

Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice



Regency Period

- Middle class gained social status; known as **landed gentry**
- Profits from Industrial Revolution and expanding colonial system
- Strived to align themselves with England's landed aristocracy
- Purchased estates and country homes to rival aristocratic mansions
- Newly acquired wealth and possessions



Austen's Novels

- Privileged circle of England's landed gentry and aristocracy
- Upper class was old hereditary aristocracy and the new landed gentry who came into money through commercial enterprise and ascended from the middle class
- Upper class did not work and frequently employed farmers to work their land
- Upper class controlled England's politics



Mr. Darcy

- **Darcy is representative of hereditary aristocracy**
- **Wealthy landowner who does not have to work for a living**
- **Employs workers to farm his land, surrounding families depend on his patronage**



The Bingleys



- **Bingleys represent the new landed gentry**
- **Bingley's father acquired wealth through trade, gave up his business, and moved his family to the country**
- **He and his sisters are now considered upper class**

The Bennets

- Bennets own land, but they are a middle-class family
- Longbourn House in Hertfordshire – 2,000 per year
- Must work to cultivate land
- Few servants and limited financial resources



Women, Patriarchy and Property Rights



- **Women had few legal rights**
- **Depend on men for protection and survival**
- **Women could not own property (they were considered property)**
- **Depended on fathers to “give them away” to a lucrative marriage**
- **At death, property went to another male heir**
- **Finding a husband was a necessity not a social preoccupation**

Women, Patriarchy and Property Rights



- **“Entailment” determined how property would be passed through several generations within a family; usually closest male relative**
- **Lady Catherine DeBourgh, patroness of Rosings Park, is a rare example of an independent woman who inherits the estate of her father.**

Theme of Social Class and Lack of Mobility

- **Conflict that arises when members of middle class, such as Bennets, mingle socially with members of the upper classes, represented by Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley.**
- **Austen was critical of the social barrier between middle and upper class (while remaining silent about members of lower class)**
- **Elizabeth Bennet breaks class barrier**



Theme of Marriage and Family



- **Future of Bennet's daughters depends on successful union with suitable husbands**
- **Women often forced into marital unions purely out of financial necessity**
- **New ideal of marriage and partnership based on mutual respect and love**
- **Expectation of social network above individual desire for privacy**
- **Family's reputation was tied to reputation of each individual member**

Theme of Propriety, Social Decorum, and Reputation

- **Person's value depends on respect of friends and neighbors**
- **Woman who engaged in inappropriate behavior with a man prior to marriage was morally corrupt. No virtue = social outcast**
- **Elizabeth values personal worth and individual character over reputation and status**
- **Standards of proper social etiquette**



First Impressions



- **Original title of P & P**
- **Premature preconceptions complicate the relationships between characters**
- **Both characters must set aside their pride and prejudice and form an opinion based on respect and cordial friendship**
- **Error in judgment with Wickham who creates a bad image of Darcy**
- **Must look beneath the surface of a person's character**

Satire

- **Humor or wit in order to criticize or ridicule a particular person or group**
- **Disguise criticism of an intended target by clothing it in humorous language, funny characterizations, and sarcasm**
- **Austen satirizes Mrs. Bennet and her need to marry her daughters; also Mr. Collins' high opinion of himself which often makes him the laughingstock of society**



Comedy of Manners

- **Uses elements of Satire to ridicule or expose behaviors, manners, flaws, and morals of members of the middle or upper classes.**
- **Incorporate love affairs, witty and comical exchanges between characters, and the humorous revelation of societal scandals and intrigues**
- **Witty banter between characters**

