



## Janet Aylmer

**Darcy's Story**  
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**Q: What was the biggest challenge in writing a well-known story from another perspective? How did you overcome it?**

A: Mr. Darcy has become such an "iconic hero" to so many people over the years that someone who has not read "Pride and Prejudice" themselves would expect that Jane Austen's novel would include very many scenes in which he appears.

I was very surprised to find on how few occasions he was actually present in that novel. So I considered each part of the story from his point of view—would he have known what was happening, had he met the people described by Jane Austen, and so on. I realized that not only was he shy and lacking confidence in most social situations, but that the lively family life of Elizabeth and the whole Bennet family would have been a mystery to him.

So a strong basis for my book was his lonely isolation, his lack of anyone to advise him or point out (however gently) that his fixed views might be wrong. But since he clearly was an intelligent man, and could act as a good brother and friend when he chose, his potential for change clearly existed, and helped me to develop his character and therefore the theme for "Darcy's Story".

**Q: Jane Austen remains one of the most revered authors of all time. What qualities make her writing have such universal appeal, even across cultures and languages?**

A: Jane Austen based all her stories on the limited social circumstances in which she was brought up, although each of her books is written in a very different style, thus illustrating the range and quality of her writing abilities. But the common basis in her books which people from many cultures can understand is the often very difficult path to the happy romantic endings that her readers enjoy.

Her combination of keen observation, carefully judged wit and skillful prose style is timeless. Many women particularly can relate to her depiction of families where the financial future of girls and women depended on whether they could attract a husband and what their social status would be after they married. The alternative was stark—to be poor dependants of their brothers or sisters, or to work for others without status as a governess or unpaid helper.

**Q: Which Jane Austen novel is your favorite (other than *Pride and Prejudice*) and why?**

A: I value "Persuasion" best—a story with a very sad beginning for the heroine, some perhaps rather confusing central sections, but then progressing to a happy ending for the heroine. Amanda Root and Ciaran Hinds in the 1995 film conveyed very well the pain of unrequited love which matched, for me, the way in which Jane Austen wrote the book.

I find it much more difficult to relate to "Mansfield Park" (perhaps partly because it was a text to be studied for an examination when I was at school!), or to "Northanger Abbey" which I have found rather tedious each time that I have read it.

**Q: In your preface, you mention reservations you have had with staged or filmed versions of *Pride and Prejudice*. Do you believe that it is possible for the stage or film to capture the essence of Jane Austen's genius fully? Why or why not?**

A: Both in a stage play, and in a feature film, each of which may last only 2 hours or so, it seems difficult to be able to reflect sufficiently the full flavor of Jane Austen's writing skills and the stories that she tells. Even with very careful script-writing, it is a "tall order" to show the novelist's plot and characters accurately without having to cut significant parts of the story. That is probably why (with an excellent script and cast) the 1995 BBC serial of "Pride and Prejudice" (which lasted 6 hours in all) was so good. The films of "Sense and Sensibility", "Emma" and "Persuasion" also worked quite well, with good scripts and because the stories themselves could be adapted to omit many less essential details.

**Q: Of the filmed versions of *Pride and Prejudice*, which is the truest to the book and why? Is it also your favorite? If not, which version is and why? The filmed versions include:**

**1940: With Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier**  
**1967: With Celia Bannerman and Lewis Fiander**  
**1980: With Desmond Adams and Elizabeth Garvie**  
**1995: With Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle**  
**2003: With Kam Heskin and Orlando Seale**  
**2005: With Keira Knightley and Matthew MacFadyen**

A: I have not seen the 1967 film, and the 2003 version that you mention has not been widely available in the United Kingdom, as far as I am aware?

I remember seeing the 1940 film when I was in my teens. Both Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier were excellent actors, but the costumes (Victorian—so 50 years later than Jane Austen's time) and the liberties taken with the plot and story, together with some rather "stilted" acting by some of the cast, spoilt my enjoyment.

I found the way that the 2005 film was presented interesting, with the Bennet family portrayed as less divided and rather poorer than Jane Austen intended. But both Keira Knightley and Matthew MacFadyen seemed to me to be a little miscast and the script, by Deborah Moggach (a well regarded English author) seemed to suffer from the time constraints mentioned earlier, and the director's wish to have such a different "take" on the novel. The conflict between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, for instance, almost disappeared so that her anxiety

about the future of her daughters could take a more central part of the story. That was interesting to see, but was not the story as Jane Austen had written it.

So my favorite must be the BBC version in 1995, for the reason I have given earlier an excellent script and cast, and plenty of time to develop the story without cutting significant characters or scenes.