

# Not Sorry Works

Hot & Bothered, Live from Pemberley

A Truth Universally Acknowledged (Chapters 1 + 2)

Published April 8, 2022

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**Vanessa:** [00:00:00] This novel starts with one of the most famous lines in all of literature. "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." But it also starts with gossip.

[Upbeat string music begins to play.]

**Vanessa:** Mr. Bingley has moved to town, folks, and he's single and rich. He's renting a house not far from the Bennets. The Bennets: the family *Pride and Prejudice* orients itself around. The Bennets are also a family consisting of two parents, five single daughters and no sons. Mrs. Bennet has a job to do and it is to marry off all five of her daughters as well as she can. So this news of their new rich neighbor is big. All that happens in chapters one and two of *Pride and Prejudice* is that Mrs. Bennet tells Mr. Bennet the news of their new neighbor. She implores him to go visit Mr. Bingley so that the five Bennet daughters will have a chance at snagging him. Mr. Bennet says he won't, but then he does. That's all that happens. But in typical Austen fashion, each sentence is like an ant carrying ten times its own weight. Here is Claudia Johnson, Murray Professor of English at Princeton University.

[Music fades out as Claudia Johnson speaks.]

**Johnson:** [00:01:27] The thing about Austen is she doesn't twist just once. Like, that's a universal truth but hey, it isn't. She twists again. And hey, wait a minute. [Laughs.] Maybe it is. And I think that's one reason we can read her so often with pleasure. There's always more of a twist that you never got the first time that you can't take it all in at once, even though it seems small. You know, in short, and you can read it all, you know, in a short time, but yet you can never really grasp it all.

[String music begins again.]

**Vanessa:** The first page of the novel includes a discussion of money, marriage and manners. In the first two chapters, a mere four pages, we get a sense of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's marriage and what kind of parents they are to their five daughters. We even get an inkling of the five girls. Jane: Beautiful. Lizzy: Clever. Mary: Serious. Lydia: Tall and fun. Kitty...well, Kitty coughs. Mrs. Bennet's anxiety about whether or not her husband will go and meet Mr. Bingley is fair. They live in a small town, so wealthy single men are thin on the ground. The only possible financial future for the Bennet sisters is marriage. *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel about love and marriage, but it is also very much a novel about money. Here is Elsie Michie, assistant professor of English at Louisiana State University.

[Music fades out as Elsie Michie speaks.]

**Mitchie:** [00:03:01] Prior to the 18th century in England, at least, almost all the wealth was located in land. It was in estates. But people are starting to make money through empire,

they're starting to make money in commerce, and they're starting to make big money. They're making money in selling things. The middle class is rising, people are buying things, and Austen's novels are full of that. I mean, *Pride and Prejudice*, it's huge that the Bingleys' money comes from trade and not from land. Right? And that they're becoming landed. I mean, Charlotte's family. Right? They also – the money is from trade and then they bought an estate.

**Vanessa:** [00:03:35] The Bennets are in the middle of these two classes. Mr. Bennet is landed, but Mrs. Bennet is not. Their financial position is precarious, especially once Mr. Bennet dies. So when Mr. Bingley comes to town, this isn't about romance, but its business.

[Music begins again.]

**Vanessa:** And Mrs. Bennet is unable to make the introductions herself. As a woman, it is improper to welcome her neighbor. So when Mr. Bennet pretends he won't go and meet Mr. Bingley, Mrs. Bennet has no recourse. So in these first four pages, we also get a lesson about power dynamics and patriarchy. Here is Elsie Michie again.

[Music fades out as Elsie Michie speaks.]

**Michie:** [00:04:18] So I think it's very important to Austen. And this comes back to the question about money to accurately represent the structures that constrain people's behavior. So she's almost like an anthropologist of her moment, right? You go back and you – and you read *Pride and Prejudice* and you feel the world she's living in. Now, I mean, Raymond Williams has famously said, and I think this is accurate, that within the gates of the estate and everything, she's absolutely accurate economically, but she refuses to look outside those gates like, well, you don't see the people who are laboring on her estates almost at all. So within the range of middle to upper class, her novels to me are brilliant because they're like an anatomy of all the different places you can – think of how many different places there are on that scale, right? That Lucases, Mrs. Philips, the gardener. Right? I mean, and I don't know anybody else who – who is as brilliant at that kind of differentiation, but that's not the stance of someone who goes, "Ooh, here's patriarchy, it's a big clump and I'm going to oppose it." Which is like what Mary Wollstonecraft does. She's not – she's not that. She's an anatomist, I think.

[Music begins again.]

**Vanessa:** [00:05:29] I agree with Professor Michie that Austen's feminism is subtle and exacting. I also obviously agree with the fact that within *Pride and Prejudice*, our gaze is only directed toward the upstairs and the upper crust. But I think that Austen, by limiting the scope of what she is dissecting, allows for a more precise rendering and critique. Mr. Bennet is a loving father in many ways. He isn't a drunk and isn't abusive. He's outright funny, but he holds all of the power in this family. The six women in his life cannot so much as go welcome a neighbor without his participation, and he only participates on his own terms.

