman who has helped him establish his career in the clergy, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. He glowingly describes the widow and her daughter, who is apparently rather sickly. As after-dinner entertainment, he attempts to read a sermon to the family, but Lydia interrupts him.

Analysis

Mr. Collins proves himself to be a ridiculous person, a nuisance, and not especially intelligent. His bragging about Lady Catherine and his insults of the household at Longbourn make him seem rather pitiful. Although he makes a living through his work as a clergyman, he is beholden to Lady Catherine.

For the Bennets, he is an unwelcome intruder who, through no real merit, will inherit Longbourn. His presence in the novel is Austen's way of pointing out the unfairness of England's inheritance laws, particularly toward women.
Summary

At the Phillips’ supper the next evening, Wickham sits next to Elizabeth and seems interested in engaging her in conversation. He reveals to her the nature of the relationship he has with Darcy. He explains that his father worked for Darcy’s father, and their sons essentially grew up together. However, at the time of the elder Mr. Darcy’s death, Wickham was denied his promised position at the rectory that the Darcy family oversees. Wickham claims that the younger Mr. Darcy did not fulfill this promise and gave the position to someone else. He claims that the younger Darcy found some kind of loophole in the arrangement that also meant Wickham did not receive the money he was promised. Wickham expresses his lack of respect for Darcy and his sister, saying that people in their neighborhood are disgusted by their pride. Elizabeth expresses outrage at the way Wickham was treated and concurs in his assessment of Darcy’s prideful attitude.

Wickham also tells Elizabeth that Lady Catherine de Bourgh is Darcy’s aunt and that Lady Catherine hopes to marry her daughter to Darcy, combining the two families’ fortunes.

Analysis

The presence of Wickham is intriguing at this point in the story. He finds in Elizabeth a sympathetic audience for his negative stories about Darcy. Elizabeth’s rapid attachment to Wickham is surprising. Although she barely knows him, she accepts his story about Darcy, which helps to solidify her increasingly negative impressions of Mr. Darcy. She may pride herself on her clear thinking, but she forms impressions far too quickly.

In this chapter, readers also learn that Lady Catherine de Bourgh is Darcy’s aunt. Darcy’s mother is an aristocrat, which means Darcy is not merely gentry but a member of the nobility. It’s no wonder, then, that Caroline Bingley finds him so attractive. It’s also no wonder that Lady Catherine would plan a marriage between her daughter and her nephew—it would keep wealth in the family, and a marriage between first cousins was considered perfectly acceptable.

Chapter 18

Summary

As it turns out, Wickham does not appear at the ball, and Elizabeth is disappointed. She wonders if his unease around Darcy led to his absence. She dances with Mr. Collins and is then surprised when Darcy asks her to dance. She accepts his offer. As they dance, Elizabeth probes him about his
relationship with Wickham, but he seems uncomfortable with the topic. He also seems unsettled by the news that there may be an engagement between his friend Charles Bingley and Jane Bennet. Meanwhile, Mr. Collins, who has discovered that Darcy is the nephew of his patroness, Lady Catherine, audaciously introduces himself to Darcy. Caroline Bingley attempts to set Elizabeth straight about Wickham's role in his falling out with Mr. Darcy. At dinner, Elizabeth's mother talks loudly to Lady Lucas about what is sure to be an impending marriage between Jane and Bingley and is overheard, to Elizabeth's dismay, by Darcy. After dinner, Mary insists on playing and singing, eliciting snickers from the Bingley sisters.

Analysis

The fact that Wickham does not appear at the ball at Netherfield, despite his earlier claim that he would not give way to Darcy, suggests he is avoiding Darcy.

Elizabeth is unsettled by her encounter with Darcy. She struggles to converse politely with Darcy because she is full of righteous anger on behalf of Wickham. When she asks Darcy whether he takes care never “to be blinded by prejudice,” she is referring to his earlier statement that his “good opinion once lost is lost forever.” Her interrogation is an example of dramatic irony, as readers have seen her own propensity to form opinions based on too little evidence. Later, when Caroline Bingley attempts to show Elizabeth another side of Wickham, Elizabeth refuses to believe it. The fact that Caroline blames Wickham's alleged bad behavior on his low birth does not help her case with Elizabeth.

Elizabeth is mortified by her family's behavior. Mr. Collins should not have introduced himself directly to Darcy, but rather waited for someone like Mr. Bennet to make the introduction. Mrs. Bennet is premature in talking loudly about Jane's engagement to Bingley—extremely premature, as it turns out. And Mary's pitiful performance makes her a laughingstock.

Chapter 19

Summary

Mr. Collins now embarks on his mission to find a wife. He surprises Elizabeth with a marriage proposal. She politely turns him down, and he persists, not believing that she is sincere in her refusal. He tells her that it is not uncommon for women to pretend to be uninterested. He repeats his offer and lists the many reasons the match would be a good idea. She insists that she is not pretending to be uninterested and indeed does not want to marry him.

Analysis

Now more than ever, Mr. Collins proves to be a ridiculous character. His idea that a proposal is a checklist of reasons for the match is laughable and completely at odds with Elizabeth's values. The actual proposal is one of the most comical moments in the novel. Collins represents a purely pragmatic view of marriage. Affection has no place in the equation. Austen's use of the ridiculous Mr. Collins as the proponent of this view underscores her antipathy toward it.

Chapter 20

Summary

Mrs. Bennet is extremely upset at the news of the thwarted marriage proposal. In her mind, a match with Mr. Collins would have been advantageous in securing her family's future at Longbourn. However, Mr. Bennet applauds Elizabeth's rejection of Mr. Collins. Even when Mrs. Bennet implores her husband to intervene, he refuses.

During this confusion in the Bennet family, Charlotte Lucas comes to visit. As the Bennets begin to relate the events of the proposal to Charlotte, Mrs. Bennet tries to recruit Charlotte to change Elizabeth's mind. Mr. Collins appears and announces that he is going to leave Longbourn shortly.

Analysis

The various reactions to Elizabeth's refusal of the marriage proposal are amusing. For Mrs. Bennet, it is a tragedy, and her reaction is typically overwrought. Mr. Bennet, always happy to counter Mrs. Bennet, is amused by the situation. And although he makes a joke of his opposition to the marriage, he means it. He can see that though it seems desirable for a daughter to
marry Collins, such a marriage would mean misery for Elizabeth. In fact, this bit of support may be one of his most responsible acts in the novel.

Chapter 21

Summary

Jane receives a letter from Caroline Bingley explaining that she and her brother will be leaving Netherfield to spend the winter in London. She adds that she thinks her brother may marry Darcy's sister, Georgiana. Naturally, Jane is upset by this news. Elizabeth attempts to comfort her, but she suspects a concerted effort is being made to keep Jane and Bingley apart.

Analysis

Jane and Elizabeth react differently to the news of Bingley's departure. True to form, Jane trusts that Caroline is a good friend and has written to her in the spirit of friendship. Elizabeth, who is more suspicious about motives, thinks that perhaps Darcy and Caroline might have other ideas in mind. She doesn't believe that Bingley doesn't love Jane. In Elizabeth's mind, Caroline may be plotting to keep the Bennet women in their place. Elizabeth has already detected Caroline's jealousy toward her, so she is suspicious of this entire matter.

Chapter 22

Summary

As the Bennets and their guest Mr. Collins dine with the Lucas family, Elizabeth is grateful to Charlotte for engaging Mr. Collins in conversation. Charlotte has her own motives for talking with Mr. Collins. Sure enough, the next day, the irrepressible Mr. Collins makes a new marriage proposal—this time to Charlotte, Elizabeth's good friend. Charlotte accepts the proposal and shares the news with Elizabeth the following morning. Charlotte explains to Elizabeth that she believes the marriage is her best chance to avoid being a spinster. She is less romantic than Elizabeth and does not think that love is an essential ingredient for marriage. Elizabeth is shocked that her friend would marry for security in the absence of love.

