



JANE AUSTEN, DAY I

1775-1817

NOTA BENE!

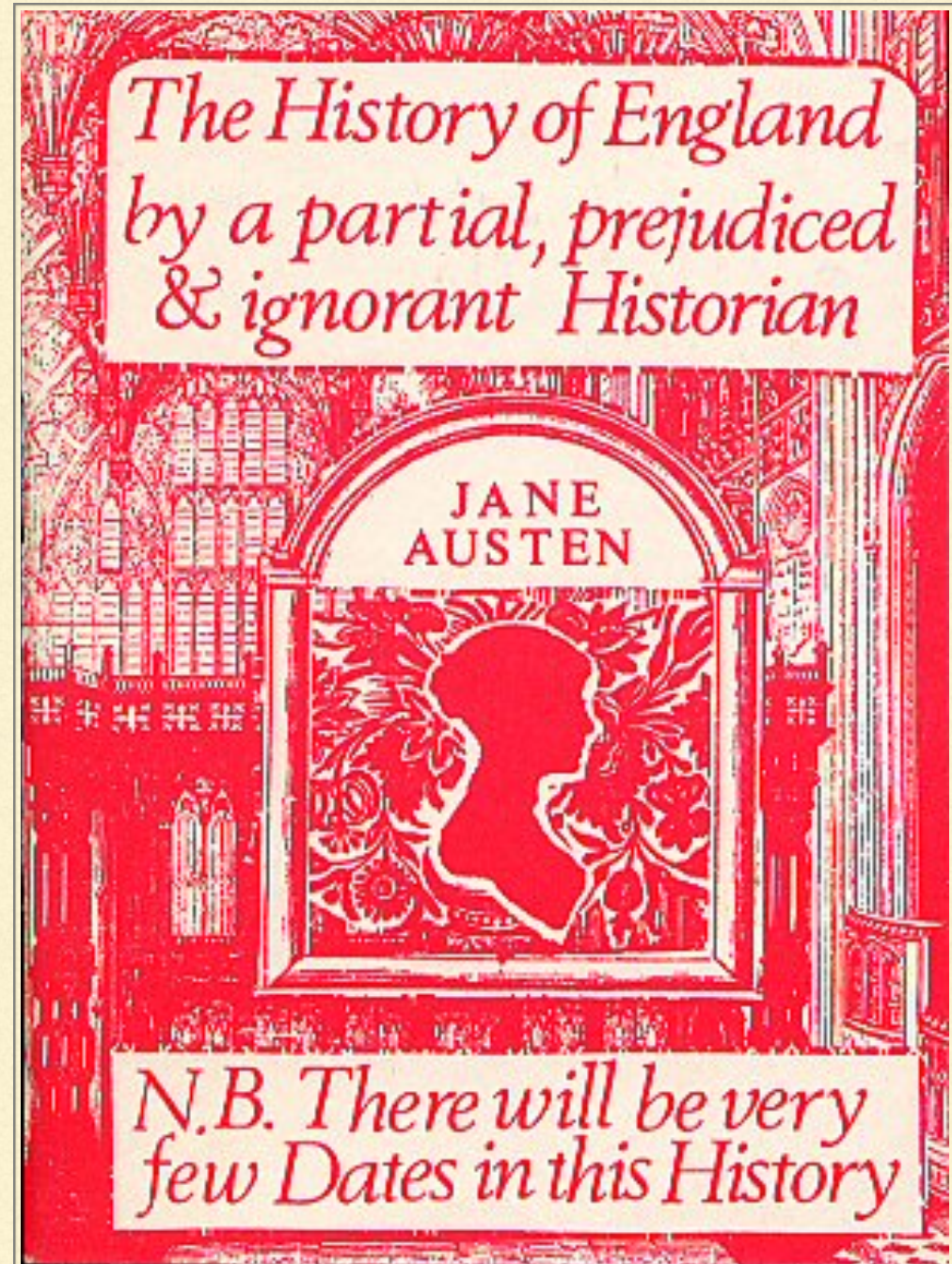
Section attendance is not optional; indeed, as stipulated in the class policies, if you miss 5 sections (or 10 lectures), you automatically fail the class.

NOTA BENE!

