

20. Jane Austen

Jane Austen *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)

Marriage market at the Bennets' 69

This is the beginning of the book, with the presentation of the setting and the introduction to some of the most meaningful characters by an ironical narrator.

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

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters. 5
'My dear Mr. Bennet,' said his lady to him one day, 'have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?'

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

'But it is,' returned she; 'for Mrs. Long¹ has just been here, and she told me all about it.'

10 Mr. Bennet made no answer.

'Do not you want to know who has taken it?' cried his wife impatiently.

'You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.'

This was invitation enough.

'Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young 15 man of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four² to see the place, and was so much delighted with it that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas³, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week.'

'What is his name?'

20 'Bingley.'

'Is he married or single?'

'Oh! single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!'

'How so? How can it affect them?'

25 'My dear Mr. Bennet,' replied his wife, 'how can you be so tiresome⁴! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.'

'Is that his design in settling here?'

1. **Mrs. Long:** a neighbour with the same problems of arranging marriages

2. **a chaise and four:** a type of carriage drawn by four horses

3. **Michaelmas:** St Michael's day, on September 29th

4. **tiresome:** irritating

‘Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes.’

30 ‘I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better; for, as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley might like you the best of the party.’

‘My dear, you flatter⁵ me. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman has five grown up

35 daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her own beauty.’

‘In such cases, a woman has not often much beauty to think of.’

‘But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr. Bingley when he comes into the neighbourhood.’

‘It is more than I engage for, I assure you.’

40 ‘But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go, merely on that account, for in general, you know they visit no new comers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him, if you do not.’

‘You are over-scrupulous, surely. I dare say Mr. Bingley will be very glad to see you; and I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chuses⁶ of the girls; though I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy.’

45

‘I desire you will do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good humoured as Lydia. But

50 you are always giving her the preference.’

‘They have none of them much to recommend them,’ replied he; ‘they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness⁷ than her sisters.’

‘Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight

55 in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves.’

‘You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least.’

‘Ah! you do not know what I suffer.’

60 ‘But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood.’

‘It will be no use to us if twenty such should come, since you will not visit them.’

‘Depend upon it⁸, my dear, that when there are twenty I will visit them all.’

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts⁹, sarcastic humour, reserve, and

65 caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding¹⁰, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.

5. **flatter**: adulate

6. **chuses**: *arch.* for chooses

7. **quickness**: intelligence

8. **Depend upon it**: Be sure that

9. **quick parts**: intelligence

10. **mean understanding**: poor understanding

Jane Austen

Sense and Sensibility (1811)

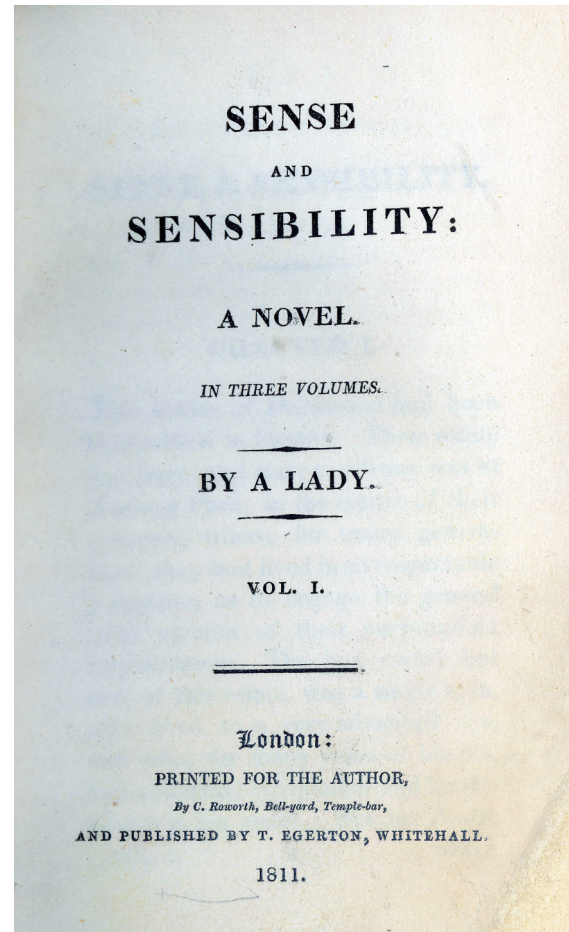
Marriage market at the Dashwoods' 70

After Mr Dashwood's death at the beginning of the novel, the family has to go through a difficult period, which each member deals with in different ways.