Analysis

Charlotte again shows her practical side by making sure she secures Mr. Collins's proposal. Elizabeth, in reacting with disappointment, is projecting her own values onto Charlotte. Charlotte has previously expressed that love is not a necessity for marriage. Elizabeth is idealistic in her desire for love in her marriage. In fact, in the absence of a good marriage, she will have limited prospects. Her family estate is going to Mr. Collins. Readers may applaud Elizabeth for her idealism. However, in early 19th-century England, it is Charlotte who represents reality. She recognizes the benefits of establishing her own future security.

Chapter 23

Summary

Mr. Lucas announces to the rest of the Bennet family his daughter's engagement to Mr. Collins. Mrs. Bennet becomes agitated. The thwarting of her wish to have Mr. Collins marry one of her daughters, combined with her annoyance that Charlotte Lucas was asked instead, lead her to fear that Charlotte will turn the Bennets out of their own home. Mrs. Bennet is also anxious about the absence of Mr. Bingley and what it means for Jane.

Analysis

In this chapter, we see Mrs. Bennet's fears and anxiety in full force. She blames Charlotte for disrupting her plan to have Mr. Collins marry one of her daughters. ("The sight of Miss Lucas was odious to her. As her successor in that house, she regarded her with jealous abhorrence.") And her fear that kindhearted Charlotte will personally turn the Bennets out of their home is evidence of her poor understanding and tendency to hysteria.
Chapter 24

Summary

A second letter from Caroline Bingley arrives. This letter makes clear that Mr. Bingley will not be returning to Netherfield from London. She also writes about the growing affection between her brother and Georgiana Darcy. Jane is distressed, especially because her mother dwells on Mr. Bingley's absence. Elizabeth becomes convinced that Darcy and Bingley's sisters have persuaded Bingley to keep away from Jane. She becomes increasingly angry with both Bingley and Darcy and more drawn to George Wickham. In fact, her whole family becomes more negative about Darcy and sympathetic toward Wickham.

Analysis

The deep pessimism Elizabeth expresses in this chapter is uncharacteristic. However, she feels betrayed both by Charlotte and by Bingley, of whom she thought better. Her anger with him is particularly ironic, because earlier in the novel she praises him for his easygoing manner. Now she sees this manner as a deep character flaw that has allowed his sisters and Darcy to steer him away from Jane.

As Mrs. Bennet becomes more upset over the dwindling prospects for her daughters, it is interesting to contrast her reactions with those of Mr. Bennet. He actually jokes with Elizabeth that she should keep her sights set on Wickham so that he might break her heart. Although he is being sarcastic, his words foreshadow Elizabeth's disillusionment with Wickham.

Chapter 25

Summary

Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, Mrs. Bennet's brother and sister-in-law, arrive at Longbourn for the Christmas holidays. Mrs. Gardiner discusses Jane's heartbreak with Elizabeth, who claims that Bingley was "violently in love with" Jane a few days before abandoning her. Mrs. Gardiner responds, "But that expression 'violently in love' is so hackneyed, so doubtful, so indefinite, that it gives me very little idea. It is as often applied to feelings which arise from an half-hour's acquaintance, as to a real, strong attachment." She offers to host Jane in London as a diversion. It is not likely they will encounter Bingley there, as they have different social circles. Jane agrees to go, still hoping she will see Bingley.

Mrs. Gardiner notices that Elizabeth and Wickham seem to be interested in each other. She knows the family from Derbyshire. She does not think that the relationship is serious. When Wickham tells Mrs. Gardiner about his past dealings with Darcy, she agrees that he is a very proud man and rather disagreeable. She also advises her niece Elizabeth to be cautious about being involved with Wickham, as neither of them have much money.

Analysis

Mr. Gardiner is a positive example of the new kind of wealth made possible by the industrial revolution. Austen contrasts him with the Bingley sisters and their snobbery: "The Netherfield ladies would have had difficulty in believing that a man who lived by trade, and within view of his warehouses, could have been so well-breathed and agreeable." Austen's irony is searing, as the Bingleys' father made his fortune in trade as well.

Mrs. Gardiner proves a mature and compassionate mentor in matters of the heart. Her dubious reaction to the phrase "violently in love" (which Collins also used in proposing to Elizabeth) seems to reveal Austen's own attitudes about rapidly formed romantic attachments.

Over the remainder of the novel, the Gardiners play a positive role in the lives of Jane, Elizabeth, and Lydia. In fact, they may be considered as surrogate parents in many ways, more engaged, levelheaded, and grounded than Mr. and Mrs. Bennet.
Summary

As the Gardiners' visit to Longbourn draws to a close, Mrs. Gardiner cautions Elizabeth to steer clear of Wickham, as he has no fortune; Elizabeth reluctantly agrees with her. Charlotte visits on the eve of her wedding to Collins and begs Elizabeth to visit her at the rectory, to which Elizabeth also reluctantly agrees.

Jane travels back to London with the Gardiners. There, Jane has an unpleasant visit from Caroline Bingley, which she describes in a letter to Elizabeth. Jane says she is resigned to the fact that Bingley is not going to pursue a relationship with her. Elizabeth feels relief that at least Jane has closure on this situation and no longer labors under the delusion that Caroline is a good friend.

In a letter, Elizabeth updates her aunt on the Wickham situation. It seems he has redirected his affections toward a young Miss King, who recently inherited a fortune. Elizabeth rather easily distances herself from Wickham, whom she does not love. She harbors no bad feelings about the reason for his change of heart: "Handsome young men must have something to live on, as well as the plain."

Analysis

Mrs. Gardiner's levelheaded advice about Wickham contrasts with the advice Elizabeth received from her father, who jokingly suggested she pursue Wickham if only to experience heartbreak.

Jane's letter shows how extraordinarily good-hearted, even naïve, she is. Although she senses Caroline's duplicity, Jane chalks it up to a sisterly anxiety for her brother's happiness. Elizabeth, in contrast, is so angry with the Bingleys that she half hopes Charles Bingley becomes unhappily married to Darcy's sister.

Elizabeth's forgiveness of Wickham's blatant gold digging seems contradictory given her strong disapproval of Charlotte's bid for security in marrying Mr. Collins.

Chapter 27

Summary

Elizabeth agrees to travel to Hunsford to visit her friend Charlotte and Mr. Collins. On the way, she stops in London to join her sister at the Gardiners' home. They talk about the Wickham affair. Mrs. Gardiner thinks that Wickham has behaved badly in suddenly abandoning his courtship of Elizabeth, although Elizabeth believes he was simply being sensible. "Pray, my dear aunt, what is the difference in matrimonial affairs, between the mercenary and the prudent motive?" Elizabeth asks. "Where does discretion end, and avarice begin?"

The Gardiners invite Elizabeth to travel with them to northern England in the summer. Elizabeth, happy for a distraction, agrees to the trip. "What are men to rocks and mountains!" she cries playfully.

Analysis

In the discussion of Wickham and his sudden pursuit of Miss King, a familiar theme about marriage plays out. In considering motives for marriage, Elizabeth draws a line between good sense (discretion) and greed (avarice). However, her judgment of Wickham seems uncharacteristically generous; she forgives his fortune hunting yet feels betrayed by Charlotte's choice to marry for security.

Chapter 28

Summary

At Hunsford, Charlotte warmly welcomes Elizabeth. Charlotte's parents are present as well. Mr. Collins seems to be determined to point out every detail of the house and gardens to Elizabeth, as if to remind her of what she missed out on by refusing his proposal. She notices that Charlotte appears to keep herself engaged, and perhaps this is how she copes with her husband. Mr. Collins is excited to talk about Lady Catherine de Bourgh's residence at nearby Rosings Park and
thrilled that they have all been invited to visit her to dine the next day. Lady Catherine’s daughter, Anne, makes an appearance. She is a pale, sickly young woman; Elizabeth feels mean pleasure at the idea of Darcy being stuck with her.

