

# WU?@therep

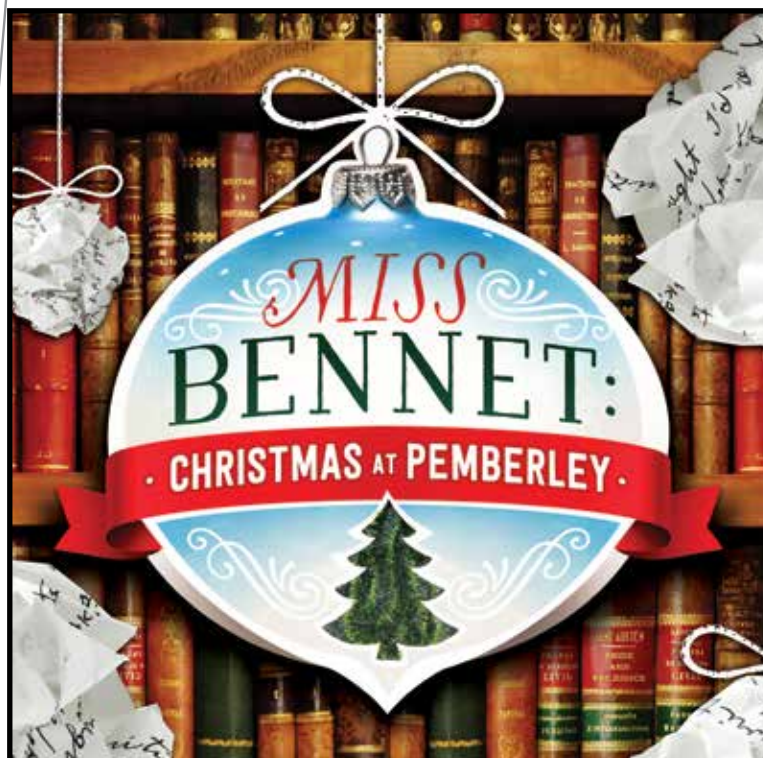
## MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLY

By Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon  
Directed by Jenn Thompson

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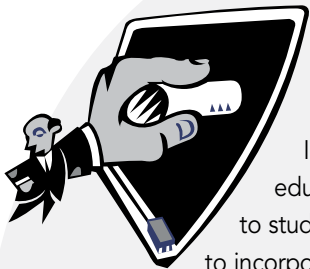


# the 11

At The Rep, we know that life moves fast—okay, really fast. But we also know that some things are worth slowing down

for. We believe that live theatre is one of those pit stops worth making and are excited that you are going to stop by for a show. To help you get the most bang for your buck, we have put together WU? @ THE REP—an IM guide that will give you everything you need to know to get at the top of your theatergoing game—fast. You'll find character descriptions (A/S/L), a plot summary (FYI), biographical information (F2F), historical context (B4U), and other bits and pieces (HTH). Most importantly, we'll have some ideas about what this all means IRL, anyway.

## CU@therep!



### The Teacher's Lounge

In an effort to make our educational materials accessible to students and easy for educators to incorporate into the classroom, our study guide is written in a student-oriented format. We hope that you will circulate this guide among your students in the weeks preceding your visit to The Rep, encouraging them to browse it before and after class and as time allows, using it as a launch point for both pre- and post-performance discussions. You may also want to visit our website, [www.repstl.org](http://www.repstl.org), for additional information including activity suggestions and behind-the-scenes information. Any materials, either from this guide or from our website may be reproduced for use in the classroom.

**NEATO!**

As always, we appreciate your making live theatre a part of your classroom experience and welcome your feedback and questions.

## HOW TO BE THE BEST AUDIENCE EVER!

### TAKE YOUR SEAT

An usher will seat your class as a group, and often we have a full house with no seats to spare, so be sure to stick with your school until you have been shown your section in the theatre.

### SILENCE IS GOLDEN

Before the performance begins, be sure to turn off your cell phone and watch alarms. If you need to talk or text during intermission, don't forget to click off before the show resumes.

