

Pride and Prejudice: Symbols

MJC ENGLISH, SEM –VI

Pemberley

Pemberley, Darcy's estate, sits at the center of the novel, literally and figuratively, as a geographic symbol of the man who owns it. Elizabeth visits it at a time when her feelings toward Darcy are beginning to warm; she is enchanted by its beauty and charm, and by the picturesque countryside, just as she will be charmed, increasingly, by the gifts of its owner. Austen makes the connection explicit when she describes the stream that flows beside the mansion. "In front," she writes, "a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance." Darcy possesses a "natural importance" that is "swelled" by his arrogance, but which coexists with a genuine honesty and lack of "artificial appearance." Like the stream, he is neither "formal, nor falsely adorned." Pemberley even offers a symbol-within-a-symbol for their budding romance: when Elizabeth encounters Darcy on the estate, she is crossing a small bridge, suggesting the broad gulf of misunderstanding and class prejudice that lies between them—and the bridge that their love will build across it.

Marriage

Instead of simply being an expression of love or the creation of a couple, marriage for the novel's women characters represents their prospects for the future. In Regency England, women could not hold property, and so after the passing of their father, the Bennet sisters will have to rely on either husbands or male relatives for security. Therefore, marriage for them represents long-term stability. While it may be easy to read Mrs. Bennet's excitement over Mr. Bingley's leasing of Netherfield as shallow, she suggests that marrying Mr. Bingley would lead to one of her daughters being "established," a word that implies permanent comfort.

Charlotte Lucas makes a calculated marriage to Mr. Collins because it will assure her a comfortable life. In contrast, Lydia rushes into marriage with Wickham because she focuses on her strong passion for him without accounting for reputation or financial issues. Elizabeth, in considering Lydia's fate, sees little prospect for long-term happiness, even though Lydia is

in the moment overjoyed. Both Jane and Elizabeth's marriages take into account chemistry with their spouses and financial security, assuring the readers of their future happiness.

The Outdoors

Outdoor settings in *Pride and Prejudice* usually signify authenticity and clear judgment.

When the characters are indoors, the demands of society, hierarchy, and reputation cloud the characters' judgments, as with Elizabeth's first impression of Mr. Darcy. In addition, during Darcy's first proposal, which takes place indoors, he focuses primarily on the social challenges to their marriage, such as Elizabeth's lower status and embarrassing family, instead of who he and Elizabeth are as people. Instead of a sincere expression of feelings, these concerns turn Darcy's ridiculous proposal into an insult.

In contrast, the outdoors, further from societal norms, allow characters to see each other for who they really are. For example, when Elizabeth walks the three miles to Netherfield, Darcy begins to notice her beauty. Seeing the outdoor grounds of Pemberley helps Elizabeth truly understand Mr. Darcy as a person. Finally, Mr. Darcy's second proposal takes place on a walk around Elizabeth's home. Here, his words focus solely on their feelings toward each other, even though their social circumstances have not changed. Being outside allows for them to clearly see and express themselves to each other, unhindered by society's biases and judgment.