Analysis

As the visit to Hunsford proceeds, readers can see the life that Charlotte has embraced by marrying Mr. Collins. Elizabeth’s first impression is to wonder how Charlotte can stand living with Collins, but eventually she sees that Charlotte is more or less content: “By Charlotte’s evident enjoyment of [her new home], Elizabeth supposed [Collins] must be often forgotten.” Charlotte seems to have made her peace with a union that Elizabeth would have found intolerable. Although Charlotte and Collins are mismatched in their sensitivities, Austen shows that a marriage made for practical purposes can give some satisfaction to both spouses.

Chapter 29

Summary

Mr. Collins diligently prepares his houseguests for the visit to Rosings. Lady Catherine takes command of the situation, expressing her opinions, none of which are questioned by Mr. Collins or by Charlotte’s parents, Maria Lucas and Sir William Lucas. Lady Catherine freely criticizes Elizabeth’s upbringing and education. Elizabeth is annoyed by the criticism. When Elizabeth challenges any of the pronouncements, Lady Catherine seems surprised and somewhat unnerved.

Analysis

This encounter with Lady Catherine is a preview of what will come. Unlike Charlotte’s parents, who are intimidated by Lady Catherine, Elizabeth is not. This is interesting because Sir Thomas Lucas, as a knight, is closer in status to Lady Catherine.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh is almost as comic as Mr. Collins. However, while Collins is a mixture of self-importance and obsequiousness, she is all pomposity. In Lady Catherine, Austen satirizes the concept of condescension. In Austen’s class-based society, to “condescend” simply means to willingly deal with someone of lower rank. But there is good condescension and bad condescension. Lady Catherine’s manner of condescension, obviously meant to inflate her own sense of self-importance, is the worst kind. She personifies the negative sense of the word as readers know it today.

Chapter 30

Summary

After a weeklong visit, Mr. Lucas leaves Hunsford. He is satisfied that his daughter has a good life with Mr. Collins. During the remainder of Elizabeth’s visit, she and Charlotte avoid Mr. Collins as much as possible. Lady Catherine visits occasionally, criticizing everything in sight, and Mr. and Mrs. Collins and their guest also dine at Rosings several more times. Mr. Collins consults Lady Catherine about everything going on in the parish (the community he serves as a clergyman).

Then there is news that Lady Catherine’s nephew, Mr. Darcy, along with his cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam, will be visiting Rosings. The pair pay a visit to the Collins home as well. Elizabeth finds the Colonel to be pleasant and Darcy aloof. When she asks Darcy if he has seen Jane in London, he says he has not. Charlotte suggests that Darcy has come to the area specifically to see Elizabeth.

Analysis

Austen makes fun of Lady Catherine’s snobbery, but she also paints a portrait of a formidable woman who involves herself in every dispute in her community, even though it is not a woman’s role to do so—even a noblewoman’s.

If Darcy has come to see Elizabeth, his cool behavior doesn’t show it. Elizabeth needles Darcy with her question about Jane; she thinks he looks confused as he responds, foreshadowing future revelations about his role in keeping Jane away from Bingley.
Chapter 31

Summary

As Easter approaches, Mr. and Mrs. Collins, Elizabeth, and Maria Lucas are invited to dine at Rosings. Lady Catherine at first attends mainly to her nephew, Darcy. Elizabeth and the Colonel have a lively chat. He asks her to play the pianoforte. Darcy and Elizabeth soon get involved in a spirited conversation that ranges from music to his shyness around people he does not know well. Elizabeth suggests that he simply needs more practice, just as she must practice the pianoforte. Darcy replies, "We neither of us perform to strangers."

Analysis

This chapter gives us another look at Elizabeth and Darcy's spirited repartee, which seems to give both of them pleasure. Their conversation touches on a theme about the importance of social conventions; Elizabeth's chiding of Darcy shows how important she thinks these conventions are, but by comparing his lack of practice in social interaction to her own in piano, she softens the criticism. Darcy's reply seems to play off of her piano comparison while taking the meaning in another direction. Perhaps in this conversation, they are "performing" for each other.

The chapter also shows a rather pathetic side of Lady Catherine, who fantasizes about how well her daughter would have played the pianoforte "had her health allowed her to learn."

Though the dialogue between Elizabeth and Darcy reveals an unspoken attraction, Elizabeth seems to go to great lengths to deny it. In fact, when she sees that Darcy has no attraction to Miss de Bourgh, she feels relieved for Caroline Bingley, her nemesis, because Caroline may yet have a chance with Darcy.

Chapter 32

Summary

The following day, Darcy visits the Collins home. Only Elizabeth is at home. At first they speak awkwardly. Elizabeth begins to question him about Bingley and whether he will return to Netherfield. She also asks him the ideal distance that a married woman might live from her family home. He tells her that Bingley is unlikely to return to Netherfield.

Charlotte then arrives home, and Darcy leaves soon after. After observing them, Charlotte suggests that Darcy might be in love with Elizabeth. Over the next several days, the cousins visit them several more times; Darcy usually sits glumly and talks little. At the end of the chapter, Charlotte speculates about whether Darcy or Colonel Fitzwilliam would be a better match for Elizabeth.

Analysis

Darcy's visits puzzle Elizabeth. The exchanges are awkward and the conversations not really significant. It is the practical Charlotte who observes Darcy's unspoken reason for visiting. The reader needs Charlotte's objective perspective to understand what is happening, because Elizabeth admits no attraction to either Darcy or his cousin.

Chapter 33

Summary

Several times, when Elizabeth takes her favorite walk, she encounters Darcy. The conversations are somewhat awkward. Another time, while she is walking, she encounters the Colonel. In the course of conversation, he describes what a good friend Darcy is to Bingley. He tells her about Darcy’s role in preventing what she surmises to be an engagement between Bingley and Jane. Elizabeth realizes that Darcy is the cause of her sister’s unhappiness. She is upset and angered and pleads a headache so she does not have to socialize that night.
Analysis

This chapter is important structurally because it leads into the one of the novel's emotional high points. Elizabeth is in a heightened stage of emotion. She is angry at Darcy for his role in Bingley's disaffection from Jane. Her agitation contributes to an emotionally fraught atmosphere, making the reader anxious to find out what will happen next.

Chapter 34

Summary

The Collins household has left for Rosings. Elizabeth is at home by herself. Darcy shows up, inquiring about her health. He then shocks her by declaring his love for her and proposing marriage. Darcy's approach is to list the reasons that she is a poor choice for him—that is, her social inferiority and her family's reputation—and then to confess that, against his better judgment, he has fallen in love with her. Elizabeth's shock turns to resentment. She refuses his proposal, criticizes his role in separating Jane and Bingley, and also accuses him of mistreating Wickham. She calls him ungentlemanly. He suggests that had his proposal been less honest, perhaps she would have responded differently. She says he is mistaken, and he leaves the house angrily. Elizabeth is in tears and hides in her room to avoid seeing anyone once the hosts and houseguests return.

Analysis

This chapter represents the emotional climax of the novel, as the themes of social class, love versus marriage, and reputation collide.

Darcy's marriage proposal takes Elizabeth completely by surprise. Elizabeth is not just shocked; she is still angry about what she perceives as his role in breaking up her sister's romance. She is also insulted by the nature of his proposal. However, Elizabeth's claim that his manner of proposal is not "gentleman like" startles him because he prides himself in his honesty—or "candor," as Austen might say—and believes his reservations are "natural and just," words that reflect his absolute belief in the social hierarchy.

Elizabeth's response reminds readers that she still believes her initial prejudice against Darcy is correct: "From the very beginning—from the first moment ... of my acquaintance with you, your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that groundwork of disapprobation." In spite of all this, Elizabeth can't help being flattered that he proposed, leaving a small door open for the future.

Chapter 35

Summary

The next morning, Elizabeth goes on her favorite walk. Darcy appears and hands her a letter. His letter begins by addressing the issue with Jane and Bingley.