[Music ends.]

**Vanessa:** The chapter ends with how these girls must spend most of their time wondering aloud when something is going to happen to them and what they can do to control the

outcome. The answer to the latter question is very little. So even Mr. Bennet's favorite, the Clever Lizzy, sits around lacing bonnets and gossiping –

[Intro synth music begins.]

**Vanessa:** – since that is just about all they're allowed to do, even in terms of trying to craft their own futures. I'm Vanessa Zoltan.

**Lauren:** [00:06:52] And I'm Lauren Sandler.

**Vanessa:** [00:06:53] And this is 'Live from Pemberley' from *Hot and Bothered*.

[Synth music intensifies with added percussion before fading out.]

**Vanessa:** Lauren, we have one thing we want to warn everybody about before we really launch in, which is just that we are going to be spoiling the book as we go along. In *Jane Eyre*, there's this big twist that, if you don't know, feels really important for us to withhold, whereas *Pride and Prejudice*, we're just going to talk about the whole thing as we go. And so we just want to warn you all about that. We're going to be talking about the alien invasion 80 pages before it happens. You know?

**Lauren:** [00:07:35] I can't wait till we get to the vampire part.

**Vanessa:** [00:07:38] So, Lauren, I can't believe we're here. I'm so excited we're talking about *Pride and Prejudice*.

**Lauren:** [00:07:42] Me too.

**Vanessa:** [00:07:43] And what do you have to teach us today, Professor Sandler?

**Lauren:** [00:07:46] Well, okay, so this feels a little nitty gritty. It's not the sexiest thing to kick us off with, but it really matters, I think, which is like, let's get into the money, because this is something that Austen does, is known for doing, and certainly hits hard time and time again in *Pride and Prejudice*, which is she tells us exactly how much money everyone has, where it comes from, what it's worth...I mean, it's like you would never, ever have these conversations in mixed company, but Austen does it, right? What she's telling us here is that Bingley has four or five-thousand pounds to live on a year. For perspective, a farm laborer would make 15 to 20 pounds a year, at most 45 pounds a year. A lawyer, considered very successful, would be making about 450 a year. Austen, herself, after her father's death, lived with her mother and sister on a total of 460 pounds a year. She earned a total of 684 pounds from all of her books in her entire lifetime. So compare that to Bingley and his four or five thousand pounds a year. It's a pretty penny, and it matters. And it matters in part, as you've told us, because we are going to have the Bennet sisters be fairly destitute upon their father's death. And so finding someone who could take care of them, at least one of them, this is a really, really significant thing. So the question then becomes, okay, where is this money coming from? And something about Bingley, which is really interesting and we'll certainly get into this, I think, over the whole season, is that his money is just the interest from government bonds, which is how inheritance was passed if it wasn't being passed through land. Something that we learn about

Bingley very, very quickly is that he has no land. Right? You were talking about this, the difference between landedness and just, like, getting that cash. And so that's what we know, is that his father probably left him about £100,000 and he gets that 4% interest like all of these men who we're going to meet. So I want to put all of that on the table for us discussing this book that, you know, not only are we talking about romance, we're talking about business, we're talking about money. And when we talk about money, we need to talk about where the money comes from.

**Vanessa:** [00:10:16] Yeah, well, and I mean, what's so exciting about Bingley or the prospect of this young man with so much money to Mrs. Bennet, I would imagine, isn't just that he would protect one of the daughters, but with that much money, he could save the whole family if ruin comes, right? If Mr. Bennet dies and the girls are all left without a place to live and with no money. Right? This is like a holy grail of a man that starts off this novel, right? Bingley is the beginning of the novel. The Bennets have been existing and Mrs. Bennet has been worried about marrying off her kids for a long time. But Bingley has come and so therefore the potential for safety, the potential for livelihoods, has arrived.

**Lauren:** [00:11:00] And it's even the potential for real wealth. I mean, other than Darcy, Bingley is pretty much the wealthiest of any of Austen's characters, which, you know, we'll see how much more wealthy Darcy is, which really, you know, Darcy's like in that gazillionaire territory. But Bingley, according to Austen scholars, is about as far up there as you get.

**Vanessa:** [00:11:24] It's so interesting, right? Because everything we've been talking about so far speaks to how high the stakes are for Mr. Bingley moving into the neighborhood. It really matters. It materially matters. It culturally matters. Mrs. Bennet can finally not only maybe marry off one of her daughters, protect herself and all the daughters, because this rich man has lived – is moving next door. And so it's like stakes, stakes, stakes. And yet this famous, famous opening line is, to a large extent, mocking Mrs. Bennet. And, you know, Claudia Johnson just said to us in the opening part of the episode that, yes, that sentence is super twisty and turny and has many meanings. But the main one, the obvious reading is, this is not a truth universally acknowledged. This man is not moving to the neighborhood because he is in want of a wife. And Mrs. Bennet is one of these overbearing mamas who is meddling.

