



An Obstinate, Headstrong Girl

Abigail Bok

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If Jane Austen were magically transported in time to late 20th-c. America, what would she make of it? What stories would she tell? In *An Obstinate, Headstrong Girl*, she arrives in rural California in 1999 and discovers that the more things change, the more they stay the same for Fitzwilliam Darcy and the Bennet family.

An Obstinate, Headstrong Girl Details

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From Reader Review An Obstinate, Headstrong Girl for online ebook

Megan says

I loved the story. Once I got the hang of reading the formal language, I enjoyed that it was something different. Definitely a unique read!

Susanne says

I "won" an autographed copy of this novel through a blog-party during the book's release. The author, "a lady" who is supposedly Jane Austen who has entered the year 1999 via a time-travel machine, writes an updated form of her most famous novel, set in late-20th century Ohio and California.

There are several major changes in characters: Jane becomes "John," Lizzy's elder brother who is gay, and Lydia becomes "Lydon," the youngest son who was caught sleeping with a brigadier general's daughter and was forced to marry her; thus "Jenny," who is much like Lydia too, enters the family. Lizzy is a landscape gardener while Mary is a strict evangelical Christian and Kitty follows Lydon and Jenny's partying ways. Mr. Bennet is self-employed, and Mrs. Bennet is a social climber, of course, wanting to belong to the country club set despite not having the money or the importance to do so.

When Mr. Bennet's estranged sister, Evelyn, dies, she leaves Lizzy a legacy in California: a secret behest to alter her home into a bilingual library for Lambtown, California, near Santa Barbara. Lizzy takes on the project and the stress of moving from Columbus to California with her entire family in tow because Mrs. Bennet is sure that Evelyn's money must be shared by the family despite everything that Lizzy and the lawyer tell her about Evelyn's will.

Lambtown is an interesting mix of the upper classes, represented by the families of the Enclave, a type of country club set, the middle-class business people and professionals, and the poor itinerant farm laborers whom Lizzy champions and tries to help with limited success. The town mayor, Morris Collins, is also a real-estate agent and is true to the Mr. Collins of the original P&P. Fitzwilliam Darcy owns Pemberley Ranch while Catherine de Bourgh owns Rosings, another ranch, both of which George (Jorge) Carillo (the Wickham character), descended from the local Native American tribe of the area, claims was taken unfairly from his forefathers. Charley Bingley, Darcy's best friend, opens a new shop in town called The Chocolate Bar with various hot chocolates, snacks, etc., and employs John, a former Starbucks barista, and the couple seems to start falling for each other although Charley isn't officially "out." And of course, Charley's sister Caroline is pursuing Darcy as usual...

And thus the story unfolds...

This story presents many interesting twists of the original P&P plot while also looking into the culture of the Santa Ynez Valley and the plight of the farm workers who live hand-to-mouth while the country club set ignores the poor right on their doorstep. It's a clash of cultures: the rich white Enclave set and the Native Americans/illegal workers whom Lizzy tries to help by creating a community garden in the center of town, an act that angers Catherine de Bourgh and the business people of Lambtown to no end.

The writing style smacks too much of Austen's style and wording at times which may have been deliberate since the premise of this novel is that Jane Austen is actually writing this story after being whisked from

1810-ish Britain to 1999 America. But often the effect is that of poor paraphrasing of Austen's original work with too much of the vocabulary of the British early-19th century interjected into late-20th century American culture. But really, that's the only weakness of the novel...well, along with a very two-dimensional Darcy. I like to see his character fleshed out more than it is here as the limited development makes it difficult to identify and empathize with him.

I found myself turning pages and quite enthralled with the twists and turns of the story. I am not usually a great fan of modern versions of P&P, but this one was quite fun and different. Technically, I'd probably give this book a 3.5, but I like to round "up." ;)

It was a lovely gift to receive this book autographed by "the Lady...with kind regards," and I certainly found the novel entertaining and at times quite fascinating.