### BREAK TIME

This performance includes an intermission, at which time you can visit the restrooms in the lobby. Intermission is only 15 minutes though, so hurry back to your seat.

### SNACK TIME

There is no food or drink permitted inside the theatre, so make sure you finish your snacks in the lobby before you enter the house.

### NOW HEAR THIS

Just as you can see and hear the actors, they can see and hear you. Any talking, even whispering, can be heard by those around you and those onstage, so please wait until the show is over to chat.

### NO PAPARAZZI PLEASE

The theatre is a camera-free zone. Flash photography interrupts the action onstage and is prohibited by Actors' Equity Association rules. You can sneak a peek at production photos on The Rep's website at [repstl.org](http://repstl.org).

### TAKE A BOW

Let the actors know you respect their work by responding to the curtain call at the end of the performance. Show your appreciation for a job well done through applause.

### THANKS FOR BEING A GREAT AUDIENCE!

#### REP EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Director of Education  
Associate Director of Education  
Education Programs Associate

Marsha Coplon  
Sarah Brandt  
Brian Coats

# A/S/L

The hostess of this year's Christmas gathering, **MRS. ELIZABETH DARCY** is ready to welcome her family to Pemberley and introduce them to some unconventional holiday traditions.

Her husband, **MR. FITZWILLIAM DARCY**, finds himself completely enamored over his wife and her decision to have a live tree inside the house.

**MRS. JANE BINGLEY**, Elizabeth's sister, is visiting Pemberley with her husband while seven months pregnant with her first child.

**MR. CHARLES BINGLEY**, Jane's husband and Mr. Darcy's best friend, finds himself questioning his readiness to be a father.

Elizabeth and Jane's younger sister, **MISS MARY BENNET**, arrives at Pemberley alone, but finds herself taken with another solitary stranger.

Mr. Darcy's cousin, **LORD ARTHUR DE BOURGH**, arrives from Oxford and wishes nothing more than to return to his studies, until he finds a kindred spirit at Pemberley.

**MRS. LYDIA WICKHAM** arrives at Pemberley without her husband and sets her playful sights on Lord de Bourgh.

**MISS ANNE DE BOURGH**, the daughter of the Late Catherine de Bourgh, unexpectedly arrives at Pemberley with some shocking news for everyone.

# H/T/H

**ADOPTION TRIED:** A lasting friendship

**ESTATE:** All of one's property and possessions, which they must leave to someone else upon their death

**PERJURE:** To willingly tell a lie

**GOVERNESS:** A woman employed to teach children in a private household

**CONFIDENCE:** A secret or private matter told to someone under a condition of trust

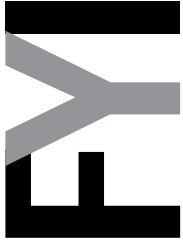
**TENUOUS:** Very weak or slight

**VIRTUOSO:** A person highly skilled in music or another artistic pursuit

**PRECOCIOUS:** Exhibiting mature qualities at an early age; clever

**RECOURSE:** Source of help in a difficult situation

**CULPABILITY:** Responsibility for a fault or wrong; blame



## SPOILER ALERT!

This synopsis contains spoilers about the story of the show. If you wish to be completely surprised by what you see on stage, you may want to wait until after the play to read this article.



2005 Film Adaptation of *Pride & Prejudice*. Photo Courtesy of Into Film

**The play opens in December of 1815 as Mrs. Elizabeth Darcy prepares the Pemberley estate for the arrival of her family for Christmas.** Part of this preparation includes mounting a large Christmas tree inside the house, a new tradition which greatly confuses her husband, Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy. Mr. Darcy reveals to Elizabeth that because his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, has passed away, her estate has been given to his cousin, Arthur de Bourgh. Darcy has invited Arthur to Pemberley for Christmas, much to Elizabeth's surprise.

