

Summary: Chapters 5–6

The Bennets' neighbors are Sir William Lucas, his wife, and their children. The eldest of these children, [Charlotte](#), is [Elizabeth](#)'s closest friend. The morning after the ball, the women of the two families discuss the evening. They decide that while Bingley danced with Charlotte first, he considered Jane to be the prettiest of the local girls. The discussion then turns to [Mr. Darcy](#), and Elizabeth states that she will never dance with him; everyone agrees that Darcy, despite his family and fortune, is too proud to be likable.

Bingley's sisters exchange visits with the Bennets and attempt to befriend Elizabeth and [Jane](#). Meanwhile, [Bingley](#) continues to pay attention to Jane, and Elizabeth decides that her sister is "in a way to be very much in love" with him but is concealing it very well. She discusses this with Charlotte Lucas, who comments that if Jane conceals it too well, Bingley may lose interest. Elizabeth says it is better for a young woman to be patient until she is sure of her feelings; Charlotte disagrees, saying that it is best not to know too much about the faults of one's future husband. Darcy finds himself attracted to Elizabeth. He begins listening to her conversations at parties, much to her surprise. At one party at the Lucas house, Sir William attempts to persuade Elizabeth and Darcy to dance together, but Elizabeth refuses. Shortly afterward, Darcy tells Bingley's unmarried sister that "Miss Elizabeth Bennet" is now the object of his admiration.

Analysis:

The introduction of the Lucases allows Austen to comment on the pretensions that accompany social rank. Recently knighted, Sir William is described as having felt his new distinction “a little too strongly” and moved away from town in order to “think with pleasure of his own importance.” Sir William remains a sympathetic figure despite his snobbery, but the same cannot be said of Bingley’s sister, whose class-consciousness becomes increasingly evident. Awareness of class difference is a pressing reality in *Pride and Prejudice*. This awareness colors the attitudes that characters of different social status feel toward one another. This awareness cuts both ways: as Darcy and Elizabeth demonstrate, the well-born and the socially inferior prove equally likely to harbor prejudices that blind them to others’ true natures.

Charlotte Lucas’s observation that Jane does not display her affection for Bingley illuminates the careful structure of the novel. Darcy notices the same reticence in Jane, but he assumes that she is not in love with Bingley. Charlotte’s conversation with Elizabeth, then, foreshadows Darcy’s justification for separating Bingley from Jane. Similarly, the author prepares the reader for subsequent developments in other relationships: Charlotte’s belief that it is better not to know one’s husband too well foreshadows her “practical” marriage to Collins, while Elizabeth’s more romantic view anticipates her refusal of two proposals that might have been accepted by others.

As in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen emphasizes the matter of entailment in order to create a sense of urgency about the search for a husband. Though Jane is the eldest child in a fairly well-off family, her status as a woman precludes her from enjoying the success her father has experienced. When her father dies, the estate will turn over to Mr. Collins, the oldest male relative. The mention of entailment stresses not just the value society places on making a good marriage but also the way that the structures of society make a good marriage a prerequisite for a “good” life (the connotation of “good” being wealthy). Austen thus offers commentary on the plight of women. Through both law and prescribed gender roles, Austen’s society leaves women few options for the advancement or betterment of their situations.

Language proves of central importance to relationships in *Pride and Prejudice*, as Austen uses conversation to reveal character. The interactions between Darcy and Elizabeth primarily take the forms of banter and argument, and Elizabeth’s words provide Darcy access to a deeper aspect of her character, one that appeals to him and allows him to begin to move past his initial prejudice. While their disagreement over the possibility of a “perfect” woman reinforces his apparent egotism and self-absorption, it also gives Elizabeth a chance to shine in debate. Whereas she does not live up to Darcy’s physical and social requirements for a perfect woman, she exceeds those concerning the “liveliness” of the perfect woman’s mind.

The novel begins to undermine the reader's negative impression of Darcy by contrasting him with Miss Bingley. Though his arrogance remains unpleasant, he is unwilling to join in Miss Bingley's snobbish dismissals of Elizabeth and her family. Like Lady Catherine de Bourgh later on, Miss Bingley serves as the voice of "society," criticizing Elizabeth's middle-class status and lack of social connections. Also like Lady Catherine, her primary motivation is jealousy: just as Lady Catherine wants Darcy to marry her niece, Miss Bingley wants him for herself. Both women exhibit spite colored by self-interest.