**Lauren:** [00:12:20] So let's – let's read this sentence one more time: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." So I think it is really interesting that you're attributing it to Mrs. Bennet and I agree with it, but Austen has chosen not to make it a quote. We have so much of Mrs. Bennet's direct voice in this chapter. Indeed, that's the bulk of the first chapter, practically, is Mrs. Bennet's chattering. Austen could have begun with a quote, or she could have begun with a line that leads into a quote. And instead this is delivered as a statement, which then makes you think, who is this narrator? I find myself absolutely fascinated by what Austen is doing with this narrator's voice, because she – she begins with Mrs. Bennet in so many ways and not with Lizzy, like it's Lizzy who we are going to internalize through the majority of this book. Lizzy's off trimming her hat. You know, we have Mrs. Bennet's voice, not just in our ear, in dialogue, but also in this characterization. And it's – it's such an interesting place to start with this narrator's voice. I wonder, though, what you think that readers take from it, what you take from it, and why it is that this, out of all of the incredible first lines of literature, is one of a handful that we carry with us in this incredibly iconic way.

**Vanessa:** [00:13:48] Yeah. I mean, first of all, it's so funny. It's such a funny line. I do think for the most part, it is an out of character line for the way that the narrator talks to us for the rest of the book. I think that for the rest of the novel, when the narrator sort of makes a wry observation, it is very clear who the butt of the joke is or what the butt of the joke is. And yet for this, right, I'm not totally clear who this is making fun of. Because it obviously is not just Mrs. Bennet who acts this way. It's universally acknowledged that, like, this is how we are to treat single men in possessions of good fortunes as if they are in want of a wife. Like this is a – a cultural necessity. And so I'm not sure who the butt of this joke is. Is it a society in which all of our hopes are pinned onto these men? Like, I don't know who's being made fun of. Whereas throughout the rest of the novel, like line for line, you know who it is that she's attacking.

**Lauren:** [00:14:57] Well, I do love the notion that it's society, and it does almost feel like a way to set up the entire book. Right? That, of course, these men need nothing. They want for nothing. They don't need wives. They can come and go however they please. They can move in and out of Netherfield. They can choose who they want to insult or dance with at a ball and entire families' futures hang on those flighty little threads. You know, I think that perhaps what Austen is doing here is sort of saying the whole way that things are organized here requires a way of tricking the mind, of frothing one's selves up, because this is the absurd system that we all have to participate in. I'm not saying that she's necessarily making a thesis statement about the feminist tract that she's about to set forth, because, as we know, it's not that simple for her. But I do think that she must see all of this as, you know, absurd and humiliating in many ways.

**Vanessa:** [00:15:57] Right. And so what is in part being said by this sentence is that all of the people in this novel buy into this and they buy into the idea that it is men who have the power and the way to exist in this world and function well is by becoming the wife. Right? The opening line of this is not, "Boy, did it frustrate Lizzy Bennet that the only way she could make a living was as a wife." This is not going to be a book that is questioning this truth or talk about the oppressiveness of it, whereas other novels will. But in this book, to some extent, Austen is saying these are characters who just take the system for granted and are going to play within it.

**Lauren:** [00:16:41] I would also say that it does seem to announce that the narrator is a woman. Because if we think about the men in this novel, none of these men, aside from Mr. Collins, who we will get to and that will be fun when we do, there is truly, you know, essentially one single man in the entire novel who cares a whit about marriage, who seems intent on finding a wife. You know, the men from Mr. Bennet on down through Darcy, you name it, I mean, the people who we spend our attentions on, don't care at all about marriage because they don't have to. And so I think that this declaration feels like it is announcing that we have a female narrator – not only do we have a female author, we have a female narrator – and that that is going to tell us a very different story from a very different place, whether or not it is one which is mocking and ironic or, as it shifts, one which is clever and sympathetic. But I think that it's also interesting in terms of the titles that – that the book holds. Right? I wonder if there is some pride and some prejudice in this statement as well, some prejudice about who we think men are, even if that is wrong, or some pride that, of course, women must be as

necessary as the men are. If there's something in here that feels like this is how women lie to themselves because they have to, and what do we make of that?

**Vanessa:** [00:18:15] Mmm-hmm. But I think everyone is indicted, Lauren, because the women are right. These men, whether or not they know it, they are looking for wives. Right? Bingley does not come to town looking for a wife, but he meets Jane and that's it. He's a goner. And Darcy does not come to town looking for a wife, but he sure meets Lizzy. Wickham doesn't come to town looking for a wife. Right? But like again and again, it's whether or not they know it, those idiots frickin' need a wife.

**Lauren:** [00:18:45] So it's so interesting because it feels like they're not looking for wives and then they fall in love with individuals. You know, you get this feeling that, oh, Lizzy isn't just going to be a wife. She's Lizzy. That's the point. Bingley isn't looking for love, but he falls head over heels in spite of himself. And I think that there's this tension between what it means to be a generic wife and what it means to be adored as an individual. And I think that that element is very, very present through the whole book, that we have these – these women who – who don't just want to be wives. And in fact, as we'll see again with Mr. Collins, when someone does choose to be a wife, as a wife and not as someone who is being cherished for her individuality, chosen for her individuality, that is something that's just anathema to Lizzy. And I think that there is some element of Mrs. Bennet wanting to marry off her daughters, which turns them into generic wives in a way that feels just maddening to us because we aren't necessarily seeing the necessity of it as a business. We want to feel the love of an individual.

