**Passages on nature and landscape in *Pride and Prejudice***

**for**

**JASNA North Carolina**

**August 20, 2023, 2-3:30 p.m.**

**Mary Jane Curry, discussion leader**

**Note:** Before we meet on August 20, please read the passages below from the novel and my questions for us to discuss. Below all that, I’ve included a note about the AGM talk related to nature.

**1**.The morning after Mr. Darcy’s ungentlemanly first proposal to Elizabeth at the Collins cottage on Lady Catherine’s estate Rosings, Elizabeth feels she must escape outdoors:

She could not recover from the surprise of what had happened; it was impossible to think of anything else, and totally indisposed for employment, she resolved soon after breakfast to indulge herself in air and exercise. She was proceeding directly to her favourite walk, when the recollection of Mr. Darcy’s sometimes coming there stopped her, and *instead of entering the park*, she turned up the lane, which led her farther from the turnpike road. *The park paling was still the boundary on one side*, and *she soon passed [walked past?] one of the gates* into the ground. (p. 195; italics mine)

Margaret Doody has explained that boundaries ̶ fences such as the “park paling,” walls, the ha-ha ̶ are “tropes of the Big Novel,” meaning the realistic nineteenth century novel that Austen taught herself to write. Which side of the Rosings boundary does Elizabeth place herself on?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: 1) The last sentence above seems ambiguous: does Elizabeth walk through the gate into the “ground,” or park of Lady C., or does she walk past it and stay on the lane that is *outside* it?

2) What social “boundaries” does Elizabeth breach while she is visiting Mrs. Collins at Rosings, or elsewhere? What physical boundaries does she cross elsewhere in the novel?

**2**.At the Collinses’ cottage, distressed over Darcy’s proposal and discovery that he kept Bingley from Jane, Elizabeth becomes pleasantly distracted by nature. Significantly, it is nature’s change from winter into spring that captures her imagination:

After walking two or three times along that part of the lane, she was tempted, by the pleasantness of the morning, to stop at the gates and look into the park. The five weeks which she had now passed in Kent, had made a great difference in the country, and every day was adding to the verdure of the early trees. (p. 195)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: 1) Which of the five senses are awakened in Elizabeth?

2) What is the connotation of the word “verdure”?

**3**.The first juxtaposition of Elizabeth’s response to nature with consequent thoughts of Darcy follows her first sight of Pemberley. As the carriage with her and the Gardiners enters the estate, Austen devotes a full page to Elizabeth’s slowly changing perspective. This emphasis is unique in Austen’s novels. The estate is described as Elizabeth’s unfolding panoramic view:

They *gradually ascended* for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the *road with some abruptness* *wound*. It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on *rising* *ground,* and backed by a ridge of woody hills; ̶ and in front, *a stream of some natural importance* *was swelled* into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were *neither formal, nor falsely adorned*. Elizabeth was delighted. (p. 245; italics mine)

A little further on, Elizabeth observes this scene:

They entered the woods, and bidding adieu to the river for a while, *ascended some of the higher ground*s; whence, in spots where the opening of the trees gave the eye power to wander, were many charming views of the valley, the opposite hills, with the long range of woods overspreading many, and occasionally part of the stream. . . . they pursued the accustomed circuit; which brought them again, after some time, in *a descent among hanging woods, to the edge of the water*, in one of its narrowest parts. They crossed it by a simple bridge, in character with the general air of the scene; it was *a spot less adorned than any they had yet visited*; and the valley, here contracted into a glen, allowed room only for the stream, and a narrow walk amidst the rough coppice-wood which bordered it. *Elizabeth longed to explore its windings*” (p. 253-254; italics mine).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: 1) Which of Elizabeth’s five senses are activated by this gradual unfolding of the estate as she rides through it?

2) What does Mr. Darcy’s naturalistic, Capability Brown-style park seem to imply to Elizabeth about the man himself—his personality as well as character?

3) This chapter is one of the most pastoral of Austen’s novels, all of which develop pastoral themes, motifs, and tropes. The motif here is love of nature (implied). Considering other scenes where Elizabeth is outdoors, how do you think she feels about nature?

4.After Elizabeth and the Gardiners enter the house, the housekeeper and their tour guide Mrs. Reynolds boasts to Elizabeth and the Gardiners that Mr. Darcy is “just as affable to the poor” as his father was (p. 249). Mrs. Reynolds implies that throughout the national crisis of poverty and rural homelessness that Austen’s first readers knew well, the Darcy men have not practiced the mercenary policy that many other landowners adopted. Elizabeth becomes aware that Mr. Darcy choses to act on moral principles even when his peers do not. She thinks, “As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people’s happiness were in his guardianship! ̶ How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow! ̶ How much of good or evil must be done by him!” (pp. 250-251). In Lambton she learns that the entire community shares Mrs. Reynolds’s opinion of him: “It was acknowledged. . . that he was a liberal man, and did much good among the poor” (p. 265).

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Compare Mr. Knightley to Mr. Darcy as stewards of their estates and community leaders: what moral qualities of each does Austen emphasize?

**Articles and books related to nature and pastoral elements in *P and P; and books on pastoral***

Clark, Robert. “’Slight and Fugitive Indications’: Some Locations in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice.*” *Jane Austen’s Geographies*. Edited by Robert Clark. Routledge, 2018, pp. 128-155. Fascinating articles by different scholars throughout this book!

Curry, Mary Jane. “’Not a day went by without a solitary walk’: Elizabeth Bennet’s Pastoral World.” *Persuasions* 22 (2000), pp. 175-186. <https://jasna.org/assets/Persuasions/No-22/0f00fb8555/curry.pdf>

Deresiewicz, William*. Jane Austen and the Romantics*. Columbia UP, 2005.

Marinelli, Peter. *Pastoral*. Methuen, 1970. This short book defining *pastoral* and explaining its features is the only scholarly work I’ve found that gives a succinct definition. Andrew V. Ettin’s *Literature and the Pastoral* (Yale UP, 1984) doesn’t define it clearly in one place, but it is otherwise excellent and has chapters on novels. All the other scholarly books on pastoral are complex and arcane. (For my book, I’ve read them all and extracted elements of pastoral that are generally agreed on so my readers won’t have to.)

Quaintance, Richard. “Salutes and Satire in Jane Austen’s Characters’ Sense of ‘Nature’.” *Persuasions* vol. 19, 1997, pp. 219-25.

Not on nature or pastoral, but an insightful, entertaining essay: <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/11/i-learned-everything-i-needed-to-know-about-marriage-from-pride-and-prejudice/281110/>

**About the Annual General Meeting, November 3-5, 2023:**

The organizers tell us that “nature and the natural world provide a powerful backdrop in *Pride and Prejudice*, just as they do in Denver.” However, the Keynote Lecture, to be given by Janet Todd, seems to be the only talk that relates directly to “nature and the natural world.” Program description: ‘The topic of Janet’s 2023 Keynote lecture is “To Dream of Pemberley.”’ She will consider the enduring fascination of Darcy’s famous home. How does it stand among Jane Austen’s other great estates? Can it (and its owner) escape censure in our censorious age?”