Soon after, Elizabeth's sisters Jane and Mary arrive, accompanied by Jane's husband, Charles Bingley. Jane is pregnant and a bit tired from the journey. They are all, like Mr. Darcy, confused about the tree standing in the sitting room and Elizabeth's plans to decorate it. The gentlemen exit and the sisters are left alone to chat. They discuss their younger sister Lydia and her impending arrival the next day. All three sisters show concern about Lydia's happiness in her marriage to Mr. Wickham, and Mary reveals her loneliness, as well as her dislike of marriage and men. Elizabeth and Jane tell her not to give up

hope before leaving so that Jane can get some rest. Mary is left alone to play the piano.

Later that evening, Mary is alone in the library when Mr. Darcy enters. They discuss Mary's solitude and Darcy remarks on her maturity. Mary feels that she has been overlooked in favor of her other sisters, and Darcy encourages her to define herself. He leaves her alone once again in the library.

The next day, Darcy's cousin, Lord Arthur de Bourgh, arrives. There is no one to greet him, so he wanders into the library and over to the map that Mary was looking at last night. Mary herself enters and the two discuss traveling and their interests in the world. They find that they are both very studious and share similar reading habits.

The arrival of Lydia Wickham interrupts their conversation. She is followed by Elizabeth and Jane. Lydia, upset that her husband could not visit Pemberley with her, tells everyone about her incredibly happy marriage, while greeting Arthur very warmly. She and Mary, never very close sisters, share a cold greeting. Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley arrive and greet Arthur, who has come to Pemberley straight from Oxford. Darcy



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encourages Arthur to write to his estate and explain that he will not be joining them for Christmas, as they are probably expecting him soon. Arthur, unfamiliar and uncomfortable with being the lord of an estate, begs Darcy and Bingley to help him adjust to this new way of living. All three gentlemen exit. Elizabeth, Jane, and Mary scold Lydia on her behavior towards Arthur, reminding her that she is a married woman. Lydia insults Mary in response, noting Mary's lack of musical talent. Mary, who has become quite accomplished at the pianoforte, shocks them all with her masterful playing. The gentlemen re-enter in time to hear it, and Arthur is very impressed.

Later that day, Mary and Arthur find themselves once again in the library. Their conversation leads to Arthur's new responsibilities as lord of an estate and he states that he feels trapped. Mary is frustrated that he cannot recognize all of the opportunities that his position gives him while she herself has none. Feeling that she has spoken out of turn, she exits. Lydia enters to find Arthur alone and tells him that Darcy is looking for him, leading him from the room. Once he has left, she slips a note that she has written into a book that she believes is his. When she exits, Mary returns to pick up the book, which is actually hers. She reads the note and believes it is from Arthur.

In the next scene, Arthur seeks advice from Darcy and Bingley. He reveals that he is very worried for Mary Bennet; Darcy and Bingley tell him that he actually seems to be in love with her. Arthur, never one to be in such situations, has no idea what to do. Darcy and Bingley give him advice and tell him to write a letter of his affections for her. After a transition, we see Elizabeth and Jane in the sitting room. Elizabeth worries that she is not good enough to be the mistress of Pemberley, and also that Lydia is not happy in her marriage. The two sisters search for a solution with little luck.

Another transition leads us to Mary and Arthur both writing letters to each other. They are both having a very hard time, as they are not used to these new romantic feelings. Mary gives up and exits. Lydia enters and surprises Arthur with mistletoe, making him very uncomfortable. He places his letter to Mary in his book and exits. Lydia finds the letter and reads it, thinking that it is for her in response to her letter to him. Arthur re-enters and Lydia is excited that he feels the same. When Mary enters, the misunderstanding is quickly sorted, and it is revealed that Arthur and Mary were writing to each other. Lydia leaves in anger, but before Arthur can reveal his feelings for Mary, Anne de Bourgh, the daughter of the late Lady Catherine de Bourgh, arrives unexpectedly and reveals that she and Arthur are to be married.