**Vanessa:** [00:20:03] I think that we're really invited to judge both Mr. and Mrs. Bennet in these chapters, because to Mrs. Bennet, you want to be like, okay, you know, he's rich and single. You don't know if he's 93 years old. You don't know if he is abusive, right? Like you don't know anything about him. Really? You just are like, great, you can marry one of our girls. He's rich and near. But then Mr. Bennet, not even being willing to go and look, right, you're like, "What are you doing? This could be a really good opportunity." And so I think that what's so interesting is that, you know, one of the questions that we have about this novel is who is it that the book finds ridiculous? Because I think that this is to your point about the narrator, it's a very judgmental book. It's judgmental of its characters, I think in a really lovely and clarifying way. It holds characters to a high standard.

**Lauren:** [00:20:55] It's also where so much of the comedy comes from. It's why I think this book is so delicious, is because it takes no prisoners.

**Vanessa:** [00:21:03] But I really do think that Mrs. Bennet is ridiculous for being like, "A man has a penis, no wedding ring, and a fortune. One of our daughters should marry him." Like, that is ridiculous. And Mr. Bennet, pretending like this isn't a big deal at all, is also being ridiculous.

**Lauren:** [00:21:22] Though it's interesting because at this point in the book, we don't understand the desperation of this family. We don't know why it is that it is so important that these girls get married off. And so, frankly, Mrs. Bennet does sound ridiculous, just sort of flapping her feathers and – and tittering on about this lone man who shows up in town. And so we will get to a point, I think, where Mr. Bennet becomes more and more of a problem. But

for me as a reader, I really start feeling Mr. Bennet's annoyance and affectionate annoyance with his wife. And then in the second chapter, when it turns out that he did go visit Mr. Bingley and has been putting on this whole act about it, I know this is something that infuriates a lot of people, but it is also the sort of teasing, humor that appeals to me so often and so time and again, even when I know where the book is going, I read these two chapters and I feel this incredible affection for him, and I feel affection for the fact that he prefers his clever daughter. So he seems far less ridiculous to me here whereas Mrs. Bennet is just this sort of clucking woman who I so often feel allergic to. And yet this notion that marrying her daughters off is her business is not, in the end, an insult in any way. It is cold, hard reality. And I think that there is a true feminist reading of her character as the only one who can see through this and know what the bottom line is.

**Vanessa:** [00:23:01] Yeah. I mean, definitely the first several times I read the book, I was like all about Mr. Bennet. But this – the second chapter, he just starts to irk me earlier and earlier, I think. You know, I agree with you that he sort of gets through chapter one unscathed, but already by chapter two, I'm like, "You know, pretending for your own amusement that you haven't done something that your wife wants you to do that she can not do on her own, that's not teasing." It feels mean to me.

**Lauren:** [00:23:37] I don't disagree with you in my mind. I know that it's mean. Her lack of agency here is terrifying. Honestly, like this entire system of manners. I mean, it's – it's – it's completely dehumanizing. And I agree with you when I think about it, which is my job to do when I'm reading, I need to be thinking as well as just feeling and enjoying. But I still find such pleasure in his way about it. And I know – I know that that's not right, I know that that's a problem. I also know that this is the love language of my family. And almost every – every family I've ever loved, right, is like these sort of elaborate pranks and ways of withholding information as a way of teasing and then mocking someone for their desires and yet giving them what they need and what they want in the end. And you can see that as abuse or if it's metered out in a slightly different way, I think you can see it as charm and affection. Unfortunately, the lesser your agency is, the more abusive it is and the greater your agency is, the more charming it is. And as we learn that balance is really off.

**Vanessa:** [00:24:50] Right. And I think that you see all of that in Mrs. Bennet's reaction. There isn't a moment where she's like, "Oh, you jerk." Instead, it's this gratitude and this like, genuflecting of like, "[Vanessa gasps.] Girls! We're so lucky to have a man like your father." Right? We're thanking Mr. Bennet for his generosity, when, really, this is his job. He's the head of the house. You go next door and you welcome the neighbors so that your wives and daughters can have relationships with them. And the fact that he's created a situation on which they feel grateful for him simply completing his duty, I think, speaks to the ways that he's in no way trying to create a sense of equality in this house. He likes having this power.

**Lauren:** [00:25:32] So I mean, we will talk about this, I'm sure, I don't like Mrs. Bennet. I know that she's right. I think that there are massive arguments for her, which I will make on this podcast, and yet I can't stand how she does it. I don't like her manner. I don't like how she expresses things.

**Vanessa:** [00:25:49] She's mortifying.

**Lauren:** [00:25:51] Oh, oh, it's the worst! And obviously this is a huge theme in this book, which we will be opening up and discussing, you know, is when people behave a certain way, are we permitted to judge them for it?

