

PRIDE & PREJUDICE
an adaptation
based on the novel by Jane Austen
by Caitlin Lushington

CHARACTERS:

MRS. BENNET: Mother of the Bennets. Although her behavior is that of a woman who has had 10 cups of coffee, she will fight ferociously for what she believes to be the best for her girls.

MR. BENNET: Father of the Bennets. Resigned to being married to a woman with the nerves of a Chihuahua, he takes comfort in solitude, reading and the most sane member of his family, Elizabeth.

JANE BENNET: Mid 20s. That person who is always cheerful, positive and optimistic no matter the circumstances. Very close with Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH BENNET: Early 20s. Like a ship fighting to sail against the wind. Stubborn, strong and determined to marry for love. Elizabeth is fascinated by the world but blind to her own prejudices.

MARY BENNET: 18. The intellectual. She could care less about anything...except maybe Mr. Collins.

KITTY BENNET: 17, but behaves younger. Like a trained puppy she will follow Lydia wherever she may go.

LYDIA BENNET: 15. Lydia loves men, and men mostly put up with Lydia.

MR. DARCY: Elizabeth's love interest. Uncomfortable in social situations, he distrusts first and asks questions later. But if you are so lucky as to earn his trust and affection, you have a loyal friend for life.

GEORGIANA DARCY: Darcy's younger sister, 17 and older than her age. Has a fierce loyalty for her brother.

MR. BINGLEY: Caroline's brother and Mr. Darcy's closest friend. Jane in male form: that's Mr. Bingley.

CAROLINE BINGLEY: Mr. Bingley's sister. She's after Mr. Darcy and highly protective of her little brother's romantic interests.

CHARLOTTE LUCAS: Elizabeth's best friend. Charlotte is self-assured and a pragmatist.

MR. COLLINS: A parson. He thinks he's a lady-killer, a brilliant preacher, an elegant compliment-giver, the man of the hour, the bees knees, the boss, and all with the humble simplicity of a parishioner. He is not.

MRS. GARDINER: Mrs. Bennet's sister. Very close with Elizabeth; sees things that Elizabeth does not.

MR. GARDINER: Mrs. Gardiner's husband. With no children of their own, the Gardiners stay close to the Bennets.

LADY CATHERINE DE BOURGH: Mr. Collins' patronness. Wealthy, fierce, and she knows it.

ANNE DE BOURGH: Anne is Catherine de Bourgh's sickly daughter. This is a non-speaking role.

GEORGE WICKHAM: Childhood friend-turned-enemy of Mr. Darcy's. Handsome and genteel, he is not what he seems, but probably believes he is in the right.

COLONEL FITZWILLIAM: Darcy's cousin and close friend. A loyal, sturdy friend.

NOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT:

The actor playing Mary, Kitty or Lydia can also play Georgiana Darcy and Anne de Bourgh.

The actor playing Caroline Bingley can also play Charlotte Lucas.

The actor playing Mrs. Gardiner can also play Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

The actor playing George Wickham can also play Colonel Fitzwilliam.

The actor playing Mr. Gardiner can also play Mr. Collins.

Any actors available can play the servant roles.

The play has been done with as few as 13 actors, 8 women and 5 men, without combining or deleting roles.

The space is empty except for a few simple set pieces (a chair, a bench, neutral blocks, etc) SL/R at the ready.

The ensemble is onstage the entire show. Thus, when an actor “exits,” he/she is actually returning to the perimeter of the space. The ensemble watches the story as it unfolds, and jumps in to continue the story and play various characters, set pieces, props, etc as necessary.

***SOUNDSCAPES:** The lines here are a structure off of which the ensemble should add sounds, vocal gestures, repeat words, etc, in an effort to create an atmosphere rather than natural dialogue. The numbers can be assigned to whatever character feels appropriate, suggestions have been made where it felt necessary.

****MOVEMENT SEQUENCES:** Are accompanied by music/sound and generally indicate a passage of time/change of space, or it is used as a visual aid to dense text.

Preferably, the piece is performed with no intermission and at a sitting-on-the-edge-of-your-seat pace.

Prologue.

A chair and rolling table center stage. Neutral set materials along the perimeter (a bench, a desk, etc). Otherwise, a blank page.

