**Workshop № 06:**

**Biographical Criticism of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice***

Jane Austen’s novel reflects many elements and experiences that Austen herself experienced in her life. Published in 1813, Pride and Prejudice is a mixture of Austen’s imagination, commentary on society, and the 37 years of her life up to that point. As seen in [several biographies](http://www.jasa.net.au/jabiog.htm) of [Jane Austen’s life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Austen), many connections can be made between the novel and Austen’s own life.

Some of the characters in Pride and Prejudice can be attributed to some of Austen’s own interpersonal relations. The close, interpersonal relationship that Elizabeth and Jane have is very similar to that of [Austen and her sister Cassandra](http://www.janeausten.org/jane-austen-biography.asp). Jane and Cassandra were the only two girls in a family of eight children, and as such bonded greatly. The two are described as “inseparable,” confidants in each other. It does not take a leap of faith to conclude that aspects of this relationship helped form that of Elizabeth and Jane. In the novel, the two are closer to each other than to the other sisters, and confide in each other their inner feelings as seen in the instance after the first ball: “when Jane and Elizabeth were alone, the former, who had been cautious in her praise of Mr. Bingley before, expressed to her sister how very much she admired him.” It could also be theorized that as a result of living with so many brothers, the characters of Lydia, Kitty, and Mary might come from a lack of understanding of having multiple sisters, rather seeing them as being like annoying company. Elizabeth and these sisters do not share a close bond, perhaps reflecting the lack of other sisters Austen had.

One significant event in Jane Austen’s life reflects one in the novel, and provides a glimpse into Austen’s beliefs regarding a major theme in Pride and Prejudice. In December of 1802, Jane Austen [was proposed to by Harris Bigg-Wither](http://www.janeausten.org/jane-austen-biography-page-2.asp). Austen initially agreed to marriage, but revoked her acceptance the next day. Mr. Bigg-Wither was a wealthy man with a large inheritance; it was practical for Austen to marry him, but she refused because she had no interest in the man, she did not feel love for him. The idea of putting love before money is one that challenged the ideals of Austen’s time, and [shines through in Pride and Prejudice](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/themes.html) in many of its characters. Perhaps the primary influence this incident holds is the rejection of Darcy’s marriage proposal by Elizabeth. Despite Darcy’s favorable social status and wealth, Elizabeth turns down Darcy’s proposal, saying, “You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it.” Elizabeth here reflects Austen’s beliefs in love over prosperity, as is further shown in Elizabeth only accepting Darcy’s hand in marriage once she falls in love with him. Charlotte, however, does not abide by this belief and ends up unhappy in her own life. She chose to marry Mr. Collins for his money despite a lack of affection for the man. In doing so she reflects a belief of the time, one that Austen disagreed with as is seen through her life and her novel.

Having come from a lower-middle class family, Jane Austen writes in criticism of class structure and standards. Like the Bennet family, Austen grew up in a village in a family not quite well off socially. The Bennets are eager to have their daughters marry those that are wealthier so that some inheritance can come to the family. Austen actively attacks this type of societal upbringing, as it leads to unfortunate circumstances such as that of Lydia. This is additionally shown through Darcy in his initial disgust at the Bennet family, of Bingley’s attraction to Jane, and most of all of Elizabeth. He had too much pride to even consider the likes of Elizabeth in her lowly position to be worth the company of him. In showing Darcy’s gradual removal of his pride that he holds, Austen makes commentary on the societal standards regarding social level and the intermixing therein between them. In showing Darcy’s removal of his prideful barriers and his subsequent happiness found with Elizabeth, Austen shows a greater potential beyond societal class separation.

Jane Austen’s life was not particularly eventful or long lasting, but its impact on her classic literature is forever left in importance for shaping her novels to be what they are. Austen’s family, life, and circumstances all served to influence different aspects of Pride and Prejudice. In all, Austen’s life served as the starting point to fuel her creation.