**Vanessa:** Totally!

**Lauren:** Whether that is because they seem uncouth in some way or they seem hard in some way because there may be some agenda that they put forth or there may be something that just is outside of our taste. And that how much of that taste is about class? How much of class is about manners? How much of our own prejudices get piqued by our relationship to these people? I mean, am I having an anti-feminist and classist response to Mrs. Bennet because I can't stand how she's behaving? Why is it that we will prefer Lizzy, so many of us, in all of these different ways? Is that a form of snobbery? I think that that's just so much of what we will be digging into here, in part because this is what Austen has, frankly, written this book about. This is what the whole love story hangs on, is whether people can get over this crap enough and frankly, whether they should.

**Vanessa:** [00:27:02] Yeah. And there are moments in which manners, being well mannered, is synonymous with goodness in the novel. And then there are other moments where people are very well mannered and yet not good at all, right? And this question of ridiculousness and power are so interesting in the novel because often...the way that someone loses their power is by being ridiculous in the eyes of others. And so part of what I want for Mrs. Bennet is it's like, just shut up a little because you are correct. And so play this well and then you will be morally virtuous and everyone can see it. You're getting in your own way by being essentially like, not cool, right? Like, by not being mannered about it. And yet, yeah, I feel for her so much. The other place, though, that I really saw power, Lauren, and I never, ever notice this until we are thinking about power and reading this chapter, is the first time we meet Lizzy, she is trimming a bonnet with lace. If you would have asked me when we meet Lizzy, what is she doing? I would have told you she was reading a book. That is the visual I have in my head is that she's the smart one, she's the clever one, and she's the fun one but she's trimming a bonnet and to me, all of these things are like rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic of like, "I want to find a husband, I want the best husband I can get. And so I'm going to try a new lace on my bonnet because there's nothing else I can do to address this. I can't even introduce myself to someone. The next ball isn't for two weeks. I have two whole weeks and it's not like I can send out another resumé or call another reference or do another informational interview. What I can do is trim my bonnet in a way that I think might catch the eye of a person who appreciates my lace taste."

**Lauren:** [00:29:05] And I think there's also this element of, like, yeah, she's just a girl, and girls who are just-a-girl kind of girls can also be the really smart and clever one. And what's doubly interesting is we see Mary and are introduced to Mary as a reader who can't even respond to her father when he asks her a direct question. You know, we will discuss Mary as we move forward because I know we are all such Mary defenders, but I do find there is something about Mary in this introduction to her kind of devastating because I want the narrator to have a little bit more hope for Mary than she allows us to see initially. But I can't help but think, like, yes, you live in this world that you don't relate to, Mary, and where you find solace and company is in your books and not in this frippery and chattering and these family dynamics, you just want to escape it in your pages. And I feel you, girl.



**Vanessa:** [00:30:06] I agree.

**Lauren:** [00:30:07] I also like a pretty bonnet, so, you know, maybe we can have it all.

**Vanessa:** [00:30:12] I mean, the other thing that I feel for Mary in this moment is – I feel like this is something we talked about a lot with *Jane Eyre* – I feel like her dad is acting like that guy at a bar that's like, "Hey, impress me." He has just said, "I want to put in a good word for my Lizzy. She's the clever one." And then – it's whatever it is, a day or two later, "What say you, Mary, for you are a young lady of deep reflection, I know, and read great books and make extracts." And it says Mary wished to say something sensible but knew not how. I mean, obviously that's funny that she doesn't know how to say anything sensible. But you also get the feeling that she wants to say something to impress her dad. And it's like, "I don't know what's going to impress you. And I was just put on the spot."

**Lauren:** [00:31:04] Well, also, this word 'sensible'. I mean, he – he's not a sensible man. And this is not a sensible circumstance. And what she wants to do is say something which is entirely outside the lingua franca of her situation or her family. And that's painful too to feel like you – you speak a different language, or rather you would like to, but you haven't been taught it because it's not the language of your family.

**Vanessa:** [00:31:28] Yeah. I mean, it almost feels like he's mocking her love of great books, right? He's like, "You must be smart. You love to read great books. Tell me, what have they taught you?" Right? It's like somebody, like, mocking the freshman who has chosen a philosophy major and he's like, "Oh, yeah, well, tell me, how would you apply your philosophy to the financial market? Does philosophy write a check?" And it's like, I get it.

**Lauren:** [00:31:55] I get it too. We both really get it. [Both laugh.]

**Vanessa:** [00:31:59] I'm sorry, I just find Mr. Bennet, he's just mean to everyone but Lizzy. Even the, like, "Kitty, you can now cough as much as you like." Like, that's making fun of both Kitty and Mrs. Bennet. Of course, it's ridiculous that Mrs. Bennet was like, "Kitty, stop coughing. It's wrecking my nerves." Although that feeling, I think, is a real one too.

**Lauren:** [Laughs.] I relate to that one too!

**Vanessa:** I totally relate to the, like, "Oh, my God. You need to stop making that noise." Right? These people on rainy days – and it rains in England a lot – have nowhere to go and nothing to do but sit in a room with each other. I swear to you, my sniffing at one point almost broke up my relationship with Peter, and I didn't blame him.

