SOFTWARE & TECH

When Was Pride And Prejudice First Published

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The Enduring Mystery of a Literary Masterpiece: When Was Pride and Prejudice First Published?

Few opening lines in English literature are as instantly recognizable as "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." This sentence, with its delicate irony and timeless social commentary, introduces readers to the world of Elizabeth Bennet, Mr. Darcy, and the bustling society of Hertfordshire. For over two centuries, *Pride and Prejudice* has captivated audiences, spawning countless film adaptations, television series, and literary retellings. It is a cornerstone of the literary canon, a beloved romance, and a sharp satire of social class. But for all its fame, a seemingly simple question often trips up even ardent fans: **when was Pride and Prejudice first published**?

The answer, while a single date, is wrapped in a fascinating story of artistic evolution, rejection, and eventual triumph. The journey of Elizabeth and Darcy from manuscript to bookshelf is a compelling narrative in itself, one that reveals much about the publishing world of the early 19th century and the quiet determination of its author, Jane Austen. To fully appreciate the novel's impact, we must travel back to the waning years of the Georgian era and explore the precise moment this literary gem first appeared in print.

The Definitive Answer: The Official Publication Date

To answer the central question directly: **Pride and Prejudice was first published on 28 January 1813**. However, like many historical details, this date comes with a subtle nuance. The title page of the first edition actually bore the year 1813, but books of that period were often released late in the preceding year to catch the Christmas market or were post-dated. Contemporary advertisements and letters confirm that the novel was publicly available on that late January day.

This first edition was published in London by Thomas Egerton, a respected publisher operating from the Military Library in Whitehall. It was released in three volumes, a standard format for novels of the period, often referred to as a "three-decker." The print run was modest, likely around 1,500 copies, and it was published anonymously. The title page simply read: *Pride and Prejudice: A Novel. In Three Volumes. By the Author of "Sense and Sensibility."* Jane Austen's name would not appear on her novels during her lifetime. The cost for this literary treasure was 18 shillings, a significant sum at the time.

The Long Road to Publication: A Story of First Impressions

The story of the novel's publication is not a straight line from conception to bookshelf. The core of the story began over fifteen years earlier, in 1796, when a young Jane Austen, then just 21 years old, began writing a novel she called *First Impressions*. This was the original draft of what would eventually become *Pride and Prejudice*.

The Rejection of First Impressions

In the autumn of 1797, Jane's father, the Reverend George Austen, took the proactive step of writing to a London publisher named Thomas Cadell. In a letter dated 1 November 1797, he offered to submit a manuscript titled *First Impressions*, describing it as "a Manuscript Novel, comprising 3 Vols. about the length of Miss Burney's Evelina."

He offered to pay the costs of publication or to accept any other reasonable terms. Mr. Cadell famously declined the offer by return of post, without even seeing the manuscript. This rejection, swift and absolute, is one of the most famous "what ifs" in literary history. The manuscript of *First Impressions* was set aside.

From First Impressions to Pride and Prejudice

It would be over a decade before Jane Austen returned to the manuscript. In the intervening years, she continued to write and refine her craft, producing early drafts of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*. In 1811, her first novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, was published to positive reviews and decent sales. This success gave her the confidence and publisher relationship to revisit her earlier work. She retrieved the manuscript of *First Impressions* and began a comprehensive revision.

The most significant change was the title. She discarded the working title *First Impressions* and settled on *Pride and Prejudice*. The new title was far more thematic, pointing directly to the central flaws and obstacles the protagonists must overcome. The phrase "pride and prejudice" was not entirely original; it appeared in other works of the time, including a phrase used by the writer Fanny Burney and in a passage by the moral philosopher William Godwin. However, Austen made the pairing her own, elevating it to a universal shorthand for social arrogance and hasty judgment. She sold the copyright to Thomas Egerton for £110, a flat fee that meant she would not receive royalties from the thousands of copies sold.

Anatomy of the First Edition: What Did It Look Like?