I mistakenly didn't order Fredrick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life* (long story, but when you order books, you can duplicate a previous semester's order — I did, but from a year in which we didn't read Douglass). I strongly encourage students to pop over to Amazon and order that Dover Thrift paperback edition of Douglass which costs — I kid you not — \$1.62. If you have Prime, that includes free shipping. However you choose to obtain the book, that's the correct edition, so please grab a copy before February 13 (not this Wednesday, but next).

AUSTEN & HISTORY

- ❖ the English Enlightenment emphasized *sensibility* (Locke, Sterne); Austen, sense
- ❖ Positioned herself against emerging Romanticism (Austen preferred social not individual, restraint rather than excess); in this regard, rather conservative
- ❖ Wrote during Napoleonic wars (1803–15), madness of the King (1811-1820), but never mentions them; focuses on small-town English life, refuses to write about what she does not know directly (Locke)



THE REGENCY

- ❖ Part of a larger, “Georgian Era” (1714–1837)
- ❖ Almost 90% of the population lived in poverty
- ❖ England was a strong power, and an empire, but was not globally pre-eminent
- ❖ Despite widespread poverty and frequent crises (especially wars), also noted for a society of elegance, refinement and artistic achievement
- ❖ Relatively frank, open and cosmopolitan, especially about sex; upper class permissive, even licentious



AUSTEN'S LIFE

- ❖ Wrote some 3,000 letters to her sister; all but 160 or so were burned to keep her privacy; even those were heavily censored
- ❖ Wrote early and often; drafts; entertained family; published anonymously (“a lady”).
- ❖ Family rather poor; two of her brothers did well (one became an Admiral), sisters did not; still, she did have a “room of her own” (Woolf) where she could write
- ❖ Love life unknown, one proposal (accepted, rejected in 24 hrs); recent stories about her love for LeFroy, etc. exaggerated or fabricated