Darcy writes that he did indeed influence Bingley to go to London in an attempt to spare his friend a connection with the Bennet family, who lack social status. Darcy also believes that Bingley was more invested in Jane than Jane was in Bingley, and he wanted to protect his friend from falling in love with a woman who was perhaps interested only in his fortune. Darcy also explains what actually happened with Wickham. In fact, Darcy writes, he did give Wickham the inheritance he had been promised by the elder Darcy. However, Wickham squandered the money on gambling and never pursued the career in the clergy provided to him. After Wickham ran out of money, he demanded more. Finally, Darcy explains, Wickham attempted to elope with Darcy's sister, Georgiana, who was only fifteen years old. In Darcy's view, Wickham was after Georgiana's considerable wealth. Darcy intervened in time to prevent this disaster. In order to protect Georgiana's reputation, he tells Elizabeth, this episode must be kept secret.

Analysis

The letter from Darcy represents the point in the plot at which "all becomes clear," deeply affecting Elizabeth. In the letter, Darcy clarifies his role in Bingley's departure and explains his version of Wickham's account of the past. Readers get to know Darcy better by hearing these explanations in his own words.

Darcy's claim that Jane did not return Bingley's strong
affection echoes a warning voiced earlier by the practical Charlotte—that Jane should not let concern over her reputation prevent her from showing her true feelings toward Bingley. At the time, Elizabeth dismissed Charlotte’s advice—another example of Elizabeth's occasional overconfidence in her own judgment.

Chapter 36

Summary

Elizabeth rereads the letter, trying to make sense of all she has learned. She is angered by Darcy's claims about Jane not returning Bingham's feelings and his continued insistence on her family's unworthiness, based not only on their small fortune but on the behavior of Mrs. Bennet and the younger Bennet sisters. But she believes Darcy's account of Wickham and also feels as if her own behavior toward him might have been misguided. When she returns to the Collins home, she learns that Darcy and the Colonel have left. All she can think about is the content of the letter.

Analysis

Elizabeth now sees clearly how Wickham's words and behavior fit the role of someone who is hiding a dark secret. In contrast, nothing in Darcy's words or behavior, however tactless they may sometimes seem, paint him as anything but scrupulously honest and honorable. The fact that he is admired by Bingley and Colonel Fitzwilliam supports this assessment, pointing to the importance of reputation and connections in Austen's world. The fact that Wickham is something of a loner should have been a red flag for Elizabeth. Once again, her prejudice let her down.

These realizations are an enormous admission for Elizabeth, who prides herself on her judgement of character. Nonetheless, she is able to admit to her own blindness. This is a critical step in Elizabeth's development as a character.

Chapter 37

Summary

The two men, Darcy and the Colonel, leave Rosings. Elizabeth and Maria plan to leave Hunsford a week later, stopping in London on the way. Elizabeth is eager to reconnect with Jane. She continues to reflect on Darcy's letter, particularly the part about her family's inappropriate behavior.

Analysis

Elizabeth's objections to Darcy are slipping away; she even has to give credit to his misgivings about her family. She reflects that her mother lacks the judgment to restrain her flighty sisters and that her father simply laughs about them. These thoughts foreshadow Lydia's disastrous elopement later in the novel, which, in retrospect, justifies Darcy's concerns and underscores his honorable behavior in acting to save Lydia's reputation.

Chapter 38

Summary

Elizabeth says good-bye to Charlotte and Mr. Collins. Then she and Maria travel to the Gardiners' home in London for a few days en route to Longbourn. Jane joins the women for the trip back home.

Analysis

This chapter serves as a transitional phase until the time that Elizabeth can share with Jane what has happened. In bidding farewell to Mr. Collins, Elizabeth demonstrates her tactfulness—striking a balance between the fake flattery of people like Collins and the abrupt manner of people like Darcy.
Chapter 39

Summary

This chapter brings Jane and Elizabeth toward Longbourn; they are met halfway there by the youngest Bennet sisters, Kitty and Lydia, at an inn. Lydia orders a lunch for the group without having the money to pay for it. Kitty and Lydia are distressed about the fact that the militia men, the objects of their flirtations, will be leaving for Brighton shortly. Elizabeth is relieved that she will not have to encounter Wickham. She also learns that Miss King, the most recent object of Wickham's attention, is out of the picture. Meanwhile, Lydia is hoping to spend the summer in Brighton in order to be around the officers. Returning home at last, Elizabeth is relieved that her father seems to have no intention of letting Lydia go to Brighton.

Analysis

The news that the regiment is departing is welcome to Elizabeth because she has no desire to encounter Wickham, especially now that she has learned about his true nature. Her sister's immature behavior—ordering lunch without thinking about who will pay for it—and her obsession with the departing officers contrast with Elizabeth's deep internal struggle.

Chapter 40

Summary

Elizabeth finally decides to tell Jane what happened during her visit to Hunsford. She relates the proposal from Darcy and the new information she has about Wickham. As they discuss Darcy, Elizabeth admits that her enjoyment of deriding him prevented her from seeing the truth about his character. The sisters decide not to make public the information about Wickham's past behavior. Even though they don't approve of Wickham's behavior, they agree it is not their place to share this information. Jane is still feeling sad about Bingley's absence, but Elizabeth does not tell her sister what she learned from Darcy about Bingley.

Analysis

Elizabeth's admission about how much she enjoyed criticizing Darcy reveals the pride and enjoyment she takes in her own wit—something she shares with her father. In her father's case, the reader can see the obvious danger of valuing wit over responsibility to others. He could do more, for example, to rein in his younger daughters' excesses, rather than simply berating their silliness.

The sisters' decision not to reveal what they have learned about Wickham is well-intentioned. They feel it would be wrong to pass on secondhand information—that is, to gossip. This decision will come back to haunt them when Wickham takes advantage of Lydia.

Chapter 41

Summary

Lydia is surprised to receive a letter from Mrs. Forster, the wife of a colonel in the regiment soon departing for Brighton. She invites Lydia to spend the summer with her in Brighton. Elizabeth is deeply worried that her immature sister will get into serious trouble. She tries to persuade her father not to let Lydia go. Mr. Bennet, however, thinks independence will help her mature and that the Forsters will supervise her. As preparations for the militia's departure are underway, Elizabeth sees Wickham. She coldly reveals that she knows the truth about his past.

Analysis

The decision to allow Lydia to go to Brighton represents a critical turning point in the novel. Mr. Bennet's refusal to take Elizabeth's concerns seriously reveals a character flaw. Damage to the family's reputation could affect every member. A more responsible parent would be deeply concerned about the possibility of injuring that reputation, especially a family with so many daughters to marry off. And Austen's readers would know that Brighton was probably the least wholesome destination in England—a resort town where the Prince Regent is known to entertain mistresses. Still, Elizabeth's unwillingness to share what she knows about Wickham, who will also be
stationed in Brighton, makes it more difficult for her to persuade her father.

Chapter 42

Summary

The chapter opens with a discussion of the Bennets' marriage. Mr. Bennet was initially attracted to Mrs. Bennet's youth and beauty, but their incompatibility soon led him to withdraw from what Elizabeth sees as his responsibility to his family.

With Lydia gone, the Bennet family begins to settle back into routines. Elizabeth is looking forward to her summer trip north with the Gardiners. The itinerary changes, however, and the Gardiners choose to tour the area of Derbyshire, where Mrs. Gardiner was raised. Derbyshire is also the location of Pemberley, Darcy's estate. Mrs. Gardiner wants to take a tour of the estate, but Elizabeth is apprehensive. However, receiving confirmation that Mr. Darcy is out of town, Elizabeth agrees.

Analysis

The theme of love versus marriage is further developed here. The Bennets' mismatch may ultimately have serious consequences, affecting the futures of their children.

Readers might wonder at the change of plans that Mrs. Gardiner makes. Keep in mind, however, that she knows nothing of Darcy's proposal to Elizabeth. Moreover, touring estates was a popular pastime then, as it is now.

Chapter 43

Summary

When Elizabeth and the Gardiners reach Pemberley, she is amazed by its beauty and size. They talk to some of Darcy's servants. They describe him as a kind master and a pleasure to serve. This information surprises the Gardiners. Although they have never met Darcy, his reputation is that he is an overly proud person. Elizabeth finds herself wondering what her life would have been like as mistress of Pemberley had she accepted Darcy's marriage proposal.

