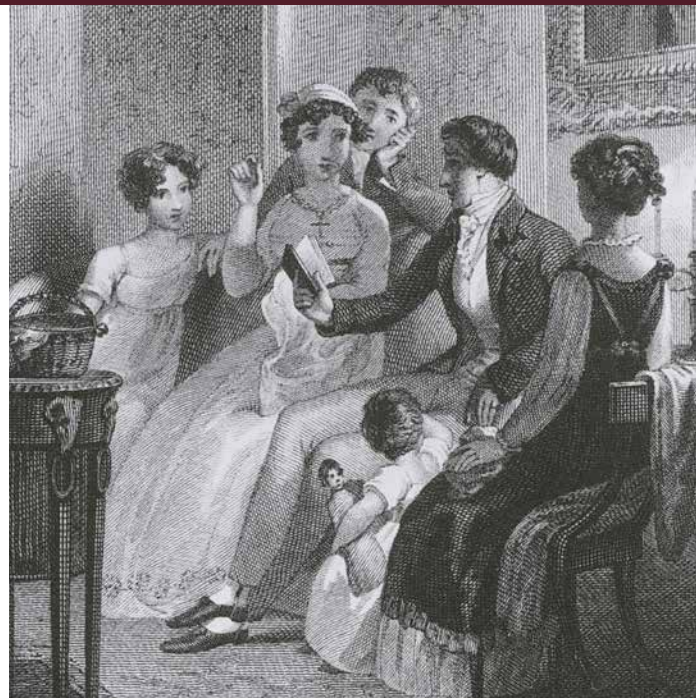
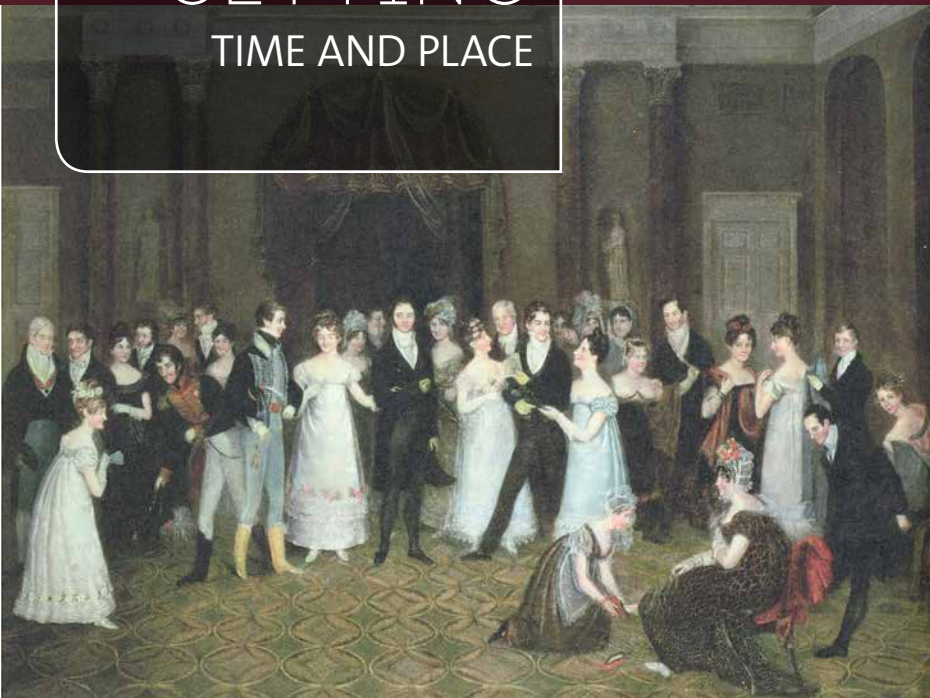


