

# CONTENTS

---

## PART ONE

### INTRODUCTION

How to study a novel .....	5
Reading <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> .....	6

## PART TWO

### THE TEXT

Note on the text .....	8
Synopsis .....	8
Characters .....	10
Detailed summaries .....	11
Extended commentaries .....	82
Text 1 – Chapter 11 (pp. 50–1) .....	82
Text 2 – Chapter 26 (pp. 123–4) .....	85
Text 3 – Chapter 46 (pp. 225–7) .....	88

## PART THREE

### CRITICAL APPROACHES

Characterisation .....	92
Elizabeth Bennet .....	93
Jane Bennet .....	95
Lydia Bennet .....	95
Mary and Catherine Bennet .....	96
Mr Bennet .....	97
Mrs Bennet .....	98
Mr Bingley .....	99
Mr Darcy .....	99
Wickham .....	101
Mr Collins .....	102
Lady Catherine de Bourgh .....	104
Mr and Mrs Gardiner .....	104
Charlotte Lucas .....	105
Colonel Fitzwilliam .....	107
Sisters .....	107
Servants .....	108
Locations .....	109

Themes and critical issues .....	111
Character as a theme .....	111
Pride and prejudice .....	113
Marriage and love .....	114
Money and self-interest .....	117
Luck and happiness .....	118
Women's role .....	119
Narrowness of vision .....	120
The implied reader .....	121
Narrative techniques .....	122
The narrator .....	122
Irony .....	124
Letters .....	125
Style and language .....	126
Realism .....	127

## PART FOUR

### CRITICAL HISTORY

Early critical reception .....	128
The new criticism .....	129
Contemporary approaches .....	130
Historicist criticism .....	130
Feminist criticism .....	131
Twenty-first-century criticism .....	132

## PART FIVE

### BACKGROUND

Biographical note .....	133
Austen's other works .....	134
Literary background .....	135
Historical background .....	136
Chronology .....	138

FURTHER READING .....	143
-----------------------	-----

LITERARY TERMS .....	145
----------------------	-----

AUTHORS OF THESE NOTES .....	148
------------------------------	-----

## CRITICAL APPROACHES



## CHECK THE BOOK

There is a short essay on 'Characterization in Jane Austen' by John Bayley in *The Jane Austen Handbook* edited by J. David Grey (1986). A famous general study of novel-writing, which pays attention to character, is E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* (1927).

## CHARACTERISATION

Through the ironic narrator, Jane Austen seems to enjoy discussing her characters, recounting their conversations with each other, and showing how they behave both in times of leisure and of stress. For further discussion of the narrator see **Narrative techniques**. However, self-sufficient though they may seem, the characters are only part of the novelist's plan to discuss a number of ideas through the narration of a series of events. When writing as a literary critic it is necessary to keep a sharp sense of their fictive nature in relation to discovering what this overall plan might be.

One striking aspect of Austen's writing is that she is surprisingly non-descriptive. We are rarely told much about what the characters look like in any specific way. Where she does indulge in more specific and individuating comment, it is usually in direct connection with that character's place in the action or the moral framework of the story. For example, we are told in Chapter 2 that Lydia, though the youngest, is the tallest of the five sisters. These comments must be seen in relation to her behaviour: at sixteen she is physically a woman, but emotionally immature and out of control. Austen has little interest in inventing an appearance for her characters. Darcy is captivated by 'a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman' (Ch. 6, p. 25). When 'with great intrepidity' he admits these are Elizabeth's (Ch. 6, p. 26), his comment is remorselessly used against him by Miss Bingley (who had expected a compliment to herself). Elizabeth's beautiful eyes – we are told they are 'dark' (Ch. 6, p. 23) – therefore serve a larger purpose than simple description. They allow Darcy to stand up for her and for himself, and then they serve Caroline Bingley with an opportunity for malice.

What finally interests the narrator is not her characters' appearance, but their moral qualities, or lack of them. Through their attitudes to these their differences are revealed, and they show their discrimination and capacity for good taste and judgement.

## ELIZABETH BENNET

Elizabeth is the second oldest of the Bennet sisters, and is used by the narrator more than any other character in the novel as a **centre of consciousness** from which to view events. In the sense that she is the main focus of the reader's interest, she is the novel's heroine, though she makes mistakes, and is not particularly heroic. In the novel's concern with pride and with prejudice, she and Darcy are the main players. She is Mr Bennet's favourite daughter, intelligent and lively, and her 'quickness' (Ch. 1, p. 6) of mind is made evident in her taste for witty and teasing conversation, where she likes to adopt striking and independent views. Evidence for this is best found in Chapters 8, 9 and 11, when she is looking after Jane at Netherfield, in her conversations with Bingley, his sisters and Darcy.

She likes to laugh at people, including herself. We are told after Darcy refused to dance with her, that 'She told the story with great spirit amongst her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous' (Ch. 3, p. 13). It is this quality of humour that attracts Darcy. Her rival Miss Bingley calls it 'that little something, bordering on conceit and impertinence' (Ch. 10, p. 46), but the narrator has already told us that 'there was a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody' (Ch. 10, p. 46). She shares her capacity for **irony** with her father, and with the narrator. This allows her to stand away from situations and offer judgements on them, sometimes (though not as often as the narrator or her father), in the form of saying the opposite of what she really means. 'Mr Darcy is all politeness' she remarks in Chapter 6 (p. 25), as a way of avoiding dancing with him: we can guess she is remembering his rudeness to her.

She is active and robust, to the point of being indecorous and unfeminine, from the point of view of her enemies. 'Elizabeth continued her walk alone ... springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise' (Ch. 7, p. 30). Her dirty petticoat is shocking to Miss Bingley. However, Darcy and Bingley find the results of her vigour attractive.



## CHECK THE BOOK

'Centre of consciousness' is a phrase used by Henry James (1843–1916) in his discussion of novel-writing. He distinguishes between 'drama' – events seen from outside – and reflection on the action through the consciousness of a character. His critical writings are collected in *The Art of Fiction* (1948).

World events

**1760** George III accedes to the throne

**1770** Captain James Cook discovers Botany Bay, Australia

**1773** The 'Boston Tea Party': workers in Boston protest against British attempts to tax the American Colonies

Author's life

**1760** George Austen, Jane Austen's father, takes up trusteeship of a plantation in Antigua

**1775** Birth of Jane Austen at Steventon, Hampshire

Literary events

**1740** Samuel Richardson, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*

**1748** Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*,

**1749** Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*

**1754** Samuel Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison*

**1755** Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*

**1757** John Home, *Douglas, A Tragedy*

**1758–60** Samuel Johnson writes *The Idler* series of essays

**1768** Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*

**1771** Oliver Goldsmith, *A History of England*; Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*

World events

**1775–6** American War of Independence breaks out, following the thirteen rebel colonies' declaration of independence from Britain

**1777** France officially joins the Americans in the war against Britain

**1783** American independence is finally recognised by Britain

**1788** George III's first attack of madness

**1789** Outbreak of the French Revolution; George Washington becomes first president of the United States of America

**1792** France is declared a republic

Author's life

**1790** *Love and Friendship* finished

**1791–2** The young Jane Austen writes *History of England* and *Lesley Castle* (both unpublished)

Literary events

**1778** Fanny Burney, *Evelina*

**1782** Fanny Burney, *Cecilia*

**1783** Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres*

**1784** Death of Samuel Johnson

**1785** William Cowper, *The Task*

**1786** William Beckford, *Vathek: an Arabian Tale*

**1788** First edition of *The Times* newspaper

**1791** James Boswell, *The Life of Johnson*