As the Gardiners and Elizabeth explore the grounds of the estate, they are surprised to encounter Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth is caught off guard and embarrassed to be there. Darcy, however, is surprisingly courteous. It turns out he has returned home earlier than planned because he will be receiving guests. He tells the group that he would like them to meet his sister, Georgiana. The Gardiners are struck by his graciousness. Elizabeth is full of wonder at the way things are unfolding.

Analysis

Detailed descriptions of houses and estates are unusual in Pride and Prejudice, so the author's attention to the house and grounds here is significant; they seem to reflect their owner's character. The longtime servants' comments about Darcy's good nature also remind Elizabeth of her hasty judgement of him: "That he was not a good-tempered man had been her firmest opinion. Her keenest attention was awakened; she longed to hear more."

After Elizabeth's initial shock at encountering Darcy, she is deeply gratified by his friendly behavior toward the Gardiners. She had fully expected him to snub them, as someone like Lady Catherine surely would have, because Mr. Gardiner is not of the gentry. Mr. Darcy here exemplifies the sort of condescension of which Austen approves. The fact that he wants to introduce his sister suggests that he wishes to see more of Elizabeth.

Chapter 44

Summary

Elizabeth meets Georgiana the next day at the inn where Elizabeth is staying with her aunt and uncle. Elizabeth finds her to be extraordinarily shy. Darcy tells Elizabeth and the Gardiners that Charles Bingley will be arriving soon. Darcy invites them all to dine with him at Pemberley.
Analysis

Gradually, Elizabeth finds that barriers to her relationship with Darcy are coming down. Another sign of her growth as a character is her willingness to listen to what others say about him.

Chapter 45

Summary

The visitors to Pemberley encounter Caroline Bingley, who makes rude comments to Elizabeth about her family, and Mrs. Annesley, who serves as Georgiana Darcy's companion. After Elizabeth departs, Caroline tries to engage Darcy in insulting Elizabeth but succeeds only in making Darcy declare Elizabeth one of the most beautiful women he knows. Georgiana is also not willing to engage in criticism of Elizabeth.

Analysis

Miss Annesley briefly provides a foil to the Bingley sisters. Although inferior in status, her ladylike conduct shows that she is more "well-bred" than the other ladies. Attention to social duties is one of Austen's most treasured values, as the reader sees time and time again.

An alliance is forming that supports Elizabeth. Both Darcy and his sister refuse to engage in negative conversation about her. Caroline sees that Darcy is interested in Elizabeth, not in her. While the Bingley sisters may have been successful in the past at influencing others, at this point their powers are becoming limited.

Chapter 46

Summary

When she returns to the inn where she is staying, Elizabeth finds two letters from Jane. They are filled with upsetting information. Lydia has run away from Brighton with Wickham, and they are both missing. Elizabeth is dumbfounded. She has never noticed any affection or interest between Lydia and Wickham. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are desperate to make sure that the two get married. If they do not, Lydia's reputation will be destroyed, along with the family's. Mr. Bennet is on his way to London, as Lydia and Wickham were reportedly last seen heading in that direction.

Dismayed, Elizabeth rushes off to find her aunt and uncle and asks Mr. Gardiner to help Mr. Bennet search for Lydia and Wickham. She runs into Darcy and shares the terrible news. He is extremely upset, compounded by his feeling that he might have been able to prevent this episode if he had been more forthcoming about Wickham. Elizabeth, too, feels responsible for not telling all that she knows. Now that she is warming to Darcy, she also wonders if the potential disgrace looming over her family has destroyed any interest he might still have in her.

Analysis

Darcy's reaction to this news is very telling. Elizabeth could have expected him to be judgmental about Lydia's reckless action. However, he reacts with grace and concern.

The reaction of both characters reveals their shared values. Both feel guilt over failing to reveal Wickham's true character. Both are also willing to admit their own failings. Like Jane and Bingley, they are emotional equals—and so, in Austen's hands, they are destined for a happy marriage.

Chapter 47

Summary

Elizabeth and the Gardiners prepare to leave Pemberley to return to Longbourn. The Gardiners attempt to reassure Elizabeth that Wickham, to preserve his own reputation, will likely marry Lydia. Elizabeth cannot share the information about Wickham's earlier attempt to elope with Georgiana, and she is unconvinced that Wickham will marry someone with no fortune.

When they arrive at Longbourn, Elizabeth learns that her father has already left for London. Her mother is somewhat hysterical. She blames the Forsters for being negligent in
watching over Lydia. Jane tries to reassure Elizabeth, who is blaming herself, that nobody could have prevented Lydia’s actions.

Analysis

The uproar caused by Wickham and Lydia's running off together illustrates another intersection of the themes of reputation, social class, and love versus marriage. The damage to Lydia is hardly more important than the damage that will come to the entire Bennet family if she and Wickham do not marry. There is very little sympathy expressed for her plight as a barely sixteen-year-old girl in the hands of a conniving older man. In fact, her family would prefer her to be married to a villain rather than to simply bring her home. Lydia’s honor is more important than her health or well-being, because it affects the entire family.

Chapter 48

Summary

Mr. Gardiner leaves Longbourn to join Mr. Bennet in London. Soon Mr. Bennet returns home, leaving the situation in Gardiner's hands. Gardiner writes to the Bennet family that he has not been able to locate Lydia and Wickham. The townspeople are beginning to talk about the situation. To add to the gossip, a letter arrives from Mr. Collins. Its pious-sounding content includes insults about the Bennets as well as advice to disown their daughter. Mr. Bennet returns home from London but doesn't reveal much about what transpired there.

Analysis

This section reveals once again how ineffectual the Bennet parents have been. Mr. Bennet is concerned but does not seem up to the task of resolving the crisis; he leaves Mr. Gardiner to fix the problem. Once again, the Gardiners play an important parental role for the Bennet daughters.

Mr. Collins's letter reinforces his insufferable piousness—and his startling lack of compassion, particularly as a clergyman—but also reflects real attitudes about wayward daughters.

Chapter 49

Summary

Soon after Mr. Bennet's return, the Bennets receive a letter from Mr. Gardiner. He reports that Wickham has been found. Wickham has agreed to marry Lydia, on the condition that the Bennets guarantee that he will receive a small income in return. Mr. Bennet agrees with the demand in order to prevent the ruin of his family, but he believes that Mr. Gardiner must have paid Wickham additional money to marry Lydia; Wickham would have never agreed otherwise. Mrs. Bennet is thrilled to have one of her daughters married at last. She swiftly shifts into an ecstatic mood, planning for her daughter's new clothes and so on.

Analysis

This chapter reveals the resolution to the crisis. The Bennets' individual reactions are true to form. Mrs. Bennet's delight that one of her daughters is going to be married overwhelms any disgust about the circumstances. On the other hand, Mr. Bennet, whose passivity allowed the situation to happen in the first place, can't resist making a joke about how Wickham would be a fool to take less than £10,000 to marry Lydia. Good-hearted Jane is convinced that Wickham is not so bad after all and that he and Lydia will live happily ever after.

Chapter 50

Summary

Mrs. Bennet is disappointed to learn that the new couple will not be living close to Longbourn. Mr. Bennet declares that Lydia will get no money for clothes and will not be allowed to set foot in Longbourn, though eventually he changes his mind.

Over time, Elizabeth's feelings for Darcy have changed. But Lydia's scandalous marriage—to Darcy's enemy, no less—has convinced Elizabeth that her chance to marry Darcy is long
gone. Because she rejected his first proposal, she thinks he would gloat if he knew about her change of heart. (“What a triumph for him. ... Could he know that the proposals which she had proudly spurned only four months ago, would now have been gladly and gratefully received!”) She broods over the bad timing of Lydia's misadventure.

### Analysis

Mr. Bennet again shows his capricious nature in setting down a prohibition that he later backs away from.

Elizabeth jumps to another conclusion about Darcy—that he would gloat over her plight. This plight—Lydia's marriage ruining her own chance at marriage—is an example of situational irony, one that Elizabeth seems keenly aware of: “But no such happy marriage could now teach the admiring multitude what connubial felicity really was. A union of a different tendency, and precluding the possibility of the other, was soon to be formed in their family.”

