

HERTOG 2023 HUMANITIES SEMINAR

JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE & PREJUDICE*

Christopher Scalia, Senior Fellow, AEI

Jane Austen's most beloved novel, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), tells the story of the unlikely courtship of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy. Despite what Austen called its "light, and bright, and sparkling" surface, the novel explores thought-provoking issues related to money and matrimony, rank and social class, morality and manners.

Fellows will consider such questions as: does Austen uphold traditional institutions – marriage and class, in particular – against reform and revolution, or does she subtly undermine them? How is the binary of irony and earnestness or sentimentality depicted over the course of the novel? How are familial and romantic relationships developed or obstructed by different attitudes toward expression and communication?

This seminar will meet online weekly on **Mondays & Thursdays from 5 to 7 PM ET.**

Course Materials:

- Jane Austen, *Pride & Prejudice* (Oxford World's Classics, ed. Kinsley)

Discussion Papers: Each fellow will be responsible for completing a brief discussion paper (1-2 pages, single-spaced). See below for your assignment. **Papers are due the day before your assigned session by 5:00 p.m. ET.** Be sure to support interpretations and claims with textual evidence and citations. They should be posted on the course Slack channel and will be part of the assigned readings for the session. Paper-writers should be ready to briefly present their ideas during the seminar.

Thursday, January 5, 2023

5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. ET

Session I: First Impressions

Readings:

- *Pride & Prejudice*, pp. 3–64 (Volume I, Chs. I–XVI)

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe the dynamics within the Bennet family? How do the parents treat the children? Which members of the family are "sensible," and which are "silly"? How are those specific traits manifest? (**Discussant:** Emily Bowling)
2. What do you make of the conversation about "accomplished" women (pp. 29–30)? What does it say about the expectations of women in these social circles? What does it reveal about the characters involved in the conversation? (**Discussant:** Katherine Farmer)
3. What traits are associated with *civility*? Which characters seem to possess it, and which do not? (In your answer, please focus on some combination of Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins, Mr. Darcy, and Mr. Wickham in particular.) (**Discussant:** Nate Padley)

Monday, January 9, 2023

5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. ET

Session II: Proposals and Rejections

Readings:

- *Pride & Prejudice*, pp. 64–120 (Vol. I, Chs. XVII–Vol. II, Ch. V)

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss one or two of the major interactions that occur during the ball at Netherfield. For example, how does Elizabeth respond to Miss Bingley's warning, and how does Elizabeth respond? How does Elizabeth respond to the behavior of her family members? What transpires between Elizabeth and Darcy? (**Discussant:** Jun Choi)
2. Evaluate Mr. Collins's reasons for proposing to Elizabeth—do they make you think less or more of him, and why? Similarly, what do you make of Charlotte's acceptance of his proposal—for example, what does it suggest about her social circumstances and the institution of marriage? (Be sure to consider the exchange between Jane and Elizabeth in Vol. II, Ch. I.) (**Discussant:** Emily Cope)
3. How would you describe Elizabeth's sense of humor (e.g., pp. 109, 115)? How do other characters respond to it? Are there other characters in the novel with a similar sense of humor? (**Discussant:** Michael Lucchese)

Thursday, January 12, 2023

5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. ET

Session III: Confessions

Readings:

- *Pride & Prejudice*, pp. 120–70 (Vol. II, Chs. VI–XVII)

Discussion Questions:

1. What is remarkable about the manners of Lady Catherine? What do the responses of specific characters to her behavior reveal (or confirm) about them? (**Discussant:** Raihan Choudhury)
2. In Chs. XI–XIII, what remarkable tonal differences do you notice about how Darcy expresses himself in person and in his letter? What might these differences suggest about the different forms of communication? (**Discussant:** Anthony Klein)
3. Much of what Darcy tells Elizabeth relates to his opinion of her family. Are his concerns legitimate, or do they signal a flaw in his character?
4. What role does the militia regiment play in the novel—does it seem to be a source of stability or of disruption? If the former, what are the sources of this stability? If the latter, is the disruption a consequence of something inherent in the regiment or a result of individual characters? (**Discussant:** Joseph Howard)

Monday, January 16, 2023

5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. ET

Session IV: Redemption & Scandal

Readings:

- *Pride & Prejudice*, pp. 170–233 (Vol II, Chs. XVIII–Vol. III, Ch. VIII)

Discussion Questions:

1. What do we learn about Mr. and Mrs. Bennet in these chapters, both as a married couple and as parents? Is Elizabeth’s judgment of them fair? (**Discussant:** Calvin Hunt)
2. Discuss Elizabeth’s reaction to seeing Pemberly. How does the estate affect her opinion of Darcy? Does her reaction strike you as sensible or superficial? (**Discussant:** Margaret Potter)
3. Apart from Lydia and Wickham themselves, who is most to blame for their actions? In your answer, take into account whether who accepts blame differs from who actually deserves it. (**Discussant:** Zacarias Negron)

Thursday, January 19, 2023

5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. ET

Session V: “Improved in Civility”

Readings:

- *Pride & Prejudice*, pp. 233–90 (Vol. III, Chs. IX–FINIS)

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss Lady Catherine’s visit with Elizabeth in Vol. III, Ch. XIV. What is the purpose of Lady Catherine’s visit, and how does Elizabeth respond? Have we seen Elizabeth behave in this manner elsewhere in the novel? What does the scene suggest about class difference, as well as Elizabeth’s feelings for Darcy? (**Discussant:** Ceyda Koksoy)
2. What do you make of the exchange between Elizabeth and Darcy when she asks, “did you admire me for my impertinence” (284)? Is there truth in her conclusion that he was attracted to her impertinence, or does she overlook how this behavior was an obstacle in their relationship? Is he right to define “impertinence” as “liveliness of mind”? (**Discussant:** Adam Powers)
3. What does the novel suggest about the capacity for people to improve? In your answer, take into account Darcy’s description of his upbringing (Vol. III, Ch. XVI), as well as Kitty’s development (Vol. III, Ch. XIX). (**Discussant:** Emma Janssen)