Debbie Payne says

I really enjoyed this book. The writing style was wonderful. It was just like reading from the time of the original Pride and Prejudice! It did not seem contrived with an old-fashioned style of writing with a modern version of Ms. Austen's book; plus, there was a challenge to figure out just what the characters were saying. It has been a long time since I read The Pride and the Prejudice. When I find some extra time, I am going to go back and read the original again. Once a classic, always a classic.

Anna Faversham says

Headstrong Girl - It is delightful. It trips along so easily - very Jane Austen. It is also inspiring. The author says that the aunt 'lived with a kind of grace'. I find that inspiring - I want to do that!

It was interesting to read the early American history of the West and the author scatters little historical details which bring that part of America alive to a Brit. She has a fascinating turn of phrase, absolutely expert, and it is written with wit and style.

And I just love Darcy's wedding gift to his wife!

Tina says

This book is a modern adaptation of Pride and Prejudice. The author did a good job of keeping to the main plot of the timeless tale. Lizzy ends up being a crusader for human rights and is secretly building a private library to be open to the public for both English and Spanish speaking people in the community at one of her Aunt's last requests. Jane in this story becomes John who still ends up with Bingley in the end. Lydia become Lydon who is Elizabeth's youngest sibling and he is married to Jenny, a general's daughter. Of course our story has to have a Wickham in the story though he is called George (Jorge) Carillo is this story and is a drug dealer. There is no Georgiana in this version but as she didn't really have a big part in the original Pride and Prejudice can you blame the author for removing her all together?

The rest of the Bennets are just as they are originally though Kitty is a lot more spoiled. Mrs. Bennet is worse than she was in P&P. All she was concerned about was her family's social status. Mr. Bennet is just as unconcerned with his family as he usually is.

I really enjoyed this book and when I wasn't at work I was reading this constantly. I'm eagerly awaiting more books from Ms. Bok.

Barbara Crane says

I enjoyed Abigail Bok's "An Obstinate, Headstrong Girl" immensely. My "4" rating is likely one star less than I would ordinarily give to a book I enjoyed so much. Austenesque fiction is not something I read very often, so I have little to compare it to. However, once I started Bok's novel, I could hardly put it down.

Bok takes Austen's masterpiece "Pride and Prejudice" and gives it a contemporary setting: Columbus, Ohio, 1999. In this telling, Elizabeth Bennet, who lives with her family in Ohio, receives an inheritance from her aunt in California. To her mother's great unhappiness, the inheritance carries very specific instructions as to how the inheritance is to be used. Elizabeth, nearly always Lizzy in this novel, decides she must move to Lambtown in the Santa Ynez Valley (north of Santa Barbara) to correctly carry out her aunt's wishes. On the chance that she and the rest of the family can turn the tide of Lizzy's good fortune to their own, Mrs. Bennet moves the whole family to Lambtown also.

The Bennet family has been updated in this tale. Instead of five sisters, the eldest and one of the youngest are boys. What's more, John, the eldest, is gay and the younger son, Lydon, is married. The famous first sentence of Austen's novel, therefore, becomes, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a young man in possession of a wife must be in want of a fortune." What a grand way to begin an Austenesque plot!

In Lambtown, Lizzy quickly learns the lay of the land, literally. The community's founding forefathers and foremothers--Mexicans who took possession of the land when California was part of Mexico in the 19th century--have been displaced by the white gentry who arrived after, sometimes long after, statehood. Mexican migrant farm workers occupy the bottom rung of the social ladder; the white gentry, the top. It's no surprise that Fitzwilliam Darcy and Catherine de Bourg are the owners of large ranches and that the community's very wealthy citizens share a common interest in raising horses and playing polo. However, we learn in the course of the novel that Darcy is a conscientious steward of the land.

Lizzy, a landscape designer with an avid interest in native plants and gardens, quickly becomes involved in the community. She builds her business and takes on the responsibilities that her aunt's estate left to her. She is inventive and ingenious--and utterly appalled by the rudeness Darcy shows toward her and her family. Of course, that is, until she falls in love with him.