(ELIZABETH enters, carrying a laptop and a shoulder bag. She takes in the space. Sits. Sets the laptop on the table, opens it, her fingers hover above the keys. She types, and an actor (MARY) appears behind her. For now, MARY is not yet Mary Bennet, she is blank, awaiting command. As ELIZABETH types, MARY crosses and stands next to ELIZABETH. ELIZABETH is surprised to see her. She stands and inspects her. ELIZABETH gestures, and MARY moves her arm. ELIZABETH gestures again, MARY steps forward. ELIZABETH takes a costume piece off herself and puts it on MARY. MARY speaks.

MARY: (toward audience)

Pride is a very common failing, I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that human nature is particularly prone to it, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary.

(MARY stops. ELIZABETH addresses the audience.)

ELIZABETH:

Beginnings are always easy for me. I have this image and BAM, it starts.

(The rest of the ensemble enters and forms a semi-circle with Elizabeth at center. The ensemble is an empty page. They come to life when ELIZABETH hands them their costume piece.)

ELIZABETH:

Endings are fairly predictable too. But middles. How we get there. Not so much.

(ELIZABETH picks out a hat from the shoulder bag and puts it on MRS. BENNET, who immediately steps forward and jumps to life. Her lines are addressed toward the audience.)

MRS. BENNET:

Mr. Bennet! Mr. Bennet! MR. BENNET! Netherfield Park is let at last!

(ELIZABETH puts a newspaper in front of MR. BENNET, and he steps forward.)

MR. BENNET:

Mm.

MRS. BENNET:

Do you not want to know who has taken it?

MR. BENNET:

(He lowers his newspaper.)

ELIZABETH: (to audience)

Meet my Mum and Dad.

MRS. BENNET:

Netherfield Park is taken by a handsome--

KITTY/LYDIA:

Handsome!?

MRS. BENNET:

--single--

KITTY/LYDIA:

Single!?

MRS. BENNET:

--wealthy young man named Mr. Bingley.

KITTY/LYDIA:

HE'S RICH!! AHHHHHH!!!

MARY:

Get a life.

JANE:

Lydia, what have I told you about listening at the door?

(The ensemble freezes.)

ELIZABETH: (to audience)

My sisters. The overcaffeinated Lydia and her faithful sidekick, Kitty, their polar opposite with a capital P.O., Mary, and the ever-beautiful, ever-charming, ever-perfect, Jane. But we'll never meet the mysterious Mr. Bingley. Papa will never agree to it.

MRS. BENNET: (with a cue from ELIZABETH)

Mr. Bennet, you must visit him as soon as possible!

MR. BENNET: (turning to MRS. BENNET)

I already have.

ELIZABETH: (re: this is not something she wrote)

Wait, what?

(ELIZABETH pushes the laptop aside and enters the scene. The ensemble creates the Bennets' living room at Longbourne. All characters now face each other.)

MRS. BENNET:

You have?

ELIZABETH:

You've already visited him, Papa?

LYDIA:

What's he like??

MR. BENNET:

You won't have to wait long to find out. He's attending the next assembly at Meryton.

LYDIA:

No—

KITTY:

--way!

LYDIA:

Lizzie, can I borrow your bonnet for the assembly? I'll do your mending for a week--

KITTY:

Lizzie's already promised her bonnet to me, Lydia--

LYDIA:

It goes better with my dress, Kitty--

KITTY:

Two weeks, I'll do your mending for two weeks--

(Ad-libs of squabbling and making deals. ELIZABETH freezes the scene and addresses the audience.)

ELIZABETH:

The Bennet girls think the day of the assembly will never come...

...

SCENE 18: The Collins House. The parlor.

(A moment of peace and tranquility. Then MR. DARCY bursts through the door.)