**Lauren:** [00:32:42] And as we'll discuss, another major theme of this book is what it means to be stuck in a family that you don't really like. And man, they were really stuck together. But thinking about power and thinking about the favoritism of Lizzy, I'm sitting here thinking about, like, how – how significant being a parent's favorite can be psychologically. But in this situation, it's so far beyond that. Mr. Bennet's favoritism has the opportunity to save Lizzy from destitution, potentially, and just throw the rest of his children to the wind. I mean, if he is going to put in a good word for Lizzy and no one else, if that is going to be his priority and he

has all the power to make all the introductions set up, all the first impressions of his family, etc., and his aim is to save his favorite daughter. And the rest of them just seem to do nothing but annoy him. I mean, what that means economically, what that means for the future of every single one of these people is...it's alarming.

**Vanessa:** [00:33:47] I also think this favoritism is a burden, though, which we will see. Right? She feels like she should be the one who should be able to convince Mr. Bennet to not let Lydia go to Brighton, for example. Right? It makes her the third adult in the house, the stand in. And, you know, we meet Lizzy and she's 18 or so, but who knows how long she's been foisted into this role between these two ridiculous adults.

[Plucked string music plays and then fades out.]

**Lauren:** [00:34:33] So when we discussed *Jane Eyre*, we looked at that book through the lens of power and desire. And as you can tell, we're already talking about power a lot because that's what we like to talk about. But in thinking – when thinking about *Pride and Prejudice*, desire didn't feel like quite the right fit. You know, it's not a tremendously desirous book, and it is a book that does have so much to say about love and about so many different types of love. And romantic love is certainly a part of that. But even Austen's conception of romantic love, I think, is a complicated one. And so instead of thinking about power and desire this time, we are going to be thinking about power and love and where power and love show up in conflict as they are – no pun intended – married to each other in each chapter and how each one of those concepts really propels the book. And what Austen wants to tell us about the world as she sees it.

**Vanessa:** [00:35:40] Yeah. And I think that one of the things that we'll see, which I'm really excited to trace, is just the importance of sisterly love. Right? And that is something that comes up again and again in Austen's novels: that the true love is the sisterly affection.

**Lauren:** [00:35:55] And even between sisterly friends. You don't even need to be blood sisters, so to speak, to have that sort of sisterly love.

**Vanessa:** [00:36:03] Totally. I mean, in this chapter, right, I think that we see love or an absence of love twice, right? In this familial love, there is a genuine care for one another that is going on in this family, whether or not it is helpfully or generously given, you know, there is love at the heart of this family. And the other is just the absence of love as far as how Mrs. Bennet is thinking about marriage. She's like, "Let's marry off one of the girls and forget loving him. They don't even have to like or know him," like, "he is marriageable."

**Lauren:** [00:36:39] And yet, that is exactly how she loves her daughters. She's so concerned about their future that it's a hierarchy of needs. And she sees the emergency coming. The narrator says, "It is the business of her life." That is an act of love because she knows how necessary it is. It's not for self-flattery. It's not so she can tell the girls at the club who's engaged. It's not so she can put the notice in the paper. It's because she doesn't want her beloved daughters to be destitute. And her husband's lack of concern for that situation, I think, is exactly his absence of love, as well as this different love that he has for Lizzy that he either doesn't feel or intentionally withholds from his other daughters.

**Vanessa:** [00:37:29] The lovingness of this marriage is definitely something that is curious to me. He's not cruel to her. He's not abusive to her. I think in several ways he tries. But also there are real moments, I think, of her reaching out to him and of him not reaching back.

**Lauren:** [00:37:52] Well, she drives him crazy.

**Vanessa:** [00:37:54] Yeah.

**Lauren:** [00:37:55] And the one thing that he can really say in her favor is about her beauty. He clearly fell in love with her beauty. And it appears to be a cautionary tale about what happens when one confuses love for a person's beauty with love for that whole person. I mean, I get his behavior in many ways, and they also seem like a lot of married couples in that way, at least married couples of a very different age, where you would just see people bicker all the time and then once in a while they would remember how they danced at the Copa. And that was, to me, what marriage was when I was growing up around my grandparents who adored each other. But, you know, there is like a certain exasperation that I always thought was inherent in marriage, which frankly may simply be cultural. Maybe this is just a far more culturally honest marriage in many ways than the marriage that we tend to get in literature from this time period. How many exasperating wives and barely tolerant husbands do we tend to see? There's something that feels so intimate about that. And yet, I wonder, is that exasperation and tolerance a form of love, too? I don't know. We'll find out.

**Vanessa:** [00:39:15] Yeah. So next episode, Lauren, we are going to be reading chapters three and four. We meet Mr. Darcy, we go to a ball, much is going to happen.

**Lauren:** [00:39:28] And we finally get more of Lizzy's voice. And I find her absence in these first few chapters so frustrating, and I'm so hungry for her as a real presence. And finally, we'll get our fix.

**Vanessa:** [00:39:42] She's comin'. She's comin'. And Mr. Darcy will find her tolerable.

[Upbeat music plays and fades out as Vanessa speaks.]

