Definition: Pride and Prejudice from The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide

Novel by Jane Austen, published in 1813. Mr and Mrs Bennet, whose property is due to pass to a male cousin, William Collins, are anxious to secure good marriage settlements for their five daughters. Central to the story is the romance between the witty Elizabeth Bennet and the proud Mr Darcy.

Summary Article: Pride and Prejudice from The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English

A novel by Jane Austen. It was begun in 1796 and completed the following year under the title ‘First Impressions’, but rejected by a publisher in this form. It finally appeared in 1813, after careful revision and with a new title.

Mr and Mrs Bennet of Longbourn are an ill-matched couple, he detached and ironic, she vulgar, gossipy and mainly engaged in seeking husbands for their five daughters. Netherfield, a house near Longbourn, is leased by the wealthy Charles Bingley, who stays there with his sisters and his friend, the still wealthier FitzWilliam Darcy. To Mrs Bennet's delight, Bingley falls in love with her eldest daughter, Jane. But the witty and high-spirited Elizabeth Bennet, next in age of the Bennet children, frankly dislikes Mr Darcy for his cold and superior manner; her prejudice against him is increased by the story she hears from George Wickham, an engaging young militia officer, of the unjust treatment he has received from Darcy. For their part the Bingley sisters and Darcy find Mrs Bennet and the younger Bennet sisters impossibly vulgar, and prevail on Bingley to detach himself from Jane.

The Bennet family is visited by William Collins, a rector under the patronage of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who will inherit Mr Bennet's entailed property on his death. With great pomposity Mr Collins proposes to Elizabeth but she refuses him, despite the financial convenience of such a marriage. Mr Collins transfers his attentions to Elizabeth's friend, Charlotte Lucas, who accepts him out of expediency. Elizabeth goes to visit the newly married couple and finds that Darcy is in the neighbourhood visiting Lady Catherine, his aunt. He falls in love with Elizabeth but phrases his proposal in so condescending a manner that she refuses, taking the opportunity to upbraid him for his treatment of Wickham and for his role in separating Jane and Bingley. In a letter, Darcy exposes Wickham as an adventurer who had once cherished designs on Darcy's 15-year-old sister Georgiana, and protests that he had never been convinced of Jane's love for Bingley.

Elizabeth leaves on a tour of Derbyshire with her aunt and uncle, the Gardiners. They visit Pemberley, Darcy's seat, in the belief he is absent but accidentally meet him. He welcomes them,
and his charm and grace begin to impress Elizabeth. Then comes the news that her sister Lydia has eloped with Wickham. Darcy helps trace the runaways and makes sure that they marry. Bingley renews his courtship of Jane and, despite insolent attempts at interference from Lady Catherine, Darcy persists in his courtship of Elizabeth. Both couples are finally united.

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