Understanding what the public first saw on 28 January 1813 gives us a tangible connection to the past. The first edition of *Pride and Prejudice* was a handsome, if standard, production for its time. Here are its key features:

- Format: Three octavo volumes, a common size for novels, approximately 8.5 x 5.5 inches.
- Binding: Typically bound in paper-covered boards with a paper spine label, or in full calf leather for presentation copies. The boards were often a drab blue-grey or brown.
- Price: 18 shillings (approximately £70-80 in today's money, but representing a far greater proportion of a middle-class weekly income).
- Anonymity: The author was listed only as "the Author of Sense and Sensibility."
- Printing: A small, clear typeface, with wide margins. The printing was done by George Sidney of London.

Surviving copies of this first edition are now extremely rare and valuable. A fine, original copy can fetch hundreds of thousands of dollars at auction. The lack of the author's name on the title page is one of the defining characteristics of these early copies, a silent testament to the era when female novelists were often considered to be trespassing on a male-dominated profession.

Contemporary Reception and Immediate Success

While the author remained anonymous, the novel did not. *Pride and Prejudice*was an immediate and resounding success. The first edition sold out quickly, and a second edition was published later in 1813. A third edition followed in 1817, the year of Austen's death. The novel was widely discussed in literary circles and private correspondence.

Royal Approval and Critical Praise

One of the most famous early readers was the Prince Regent's librarian, who noted that the Prince himself was a great admirer of Austen's work (a fact that Austen herself found somewhat embarrassing, given her personal dislike for the Prince). The reviews were predominantly positive. The *Critical Review* praised the novel's "very lively and playful humour" and its "just picture of life." Another review in the *British Critic*called it "a very superior work."

Perhaps the most telling praise came from Austen's own family. Her sister, Cassandra, and her mother both adored the novel, with Mrs. Austen declaring Elizabeth Bennet to be "the most delightful character ever created."

The public's hunger for the story was palpable. Readers eagerly awaited the next volumes, and the novel's witty dialogue and relatable characters made it a favorite in drawing rooms across England. The success of *Pride and Prejudice* cemented Jane Austen's reputation, even if the public did not yet know her name.

The Significance of the Publication Date in Context

The year 1813 places *Pride and Prejudice*in a very specific historical and literary context. The Napoleonic Wars were raging across Europe. The English Regency was in full swing, with the Prince Regent ruling in place of his ailing father, King George III. This was a time of great social upheaval, rigid class structures, and evolving notions of individualism and sensibility.

In literature, the novel was still a relatively young and sometimes disreputable form. The Romantic poets—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley—were dominating the literary landscape. Jane Austen was writing in a tradition of realism and social satire that was distinct from the heightened emotion of Romanticism. Her contemporaries included Sir Walter Scott, who published *Waverley* in 1814, and Mary Shelley, whose *Frankenstein* appeared in 1818. *Pride and Prejudice*stands out in this company for its laser focus on the domestic sphere, the inner lives of women, and the economic realities of marriage.

From 1813 to Today: The Legacy of a Publication

Knowing **when was Pride and Prejudice first published**is more than a trivia fact; it is the key to understanding its long journey from a rejected manuscript to a global phenomenon. The 28th of January, 1813, marks not just the birth of a book, but the birth of a cultural touchstone. It became a model for the romantic comedy, a template for the enemies-to-lovers trope, and a masterclass in free indirect discourse—a narrative technique where the author seamlessly blends third-person narration with the character's voice and perspective.

Today, the novel is read in high schools and universities, analyzed by scholars, and cherished by millions of casual readers. It has been translated into dozens of languages and adapted into film, television, theater, and even web series. The story of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy has become a global archetype of complex, intellectual romance. The fact that it was published in the dark days of the Regency, during a time of war and social rigidity, only makes its wit, warmth, and human insight more remarkable.

Conclusion

The publication of *Pride and Prejudice* on 28 January 1813 was a quiet event that would echo through the centuries. It was the culmination of a long creative journey, from the rejected *First Impressions* of 1797 to the polished, perfected novel that took the literary world by storm. Jane Austen, a woman writing in an era that often dismissed female authors, created a work of profound intelligence, sharp social observation, and enduring charm. So, the next time you find yourself revisiting the ballroom of Netherfield Park or the gardens of Pemberley, remember the date that made it all possible. The answer to **when was Pride and Prejudice first published**is the gateway to understanding the incredible, improbable, and ultimately triumphant story of a masterpiece that continues to define the very idea of a classic novel.

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