The other family members are having their trials also. Mrs. Bennet is unable to break into Lambtown society in spite of her best (or worst) efforts. Eldest brother John falls in love with Charley Bingham, who is spirited away by Darcy. Lydon, the younger and married brother, falls prey to a common contemporary failing. Mr. Bennet, no great help in any situation, turns a blind eye. It's left to Lizzy to help, which she has more agency to do in the 20th century than she did in the early 19th. We all know who saves the day, but that doesn't spoil the happiness I felt when these two well-known characters came together once again.

I especially liked the language that Bok uses. She interweaves a clear contemporary prose seamlessly through a more formal Austen style. For example, in this passage when she writes about how Lizzy experiences the region's hot summer weather, Bok employs Austen's formality: "The work provided

occupation for her mind, however, and the continuing absence of the gentlemen afforded her all the relief of tedium. If happiness were not to be had, these lesser satisfactions could be enough for a time. She filled her days and bore all the appearance of contentment." In the following passage, her language becomes a descriptive, modern prose as she tells about Lizzy's first view of Pemberley ranch: "Cattle moved slowly through the shady groves, fenced off from the stream banks but drawing sustenance from its waters, which were pumped at intervals into troughs for their use. Birds called out from the trees, and a coyote slipped out of view through the undergrowth."

Now all that is needed is a book by Bok that takes us into the 21st century with its cell phones, computers and the like. Or at least another book written by Bok, who appears to be able to handle anything literature puts in her path.

Abigail Bok says

Robin Schachat says, "What a pleasure to find a modern-day *Pride and Prejudice* written in the voice of a modern-day Jane Austen! So many authors try to give it to us, but cannot achieve the kind affection for her characters that lies beneath the intelligent irony. Finally, those of us who consume Austen and her followers for breakfast, lunch, and dinner have found an author who delivers the inimitable voice of our true heroine. Many cheers for Abigail Bok, who has channeled the master as an observer of life, love, and social behavior on the ranches -- and in the ice cream shoppes -- of California wine country. When will we see a modern *Persuasion*? I am waiting!!"

S.K. Rizzolo says

I don't generally review books (especially those being written today), but I just came across this one on my shelf and remembered how much I enjoyed it when I read it a few years ago. A sprightly, polished, and very entertaining read!

Jennifer says

This book was pure delight from the very first page! filled with fun, wonderful dialogue, and great social commentary, I look forward to reading more from this 'time trapped' author. ;)

Ceri says

This review was first published on Babblings of a Bookworm: <http://babblingsofabookworm.blogspot....>

This is an update of 'Pride & Prejudice' with an unusual premise: what if our beloved Jane Austen was to somehow find herself in California in the year 1999. What type of book would 'Pride & Prejudice' have been if Jane Austen had been writing it now?

Elizabeth Bennet lives with her large family in Ohio. The Bennet family comprises the lugubrious Mr Bennet, who hides away from his family in his den, Mrs Bennet, who is a bit of a social climber, and five

children, John, Lizzy, Mary, Kitty and Lydon (yes, the Bennet children are mixed sex here, with a Bennet brother oldest and youngest). Lydon is married to Jenny, the daughter of an army Brigadier General, being persuaded to marry after he was caught in a somewhat compromising situation with her. Although Mr Bennet was lucky enough to inherit a beautiful house he hasn't made much of an effort to better the family's financial situation and Mrs Bennet is still bitter that her husband was overlooked for an inheritance, which instead went to his estranged sister, Evelyn. The story begins with the Bennets receiving word that Evelyn Bennet has died. She hasn't fulfilled Mrs Bennet's dearest wishes by righting wrongs and leaving Mr Bennet all her money. Instead, Elizabeth, who was Evelyn's goddaughter, has been appointed as Executor of the estate and received instructions to oversee the creation of a non-profit enterprise, the purpose of which is to act as a public library for all the citizens of Lambtown, California. Evelyn has requested that she keep her bequest a secret, but without giving a reason for the secrecy.