# SETTING

## TIME AND PLACE

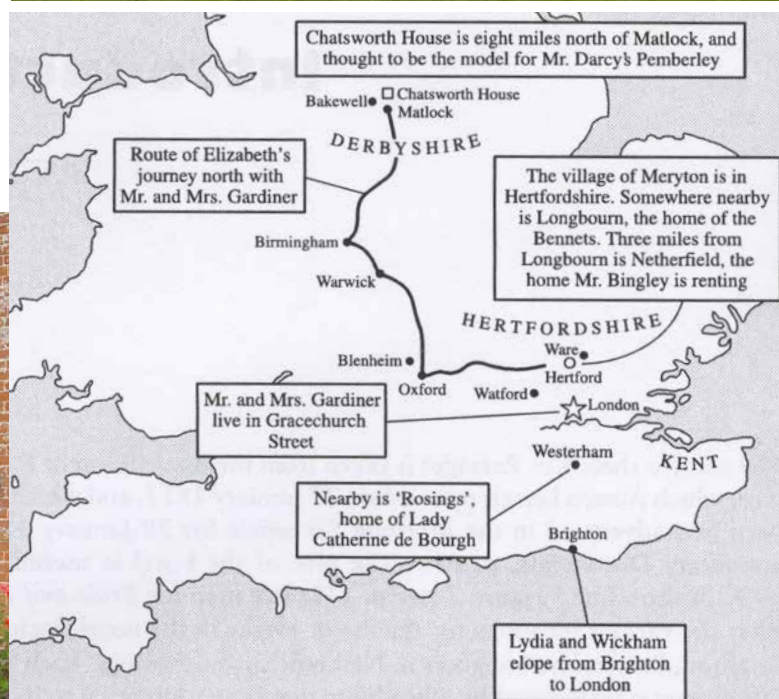


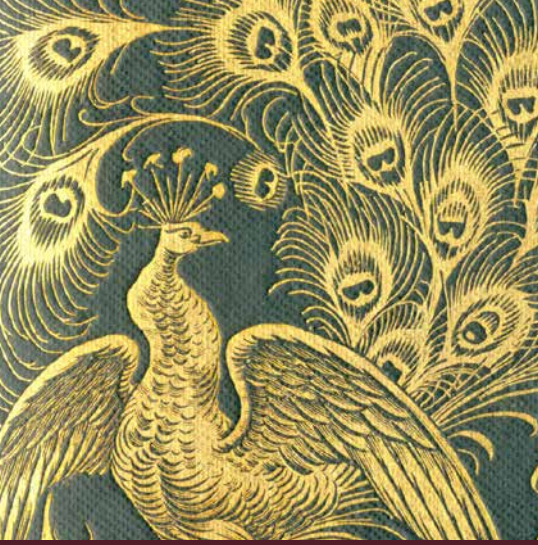
The play begins in about 1797 at Longbourn, the Bennet's home in Hertfordshire, England.

The French Revolution is still scourging while stirrings of the Industrial Revolution are beginning to transform the lives of England's landed classes.

This is not Victorian England—the stereotypes of repression and stuffiness do not apply here. There are many formalities, but the social conventions vary depending on how old-fashioned the people are and how formal the setting.

In terms of settings, the action of the play moves through time and place as fluidly as the dancing presented on stage. Although the play begins in the humble Bennet household, it transports us to a number of different estates, public assemblies, and private balls throughout England's countryside.

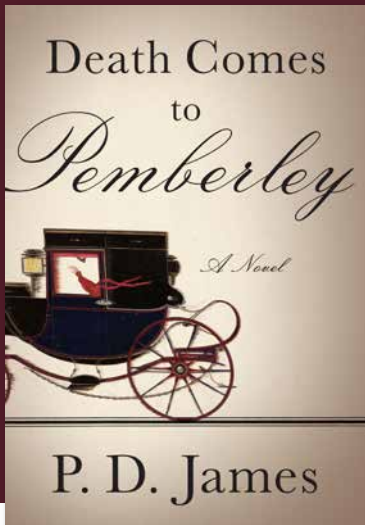




# THE ENDLESSLY ADAPTABLE

## *Pride and Prejudice*

by Juliette Wells, Associate Professor and Chair of English, Goucher College



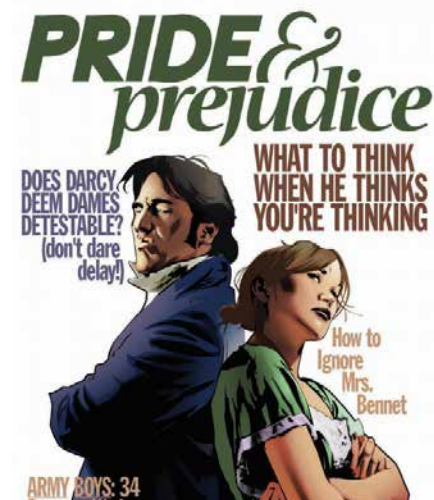
**In addition to the play you're seeing today, versions of *Pride and Prejudice* have appeared in every possible medium, from film and television to comic books to a YouTube series. What makes this novel, first published in 1813, so endlessly adaptable?**

A major reason, certainly, is Jane Austen's compelling characters. Austen creates characters who think and act in psychologically plausible ways. She has a special gift for sharply observed portraits of women, which continue to appeal to audiences. While Elizabeth Bennet's outspokenness would have seemed somewhat shocking to Austen's contemporaries, we welcome her confidence and self-determination.

