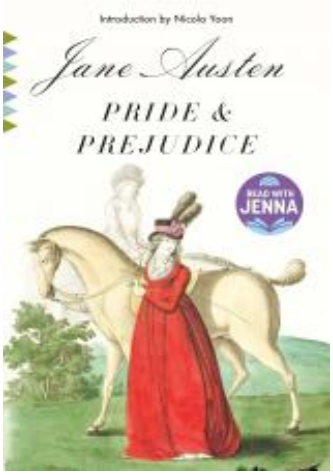
Pride and Prejudice

by Jane Austen



About the Book

This enduring classic about the perils of first impressions has enthralled generations of readers with its romantic drama and unforgettably witty and intelligent heroine.

With a new introduction by Nicola Yoon.

When Elizabeth Bennet first encounters the aristocratic Fitzwilliam Darcy at a ball, the two young people are mutually appalled --- she by his arrogance and aloof manners, and he by her embarrassingly crass relatives. Though Elizabeth?s future security depends on finding a prosperous husband, she is determined to follow her heart instead. Darcy, meanwhile, finds himself thoroughly unsettled by such an uncommonly lively and headstrong woman. Further misunderstandings widen the gulf between them, before a devastating scandal forces the pair to confront the errors of pride and prejudice that have kept them from recognizing each other?s true worth.

Jane Austen?s skill in uniting sparklingly humorous dialogue with profound depths of feeling never found more dazzling expression than in this much-loved novel.

Discussion Guide

1. PRIDE AND PREJUDICE was originally titled *First Impressions.* Critic Brian Southam notes that this phrase comes from the language of the sentimental novels Austen often criticized, where it connoted the idea that one ought to trust one?s immediate, intuitive response to things.

It is widely believed that Austen derived the later title from the fifth book of CECILIA, a novel by Fanny Burney, where the phrase appears (according to Austen biographer Park Honan, however, the phrase dates earlier, to a 1647 book by Jeremy Taylor called LIBERTY OF PROPHESYING, and also appears in Gibbon?s 1776 DECLINE AND FALL OF

THE ROMAN EMPIRE).

Anna Quindlen, in her Introduction to the Modern Library edition, indicates her preference for the second title ("Austen originally named the book *First Impressions;* thank God for second thoughts!").

Which do you think is the more appropriate title and why?

2. The famous opening line of PRIDE AND PREJUDICE --- "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife " --- magnificently displays the irony that suffuses the novel at both local and structural levels. What is the purpose of irony in PRIDE AND PREJUDICE?

3. Austen was writing during a time when novels in the form of letters --- called epistolary novels --- were very popular. There are nearly two dozen letters quoted in whole or in part in PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, and numerous other references to letters and letter-writing. How do you think letters function in the novel? How do the letters --- a narrative element --- interact with the dramatic element (manifested in the dialogue)?

4. A number of critics have maintained that Darcy is not a particularly well-developed or believable character, and that his transformation is a mere plot contrivance. Others have argued that this suggestion fails to take into account the fact that the reader in large part only sees Darcy through the prejudiced eyes of Elizabeth. Which side would you take in this debate, and why?

5. PRIDE AND PREJUDICE has often been criticized for the fact that it appears unconcerned with the politics of Austen?s day. For example, in a letter (written before World War I) to Thomas Hardy, Frederic Harrison refers to Austen as a "heartless little cynic" who composed "satirettes against her neighbors whilst the Dynasts were tearing the world to pieces and consigning millions to their graves." Is this charge fair?

6. Charlotte Brontë wrote in an 1848 letter to G. H. Lewes: "Why do you like Miss Austen so very much? I am puzzled on that point. What induced you to say that you would have rather written PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, or TOM JONES, than any of the *Waverley Novels*? I had not seen PRIDE AND PREJUDICE until I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And what did I find? An accurate, daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully --- fenced, highly --- cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses."

Do you agree with Brontë?s claim that there is no poetry or passion in PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, and her conclusion that "Miss Austen being...without sentiment, without poetry, maybe is sensible, real (more real than true), but she cannot be great"?

Author Bio

Though the domain of Jane Austen?s novels was as circumscribed as her life, her caustic wit and keen observation made her the equal of the greatest novelists in any language.

Born the seventh child of the rector of Steventon, Hampshire, on December 16, 1775, Austen was educated mainly at home. At an early age she began writing sketches and satires of popular novels for her family?s entertainment. As a clergyman?s daughter from a well-connected family, she had ample opportunity to study the habits of the middle class, the gentry and the aristocracy. At 21, she began a novel called ?The First Impressions,? an early version of PRIDE AND PREJUDICE. In 1801, on her father?s retirement, the family moved to the fashionable resort of Bath. Two years later she sold the first version of NORTHANGER ABBEY to a London publisher, but the first of her novels to appear in print was SENSE AND SENSIBILITY, published at her own expense in 1811. It was followed by PRIDE AND PREJUDICE (1813), MANSFIELD PARK (1814) and EMMA (1815).

After her father died in 1805, the family first moved to Southampton then to Chawton Cottage in Hampshire. Despite this relative retirement, Jane Austen was still in touch with a wider world, mainly through her brothers; one had become a very rich country gentleman, another a London banker, and two were naval officers. Though her many novels were published anonymously, she had many early and devoted readers, among them the Prince Regent and Sir Walter Scott. In 1816, in declining health, Austen wrote PERSUASION and revised NORTHANGER ABBEY. Her last work, SANDITION, was left unfinished at her death on July 18, 1817.

Austen was buried in Winchester Cathedral. Her identity as an author was announced to the world posthumously by her brother Henry, who supervised the publication of NORTHANGER ABBEY and PERSUASION in 1818.

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