



CELEBRATING
PRIDE
AND
PREJUDICE

•
200 Years of
JANE AUSTEN'S
Masterpiece

•
Susannah Fullerton

For my daughter— my dearest, loveliest Elinor Elizabeth

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'Behold Me Immortal'

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

*But tell Jane Austen, that is, if you dare,
How much her novels are beloved down here.*

*She wrote them for posterity, she said;
'Twas rash, but by posterity she's read.*

'A Letter to Lord Byron', W.H. Auden

In Karen Joy Fowler's novel *The Jane Austen Book Club*, five women and one man join together to form the 'Central Valley/River City all-Jane-Austen-all-the-time book club' so that they can talk about *Pride and Prejudice* and Jane Austen's five other novels. As they read and discuss these books, they learn about themselves, each other, about love and their world. Each member recognizes that it is 'essential to reintroduce Jane Austen into your life regularly'.

We live in an age when so many forms of entertainment compete for our time. So why, some readers ask, should time be spent rereading *Pride and Prejudice* when there are so many other good books waiting to be read? But do those same readers listen only once to a Beethoven symphony and then tick it off as something done, never to be done again? Do they never return to the art

*The cast of *Pride and Prejudice* (illustration by Liz Monahan).*



gallery to study that Vermeer, believing that once they have viewed it, there's no need to look at it a second time? Rereading *Pride and Prejudice* is as necessary as listening again to favourite music or looking once more at a much-loved painting. For really no one ever reads the same *Pride and Prejudice* twice. A first reading alters you; by a second reading you are a slightly different person. Every subsequent reading reveals different things about you and your world. A starry-eyed teenager will find a romantic *Pride and Prejudice* on first perusal, but thirty years later that same reader, now a parent to five daughters, will discover a very different *Pride and Prejudice* on re-opening its pages. Every reading of *Pride and Prejudice* is a new one.

But how is *Pride and Prejudice* being read and reread today? It's no longer essential to get a *Pride and Prejudice*-fix from paper and ink. Recent reading changes have been quite incredible.

In 1932 the 'Talking Book Machine' was invented and within a short time *Pride and Prejudice* was recorded so that the blind could listen to it. Soon others were enjoying the first audio versions too. Today the ribboned cassettes of such machines seem decidedly old-fashioned and the technology for playing cassettes of Irene Sutcliffe reading *Pride and Prejudice* has almost disappeared. CDs came next and the story of Elizabeth and Darcy was put on shiny metal discs. These were soon readily available through bookshops and libraries, and indeed still are. Now it's downloads as mp3s – an audio version can go from the computer to an iPod, an iPad or even a mobile phone. A person can 'read' *Pride and Prejudice* while running in the park, driving a car or doing the housework. Audible.com (the audio book branch of Amazon) currently offers over twenty different audio versions. However, half of those are abridged and NO ONE should listen to a shortened *Pride and Prejudice*! (The full version should last about eleven to twelve hours, but Audible has for sale one audio version that lasts fifty-four minutes. Imagine a *Pride and Prejudice* with 92 per cent of the story chopped out – what on earth is left?) Also available on audio are several dramatized versions, a children's version, Spanish and Italian translations, various vampire, pornographic and sequel offerings, and even a Cliff Notes to *Pride and Prejudice* recorded on CD. Readers have such choice: a customer can select whether to have the novel read by a woman (Emilia Fox, who played Georgiana Darcy in the 1995 BBC series, is one

reader; Joanna David, who played Aunt Gardiner in the same adaptation, is another; others include Joanna Lumley, Juliet Stevenson, Jenny Agutter, Lindsay Duncan, Angela Lansbury and Jane Lapotaire) or by a man (Neil Conrich is one male reader), by someone with an English accent or an American one.

Digital technology is changing the book format too. Now the novel can be downloaded on to a Kindle, an iPad, a Kobo or some other electronic reading device. More and more readers are growing comfortable with these new technologies, and the technologies are changing and developing at an incredible speed. Austen's novels are especially popular on such devices because they can be downloaded for free, as their copyright has expired. Project Gutenberg, the world's oldest digital library, offers *Pride and Prejudice* at no charge; so do Google, Facebook and Twitter.