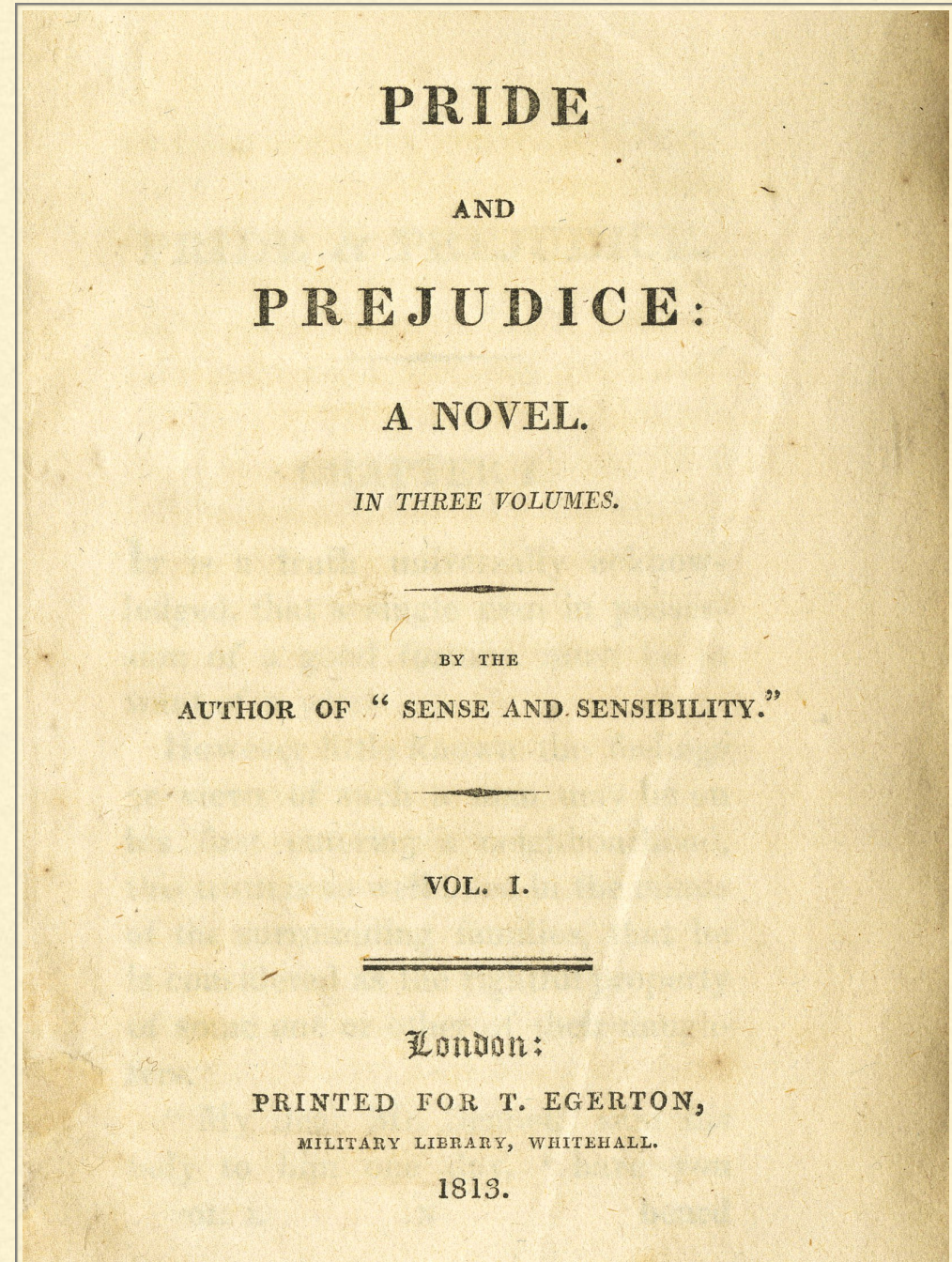


The disputed “Rice portrait,” purportedly showing Jane Austen as a teenager



AUSTEN'S CAREER

- ❖ Published four novels in life, all written by “a lady”; all sold fairly well; the Prince Regent admired them and owned a set
 - *Sense and Sensibility* (1811)
 - *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)
 - *Mansfield Park* (1814)
 - *Emma* (1816)
- ❖ Two followed after death:
 - *Persuasion* (1817)
 - *Northanger Abbey* (1818, written 1803)
- ❖ Her reputation went stratospheric starting in the 1880s after an influential (and rather misleading) biography
- ❖ The first English novelist to receive a scholarly “complete works” edition



PRIDE & PREJUDICE

- ❖ A novel largely about socio-economic class
 - Working class: skilled laborers might earn £100/year
 - Landed gentry (lived off of the income from their land, did not work): generally about £1,000-5,000/year. Austen's family was "pseudo-gentry" (about £200/year). Below this, your social prestige fell considerably (Bingley is a special case)
 - Aristocracy: generally wealthy, usually more than the gentry, but also with a hereditary title (knight-/damehood is *not* hereditary)
- ❖ Attempts to calculate the wealth of Austen's characters in modern terms is difficult, but Toran says Mr. Bingley's total wealth was about \$8,000,000. Not bad.
- ❖ What about Mr Darcy?



~ \$328,000,000

Mr Darcy is by far the wealthiest character in any of Austen's novels. He would have been one of the 400 or 500 richest people in the country. As Toran notes, "although in terms of purchasing power he was a ['mere' multi-]millionaire, in terms of the prestige Mr. Darcy held in British society, he would have been a billionaire."

PRIDE & PREJUDICE

- ❖ The Austen matrix: too many economically precarious women, not enough wealthy men
- ❖ This “money explanation” is a standard part of Austen’s novels, usually appears in Chapter One (see *Sense and Sensibility*, *Persuasion*); in *Mansfield Park*, it is the opening sentence of the novel; in *P&P*, chapter VII
- ❖ Money is primary, love secondary; this is *society’s* view; Austen doesn’t necessarily agree, but recognizes economic and social forces constrain women’s lives



PRIDE & PREJUDICE

- ❖ £2,000/year is comfortably middle class, and that's how much Mr Bennet has; whence the sense of economic dread and anxiety that pervades the novel?
- ❖ Mr Bennet has little savings, and his income is *entailed* — he possesses it as the eldest male of the Bennet line; when he dies, that income transfers to the next closest male heir (Mr Collins); his wife and daughters will get only what meager income his savings generate
- ❖ Let's note, then, the absolutely real urgency of the “man hunt” in this novel; without securing a relatively wealthy husband, Lizzy and Co. will be reduced to about 1/10 of their usual income, and fall permanently out of the middle class



“It is a truth
universally
acknowledged
that a single man
in possession of a
large fortune,
must be in want
of a wife.”