Also crucial to Austen's adaptability are two qualities that authors rarely balance as well as she does: humor and morality. Combining to form satire, these central elements of Austen's fictional world speak to audiences across the centuries, even if the specific manners and social conventions she depicts seem distant.

Finally, the essential plot of *Pride and Prejudice* can be transferred successfully into almost any realm. Austen wasn't the first to create a witty couple whose strong dislike gradually gives way to love: see, for example, Beatrice and Benedick of *Much Ado about Nothing*. But Austen's particular take on the sparring pair has been influential on everything from 1940s screwball comedies to today's romance novels and romcom flicks.

Interpretations of *Pride and Prejudice* by other creators began with the first illustrated edition, published in London by Richard Bentley



in 1833. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, fully illustrated editions were much in demand and, thanks to changes in printing technology, could be affordably priced. The beautiful “Peacock Edition” illustrated by Hugh Thomson has become an especially sought-after collectible.

The first feature-length film based on an Austen novel, MGM’s *Pride and Prejudice*, established Laurence Olivier as Darcy and Greer Garson as Elizabeth in the popular imagination. This film adaptation grew out of Helen Jerome’s acclaimed stage play *Pride and Prejudice*, performed in New York and London in 1935–1936, which later inspired a 1959 Broadway musical titled *First Impressions*. A sharp script by the English novelist Fay Weldon enriched a 1980 television miniseries released by the BBC. But the 1940 MGM film unquestionably retained its cultural dominance until, in 1995, Colin Firth took up the role of Darcy and, indelibly, dived into a pond at Pemberley.

An international sensation, not least because of this infamous “wet shirt” scene, the 1995 BBC miniseries launched a wave of Austenmania that has yet to abate. In the bestselling novel *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1996), itself later adapted into a popular film, Helen Fielding affectionately mocked Firth fans while suggesting, more seriously, that the restrictions on women in Austen’s world haven’t fully gone away. Fan fiction writers around the world responded enthusiastically to Firth’s Darcy—and, to a lesser extent, to Jennifer Ehle’s portrayal of Elizabeth—producing countless sequels and alternative versions.

Firth and Ehle’s influence was still going strong ten years later when Focus Features released a very different *Pride & Prejudice* feature film, one with roots more in 1980s teen comedies than in so-called “heritage” adaptations. Keira Knightley’s spirited Elizabeth in the 2005 film appealed especially to younger viewers, while Matthew Macfadyen’s portrayal of an awkward, deeply introverted Darcy resonated with those for whom the autism spectrum and Asperger’s had become familiar concepts.

Altogether, the decade of the 2000s demonstrated, often thrillingly, just how far you could go with *Pride and Prejudice*. Director Gurinder Chadha updated the story in a global context with her 2004 Bollywood-influenced film *Bride & Prejudice*, reinventing Darcy as an arrogant American hotel magnate and Elizabeth as Lalita Bakshi of Amritsar, India. What happens when a passionate Austen fan magically enters the world of *Pride and Prejudice* was the premise of *Lost in Austen* (2008), a smart and gleefully metafictional miniseries in which familiar characters don’t behave at all how you’d expect. An invented connection between *Pride and Prejudice* and Austen’s own love life anchored the 2007 biopic *Becoming Jane*, starring Anne Hathaway. And, of course, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) became an unlikely bestseller by, yes, just adding zombies to Austen’s world.

To the joy of those who share an omnivorous love of Austen, creative takes on *Pride and Prejudice* for different audiences continue to

proliferate. For the social media generation: the Emmy Award-winning YouTube series *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012–2013). For devotees of P. D. James’s magnificent detective fiction: *Death Comes to Pemberley*, that author’s late-life homage to Austen (2011; TV miniseries version, 2013). For lovers of literary fiction: Jo Baker’s *Longbourn* (2013), a wholly new approach through the point of view of the servants whom Austen barely mentioned.

Keep your eyes peeled for more. *Longbourn* is en route to becoming a film, as is *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Yet to be released is *Eligible*, a novel by Curtis Sittenfeld (author of *Prep* and *American Wife*). And Nora Ephron, before she died, adapted *Lost in Austen* into a feature film.