**Vanessa:** So at the end of every episode, we are going to interview an expert about something related to the conversation that Lauren and I have had or the chapters that we have looked at. And today, we're lucky enough that Dr. Tara Menon is willing to get on the phone with me. Those of you who listened to our last season of *Hot and Bothered*, 'On Eyre,' will remember Tara, who came to talk to us about *Jane Eyre*. But today she's here to talk to us about *Pride and Prejudice*. Tara is an English professor at Harvard University, and her work centers around counting the words the different characters say in novels. Who is named and who is unnamed and really trying to quantify who has the power of words in novels, when and why. So I'm going to give Tara a call.

[Skype dialing noises sound and then cut off.]

**Vanessa:** [00:40:54] Hi, Tara.

**Menon:** [00:41:00] Hi. How are you?

**Vanessa:** [00:41:01] I'm good. How are you?

**Menon:** [00:41:03] I'm doing well, thanks.

**Vanessa:** [00:41:05] I have so many questions for you, but I just want to start with: any thoughts about who it is that is saying this opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* or like what that narrator's voice is, are we supposed to think about it? Is Austen, as any number of things.

**Menon:** [00:41:24] I think that the first line establishes what we think of as something like the godlike authority of Jane Austen's narrative voice. Right? "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a small fortune must be in a wife."

**Vanessa:** [00:41:39] A great fortune, not a small fortune.

**Menon:** [00:41:41] A *great* fortune. Yeah, I've diminished it already. Small compared to Darcy.

**Vanessa:** [00:41:48] [Laughs.] Yes.

**Menon:** [00:41:48] But there is obviously irony, which is the characteristic note in so much of *Pride and Prejudice* and Austen's fiction that because, of course, it is the inverse that is true in the world of this novel, that in fact the women here are in want of husbands rather than the husbands in want of wives. But I think that one could say that there's a little bit of Mrs. Bennet creeping into that line, or rather at least the community's voice, rather than just simply the authorial voice that is in that first line. That, the irony is, is partly playing on the fact that this is a held belief on the part of the community and people like Mrs. Bennet.

**Vanessa:** [00:42:32] I know that you're someone who pays a lot of attention to, like, when something is in quotes and when it isn't, and when things aren't in quotes, in *Pride and Prejudice*, we have this godlike, you know, authorial narrative voice, but it changes in tone so much, even just in these first few chapters, let alone throughout the book. How are we supposed to think of how – how much the narrative voice changes throughout the book?

**Menon:** [00:43:01] This is, I think, a central question in this novel. In fact, maybe the central question, which is, as I'm sure many of your readers know, Austen's great innovation in fiction is a technique, a formal technique, called free indirect discourse. And the magic of free indirect discourse is that it combines the thing that I think about a lot in my work, which is direct speech or direct discourse. So words that are imagined to be the exact words that are uttered by an individual character and something like the detachment of the third person narration. So sometimes it's very obvious in the novel, even when we're in the third person narrative sections of the novel, not the direct speech sections of the novel, which characters' consciousness the narration is being filtered through, and sometimes it's much less obvious. And so part of the work of reading Austen's fiction is trying to figure out what is happening. All the while, the style sort of, like, carries you along and tries to stop you from doing the work actively of figuring it out.

**Vanessa:** [00:44:08] Ugh, she's so mean.

**Menon:** [00:44:11] [Laughs.] She is. She is so mean. And I think so many people sort of underestimate how mean she is.

**Vanessa:** [00:44:18] Yeah. She's tricking you all the time.

**Menon:** [00:44:21] All the time.

**Vanessa:** [00:44:23] Mrs. Bennet is not one of the main, main characters in the novel. Right? She, I would say, is secondary. But her voice in terms of the work that you do is so dominant in this introduction to the novel. Why is Austen introducing us to this world through Mrs. Bennet's eyes?

**Menon:** [00:44:45] I will tell you two things about speech in this novel, which will be somehow indirectly an answer to your question. So the first thing is that in most narrative fiction, we would expect that the protagonist is the character that speaks the most number of what. This is very true in this novel. Elizabeth Bennet speaks 29% of the total amount of speech, but the character that speaks the second most is Mrs. Bennet. [Vanessa gasps.] And she speaks 13% of all of the words, and Darcy is third and he speaks 8%. So he's almost a little bit of a distant third. And then there are a few characters, Jane, Mr. Collins, Mr. Bennet, who speak about – also about a little less than eight, but about the same amount that Darcy does. So that's fact number one. Actually, Mrs. Bennet is the second highest speaker in this novel. The other thing that I will tell you about *Pride and Prejudice* and speech is that most novels in the 19th century have less speech at the beginning, and then they sort of plateau in the middle, and then they have a little bit less speech in the end. So it follows a sort of nice typical arc. *Pride and Prejudice* almost inverts this arc exactly. So it starts with a lot of speech. It has a middle period that has not very much speech, and then it ends with a lot of speech. And for readers familiar with the novel, they will know that's partly because the middle part of this novel is a novel of interiority. It's a novel where we really get to know Elizabeth Bennet, where really the narration is engaging in that free indirect discourse that I spoke about earlier. But the beginning and end of the novel in some ways are Elizabeth in community. You know, the novel launches into speech. Yes, that famous first line is not direct speech, but almost the rest of that chapter is entirely speech. And so I think it's part of situating Elizabeth Bennet in a – a family and a community in which there's a lot of conversation and communication going on.