### Chapter 51

#### Summary

Lydia and Wickham arrive at Longbourn. Elizabeth is rather disgusted by their behavior. Lydia brags about her new marital status and marvels that she, the youngest, is the first of the sisters to marry. They act oblivious to the problems they have caused. Elizabeth also notices that Lydia seems more in love with Wickham than he is with her. In the course of their chatter, Lydia happens to mention to Jane and Elizabeth that Mr. Darcy was in London around the time of their marriage. Elizabeth says nothing about this to her father, but she hastily writes a letter to her aunt, Mrs. Gardiner, to see if she can shed light on this curious piece of information.

#### Analysis

Wickham's perfect ease during the visit underscores his duplicious nature; he, more than Lydia, is surely aware of the pain he has caused the family.

Darcy's presence in London while Mr. Gardiner settled things with Wickham raises a flag for Elizabeth and adds suspense to the plot.

### Chapter 52

#### Summary

Mrs. Gardiner replies quickly, writing a long letter to Elizabeth. She explains that it was actually Darcy who located Lydia and Wickham. In addition, Darcy paid Wickham to marry Lydia, paid off Wickham's debts, and bought him a new military commission. She tells Elizabeth to keep this information a secret, as Darcy does not want the information to be made public. Her letter stresses that she believes that Darcy's heroic rescue of the situation reflects his true love for Elizabeth. His action to remedy a potentially disgraceful situation is his way of proving his devotion to her and respect for her family. Elizabeth wonders whether her aunt's assessment is correct. After reading the letter in the garden, she runs into Wickham; he seems anxious to find out what she now knows about him, but Elizabeth does her best to keep the conversation light and friendly.

#### Analysis

Elizabeth continues to struggle with the insecurity and uncertainty she has felt since Lydia's elopement. The theme of pride undergoes an interesting development. Elizabeth feels personally humiliated but grateful to Darcy: “For herself she was humbled; but she was proud of him.” Pride here—for another, rather than for oneself—seems to be a very good thing.

Elizabeth's handling of the conversation with Wickham again shows her composure and her dedication to family. As shown in these last chapters, family is extremely important in Austen's world.

### Chapter 53
Summary
Lydia and Wickham leave for his new military posting in Newcastle. Mrs. Bennet is sad because her darling daughter will be so far away, but news that Bingley is returning to Netherfield proves a distraction. Bingley arrives at Longbourn, and Mr. Darcy is with him. Bingley is very pleasant, but Darcy seems reserved. Mrs. Bennet is carelessly rude to Darcy, upsetting Elizabeth, who knows Darcy's role in saving their family from disgrace. Mrs. Bennet invites the two gentlemen to return to dine with them soon.

Analysis
Elizabeth finds Darcy's reserve during the visit confusing. She is not sure whether this behavior reflects his feelings about her or discomfort around her family. Her spirits are low, and the reader feels her frustration. She is not accustomed to being so unsure of herself.

Chapter 54
Summary
Bingley and Darcy come to dine at the Bennets' home. Bingley sits next to Jane, and they seem to enjoy each other and converse warmly. Elizabeth is seated across from Darcy. They are not communicating well with each other. Elizabeth convinces herself that she must accept the fact that he will not propose again. She feels disappointed and disheartened. However, she is happy to observe that Jane and Bingley seem to be progressing in their relationship.

Analysis
The awkwardness between Darcy and Elizabeth contrasts sharply with the lively and witty conversation they normally share. Austen has conveyed their relationship primarily through their verbal exchanges, as well as through, to a lesser extent, their correspondence. The effect here is to build our suspense. Without their words, the suspense about their future grows.

Chapter 55
Summary
Bingley makes several more visits to Longbourn. During one of them, he proposes to Jane. She joyfully accepts. The family is thrilled. Bingley tells Jane that he did not know she was in London when he was. Darcy and his sister Caroline had kept that information from him. He also admits to Jane that he left Netherfield because he thought that Jane was not interested in him.

The Bennets are excited at the prospect of Jane's marriage, and Bingley's frequent presence at the house seems to make everyone happy.

Analysis
The happy results of Bingley's courtship of Jane suggest that Darcy is not set against the Bennet sisters anymore. Darcy now seems content to see his friend pursue his love, regardless of the class difference or family reputation. This development represents a change in Darcy, who seemed, until recently, to put a great deal of stock in maintaining class distinctions.

Although Austen's work is marked by witty dialogue, she usually refrains from capturing highly romantic dialogue. Bingley's proposal to Jane occurs offstage. Upon hearing about the proposal, Elizabeth pronounces it "the happiest, wisest, most reasonable end!" These sentiments reflect the idea that true love and successful marriages are the products of wisdom and reason.

Chapter 56
Summary
Lady Catherine pays an unexpected visit to Longbourn. She says that she wants to speak privately with Elizabeth. They go for a walk. Lady Catherine explains that she has heard a rumor that Darcy, her nephew, is going to propose to Elizabeth. However, she is happy to observe that Jane and Bingley seem to be progressing in their relationship.

Analysis
The awkwardness between Darcy and Elizabeth contrasts sharply with the lively and witty conversation they normally share. Austen has conveyed their relationship primarily through their verbal exchanges, as well as through, to a lesser extent, their correspondence. The effect here is to build our suspense. Without their words, the suspense about their future grows.
Bennets' social status is so inferior to Darcy's. In addition, she expects that he will marry her daughter, Anne. The conversation is surprising to Elizabeth, who has no inkling that a proposal is planned. In fact, Darcy has been rather distant lately. Elizabeth is insulted by Lady Catherine's negative descriptions of her family. Lady Catherine attempts to make Elizabeth promise that she will not marry Darcy. Elizabeth refuses to promise any such thing. Lady Catherine is outraged by her defiance. Elizabeth holds her ground and also decides not to mention this strange conversation to anybody.

Analysis

The confrontation between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth is the perfect culmination of Elizabeth's personal growth. In the past, Elizabeth hasn't been afraid to disagree with the aristocratic lady. In this exchange, she shows even greater strength of character by directly flouting Lady Catherine's will. Though she is surprised by the rumor, her self-confidence, serenity, and superior intelligence allow Elizabeth to "out-argue" Lady Catherine: "Neither duty, nor honor, nor gratitude [to Lady Catherine] have any possible claim on me. .... No principle of either, would be violated by my marriage with Mr. Darcy." Elizabeth clearly shows where she stands on the issues of class and love; when it comes to the second, she will not allow the first to stand in her way.

Chapter 57

Summary

The next day, Mr. Bennet shares with Elizabeth a letter he has received from his cousin, Mr. Collins. In it, he brings up the rumored impending engagement between Elizabeth and Darcy. Mr. Collins warns Elizabeth not to thwart Lady Catherine's will. Mr. Bennet is completely baffled by this notion of an engagement. He believes the idea is ludicrous. Her father's reaction is insulting to Elizabeth, and the exchange between them is awkward.

Analysis

Mr. Bennet's obliviousness to the relationship between Darcy and Elizabeth is not entirely surprising. Elizabeth has been very discreet about her feelings, even with Jane. However, the Gardiners were well aware of Darcy's attraction to Elizabeth in Derbyshire. Even though Darcy and Elizabeth's rapport has been uneasy since her return to Longbourn, surely there must be some chemistry between them; how could Mr. Bennet not notice? He seems to be out of tune with his family. Elizabeth's pained reaction to her father's insensitivity shows that the equilibrium she displayed with Lady Catherine is fragile. Though she has no doubt of her right to be with Darcy, she is not sure whether he wants her.

Chapter 58

Summary

A few days later, Darcy and Bingley visit Longbourn, and the young people go for a walk. Elizabeth and Darcy walk together. Elizabeth tells him how grateful she is for his role in rescuing Lydia from disgrace. Darcy replies that he did so only because of his feelings for Elizabeth. He professes his love for her and asks if her feelings for him have changed since he first proposed to her. She replies that her feelings have indeed changed, and the two agree that they will be married.

