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The Wit & Wisdom of Jane Austen: Quotes From Her Novels, Letters & Diaries
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Given the renewed popularity of Jane Austen's work since the BBC's 1995 serialization of *Pride and Prejudice*, it is surprising that a collection of the author's quotes hasn't been published sooner. Austen was known for her razor sharp tongue, and *The Wit & Wisdom of Jane Austen* certainly contains some potent quotables:

"A lady's imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony in a moment," Mr. Darcy tells Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*.

The quotations are divided into chapters on subjects including balls and gowns, love, family, housekeeping, and marriage. Austen was a prolific letter writer and many of the items collected here are taken from letters to her nieces and her devoted sister Cassandra. Most of her correspondence (she wrote upwards of 3,000 letters), including all of the letters she received from Cassandra, was destroyed by her family members after her death. But the 160 letters that survive contain plenty of memorable lines:

> *Expect a most agreeable letter, for not being overburdened with subject (having nothing at all to say), I shall have no check to my genius from beginning to end.*

Each chapter is introduced by a black and white illustration from previous editions of her novels (including several from the incomparable C.E. Brock) or a period fashion plate.

Austen's self-deprecating humor is evident at every turn: "You deserve a longer letter than this; but it is my unhappy fate seldom to treat people so well as they deserve," she tells Cassandra. And she seemed to have a blunt way of breaking news, though irony often softens the blow: "I will not say that your mulberry-trees are dead, but I am afraid they are not alive."

Enright is the author of *The Wicked Wit of Women* and *The Wicked Wit of Winston Churchill*, and her original introduction and chapter openings demonstrate a great deal of research. "Her success as a writer lies in that, although her world was small, what she drew from it, and her insights into the people she encountered, allows her novels to function as microcosms

of society at large," Enright writes.

Four of Austen's six novels were published in her lifetime. Never marrying, she lived with Cassandra and her mother until her death. She earned modest fame as an author (the Prince Regent was one of her most devoted readers), but retained her wry sense of humor all her life—even during the illness which eventually resulted in her death.

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