Reading *Pride and Prejudice* on a Kindle has pluses and minuses. It is cheap (or free) once the Kindle has been purchased, has less environmental impact, and is amazing for travel (no more heavy suitcases, when thousands of books can be loaded on to one Kindle). However, an electronic version lacks the memories associated with a printed book, in which that coffee ring near Darcy's proposal reminds you of reading the scene in a Paris café or the curled pages bring recollections of laughing over Mr Collins while reading on the beach. No one can furnish a room with Kindle books, whereas a precious Jane Austen collection brings wonderful memories to its proud owner. Myriad ideas associated with a physical book are absent from a Kindle. And a Kindle homogenizes books – a reader has no sense of differing weights, different degrees of quality when *Pride and Prejudice* and *Pies and Prejudice* pop up in identical formats on the same screen. On a Kindle *Pride and Prejudice* weighs as much in an abridged edition as in the uncut one. Should one read a book in the way its author visualized it going out into the world, or do we all opt for convenience, cheapness and change? Or is what really matters the connection between the mind of the author and that of the reader, which is still there in an electronic version? Reading technologies have altered rapidly in the last twenty years and another 200 years could bring almost anything. If, as Elizabeth Bennet advises, you 'indulge your imagination in every possible flight which the subject will afford', you will still never be able to gain an accurate idea of how books will be read in 2213.

Preacher Charles Spurgeon once advised, 'Master those books you have. Read them thoroughly. Bathe in them until they saturate you. Read and reread them . . . digest them.' When you have read, reread and digested *Pride and Prejudice*, the next impulse is likely to be to want to talk about it. Jane Austen's earliest fans wrote of it excitedly in correspondence, and discussed it in their circulating libraries. In the twentieth century Jane Austen societies were formed for the purpose of providing forums for just such talk. Today, lectures, workshops, conferences, dinners, quizzes, journals and newsletters all provide opportunities for discussion, argument and debate. Il Club Sofa and Carpet di Jane Austen (the Italian society) hosts a Regency ball, offering prizes for those who can out-dance Darcy and Elizabeth; the Jane Austen Society of Australia holds regular study days on *Pride and Prejudice*; the Jane Austen Society of North America gives a scholarship for writers to research *Pride and Prejudice* (or another Austen novel) at Chawton House; and the Jane Austen Society of the Netherlands offers monthly balls in Dutch stately homes. Jane Austen societies provide opportunities to discuss themes, characters, setting, irony, comedy, films, sequels, romance, structure, marriages, food, travel, historical background, hero, heroine, style, time frame, continuing relevance, morality, feminism, Marxism, influence, criticism and many other aspects of *Pride and Prejudice*.

The novel is being talked about in the academic world too. Universities publish scholarly articles on a vast range of Austenian topics. Professor Douglas Bush ponders the phallic significance of Mr Gardiner's fishing tackle in an article entitled 'Mrs Bennet and the Dark Gods'; in another Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes an essay to establish which of Jane Austen's characters are into regular masturbation. Articles examine the ways in which Gaskell's *North and South* is inspired by *Pride and Prejudice*, or how the novel was inspired by Samuel Richardson's works. D.W. Harding famously examined the 'regulated hatred' to be found in the novel, while Margaret Kirkham sought out its feminism. Today's academics are still finding plenty to write about *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen classes at universities currently attract far higher numbers than classes on any other nineteenth-century novelist; university extension courses and summer school programmes for adults keen to learn more about *Pride and Prejudice* are immensely popular. From China to New

Zealand, Sri Lanka to Japan, students are kept busy writing essays about *Pride and Prejudice*; and lectures and seminars devoted to in-depth analysis of the novel are currently taking place all over the world.

Today, discussion is also taking place on the worldwide web. In 1943 Sheila Kaye-Smith and G.B. Stern (both novelists) sat down to write up their discussions about Jane Austen's novels. The result was *Talking of Jane Austen*. Reading their book is like eavesdropping on two friends chatting over a cup of tea about their favourite novels. In 2008 Steve Chandler and Terence N. Hill wrote *Two Guys Read Jane Austen*, a book that consists of chat conducted by email, as they ponder the importance of Jane Austen in their lives. Although they lived in different parts of the US, distance was no barrier to their holding a literary conversation. Now conversation about Jane Austen is global. There are hundreds of chat rooms, blogs, archives, discussion sites and Internet forums dedicated to her works. One of the best known, 'The Republic of Pemberley', was formed 'for people addicted to *Pride and Prejudice*', so that they could 'feel free to gush', and today 'Pemberleans' from around the world enthuse, argue, inform and gush to their heart's content. 'Austenprose – the Jane Austen Blog' daily celebrates the brilliance of *Pride and Prejudice*. There are online polls, web quizzes, chat rooms devoted to the films and scholarly sites. Those wanting to talk about *Pride and Prejudice* or hear what others have to say can visit an 'I Love *Pride and Prejudice* Group', austenacious.com, austenonly.com, 'All Things Austen', the 'Mr Darcy Fan Club' (or the Internet fan clubs specializing in Elizabeth Bennet, or Jane and Bingley), 'November is *Pride and Prejudice* Month', firth.com, 'Firthness' (offering 'All Darcy, all the time') or 'The *Pride and Prejudice* Paradise'. The BBC is bringing the world of Jane Austen to Facebook in 2012, with 'Jane Austen's Rogues and Romance', the first online social game dedicated to Wickham, Darcy and co. There's an awful lot of happy cyberspace taken up by people talking about *Pride and Prejudice*.

