

Analysis of Major Characters

Elizabeth Bennet

The second daughter in the Bennet family, and the most intelligent and quick-witted, Elizabeth is the protagonist of *Pride and Prejudice* and one of the most well-known female characters in English literature. Her admirable qualities are numerous—she is lovely, clever, and, in a novel defined by dialogue, she converses as brilliantly as anyone. Her honesty, virtue, and lively wit enable her to rise above the nonsense and bad behavior that pervade her class-bound and often spiteful society. Nevertheless, her sharp tongue and tendency to make hasty judgments often lead her astray; *Pride and Prejudice* is essentially the story of how she (and her true love, Darcy) overcome all obstacles—including their own personal failings—to find romantic happiness. Elizabeth must not only cope with a hopeless mother, a distant father, two badly behaved younger siblings, and several snobbish, antagonizing females, she must also overcome her own mistaken impressions of Darcy, which initially lead her to reject his proposals of marriage. Her charms are sufficient to keep him interested, fortunately, while she navigates familial and social turmoil. As she gradually comes to recognize the nobility of Darcy's character, she realizes the error of her initial prejudice against him.

Fitzwilliam Darcy

The son of a wealthy, well-established family and the master of the great estate of Pemberley, Darcy is [Elizabeth](#)'s male counterpart. The narrator relates Elizabeth's point of view of events more often than Darcy's, so Elizabeth often seems a more sympathetic figure. The reader eventually realizes, however, that Darcy is her ideal match. Intelligent and forthright, he too has a tendency to judge too hastily and harshly, and his high birth and wealth make him overly proud and overly conscious of his social status. Indeed, his haughtiness makes him initially bungle his courtship. When he proposes to her, for instance, he dwells more on how unsuitable a match she is than on her charms, beauty, or anything else complimentary. Her rejection of his advances builds a kind of humility in him. Darcy demonstrates his continued devotion to Elizabeth, in spite of his distaste for her low connections, when he rescues Lydia and the entire Bennet family from disgrace, and when he goes against the wishes of his haughty aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, by continuing to pursue Elizabeth. Darcy proves himself worthy of Elizabeth, and she ends up repenting her earlier, overly harsh judgment of him.

Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley

[Elizabeth](#)'s beautiful elder sister and Darcy's wealthy best friend, Jane and Bingley engage in a courtship that occupies a central place in the novel. They first meet at the ball in Meryton and enjoy an immediate mutual attraction. They are spoken of as a potential couple throughout the book, long before anyone imagines that Darcy and Elizabeth might marry. Despite their centrality to the narrative, they are vague characters, sketched by Austen rather than carefully drawn. Indeed, they are so similar in nature and behavior that they can be described together: both are cheerful, friendly, and good-natured, always ready to think the best of others; they lack entirely the

prickly egotism of Elizabeth and Darcy. Jane's gentle spirit serves as a foil for her sister's fiery, contentious nature, while Bingley's eager friendliness contrasts with Darcy's stiff pride. Their principal characteristics are goodwill and compatibility, and the contrast of their romance with that of Darcy and Elizabeth is remarkable. Jane and Bingley exhibit to the reader true love unhampered by either pride or prejudice, though in their simple goodness, they also demonstrate that such a love is mildly dull.

Mr. Bennet

Mr. Bennet is the patriarch of the Bennet household—the husband of [Mrs. Bennet](#) and the father of Jane, [Elizabeth](#), Lydia, Kitty, and Mary. He is a man driven to exasperation by his ridiculous wife and difficult daughters. He reacts by withdrawing from his family and assuming a detached attitude punctuated by bursts of sarcastic humor. He is closest to Elizabeth because they are the two most intelligent Bennets. Initially, his dry wit and self-possession in the face of his wife's hysteria make him a sympathetic figure, but, though he remains likable throughout, the reader gradually loses respect for him as it becomes clear that the price of his detachment is considerable. Detached from his family, he is a weak father and, at critical moments, fails his family. In particular, his foolish indulgence of Lydia's immature behavior nearly leads to general disgrace when she elopes with Wickham. Further, upon her disappearance, he proves largely ineffective. It is left to Mr. Gardiner and Darcy to track Lydia down and rectify the situation. Ultimately, Mr. Bennet would rather withdraw from the world than cope with it.

Mrs. Bennet

Mrs. Bennet is a miraculously tiresome character. Noisy and foolish, she is a woman consumed by the desire to see her daughters married and seems to care for nothing else in the world. Ironically, her single-minded pursuit of this goal tends to backfire, as her lack of social graces alienates the very people (Darcy and Bingley) whom she tries desperately to attract. Austen uses her continually to highlight the necessity of marriage for young women. Mrs. Bennet also serves as a middle-class counterpoint to such upper-class snobs as Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley, demonstrating that foolishness can be found at every level of society. In the end, however, Mrs. Bennet proves such an unattractive figure, lacking redeeming characteristics of any kind, that some readers have accused Austen of unfairness in portraying her—as if Austen, like [Mr. Bennet](#), took perverse pleasure in poking fun at a woman already scorned as a result of her ill breeding.