Lizzy hopes to go to Lambtown alone, but she is foiled in this by her mother, who wants to take the whole family along to try and iron out this inheritance issue. Mr Bennet can't be bothered opposing her, so they rent out the house for a year, and the entire Bennet family goes to California. They find Lambtown a sharply-divided community. On the one hand there are the families who are members of the Enclave, a country club where the members are all rich ranch or vineyard owners – the conversation revolves around horseracing, horse breeding or polo. At the other end of the scale there are the Mexican migrant workers, some of whom are in the country illegally. Lizzy isn't that impressed with the young people she meets from the Enclave:

“The people around here are insufferable! They're so class-conscious and self-satisfied, as if just being rich made them important.”

However, she is more impressed and flattered by the dashing George Carrillo (who goes by the name Jorge Carrillo), who is descended from Mexicans who immigrated to the area many years ago, before people of European origin arrived there. Jorge pours a tale of woe and land-snatching into Lizzy's ears and she's eager to listen. Jorge has cultivated a persona of somebody in touch with the land which his family has had roots in for many years, and Lizzy really gets caught up in the romance of the idea. Obviously as this is a 'Pride & Prejudice' retelling, we the readers won't be so easily fooled and will realise Jorge isn't the person he's making himself out to be.

John Bennet, Lizzy's older brother, is gay, which I thought adds a different dynamic to possible objections to a relationship between Jane Bennet/Charles Bingley of canon; these days a person's relatives being a bit uncouth is not such a barrier, but becoming part of a gay couple when you're not officially out in a small community that you fear may not accept you is a believable barrier that could prevent a relationship if Bingley isn't completely committed to taking that irrevocable step:

“Charley certainly is good-natured and he has a way of disarming even those who might be prejudiced against him – this a pretty conservative area you know.”

You may be wondering, what of Darcy? Well he's here but in my opinion he doesn't really get enough page time. I would have liked to have seen more interaction with him and Lizzy so you could see his feelings towards her grow. As it is, aside from insulting her within her hearing, he is just a very quiet man who Elizabeth has decided to hate mostly in what appears to be a fit of inverse snobbery. She is determined from the first that the people with money are bad and those with none are good and of course, things are really not that simple. There is certainly more that the rich people of Lambtown could be doing for the poorer in the community, and a huge amount of snobbery going on, but Lizzy lives up to the title of the book and takes some steps which are guaranteed to set people's backs up at a time when she should really be being a bit more humble and currying favour with the powerful people in the community to ensure her aunt's bequest to the community can succeed.

Style-wise, this book really stands out, because it's not entirely modern. There are quite a few lines of text

taken from 'Pride and Prejudice' or in the style of that book, but in a modern setting. I wouldn't have thought that this would work, but I felt that it actually worked really well. It is like modern circumstances being described in an older style:

"I give you permission to like him John; such a paragon of every imagined virtue indeed cries out for admiration. And it's important to take care that we admire those who admire us already: it makes for a pleasing symmetry in our social relations."

One thing I always enjoy about reading Jane Austen is her humour, she would add in some very dry asides and droll utterances, and there were some nice instances of a similar humour here, such as Mr Bennet's reflections to his wife on the loss of Mr Collins' society:

"Morris Collins's conversation was indeed a joy to us all, and I for one shall miss it," remarked Mr. Bennet. "Greatly though I valued his discourse, however, I can't go so far as to say that we are bereft of any joy when deprived of it. After all, there remain all the pleasures of your company, my dear."

I thought the plot of this book stayed very close to 'Pride and Prejudice' in so far as the relationships between the characters went. Though quite a few plot points were different, such as the library and the Lydia/Wickham storyline is entirely altered as Lydia here is Lydon, a male and neither he nor Jorge are interested in each other that way. For those who like to know these things there are no sex scenes in this book. In fact, at one point a character mentions 'sleeping with' somebody and I was actually quite shocked!

I felt the spirit of the update was very close to 'Pride & Prejudice' and some of the changes in the plot were to make it work in modern times. I very much enjoyed reading this book. I enjoyed the author's style particularly, the mix of the old and new language, and the humour, and I'd rate it as a 4½ star read.

**I received a copy of this book in return for my honest review.*

Kirk says

Loved it!!! Loved the poetry in. Loved that one of the best lines in the book was given to Mary Bennet! Just wished that one character from the original was in this adaptation. I won a copy from Ceri's blog(thank you!).