MR. DARCY:

Oh—

(MR. DARCY exits. A knock. ELIZABETH opens the door. A moment. MR. DARCY hugs his jacket a little tighter)

ELIZABETH:

Oh--

(ELIZABETH steps out of the way to let MR. DARCY in. She shuts the door. They stand. MR. DARCY goes to sit. Then, ELIZABETH goes to sit, but MR. DARCY has risen. He sees ELIZABETH sitting and retreats to a chair. They sit. They look at each other, then away. He clears his throat. ELIZABETH gets him water. He nods. She breathes. He breathes. Darcy drinks the water and it goes down the wrong pipe. He coughs, recovers, and takes a breath. Finally, MR. DARCY leans forward...)

MR. DARCY:

So--

(...just as CHARLOTTE enters. MR. DARCY stands)

MR. DARCY:

It's been a pleasure, Miss Bennet. Good day.

(MR. DARCY exits.)

CHARLOTTE:

What on earth was that about?

ELIZABETH:

I've no idea.

CHARLOTTE:

I think he's in love with you.

ELIZABETH:

What?

CHARLOTTE:

Mr. Darcy.

ELIZABETH:

Charlotte, what on earth are you talking about?

CHARLOTTE:

The way he looks at you...

ELIZABETH:

Wait, we are still talking about Mr. Darcy, right?

CHARLOTTE:

--who just dropped in speak with you alone when Mr. Collins and I were conveniently out of the house--

ELIZABETH:

Who said anything about speaking?

CHARLOTTE:

--who stared at you all night at the dinner party--

ELIZABETH:

He didn't say anything!

CHARLOTTE:

--who arrived "early" at Rosings and just so happened to stop in the night you were there--

ELIZABETH:

But he didn't say anything!

CHARLOTTE:

He didn't say anything?

ELIZABETH:

Nope.

CHARLOTTE:

Then what did he want?

ELIZABETH:

I don't know! Probably wanted to see me make a fool of myself and tout it to Her Ladyship O Cold One Lady Catherine de Brrrrrrgggh.

CHARLOTTE:

Hm. Weird.

ELIZABETH:

I'll say.

(She goes to exit, then freezes. The ensemble enters to narrate.)

CHARLOTTE:

And it only got weirder.

1:

Mr. Darcy came the next day as well,

2:

This time with Colonel Fitzwilliam...

ELIZABETH: (unfreezing)

(to CHARLOTTE) Thank God! At least the Colonel and I could keep the conversation going while Mr. Mute sat there like the poor miserable soul that he--wait! No, I think he actually may have said "yes"! One word, Charlotte! It's a miracle! Do you think he's a robot?

CHARLOTTE:

And then he came again...

ELIZABETH:

Four words today. I really think he's a robot.

3:

And again...

ELIZABETH:

7 words Charlotte! Almost certainly a robot, but learning humanoid speech. Probably alien. Probably dangerous. Do you think we should call the police?

4:

And again...

ELIZABETH:

I don't understand it, Charlotte. Every morning I take my walk, and there he is. The first few times the Colonel accompanied him, and it was bearable. Now he comes alone. From the very first morning I took great care to tell him that this was my favorite walk, and that I'm on that exact walk every morning. And yet, there he is, right on schedule, every bloody morning. I'd find a new walk except that would be giving in.

(CHARLOTTE turns to ELIZABETH).

CHARLOTTE:

What about the Colonel, Lizzie?

ELIZABETH:

What about him?

CHARLOTTE:

I've seen him looking at you--

ELIZABETH:

According to you, every handsome, smooth-talking man that's got something in his eye is in love with me.

CHARLOTTE:

So you admit it.

ELIZABETH:

What?

CHARLOTTE:

You think Mr. Darcy is handsome.

ELIZABETH:

What?!

(Enter COLONEL FITZWILLIAM)

COLONEL:

Knock, knock.

CHARLOTTE:

Colonel Fitzwilliam! What a pleasant surprise!

COLONEL:

I'm glad it's pleasant. I'm sorry about the surprise bit, though. I would have knocked but the door was open.

CHARLOTTE:

Lizzie was just saying how she wanted someone to accompany her on her morning walk.

ELIZABETH:

Uh--

COLONEL:

I'd be happy to oblige.

CHARLOTTE:

I knew you would be. Don't forget your hat and scarf, Lizzie. Off you go! Make good choices!

(CHARLOTTE joins the rest of the ENSEMBLE in creating the tree-lined path that ELIZABETH and the COLONEL are walking on.)