Elinor, this eldest daughter, whose advice was so effectual, possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgement, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother, and enabled her frequently to counteract, to the advantage of them all, that eagerness of mind¹ in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. She had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate², and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them: it was a knowledge which her mother had yet to learn; and which one of her sisters had resolved never to be taught.

Marianne's abilities were, in many respects, quite equal to Elinor's. She was sensible and clever; but eager in everything: her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she was everything but prudent. The resemblance between her and her mother was strikingly great.

Elinor saw, with concern³, the excess of her sister's sensibility; but by Mrs. Dashwood it was valued and cherished⁴. They encouraged each other now in the violence of their affliction. The agony of grief⁵ which overpowered them at first was voluntarily renewed,



Title page from the first edition of the first volume of *Sense and Sensibility*, 1811.

1. **eagerness of mind**: impatience, enthusiasm
2. **her disposition was affectionate**: character was tender (it. *la sua indole era affettuosa*)
3. **with concern**: it. *con preoccupazione*
4. **valued and cherished**: appraised and held dear, nurtured (it. *tenuto in conto e apprezzato*)
5. **agony of grief**: which overwhelmed them (it. *straziante dolore*)

was sought for, was created again and again. They gave themselves up wholly to⁶ their sorrow, seeking increase of wretchedness⁷ in every reflection that could afford it, and resolved against ever admitting consolation in future. Elinor, too, was deeply afflicted; but still she could struggle, she could exert herself. She could consult with her brother, could
30 receive her sister-in-law on her arrival, and treat her with proper attention; and could strive to rouse her mother to similar exertion⁸, and encourage her to similar forbearance⁹.

Margaret, the other sister, was a good-humored¹⁰, well-disposed girl; but as she had already imbibed a good deal of Marianne's romance, without having much of her sense, she did not, at thirteen, bid fair¹¹ to equal her sisters at a more advanced period of life.

6. **gave themselves up wholly:** abandoned themselves completely (it. *si lasciavano andare completamente*)

7. **wretchedness:** unhappiness (it. *afflizione*)

8. **strive to rouse her mother to similar exertion:** tried to urge her mother to make a similar effort (it. *impegnarsi per incitare sua madre a fare uno sforzo simile*)

9. **forbearance:** self-control (it. *pazienza, acquiescenza*)

10. **good-humored:** it. *di buon umore*

11. **bid fair:** had good chance to

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After the meeting 71

The differences between the two girls is enhanced in the dialogue taking place soon after a meeting with the seemingly wonderful Willoughby.

‘Well, Marianne,’ said Elinor, as soon as he had left them, ‘for one morning I think you have done pretty well. You have already ascertained Mr. Willoughby’s opinion in almost every matter of importance. You know what he thinks of Cowper and Scott; you are certain of his estimating their beauties as he ought, and you have received every assurance of his admiring

5 Pope no more than is proper. But how is your acquaintance to be long supported, under such extraordinary despatch of every subject for discourse¹? You will soon have exhausted each favourite topic. Another meeting will suffice to explain his sentiments on picturesque beauty, and second marriages, and then you can have nothing farther to ask.’

10 ‘Elinor,’ cried Marianne, ‘is this fair? is this just? are my ideas so scanty²? But I see what you mean. I have been too much at my ease, too happy, too frank. I have erred against every common-place notion of decorum; I have been open and sincere where I ought to have been reserved, spiritless, dull, and deceitful³: – had I talked only of the weather and the roads, and had I spoken only once in ten minutes, this reproach would have been spared.’

1. **despatch ... discourse**: if you talk so quickly about all possible topics

2. **scanty**: poor

3. **spiritless, dull, and deceitful**: depressed, slow and false