Jeffrey says

The author sits at her laptop putting the finishing touches on An Obstinate, Headstrong girl. A feminine apparition dressed in ancient garb crouches behind her occasionally whispering something into her ear. The author, Abigail Bok, has signed this novel "by a lady." Who else signed her work "by a lady?" As a contemporary retelling of the timeless classic Pride and Prejudice, it reads suspiciously like it was indeed ghost-written by none other than Jane Austen!

The Bennet family has just relocated from central Ohio to the small central California community of Lambtown to accompany Elizabeth who has been chosen by her recently deceased wealthy aunt to be the executor of her estate. Of course, Mrs. Bennet has ulterior motives in that she plans to contest the will because none of the money went to her family but instead to the founding of a benevolent trust. Lizzy's late aunt sought to improve relationships between Hispanic migrant workers and the established community by way of a bi-lingual library that would cater to the needs of both groups. There lies the crux of the plot.

The principals in the Bennet family have been portrayed with all of the faithful qualities that Jane Austen intended for them in the original. How can this be since “Lizzy” now has two brothers and two sisters? Older sister Jane has morphed into John and youngest sister Lydia becomes brother Lydon, the family profligate. Stranger yet, older brother John (gasp) is a gay man! Trust me on this. If it seems impossible to imagine, I assure you it is not. It becomes so fitting and works in every sense of the word. And, younger sisters Kitty and Mary are just SO Kitty and Mary.

The plot of the story works on two levels much like the original: First, there is the romantic clash between Lizzy, a professional landscaper turned community activist and Fitzwilliam Darcy, the proud owner of the largest ranch in the region. Second, the author showcases lessons on the class prejudices between established ranchers and the migrant workers in Lambtown and also the suspicions of the community witnessing a gay romance right in their midst.

Charles Bingley is Charlie, Fitzwilliam’s best friend and the other half of the growing gay relationship with John. George Wickham becomes mysterious Jorge Carillo, the handsome and charismatic son of one of the more established Mexican-American families in Lambtown. Catherine DeBourgh owns a prestigious ranch and is the haughty leader of the landed establishment in a group known as “the enclave” who set themselves against the migrant workers and their champion “Lizzy” Bennet.

How can this modern retelling, on the one hand, be so wildly different from the original but, on the other hand, be so genuinely devoted to the portrayal of Miss Austen’s beloved characters? The prose, for one, is largely from the exquisite Regency style.....elegant, complex, and lofty. To be able to combine the venue of this modern story and yet retain the authenticity of the original characters onto a story with such compelling contemporary political/social issues is a testament to the author’s creative abilities. All of the dramatic moments are suspended on the classic framework from Jane Austen’s original in accurate detail along with some of her more famous quotes.

In a sweet moment prior to Morris Collins’s wedding to Charlotte, Lizzy talks to Mrs. Gardiner, contrasting her brother John’s sterling qualities up against the present obstacles in his growing relationship with Charlie. “Yes, isn’t he amazing? Not only does he never speak ill of anybody, he’s hurt if I do so. He’s capable of finding goodness in everyone; but if I mention his own perfections, he denies and disclaims and will have none of it. I only wish he could have the happiness he deserves but the prospect has never seemed more distant. How can anyone be unkind to someone like him?” To which Mrs. Gardiner replies “You’re asking others to see people as they are, not as we think they ought to be.”

Finally, if the prospective reader of this tale had never heard of Jane Austen, the story would still stand confidently on its own with the compelling urgency of both personal and community conflicts, how they unfold in their complexity, and the beautiful way in which the author seeks to resolve them. Indeed it had me examining my own prejudices on the social/political issues presented. This remarkable story deserves more exposure and I hope you will find a place for it in your stack of must-reads.