PRIDE & PREJUDICE

- ❖ Is this statement true?
- ❖ *Which* statement? Is the truth universally acknowledged? Is it true that a single man with a large fortune needs a wife?
- ❖ The “romantic” understanding is that yes, everyone’s looking for love. The Enlightenment understanding would be “knowing,” ironic. Everyone says this so we won’t have to face the ugly truth: guys go for looks, girls go for status.
- ❖ Ultimately, the question becomes not what is said, but *who is speaking?*



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DIRECT DISCOURSE

“Such amiable qualities speak for themselves. What a contrast between him and his friend! Mr. Darcy danced only once with Mrs. Hurst and once with Miss Bingley, declined being introduced to any other lady, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party. He is the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and I hope that he will never come here again!” said Mrs. Bennet, rather loudly.



INDIRECT DISCOURSE

Mrs. Bennet gave her opinion quite loudly declaring that such amiable qualities must speak for themselves. She noted the contrast between him and his friend, observing that Mr. Darcy danced only once with Mrs. Hurst and once with Miss Bingley, declined being introduced to any other lady, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party. She finally declared that he was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and hoped that he would never come there again.



FREE INDIRECT DISCOURSE

Mr. Bingley was lively and unreserved, danced every dance, was angry that the ball closed so early, and talked of giving one himself at Netherfield. **Such amiable qualities must speak for themselves. What a contrast between him and his friend!** Mr. Darcy danced only once with Mrs. Hurst and once with Miss Bingley, declined being introduced to any other lady, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party. **His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and every body hoped that he would never come there again.** Amongst the most violent against him was Mrs. Bennet, whose dislike of his general behaviour was sharpened into particular resentment by his having slighted one of her daughters.



COMPLEX IRONY

“I see what you are feeling,” replied Charlotte, — “you must be surprised, very much surprised, so lately as Mr. Collins was wishing to marry *you*. But when you have had time to think it all over, I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic, you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state.”

Elizabeth **quietly** answered “Undoubtedly”; — and **after an awkward pause**, they returned to the rest of the family.



COMPLEX IRONY

This irony is verbal: “undoubtedly” means that Lizzy doubts it very much indeed.

But there is a second form of rather peculiar irony here, like Freud’s joke about the traveler who lies about his destination by telling the truth—because, in fact, Charlotte **is quite right**: her chances of marital happiness are indeed about as good “as most can boast” (contrast Lizzie’s own parents, most other couples in Austen, everyone who makes a financially foolish match). Austen was *very, very* cynical about marriage—very few of her established married couples are good matches or happy over the long term.

The irony is also dramatic (see p. 124)



“Miss Eliza Bennet,” said Miss Bingley, “despises cards. She is a great reader, and has no pleasure in anything else.”

“I deserve neither such praise nor such censure,” cried Elizabeth; “I am *not* a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things.”

READING

- ❖ Is Miss Eliza a great reader?
- ❖ Who is a great reader in this novel? Only one character *literally* qualifies, and that is Mary Bennet. But she is a *terrible* reader, the worst!
- ❖ In general, Austen prefers speech to reading; speech is social, reading anti-social. And the art of reading is almost entirely the art of reading people, not books.
- ❖ Is Miss Eliza a great reader?



THE SOCIAL NETWORK

- ❖ Plot turns on the success or failure of each character to “read” others
- ❖ Each succeeds sometimes and fails other times (Jane misreads Caroline, but gets Darcy right; Lizzy misreads Darcy but gets Caroline right — even the wicked Wickham gets Lady Catherine right)
- ❖ But the key is that one must understand *oneself* as part of the social network, not as a detached outsider; this is Lizzy’s great breakthrough (141); Darcy’s, too. They both initially claim they don’t care how other people see them. They learn why you must care.