Pride and Prejudice is rare as a novel in making the highbrow and the lowbrow want to discuss it. It has mass appeal. Today many of those talking about it are female, although 100 years ago the book was read more by men than by women; films have made the book mistakenly appear to be more a female experience than a male

one. But there are male enthusiasts too and many fine modern critics have been, and are, men. Gender, geography, age, nationality and religion are all unimportant – around the world this novel is forcing a universal response.

Pride and Prejudice is an invitation: it demands to be talked about. It asks readers today, and readers to come, to enter its world, engage with its characters and issues, find answers for the questions it poses. It makes us think about friendships, about relationships with parents and siblings, about finding happiness in marriage, about demanding employers, about chance and the role it plays in human affairs (for example, Darcy walking across his lawn at Pemberley just as Elizabeth is doing the same), about clergymen and military men and their role in society, about social rankings, about self-knowledge, about . . . The list goes on and on. It encourages us to find role models in its finer characters, to strive for self-awareness, to learn how to cope with aggressive bosses or false friends. Human nature has not changed in 200 years and so *Pride and Prejudice* can still tell us what makes people tick. And of course it forces every reader to consider the many forms of 'pride' and 'prejudice' encountered by everyone every day in this world in which we live. Professor Amanda Vickery, who recently presented a documentary on *The Many Lovers of Miss Jane Austen* (screened in Britain on the BBC in late 2011), summed it up very well: 'I think the key to her adaptability is her restraint. Austen leaves room for the reader's intelligence and fantasies, which has the uncanny effect of allowing each new generation to see themselves reflected back from her pages.' Surely in 200 years new readers will still be seeking themselves in the pages of *Pride and Prejudice*. As Anthony Trollope remarked, this is a novel 'full of excellent teaching'. There is every hope that *Pride and Prejudice* will continue to teach its invaluable lessons to many generations to come.



— PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AS BIBLIOTHERAPY —

The ancient Greeks put up signs in their libraries announcing them to be 'healing places for the soul'. Any reader knows that books make you feel better, but today there's a word for it: bibliotherapy. It's an expressive therapy which uses novels, poems and the written word to fight depression and psychological problems. Bibliotherapy gives confidence to children, facilitates dialogue in troubled relationships, occupies a patient in a healthy and productive way, and brings catharsis and resolution to trauma. Bibliotherapy can take place in a professional environment, with trained therapists, in the classroom or at home. *Pride and Prejudice* is high on the list of books recommended by professional bibliotherapists.

Bibliotherapy is not a new concept, even if its name is a new one. Many a reader over the last two centuries has turned to *Pride and Prejudice* as a pick-me-up. As we have seen, in the trenches of First World War the Bennets and Bingleys brought comfort to men desperately in need of something to smile about ('Jane Austen has taken her fragrant way into a surprising number of dugouts', one contemporary commentator remarked) and Kipling wrote in 'The Janeites' of the group therapy the novel provided for weary men and the sense of companionship that *Pride and Prejudice* gave. He found solace in its pages when his only son was killed in France. A.A. Milne read it as he recuperated in a war hospital and in its pages forgot the horrors of the Front. Thousands took copies of *Pride and Prejudice* into bomb shelters in the Second World War. Anxieties over whether Darcy and Elizabeth would finally unite drove away greater anxieties about the exploding world outside. For two centuries *Pride and Prejudice* has soothed, cheered, calmed, inspired confidence, overcome emotional problems and lessened the hurts of life. Reading it makes you feel good. Who needs Mogadon when there is a copy of *Pride and Prejudice* on the bookshelf?

EXAMPLES OF *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AS BIBLIOTHERAPY

'Let me have only the company of the people I love . . .'

A friend I love has been precious to me for sixty years. A giving friend who is never demanding and expects nothing in return, a friend who provides delight and humour when I seek escape, solace in times of worry or grief, a friend who willingly shares acquaintances who are guaranteed to reveal the unexpected at each encounter. My treasured friend? *Pride and Prejudice!*

Marlene Arditto, Vice President, Jane Austen Society of Australia

'How can you be so silly,' cried her mother, 'as to think of such a thing, in all this dirt! You will not be fit to be seen when you get there.'

'I shall be very fit to see Jane – which is all I want.'