Debbie Brown says

This is such a distinctly unusual and ambitious approach, and you must be sure to read the "Deprecatory Note by the Author" that precedes Chapter One to fully appreciate it. Abigail Bok is named as the author in the GoodReads and Amazon listings, but my paperback copy states it was penned "by a lady." The reader is to imagine that Jane Austen HERSELF has mysteriously traveled through time and space to the USA and written *Pride and Prejudice* here. Instead of setting it in her native Regency England, she has placed her

story where her time travel landed her, in 1999-2000 America.

As wildly different as the time and place are from canon, Miss Austen's distinctive Regency writing style remains intact. Those who know the original *Pride and Prejudice* well will recognize many passages throughout the book. It's a credit to Ms. Bok that the rest of the book blends seamlessly.

The story is recognizable as well...and yet not really. Elizabeth Bennet, a landscape contractor, has four siblings, but both the eldest and the youngest are brothers. Lyndon is the pampered, undisciplined younger son and is already married to Jenny, the daughter of Brigadier General Hughes. Elizabeth's older brother John, with whom she is closest, is gay. As for the rest of the family...Mr. Bennet is indolent, Mrs. Bennet is obsessed with getting all her offspring married, Mary is sanctimonious, and Kitty is a silly flirt. (THAT sounds familiar, doesn't it?)

The book begins in Ohio, where Mr. Bennet receives word that his sister Evelyn, with whom he had a falling out and whose only connection with his family has been through Elizabeth, has died. Circumstances surrounding Evelyn's will bring all the Bennets to the Santa Ynez Valley in central California, where Elizabeth has been left specific instructions by her aunt Evelyn to arrange for her former home in Lambtown to become a library accessible to all. The preparations for this must be made in secret until time for the library to open. As odd as this demand for secrecy appears, the reasoning becomes clear once Elizabeth starts to become acclimated to the community.

This is a town of "haves" and "have-nots." The Anglos look down their noses at the large Hispanic community, which serves as their unskilled workforce. Many of the workers and their families can't speak English while others are completely illiterate, and most live in poverty. The ranching elite among the Anglos is known as "the Enclave," unofficially headed by Catherine de Bourgh and the Darcy family. Morris Collins is a real estate agent and the Mayor of Lambtown. As you might expect, he's also a toady for Catherine de Bourgh.

The Spanish festivities charm Elizabeth from the start, as she is greeted her first day in Lambtown by a parade celebrating Dia de la Candelaria (the first of many cultural events the book describes). She's appalled by the racist attitudes of the local shopowners and ranch owners, and she is determined to bridge the gap. For starters, she pushes to establish a community produce garden where the less fortunate can grow their own food.

Between Elizabeth's zealous crusade for the impoverished and the generally poor behavior of her family, the Bennets are not well received by much of the local Anglo society. Fortunately, the Gardiners live right across the street from the intended library, and they become her closest friends in her new neighborhood. Elizabeth also meets the charismatic Jorge/George Carrillo, from whom she learns about Fitzwilliam Darcy after observing him standing by disapprovingly on the day of the parade.

John and a friend of Darcy, the wealthy Charles Bingley, quickly become close friends. When Charley opens The Chocolate Bar, a family-centered business in downtown Lambton, he recognizes that John has a way with children and immediately hires him. Charley's sister Caroline is all too obvious in her attempts to land Darcy, while Elizabeth already knows from Jorge that Darcy is engaged to Catherine de Bough's daughter Anne.

This is not an open-minded community that would willingly accept homosexuality, and only those closest to John recognize where his relationship with Charley appears to be headed. Before the two become an obvious couple, however, Charley unexpectedly leaves town.

It is truly impressive to read how well the author weaves so many seemingly disparate elements together. Along with the foundational *Pride and Prejudice* story and the subtext condemning racial and homosexual

bigotry, the book provides regional history, horticultural facts, Hispanic traditions, and 1999 American culture (various song names and the infamous Y2K scare come up in passing). Characters even give diverse readings of poetry and prose in Lambtown's "Dead Poets Society," of which Elizabeth and the Gardiners are members.

Readers should be aware that the romance between Darcy and Elizabeth is not presented with a lot of steam, but this makes sense with Jane Austen as the author.