Photo Courtesy of ThousandWonders.net

Pictured above, the Chatsworth House played the role of Pemberly Estate in the 2005 film adaptation of *Pride & Prejudice*.



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When Act Two begins on Christmas Eve morning, Arthur is trying to speak with Mary, but she will not listen to him. She feels that she has been tricked and is deeply hurt. Upon her exit, Anne de Bourgh enters, explaining how Rosings, Arthur's estate, is so much better than Pemberley. Arthur admits to being confused about their impending marriage, as he had no idea it was to happen, and Anne explains that it was the wish of her mother and of Arthur's father. While Arthur feels differently, he doesn't see how he can avoid it.

Later, Arthur seeks out Darcy and Bingley to tell them that he plans to leave Pemberley earlier than expected. His explanation reveals to them everything that has happened, and Darcy explains that he doesn't have to marry Anne. Arthur doesn't know what else to do, as he can't throw Anne out of her home. He exits, resolved. Darcy and Bingley seek out their wives to help solve the situation.

Everyone is gathered in the sitting room and Mary is playing sad music on the pianoforte. A conversation between the sisters reveals that Arthur is to be married to Anne and that Mary has feelings for him. She runs out and the rest discuss what they should do about the current situation.

Arthur enters and Elizabeth congratulates him on his engagement. She can see that he is unhappy as he runs from the room. Darcy comes over to speak to Mary, telling her that Arthur is planning to leave and that she should seek him out before he does so. Everyone begs Mary to listen to him, including Lydia. Arthur enters and everyone leaves, giving him and Mary a moment alone. Anne enters and Arthur tells her that he does not wish to marry her. Arthur and Mary finally tell each other of their feelings. Anne exits angrily.

The next day is Christmas and everyone is gathered together for the holiday. Jane has invited Lydia to live with her and Bingley to help take care of the baby, much to Bingley's surprise. Anne, annoyed to still be at Pemberley, is sought out by Darcy, who explains to her that she is free to be her own woman now. Lydia vows to help her. Arthur enters, soon followed by Mary, and it is revealed to everyone that they plan to marry, once Arthur has spoken to Mr. Bennet, Mary's father. They all sing Christmas songs and then the bell rings, announcing the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. Mary and Arthur share one final moment, excited for their future together.



*Miles G. Jackson and  
Justine Salata. Photo by  
Lon Brauer.*

# RBTL

## SOCIETY VERSUS SELF

Expectations weigh heavily on all of the characters in *Miss Bennet*. Mary finds herself trying to change the expectations that everyone else has for her, as most see her as someone who will spend the rest of her life alone. She wishes to be seen for herself, without her connection (or lack thereof) to any partner. Arthur de Bourgh struggles with the expectations that come with being the master of a large estate, when all he wants to do is read and study. Even Elizabeth, who faced much of her conflict in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, struggles with being the mistress of an estate like Pemberley, questioning whether she is good enough for such a position. Pay close attention to the expectations that each character must struggle with, both the ones that society has placed on them and the ones that they have placed on themselves. **How do they deal with these expectations, and how, if at all, are they resolved?**

## WEALTH & OPPORTUNITY

When it comes to Jane Austen, there is a pretty good chance that there will be some discussion of wealth and the opportunities that it affords. Men and women in Regency England were born with different freedoms (men significantly more than women) based on their status and class in society. Arthur, who has recently come into a lot of money, finds his new status to be a burden against his own desires, while Mary struggles to understand why he cannot see all of the opportunities that his new position brings him. Consider both sides of the conversation: **Is there a right or wrong perspective? Do the playwrights seem to favor one opinion over the other? Do you? Thinking of your life today, what is the correlation between wealth and opportunity? What does having one mean for the other? Is this similar or different to Mary and Arthur's situation?**