**Vanessa:** [00:46:49] That also makes so much sense because the middle of the novel is also where a lot of miscommunications are happening. And so it's so interesting that they're literally just not talking to one another. Right? It's Lizzy who makes the decision to not talk to her family about Wickham. Right? Like there are a lot of decisions to not talk.

**Menon:** [00:47:07] Indeed, yeah. And also the two characters who we think of as actually being in quite good communication at the beginning of the novel is Elizabeth and Jane who are not in communication in the same way in the middle of the novel.

**Vanessa:** [00:47:21] I know we asked you about minor characters and *Jane Eyre*, and I'm wondering about the minor characters in *Pride and Prejudice* and how much they speak or don't speak.

**Menon:** [00:47:31] One of the things that we see in novels that are later in the 19th century is speech from very minor characters, unnamed characters, people like shopkeepers or milliners or waiters. In Austen's world, that basically never happens. The characters that speak, especially indirect speech in Austen's fiction, are almost universally known to other characters in the novel. This novel has only 25 characters that speak out loud. And of those, only two are unnamed. One of them is a butler who gets a line. And another is an unnamed girl at a ball who also gets one line. But it's important that both of those characters, even though they're not given first or last names are known to the other characters, the butler is known to the characters in Jane Austen's world. They know his name. We might not get that name, but he's not a stranger. And neither is the girl at the ball. No one's a stranger in this world. The great critic, Raymond Williams, his line about country fiction is that they're made up of knowable communities and Austen exemplifies this. *Emma*, in some ways, is probably the Austen novel that most exemplifies this. There are only 16 characters in *Emma*. Every single one of them is named, and every single one of them speaks to at least two other people. So it's a perfect, closed social network. *Pride and Prejudice* isn't quite as perfect, quite as closed, but it's still 25 people compared to a novel like a Dickens novel, which might have over 100 speaking characters.

**Vanessa:** [00:49:18] It's so interesting how few characters speak, given that we have so many balls and there's a frickin' militia in town.

**Menon:** [00:49:27] It is.

**Vanessa:** [00:49:28] So, Tara, we are at the beginning of this journey. Is there anything that you think that we and our listeners should keep in mind as we read our way through this book that, you and I agree, is quite cruel to its readers? Is there something we should watch out for with the landmines that Austen sets out for us?

**Menon:** [00:49:49] One of the things I think is the most interesting elements of this novel is the way that Austen, speaking of her cruelty, manufactures emotions like contempt and disdain and dislike for her characters. And I think one of the main ways that she's able to do that so effectively is the way she uses – the way she deploys direct speech. So that can be by having an extremely verbose character, a character who speaks sentences upon sentences upon sentences without letting anyone else get a word in edgewise. But it can also be when characters speak repeatedly without letting a reply come back to them, for example. And so I think one of the things I would ask your listeners to pay attention to as they read through this novel is whenever they have a feeling that they really don't like a character to think about what exactly Austen has done to make them feel that way.

**Vanessa:** [00:50:50] Yeah. Including with Mrs. Bennet –

**Menon:** Indeed.

**Vanessa:** – who I'm a great apologist for.

**Menon:** [00:50:57] Yeah, Mr. Bennet's the real bad guy.

**Vanessa:** [00:51:00] Amen. Amen. Well, Tara, thank you so much. It was a pleasure, as always. And we're so grateful.

**Menon:** [00:51:09] Thank you so much for having me. It was really fun.

[Synth music begins to play.]

**Vanessa:** [00:51:14] You've been listening to 'Live from Pemberley' from *Hot and Bothered*. We are a small show, so we really need your support to run. So if you can, please consider supporting us on Patreon at [patreon.com/hotandbotheredrompod](https://patreon.com/hotandbotheredrompod). If you love the show, please leave us a review on Apple Podcasts. We are a Not Sorry Production. Our executive producer is Ariana Nedelman and we are distributed by A Cast.

**Lauren:** [00:51:38] Thanks always to our Jane-level patrons, Baroness Elise Kanagaratnam of Unicornia, Viscountess Gretchen Sneegast of Breakfastcarbston, Knight Molly Reel of Worcestershire Sauce, The Countess of Kristen Hall, Dame Leah B Pickleshire, Duchess Two Cats of Filofaxia, Dame Becky Boo of Tiaralandia, and Duchess Bidy Higgins of Bubble Bath. You are doing so much to make this show possible.

**Vanessa:** [00:52:09] Thanks to Tara Menon, Claudia Johnson and Elsie Michie for talking to us. You will hear more from them throughout our season, you lucky ducks. Thanks always also to Lara Glass, Gabby Iori, AJ Jaramaz, Julia Argy, Nicki Zoltan, Stephanie Paulsell and all of our patrons.

[Music fades out.]