My only criticism is that I don't care for much of the dialogue, which sounds too early-19th-century British, too formal, and too polished to be believable when spoken by late 20th century characters in the USA. I'm sure this was an intentional choice by the author, but I found it distracting at times. Despite that, I think the flow and authentic flavor of the Regency writing throughout is pretty amazing. It stretched my vocabulary a bit, too. (emolument, amanuensis...?)

This is wonderfully creative. Its plot colors outside the lines yet stays recognizably consistent with the original *Pride and Prejudice*. It's just a marvelous book. Content is clean.

I received a copy of this book from the author with no promise of a review, favorable or otherwise.

Liz Treacher says

I really enjoyed this novel - 5 stars. I enjoyed the contrast of the modern plot with language that was reminiscent of Austen's time. I also liked the inclusion of subtle differences and modern twists.

Sophia says

It is always part of the excitement for me to speculate how a writer will take a classic tale and reinvent it for modern times when I see a modern retelling or variation on the original. I was eager for this book, especially because I grew up in a Northern California community probably not much different than the one depicted in the story. Home and Jane Austen, what more could I ask?

An Obstinate, Headstrong Girl is indeed a modern retelling and the main events of the story depict events much in line with the original, but the backdrop and background color as well as the author's personal flavor bring the originality to the piece. Existing Austen fans will recognize the tried and true while also getting something fresh and folks new to the Austen scene can appreciate the book just fine without prior introduction to *Pride & Prejudice*.

At its heart, this is the story of a young woman coming into her own on a journey orchestrated by a loving aunt who saw early promise in Lizzy and wanted to see Lizzy add to this life's seasoning learned through experience. Lizzy has a strong sense of self and responsibility, decided opinions and set beliefs even though this has all been relatively untried in her home and home town. But, an opportunity to move across the country and take up her aunt's challenge to do something new and exciting as well as good for others has her ready and willing.

Naturally, her zany family decides to follow and complicate matters for her, but she loves them in spite of their issues and their dysfunctional nature. The new Central California town is invaded by the Bennets

including Lizzy who looks about her and sees need every which way she turns. Her aunt advised caution and baby steps as does her lawyer, but Lizzy is young and zealous. She must have action and impetuously leads with her heart with little thought for consequences.

Meanwhile, she encounters two men. One strikes her as pretentious, proud, and everything her generous heart despises while the other is friendly, fun, and seems to fall in line with her way of thinking. On the side, her older brother finds the man of his dreams and her mother is set upon making the Bennets members of the community's leading social set while her younger brother and sisters bring their brand of crazy to entertain the natives.

Remember how I said I love seeing what an author does to slip the classic tale into the modern world? I had such a good time with the clever take on each character, scenes from the original translated forward, and the wit and comedy that doesn't always carry over, sadly, but did in this instance. I found myself enjoying this story immensely. Lizzy's personal growth journey might be at the center, but the antics of others and even the comedy of errors in the romance were all delicious delicacies.

Father Austen was an original of the author's and he's an... well, original. His curmudgeonly-ness and good heart were the best. The sweet Gardiners and stuffy Caroline Bingley. Oh, and what fun, Lizzy's family included two brothers and they were as opposite as they come. I thought the choice of a mix of guys and girls was a good one rather than the usual five sisters.

The setting was so well drawn that I felt I was there and I pictured it all so well. I loved all the color and festivals that made this small town and ranching community a special place. A poetry society that allowed prose lovers in and a chocolate shop with such inviting delicacies? I want to live there.

The author, much like Austen herself, tackled some societal ills of the day while putting forward a well-paced plot.

Now, as to the writing style. This was a curious thing. I've not seen this style done before and I would not have thought I'd like it. The author managed to cleverly mesh Austen's style of writing and modern. There was always a sense of an overlay no matter what modern words, thoughts, or actions were happening. The spirit of Austen felt strongly present. It was different, but engaging.

All in all, this was a fun though not necessarily always light modern rendition of Jane Austen's classic. I enjoyed the author's flavor and choice of background and setting very much. I think this will most appeal to Austenesque lovers, but those who enjoy sweet contemporary romance should also give it a look-see.