## MISUNDERSTANDINGS

The play features many simple moments of misunderstanding that take on a somewhat farcical nature. Letters get mixed up, characters misunderstand intentions, and other characters burst in to complicate matters. This device is used by the playwrights to increase the dramatic tension while at the same time exploring the characters' reactions to such circumstances. These misunderstandings also help to expand the plot, creating some complications for the characters to face so that when they come together at the end, they have faced obstacles and fought through them. **As an audience member, how does it feel to watch these moments? How drastically would it change the plot and the characters if these misunderstandings were not included?**



# B4

## A CLOSER LOOK AT REGENCY ENGLAND

Like the Jane Austen novels that inspire it, *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* takes place during a period known as The Regency Era. Spanning roughly 42 years (1795–1837), The Regency Era marked a time of great accomplishment and refinement for the upper classes of English society. However, it was also a time marked by extreme social change and therefore had its own share of conflicts and difficulties.



### THE PRINCE REGENT

What is a regent? Since the United States of America does not have a monarchy, it is not a term that we use very often. A regent is someone who is assigned to take charge when the monarch is unfit to rule, typically due to age, absence or disability. The Regency Era is named as such because during this period, England was ruled by the Prince Regent. Towards the end of his reign, King George III (you'll recognize him as the ruling power against the American colonies during the American Revolution) was seen as too mentally unstable to act as king. In 1810, his eldest son, George, Prince of Wales, was granted the authority of Prince Regent, and ruled England as such until his father's death in 1820. At that time, he ascended to the throne as King George IV. Due to this timeline, many place the Regency Era between 1810 and 1837, when Queen Victoria was crowned and the Victorian Era began. However, the influence of the Prince Regent was felt long before his official reign, so it is fitting to extend the period before his ascension.

### PATRON OF THE ARTS

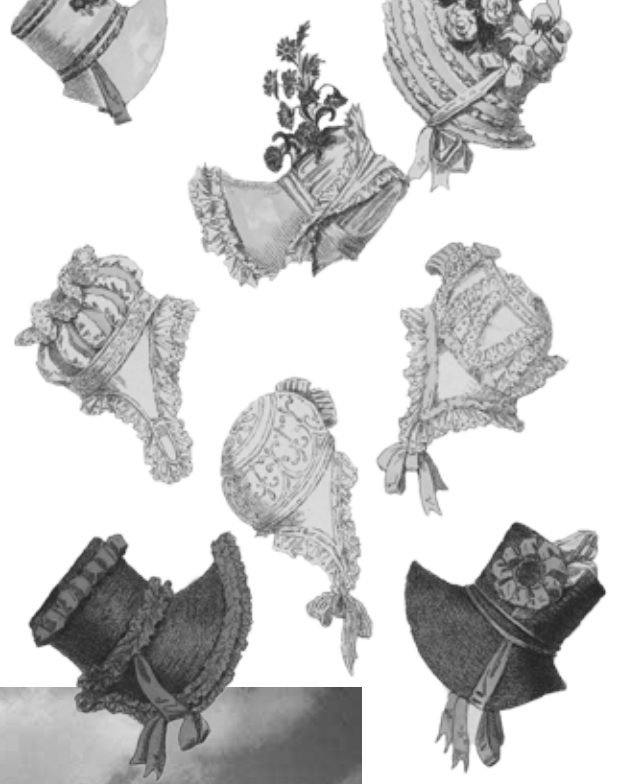
The Regency Era is defined as a period of great elegance and achievements in arts and architecture. This is something you will certainly notice at the start of the play, as *Miss Bennet* concerns itself with the wealthiest of society. The Prince Regent himself was one of the greatest patrons of the arts during this time. He oversaw the construction and renovation of many costly buildings throughout England, including the famous Brighton Pavilion in Brighton, England. This spending caused the Prince Regent to dip into the treasury, which had an effect on the people of England.