Analysis

The actual proposal is touching but seems anticlimactic after the recent dramatic confrontation between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine. In typical Austen form, the narrator does not share the words with which Elizabeth responds to Darcy's proposal. Once the lovers begin to discuss the events that led to their estrangement and reunion, the dialogue returns. This is the ground Austen prefers to cover—analytical, ironic conversation. Darcy wraps up the ongoing conflict between pride and prejudice: "What did you say of me, that I did not deserve? For, though your accusations were ill-founded, formed on mistaken premises, my behavior to you at the time had merited the severest reproof. It was unpardonable."
Chapter 59

Summary

Elizabeth first shares her news with Jane, who is dumbfounded because of Elizabeth's initial disdain for Darcy. Darcy calls on the Bennets to ask Mr. Bennet for Elizabeth's hand in marriage. The family is surprised and excited. Elizabeth confides in her father Darcy's role in rescuing Lydia's reputation. Mrs. Bennet is ecstatic that her daughter is marrying into such wealth.

Analysis

Mr. Bennet is overcome with shock that Elizabeth would want to marry Darcy, and the scene in which Elizabeth persuades her father that she is following her heart is one of the novel's most touching, revealing her tumultuous emotions: "'I do, I do like him,' she replied, with tears in her eyes. 'I love him. Indeed he has no improper pride. He is perfectly amiable. You do not know what he really is; then pray do not pain me by speaking of him in such terms.'"

Chapter 60

Summary

Elizabeth and Darcy talk excitedly about their courtship. They explore the ways that their relationship has grown and appreciate each other for having learned to fall in love. Elizabeth writes to her aunt to share her wonderful news. Mr. Bennet impishly writes to Mr. Collins, countering his last obnoxious letter with news of the impending marriage. Darcy writes to Lady Catherine, who is outraged, of course.

Analysis

Characters' responses to the news of Elizabeth and Darcy's engagement are part of the pleasure in the novel's denouement. Each of the other players responds in ways true to the character that Austen has carefully developed in the novel.

Chapter 61

Summary

As an epilogue, the final chapter wraps up loose ends. Jane and Bingley purchase a home near Pemberley, and the two eldest Bennet sisters visit each other often. Kitty visits them frequently, and her character improves under the influence of her two older sisters. Lydia and Wickham are unchanged, constantly asking for money from Lydia's family. Elizabeth also grows close to Georgianna Darcy. In general, the novel closes on a happy note.

Analysis

Austen ends the novel with two happy marriages, assuring readers that love conquers all, including class differences, pride, and prejudice.

"” Quotes

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

— Narrator, Chapter 1

This is the opening line of the novel, and is often quoted. It very neatly states the impetus for many of the novel's subplots—the pursuit of wealth and status through marriage. The statement is ironic, because it really reflects the desire of families with unmarried daughters, not necessarily the desire of a single wealthy man, to be married.

"Oh! you are a great deal too apt, you know, to like people in general."
You never see a fault in any body. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in my life.”

— Elizabeth Bennet, Chapter 4

The day after the dance at Meryton, Elizabeth and Jane are discussing Mr. Bingley. This quotation nicely captures the way that Elizabeth views her dear sister/confidante, Jane. While in this case, Elizabeth’s assessment is largely accurate, it also illustrates her habit of forming fixed views of other people’s personalities.

“Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar beforehand, it does not advance their felicity in the least.”

— Charlotte Lucas, Chapter 6

This quotation reflects Charlotte’s acceptance that love and happiness are not necessarily to be expected in a marriage. It points to a difference between her ideas and those of her dear friend Elizabeth, who is more idealistic.

“But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she hardly had a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness.”

— Narrator, Chapter 6

Darcy has just declared that Elizabeth’s appearance was “in the atf eidl.barely tolerable.” Soon after sharing this observation with his friends, he begins to realize that his first impression may have been hasty. He is beginning to notice more interesting things about her that he initially overlooked. This is the very beginning of Darcy’s growing interest in Elizabeth. This realization also signals his willingness and ability to change his opinions.

“What are young men to rocks and mountains?”

— Elizabeth Bennet, Chapter 27

After feeling frustrated by the complications of romance, Elizabeth accepts her Aunt Gardiner’s suggestion of a trip to the country. This quotation is an expression of Elizabeth’s excitement at changing her focus to something other than social concerns and anticipating the opportunity to enjoy nature.
“Do not make yourself uneasy, my dear cousin, about your apparel. Lady Catherine is far from requiring that elegance of dress in us which becomes herself and her daughter. I would advise you merely to put on whatever of your clothes is superior to the rest—there is no occasion for anything more. Lady Catherine will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed. She likes to have the distinction of rank preserved.”

— Mr. Collins, Chapter 29

Mr. Collins gives this advice to Elizabeth during her visit. In this quotation he manages to insult Elizabeth's lack of access to fancy clothing, while also unintentionally pointing out Lady Catherine's vanity.

“In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”

— Fitzwilliam Darcy, Chapter 34

This quotation is the opening line of Darcy's proposal to Elizabeth. It is striking because of its honesty and openness. It stands in direct contrast to the earlier marriage proposal from Mr. Collins, in which the clergyman lays out an unemotional argument for why Elizabeth should accept his proposal.

Although Elizabeth rejects Darcy's proposal, the love and sincerity he expresses are clear.

“He spoke well; but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed; and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit.”

— Narrator, Chapter 34

This quotation follows Darcy's expression of love. Although Darcy expresses his love for Elizabeth, his presentation is hopelessly flawed because he refers to her "inferiority," meaning her lower social status. Darcy may have meant this to be evidence of how sincerely he loves Elizabeth—so much so that he is willing to overlook their difference in status. However, Elizabeth is deeply offended.

""How despicably have I acted!" she cried. I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candor of my sister ... How humiliating is this discovery!"
... Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. ... [O]n the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away ... Till this moment, I never knew myself."

— Elizabeth Bennet, Chapter 36

When Elizabeth reads Darcy's letter explaining his actions and the truth about Wickham, she reacts to her initial prejudice against him. She now realizes that she misjudged him. This quotation marks the turning point in her feelings for him.

“Lydia will never be easy until 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."

— Mr. Bennet, Chapter 41

These are Mr. Bennet’s famous last words on the topic of whether Lydia should be allowed to go to Brighton, where the militia is to be relocated. They foreshadow the scandal Lydia causes in running off with Wickham, and reflect Mr. Bennet’s negligence. It’s worth noting, however, that at this point Mr. Bennet does not know Wickham’s true character, and no one suspected the fortune-seeking Wickham would target Lydia.

“It was a large, well proportioned room, handsomely fitted up. Elizabeth, after slightly surveying it, went to a window to enjoy its prospect. The hill, crowned with wood, which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was good; and she looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with delight."

— Narrator, Chapter 43

Upon visiting Pemberley with her aunt and uncle, Elizabeth is struck by the unpretentious elegance of Mr. Darcy’s home and grounds. Her observations mark a further development in her changing feelings about Darcy.

“You are a gentleman’s daughter. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition."

— Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Chapter 56

Lady Catherine visits Longbourn to extract Elizabeth's promise that she will not marry Darcy, her nephew. This quotation demonstrates how she haughtily assumes her power in this matter, and reflects the fine distinctions within the same class of gentry: Lady Catherine’s family has a title, and she considers Elizabeth only partially a member of the landed gentry, on her
father’s side. Elizabeth’s vulgar family associations further lower her status.

“Elizabeth was much too embarrassed to say a word. After a short pause, her companion added, “You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject forever.’ Elizabeth feeling all the more than common awkwardness and anxiety of his situation, now forced herself to speak; and immediately, though not very fluently, gave him to understand, that her sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the period to which he alluded, as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure his present assurances.”

— Narrator, Chapter 58

This quotation represents the culmination of Elizabeth and Darcy’s courtship. As usual, Austen does not include the full dialogue of this sentimental exchange. In an earlier chapter, in the character of Mrs. Gardiner, Austen seems to voice her own attitude towards lovers’ talk: “But that expression of ‘violently in love’ is so doubtful, so indefinite, that it gives me very little idea. It is as often applied to feelings which arise only from a half-

hour’s acquaintance as to a real, strong attachment.”