Cynics may remark that there’s no end to the ways people will try to make money off of Jane Austen—and, indeed, there probably isn’t. Her work is in the public domain, and her name is a very recognizable brand. And it’s certainly true that adaptations beget more adaptations, in Hollywood as in the culture at large. But many people today who love Austen’s novels came to them first through an adaptation, or credit an adaptation with renewing their appreciation for her writing. How could you better honor an author than by inspiring a reader? Bring on every new adaptation, I say! Let’s be spoiled for choice. And then I hope you’ll join me in going home and opening up *Pride and Prejudice*. ❀



# Of Patriarchal Pride and Gendered Prejudice: A Woman's Place in Regency England

by Faedra Chatard Carpenter,  
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The original title page of Jane Austen's 1811 debut novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, makes no mention of the author's name, noting only that it was written "By a Lady." Likewise, *Pride and Prejudice* merely credited authorship to "the Author of *Sense and Sensibility*." Though critical commendations paved the way for further publications, the truth of Austen's authorship remained veiled until her brother posthumously published her final two books. Only then, in 1817, was Jane Austen fully revealed as the acclaimed writer of her six notable novels.

So, why did Austen choose to remain anonymous, especially in light of her works' positive reception? Certainly, her family and friends actively supported her literary talents and efforts to publish. As early as 1797, her father contacted a London publisher, asking him to consider one of Austen's initial efforts, *First Impressions*. And while his letter of inquiry was sent back with the terse response, "Declined by Return of Post," Austen continued to revise the manuscript until its successful publication 16 years later—as *Pride and Prejudice*.

Despite consistent familial encouragement, Austen elected to keep her authorial identity relatively secret. We can safely assume that being of "the fairer sex" was likely a major factor. After all, Austen wrote at a time in which gendered inequalities were fundamental to the social, economic, and political fabric; Regency England placed high expectations and severe limitations on gentlewomen and their lives. Identifying oneself as an author was almost inconceivable for a respectable unmarried woman.

In general, women were believed to be intellectually inferior to men, an idea that Mary Wollstonecraft vigorously countered in her 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Despite such refutations, fields such as mathematics and science were routinely considered beyond a woman's grasp, along with poetic—yet rigorous—subjects such as philosophy, Greek, or Latin. Moreover, serious study failed to prepare women for what was then deemed to be their highest calling: to serve men and society as wives, mothers, and hostesses.

In order to fulfill these vocations effectively, women were limited to a *special type* of education. There were no public schools or universities open to them, but young ladies could learn what they needed to master through the tutelage of their mothers, governesses, or boarding schools. Their curriculum generally focused on artistic skills known as "accomplishments"



(i.e., needlework, dancing, and music); primary academic skills (such as spelling, basic arithmetic, and geography); as well as lessons in proper etiquette, social conduct, and moral behavior.

Once primed and readied, young ladies were presented to society. For those on the so-called "marriage market," social gatherings at formal dances (assemblies and balls) served as the major conduits for eligible young men and women to window shop for potential spouses. These dances not only granted young people the opportunity to meet and socialize, but they also gave conscientious parents the chance to make sure that their children's amorous inclinations could lead to beneficial financial transactions. While romance-inspired matrimony was on the rise, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the institution of marriage was still very much a business venture.

For women, marriage was vital. With few alternatives, a profitable union was usually the only way a woman could guarantee her livelihood. Restricted pathways to economic security were due, in part, to the limits placed upon what women were allowed to learn and do in the work force. However, limits were also placed on what women could own and control even when it came to their immediate homes, families, or possessions.

Prior to marriage, a young lady was dependent upon her father (or the male head of household), and after marriage a woman's husband was granted control of her life and legal agency. Thus, upon marrying, any property or wealth possessed—or gained thereafter—became the property of her husband. Even the custodial rights of a couple's children were granted to the father. While this alone encumbered a woman's ability to inherit money or property, the legal procedure of entailment further crippled her potential for fiscal freedom.

Common at the time (and familiar to viewers of *Downton Abbey*), entailments mandated that estates and property were inherited by the closest male heir (even when "close" meant relatively distant). While there were some exceptions made and loopholes exploited within this practice, on the whole entailing proved to be a successful way to preserve familial wealth and property among the landed gentry and the elite classes—just as it proved to be a highly effective means of hindering female autonomy.

And if one did not marry? Like Austen (who benefited from the patronage of a wealthy elder brother), a woman could be lucky enough to be supported by a generous relative or family friend. Or a single woman trained in accomplishments could try to secure a position as a governess, teacher, or "lady's companion"—if she could find the work. However, for women without family ties, kindly patronage, or any learned skill, the situation was much more dire—with abject poverty or prostitution lurking as fateful ends.

Accordingly, the stakes for young women in the world of Jane Austen were very real and very high. The risks and rewards that arise from something as seemingly innocuous as "a country dance" are palpable and pressing, serving as stark reminders of a society well versed in patriarchal pride and gendered prejudice. ❀