The screenshot shows a social network interface for 'austenbook'. At the top is a blue header with the name 'austenbook'. Below the header are five tabs: 'News Feed' (selected), 'Status Updates', 'Photos', 'Posted Items', and 'Live Feed'. The main content area displays a list of 18 items, each with a small icon and text. The items include:

- Charles Bingley is renting a house in Hertfordshire!
- Mrs. Bennet became a fan of Charles Bingley.
- Kitty Bennet can't stop coughing!!!
- Charles Bingley is now friends with Mr. Bennet and Sir William Lucas.
- 11 of your friends are attending Assembly at Meryton.
- Fitzwilliam Darcy is dreading this evening.
- Charles Bingley and Jane Bennet are now friends.
- Elizabeth Bennet is not handsome enough to tempt a certain gentleman. Ha!
- Mrs. Bennet had a most delightful evening!
- Mr. Bennet wishes that Mr. Bingley had sprained his ankle in the first dance.
- Elizabeth Bennet promises never to dance with Mr. Darcy.
- Fitzwilliam Darcy became a fan of Fine Eyes.
- Caroline Bingley is all astonishment.
- Lydia Bennet became a fan of Officers.
- Kitty Bennet became a fan of Officers.
- Caroline Bingley tagged Jane Bennet in her note Visit us at Netherfield.
- Jane Bennet finds herself very unwell. :(
- Elizabeth Bennet is going to stay at Netherfield with Jane.
- Louisa Hurst saw Elizabeth Bennet's petticoat and is absolutely certain it was six inches long.
- Elizabeth Bennet is improving her mind by extensive reading.
- Charles Bingley created an event: Ball at Netherfield.
- Fitzwilliam Darcy is writing to Georgiana.

THE PROPOSAL

- ❖ Darcy confesses his ardent love and admiration. Neither that nor his \$330 million are enough to sway Lizzy, who pronounces him “the last man in the world” she could be forced to marry
- ❖ But both of them have misread the other: Darcy has *not* mistreated Wickham (but has mistreated Jane and Bingley); Lizzy has almost entirely misjudged Darcy’s character, as well as Wickham’s
- ❖ Both have misjudged *themselves*: Darcy has not realized what a pompous ass that he looks like to others; Lizzy has not appreciated just how vulgar some of her family are



NECESSARY FAILURE

- ❖ The “initial failure” in love has remained deeply embedded in the DNA of the romance novel since Austen. It is not an accident, but *necessary*
- ❖ Social: the heroine is not a gold-digger
- ❖ Literary: two people meet cute, fall in love and live happily ever after. Boring. Two people meet, etc., and external obstacles keep them apart (*Candide*). Okay. Two people meet, etc, and *internal* obstacles keep them apart? Genius. And *novelistic*.
- ❖ Philosophical: some truths emerge only from failure. There are things you cannot simply be told are true and accept (“everyone thinks you’re a jerk, Darcy” or “your whole family look like yahoos, Lizzy”); you must learn them through experience (Hegel)



EXPERIENCE & FANTASY

- ❖ Experience was vital for Austen, and she did not write anything she did not know from direct personal experience. In particular, *there is not a single scene in any of her fiction of men alone or a man alone*
- ❖ For Austen, literature is not vicarious fantasy, but more like virtual experience. Sometimes understood as *moral* (Austen is here to teach us a lesson), but to me it feels entirely practical, even cynical
- ❖ Is “love” in Austen real, or is it just the exchange of sex for financial security? Charlotte is explicit that for her it is the latter. Marianne and Brandon in S&S (£2,000/year). Even Lizzy jokes (?) that she only falls in love with Darcy when she first sees his magnificent estate.



EXPERIENCE & FANTASY

- ❖ In Austen's time, there were only two professions for a middle-class woman: governess and wife. Only one offered stability.
- ❖ We now have *choice* (neoliberalism)—but *no option offers stability*: marriage is no longer a permanent and unbreakable contract, and economic lives are fragile and precarious
- ❖ Hence our contemporary anxious fantasies of stability, professional and romantic. Contemporary romance (“chick-lit”) and Austen speak precisely to these concerns.
- ❖ This cynical reading is unbearable—our most profoundly intimate interior emotional states are determined by the economy. The only way to present this truth is to conceal it in a haze of love. To present it directly would be *pornographic*—we are watching intimacy exchanged for money. Are Austen and pornography two sides of the same coin?