*Coronation portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence, 1821*



## A DEFINED SOCIAL STRUCTURE

During the Regency Era, society was rigidly organized in a hierarchical class structure. Everyone was placed inside one of the classes and there was little to no movement between them. A man's placement was determined by his wealth and the details of his land holdings. For the most part, this was based on inheritance, as most, if not all, wealth and titles were passed from father to son, or in the event of there being no sons, to the next male heir. For women, their placement was determined by the status of their father. They rarely inherited wealth and had few opportunities to make a living on their own, leaving them to make an advantageous marriage as a way to attain wealth. In Regency England, marriages were typically more of a financial agreement than a result of romance.



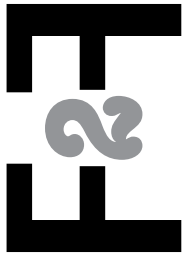
Brighton Pavilion from VisitBrighton.com



*Bal de société*  
A Society Ball, engraved by Charles Etienne Pierre Motte



Regency Evening gown from Ackermann's Repository of Arts



# JANE AUSTEN: VOICE OF THE REGENCY

In much the same way that Charles Dickens has become known as the voice of the Victorian Era, Jane Austen has long been the established voice of the Regency Era. Through her six major novels, Austen was a leading interpreter and critic of the social class system or society structure of this period of history. While Austen was unable to touch on all of the issues of her time, her characters and their struggles have given scholars and historians great insight into the customs and societal conflicts of the time.

Austen was born in 1775 in a small English village, the daughter of an Oxford-educated clergyman. She was extremely close to her only sister, Cassandra—a relationship that clearly inspired the close relationship between Jane and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*. Though educated briefly in Oxford, Austen's health issues caused her to be home educated for a while, where she spent much of her time reading from her father's extensive library. She was also encouraged to write, and became aware of the world outside her home when she traveled to see her brother Henry in London.

Another of her brothers lived in an estate, where Jane and Cassandra would visit and

where, more than likely, she learned of the customs of the wealthy. These experiences inspired the settings and situations of the characters in her novels.

While Jane never married, she did have a rather brief engagement with a friend's brother. However, she did not feel that she loved him, and remained unattached for the rest of her life. Themes of love and marriage can be found in all of Austen's novels, particularly *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. By the age of 23, Jane had written three of her six major novels.

At the age of 35, Austen began to publish her novels. *Sense and Sensibility* was published in 1811, *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813, *Mansfield Park* in 1814, and *Emma* in 1815. While she was alive, Austen was not what we would consider a successful novelist. It was only following her death in 1817, as well as the publication of her final two novels, that Austen began to become so well-known for her stories. Today, there is no question that Jane Austen is and was the voice of her time.

## JANE'S WORKS

1811	<i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	1817	<i>Northanger Abbey</i> (published posthumously)
1813	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	1817	<i>Sandition</i> (unfinished at the time of her death)
1814	<i>Mansfield Park</i>	1871	<i>Lady Susan</i> (published as part of <i>A Memoir of Jane Austen</i> , by her nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh)
1815	<i>Emma</i>		
1817	<i>Persuasion</i> (published posthumously)		



# O' CHRISTMAS TREE (AND OTHER HOLIDAY TRADITIONS)



The characters in *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* are completely shocked to find that Elizabeth has mounted a large, living tree in the sitting room of Pemberley. To you or I, this is a typical holiday tradition, but in 1815 England, the practice of bringing a tree into the house was just beginning to be introduced. Here are some other holiday traditions that we find to be commonplace, but that might be shocking to others in different places and times in history.

## CHRISTMAS TREES

As Elizabeth informs us in the play, the tradition of bringing a Christmas tree into the house is credited to Germany, when 16th century Christians brought trees inside and dressed them up with decorations. However, the idea of bringing in boughs or other types of plants was common practice long before this time, when evergreens were said to ward off spirits or illness.

## MISTLETOE

Arthur tells Lydia that the idea of hanging mistletoe as a sign of celebration and love is a rather odd one considering its poisonous qualities. However, the practice developed long before the idea of Christmas came about. Mistletoe was once a mere decoration used to celebrate winter. In northern Europe, it was thought of as a plant of peace and harmony. Scandinavians were the first to associate the plant with love, crediting it to their goddess of love, Frigga. From there, it became tradition to kiss underneath the mistletoe.

## CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Christmas carols have been around since the beginning of the holiday's observance; however, it wasn't until the publication of Christmas music books in the 19th century that the carols that we think of today became traditional. It would be difficult for us to recognize the first carols from medieval times, as certain songs have gone in and out of fashion over time. Since the first publications in 1800s, a collection of carols, such as "Hark! The

Herald Angels Sing" and "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen," have become yearly sing-along fare.

## BOXING DAY

In some countries, the day after Christmas is celebrated as Boxing Day. Some claim this holiday began in the Middle Ages and was the day when the alms box, collection boxes for the poor often kept in churches, were traditionally opened so that the contents could be distributed to poor people. Today, Boxing Day has become more of a shopping holiday, similar to Black Friday in the U.S.

## SANTA CLAUS

We're all familiar with this jolly figure who brings toys to good children on Christmas Eve, but did you know Santa's story stretches all the way back to the third century? The legend of Santa Claus can be traced back hundreds of years to a monk named Saint Nicholas. It is believed that Nicholas was born sometime around 280 A.D. in Patara, near Myra in modern-day Turkey. Much admired for his piety and kindness, it is said that he gave away all of his inherited wealth and traveled the countryside helping the poor and sick.



# BTW

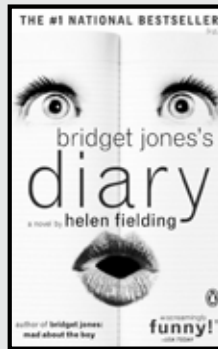
Playwrights Laura Gunderson and Margot Melcon are not the first ones to be inspired by the works and life of Jane Austen. Check out these other works about the Regency Era, Austen and her delightful characters:



## ***Becoming Jane***

Directed by Julian Jarrold

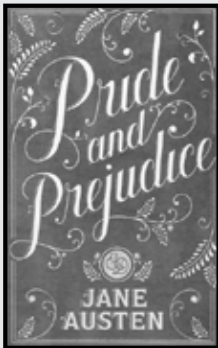
Interested in learning more about the mind behind *Pride and Prejudice* or *Sense and Sensibility*? Revisit Jane Austen's early life in this 2007 film, starring Anne Hathaway.



## ***Bridget Jones's Diary***

by Helen Fielding

Read this modern and hilarious take on Jane's Austen *Pride and Prejudice*, which was later turned into an Award-winning film starting Renee Zellweger and Colin Firth.



## ***Pride and Prejudice***

by Jane Austen

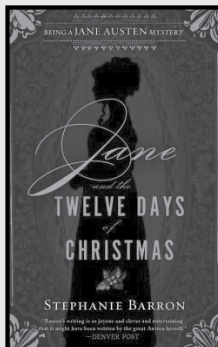
Before becoming the power couple we know and love in *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, Elizabeth and Darcy had a complicated and messy history. Find out how this epic love story came to be by reading their original novel.



## ***Little Women***

by Louisa May Alcott

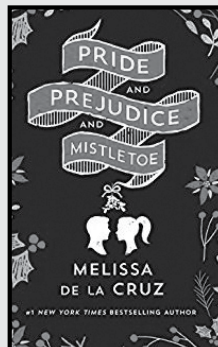
This book, originally published in 1868, follows the story of strong-willed women breaking out of their social classes and finding love in the process, not so unlike Jane Austen's greatest heroines.



## ***Jane and the Twelve Days of Christmas***

by Stephanie Barron

In this novel inspired by Austen, Jane has been invited to spend the holidays with friends only to be embroiled in a mystery after the death of one of the guests.



## ***Pride and Prejudice and Mistletoe***

by Melissa de la Cruz

In this modern retelling, we meet young professional Darcy Fitzwilliam as she unexpectedly falls for humble Luke Bennet, a carpenter and member of a family of slacker brothers.