What better escape from the disruptive impact of an earthquake could there be than to dip into *Pride and Prejudice*? Against a background of ongoing quakes with associated damage, traffic delays and recurrent liquefaction, how could I not identify with Elizabeth Bennet when she arrives at Netherfield, her petticoats six inches deep in mud? Her example cannot fail to inspire. She thinks not of presenting a pristine appearance but of the need to support her sister. What a heroine! In a similar way, Christchurch may be damaged, but remains unbowed. Lizzy's imperfect appearance actually meets the approval of those who matter in the novel. Hard hats and high visibility vests are modish in my home town! In the midst of abnormal conditions, *Pride and Prejudice* is a never-failing source of inspiration, entertainment and a welcome distraction from life in quake-affected Christchurch.

Ruth Williamson, JASA member in Christchurch, New Zealand

What books are best when I am feeling low? It's not always escapist fantasy that fills the bill. Sometimes what is most comforting is to be reminded of an ordered world in which integrity wins the day, good manners are a reflection of a good heart, and love is generous not self-serving. For that, *Pride*

and Prejudice is the perfect therapy: a timeless story which is at one and the same time both profound and vastly entertaining. How many books are there where, even though you have known the ending since you were 12, you still can't wait to find out what happens? The seriousness, the sanity, the exquisite sense of fun of Jane Austen's world in this novel combine to put everything back into perspective – and life begins to look up again.

Dr Joanna Penglase, editor of JASA journal *Sensibilities*

Even when I think I know the book so well, every re-reading turns up new delights of wit and humour and always makes me feel better. Jane Austen's portraiture in words is wonderful. Her succinct, clever, insightful and elegant language is a joy. I always laugh at Elizabeth's verbal fencing matches with Darcy, the Bingleys and Lady Catherine, at Mr Bennet's dry comments, at Mrs Bennet's twittering and at the never to be forgotten verbosity and pomposity of Mr Collins! Who can beat her?

Maureen Kelly, chairman of the Scottish branch of the Jane Austen Society

Since 2012 is a presidential election year in the USA, it is a *Pride and Prejudice* year for me. Although sorely tempted, I try to refrain from demonizing adherents of either political party. I do, however (as a Janeite) depend upon being entertained – virtually daily – by ridiculous, ludicrous, hyperbolic statements, accusations and charges made by candidates and the media types who report on their antics. Given the emptiness of political discourse in these polarized times – most people strive only to reinforce their own preferences and prejudices – I have been known to interrupt a political exchange, online or in-the-flesh, with this personal maxim: 'Forget politics. Read Jane Austen.' This year, of all years, my novel of choice for sense, sanity, stability and civility must certainly be *Pride and Prejudice*.

Elsa Solender, past president of JASNA, author of *Jane Austen in Love: An Entertainment*

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE,

A NOVEL,

BY

JANE AUSTEN.



*This is not to be taken, Miss Bennet.
I insist on being satisfied. He has
my nephew with you an offer of marriage.*

ABOVE: The first illustrated edition of *Pride and Prejudice* published in 1833; OPPOSITE: 'Three daughters married! . . . I shall go distracted.' An illustration by Ann Kronheimer from the Real Reads abridged edition of *Pride and Prejudice* retold by Gill Tavner.

Pride and Prejudice is a diamond of a novel. The marvellous dialogue, beautifully constructed plot, wit and superb characters all sparkle from the page. It radiates light and energy, throwing off many shades and reflections from its facets. Like a diamond, it refuses to crack under pressure: it survives the onslaughts of filmmakers, sequel writers, critics and fans. Like a diamond, it's the universal symbol of Love. Critic Tony Tanner once remarked that *Pride and Prejudice* is the story of a man who changes his manners and a lady who changes her mind, but it's also the world's greatest love story. Like a professionally cut stone, *Pride and Prejudice* has exquisite symmetry. Those looking into its glittering depths find beauty, order and balance, but they also discover there what they want or need to see. There's nothing fake about this gem of a novel – it took great effort to forge its sparkle – and its glittering perfections have not worn away after two centuries of hard wear. Like a diamond, it is timeless and universal. Just as man has always lusted after jewels, *Pride and Prejudice* too evokes a powerful response.

It is not surprising, then, that readers' polls regularly place *Pride and Prejudice* in No. 1 position. It has been voted the 'Most Romantic Novel of all Time' and it was 'No. 1 Most-Loved Book' in a World Book Day poll. *Pride and Prejudice* is the book that people do not want to be without. In lists of '100 Books You Should Read Before You Die', *Pride and Prejudice* is there again. In so many ways, the world has acknowledged its uniqueness and its immense popularity.

It has been said that a classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say. *Pride and Prejudice* has now been 'speaking' for 200 years, and there is every reason to believe that it will go on speaking to readers for ever.

