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## Literary Terms

## Authors of these Notes
Critical approaches

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 affect 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.
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

1775 Birth of Jane Austen at Steventon, Hampshire

Author's life

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

1768 Laurence Sterne, A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy


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

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

1790 Love and Friendship finished
1791 James Boswell, The Life of Johnson

1791-2 The young Jane Austen writes History of England and Lesley Castle (both unpublished)

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 First edition of The Times newspaper

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