“Good gracious! Lord bless me! only think! dear me! Mr. Darcy! Who would have thought it? And is it really true? Oh! my sweetest Lizzy! how rich and great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane's is nothing to it—nothing at all. I am so pleased—so happy. Such a charming man!—so handsome! so tall!—Oh, my dear Lizzy! Pray apologize for my having disliked him so much before. I hope he will overlook it. Dear, dear Lizzy. A house in town! Everything that is charming!”

— Mrs. Bennet, Chapter 59

Mrs. Bennet has achieved much of what she has been determined to do. By the end of the novel, three of her daughters are married. This exclamation, uttered when she had accepted that Elizabeth intends to marry Darcy even though initially Mrs. Bennet does not approve of him—captures her giddiness. She is particularly pleased about Elizabeth’s match because Darcy is very wealthy.

“I am the happiest creature in the world. Perhaps other people have said so before, but no one with such justice. I am happier even
than Jane; she only smiles, I laugh."

— Elizabeth Bennet, Chapter 60

In this excerpt from a letter she writes to her aunt, Elizabeth articulates her joy in the incisive way that reflects her intelligence and wit.

Symbols

Houses

The houses and estates in Pride and Prejudice symbolize social class. The grander the house, the higher the social status of the occupants. More significantly, however, the houses come to represent their owners. Since readers learn more in Pride and Prejudice through dialogue than description, the parallels between characters and their houses are revealed as other characters react to the homes.

For example, the grandeur of Rosings leads visitors to become awestruck; it induces a sense of inferiority in the viewer. The owner of Rosings, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, elicits the same emotions with her haughty and untouchable attitude.

Pemberley, on the other hand, is equally grand but also charms its visitors. The estate feels natural and welcoming, and the care that goes into maintaining it is evident. In the same way, Pemberley’s owner, Fitzwilliam Darcy, seems unreachable at first because of his elevated status, but he proves his fine character as others get to know him.

Nature

For the heroine of Pride and Prejudice, nature is a clear symbol of freedom. Elizabeth Bennet is never happier than when she can enjoy the outdoors, especially when she is alone. Elizabeth treasures her walks in nature, away from the constraints of society. The garden paths of the great estates she visits, not within their walls, is where she finds peace.

Themes

Social Class

Social constraints imposed by the class structure are evident throughout the novel. People know their place in society. The Bennets are members of the gentry, or landowning class, but they are not very wealthy and have “low” relatives engaged in trade. They may socialize with the wealthy Bingleys and the aristocratic Darcy family, but class distinctions still govern every interaction with those characters. Lady Catherine de Bourgh is a good example of a character who puts people in their places. At the end of novel, she calls on Elizabeth and self-assuredly expresses her expectation that Elizabeth will keep to her class and not marry Darcy. "If you were sensible of your own good," Lady Catherine says, "you would not wish to quit the sphere, in which you have been brought up."

Mr. Collins, who idolizes Lady Catherine, also personifies a slavish adherence to class distinctions. As someone who has risen higher than he might have expected—from a merchant’s son to a clergyman—he makes every effort to pay homage to his patroness, who has helped him achieve his post in the clergy. In one telling scene, he insults Elizabeth by telling her that her simple clothes are appropriate because Lady Catherine likes to be better dressed than her guests.

As the children of a man who made, rather than inherited, his wealth, the Bingleys are newer members of the upper class. Keen to reinforce her social status, Caroline Bingley looks down on people of lower status, as if they might drag her family name back down.

Darcy, acutely conscious of the “distinctions of rank,” is well aware of the implied prohibition on marrying below his social class. Yet the power of his love for Elizabeth, and his recognition of her value as an intellectual and emotional equal, overcomes his initial adherence to class distinctions.
Reputation

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the importance of reputation, especially a woman's reputation, is woven through the novel. Early in the story, Elizabeth makes her way to Netherfield, where her sister Jane has taken ill while visiting the Bingleys. The three-mile walk takes her through muddy terrain. Upon her arrival, Caroline Bingley views Elizabeth's muddy skirts with disdain, expressing no empathy or admiration for Elizabeth's sisterly devotion.

When Lydia and George Wickham elope, the Bennets are nearly hysterical about Lydia's potential disgrace and how it may damage the family's reputation—and the other daughters' marriage prospects. Mr. Collins writes to recommend that they disown Lydia and consider her dead. Even after the problem is remedied and the couple has been legitimized through marriage, Mr. Bennet has to be convinced to admit the couple to his home. The marriage will always be tainted by scandal because it is generally known that Lydia and Wickham lived together for two weeks before marrying.

Darcy orchestrates George Wickham's marriage to Lydia, providing him with an income and setting him up in a new military posting to ensure that Lydia's reputation is saved. It is an act that proves his love for Elizabeth, as it shields the Bennets from further social ostracism. His drastic steps to save Lydia's reputation emphasizes the importance society places on a woman's reputation. If Elizabeth's family is ruined by her sister's actions, Darcy can never hope to marry Elizabeth.

Love versus Marriage

At the center of *Pride and Prejudice* is the love story between Elizabeth and Darcy. But this is not a "love at first sight" romance. Their initial encounter produces mutually negative impressions. The tension that builds as their relationship evolves creates the energy that fuels the plot, building suspense toward what readers hope will be a happy ending.

The road to love is littered with misunderstandings and complications. Darcy, first finding Elizabeth's looks only "barely tolerable," becomes increasingly drawn to her liveliness and wit, even as his pride makes him feel that the attraction is beneath him. His cringe-worthy proposal only hardens Elizabeth's initial impression of his snobbery and coldness, an impression she mistakenly allows Wickham to foster.

Darcy overcomes his pride, accepting Elizabeth as she is, despite the fact that her family is not wealthy and often not even respectable. Elizabeth, for her part, must also swallow the pride she takes in her judgment of people's characters, for she eventually realizes that Darcy's pride is based more on honor than class, his reserve is more natural seriousness than snobbery, and what he lacks in charm he makes up for in sincerity. Ultimately, the two realize that their complementary parts create a perfect whole.

Three couples in the novel have the luxury of marrying for love. In addition to Elizabeth and Darcy, Jane and Bingley and the Gardiners make or have love-based marriages. Other couples present a different view of love and marriage. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's marriage was brought about by an initial attraction that soon faded. Lydia and Wickham's marriage, founded on sexual attraction, is surely destined for the same fate. Charlotte's marriage to Collins is based on convenience—she needs a husband, and he, a wife. Austen does show in both characters that such a marriage may have some consolations, however. Charlotte has the satisfaction of running her own household, something that would not have been possible if she had stayed in her family's home, unmarried. Mr. Collins's goal in marriage seems to have been finding a respectable mate to please Lady Catherine, and he has achieved that goal.

Motifs

Letters

Letters are an important motif in the novel. Not only are they the sole method of long-distance communication for the main characters, but they also serve to advance the novel's plot and characterizations. For example, Mr. Collins's letter announcing his planned visit to the Bennets shows his pomposity. Mr.
Darcy's letter to Elizabeth explains why he separated Jane and Mr. Bingley and illuminates the reasons for his past behavior toward Wickham; this knowledge greatly improves Elizabeth's and the reader's understanding of his character. Jane's letters to Elizabeth impart the terrible news about Lydia's elopement and thus help propel the plot toward its resolution.

Journeys

The idea of a journey implies change and a seeking of something new. As characters in the novel venture out of their familiar settings, they reveal more about themselves and move the plot forward. For example, the novel opens with Charles Bingley's move into the neighborhood. His arrival in a new place sets the stage for the action to come. Elizabeth's trips, first to Hunsford to visit Charlotte and later to Pemberley with the Gardiners, put her in Darcy's path—and lead to a new phase in their courtship. Lydia and Wickham's elopement is a fairly drastic example of a journey. Journeys, as motifs of change, keep the plot unfolding and characters developing through the novel.

Suggested Reading


