

A sense of place in austen's pride and prejudice

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Place: The particular portion of space occupied by or allocated to a person or thing. It is interesting to observe Dictionary.com's definition of the word "place" in relation to "person". Especially when it comes to *Pride and Prejudice*, where Austen has made great use of the objective correlative technique, in which many, if not all, of her settings considerably reflect the characteristics of their owners. She additionally employs several other techniques regarding the sense of place in her novel, which are important not only in the facilitation of numerous plot points, but also in establishing and understanding her characters and their relationships. So what are these techniques, and why are they so effective? To find the answers to such questions, we should look closely at Austen's methods of incorporating a sense of place into her novel. The technique of objective correlative is often used in establishing the qualities of a character by having them reflected in that character's surroundings. These can be material objects, belongings, or in Austen's case, locations. If we take a look at the setting of Rosings, we see that it is described as ostentatious, overwhelming, and, in comparison to Pemberley, the other grand country estate, rather garish: From the entrance hall, of which Mr. Collins pointed out, with a rapturous air, the fine proportion and finished ornaments, they followed the servants.... In spite of having been at St. James's, Sir William was so completely awed by the grandeur surrounding him, that he had but just courage enough to make a very low bow, and take his seat without saying a word; and his daughter, frightened almost out of her senses, sat on the edge of her chair, not knowing which way to look. (p. 121) Sir William Lucas' intimidation at the enormity of his surroundings demonstrates perfectly the excessively extravagant nature of

Rosings, a description which is maintained throughout this chapter and indeed the rest of the novel. At the centre of this gaudery, we find Lady Catherine de Bourgh, a creature exactly fitted to the nature of her surroundings. She is large, intimidating, and self-centred, and it is interesting to note that both she and her estate invoke a sense of discomfort in those who have the misfortune to be nearby. She stirs a feeling of uneasiness in her visitors; upon Elizabeth and Charlotte's first visit, it is described that "there was little to be done but to hear Lady Catherine talk, which she did without intermission till coffee came in, delivering her opinion on every subject in so decisive a manner as proved that she was not used to having her judgment controverted" (p. 122). It is also interesting to note that Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth takes place in this setting of discomfort, and both characters are left feeling worse afterward than before. However, his second, being back at Longbourn, a place where Elizabeth feels comfortable, is more successful. The other famous estate in *Pride and Prejudice* would undoubtedly be Pemberley, Mr. Darcy's country domain. In comparison to Rosings, though it is also large and stately, there is no sense of discomfort in its visitors, nor any hint of flashiness: The rooms were lofty and handsome, and their furniture suitable to the fortune of their proprietor; but Elizabeth saw, with admiration of his taste, that it was neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less of splendor, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Rosings. (p. 182) A similar description can be applied to Mr. Darcy himself. Though at first seemingly proud and haughty, he is in actuality a decent fellow, well-dressed (though not overly showy), and very down to earth. Through this description of Pemberley, we see Elizabeth's comfort in

her surroundings (as opposed to her unease at Rosings), and once again, through this technique, are able to see (from later in the book) that she will be at ease with Mr. Darcy himself. Almost all of the settings in *Pride and Prejudice* reflect their owners effectively, with Longbourn House being relatively plain and simple, similar to Mr. and Mrs. Bennet; Brighton, the loud and flashy seaside town where Lydia ends up with Wickham; and lesser-known settings such as Ramsgate, a quiet and isolated place in Kent, much like Georgiana Darcy herself. Other than the usage of the objective correlative, Austen creates a sense of balance in her story by having several notable events occur outside, while other, less significant events take place in the interior. Events such as Darcy's giving of the letter to Elizabeth, numerous encounters, and his infamous second proposal occur during walks outside in the garden. This is most interesting, as it is the events that take place in the vast open spaces of the garden that accumulate to the important decisions regarding Elizabeth's future, whereas less important events, such as Mr. Collins' proposal, occur within the boundaries of the inner recesses. It could be hypothesised that these important events take place outside, as the garden is a place which everyone shares; a sort of common ground where there are no advantages or disadvantages, and no influences. The openness of the great outdoors promotes a sense of honesty in whichever characters happen to be there, a feeling which consequently affects the significance of these events in Elizabeth's future with Mr. Darcy. Whereas inside, confined within the boundaries of the house, Elizabeth finds herself surrounded with the influence of her giddy mother, and trapped with Mr. Collins. This environment, being far from open and honest, promotes

quite the opposite feeling, which is why events such as his proposal have little effect on her life in general. A sense of place also serves to facilitate several plot points, such as Lydia's elopement with Mr. Wickham, Elizabeth's trip to Netherfield (where she creates her first — and lasting — impression on Caroline Bingley), along with many others. If it were not for these different places, characters would have no need to correspond by means of written communication, and the numerous letters which we find in *Pride and Prejudice* would have no reason to exist. These letters (of which there are twenty in the novel) allow for an enormous sense of personal insight into the characters, and as it is through these means of communication that readers are able to discern the sentiments of one character for another, and, in the case of Elizabeth and Jane, to feel almost as if we were reading entries in a diary, their relationship being so close. It is interesting to note that the original title of *Pride and Prejudice* was “*First Impressions*”, and may have been written entirely in epistolical form. If it were not for a sense of place, there would be no letters at all, and we would be left with a very bland story indeed. It is also noteworthy that with all these correspondences of important information, characters' responses can never be spontaneous (except on Elizabeth's part; she is often heard responding to letters as if she really were addressing the writer). The very nature of a letter requires that sentiments are thought over before being committed to paper, and so in dealing with issues of importance (such as what is to be done about Lydia's elopement with Mr. Wickham), each party must first think about the right thing to say, and thus eliminate any sense of spontaneity. This allows for many other events to take place, such as misunderstandings between

characters, and delays a lot of the action, ensuring that mistakes cannot be corrected immediately. For instance, if Jane and Elizabeth were constantly in the same place, the latter would simply be able to tell Jane of her misapprehensions regarding Miss Bingley, and much of that storyline would be lost. *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel in which Jane Austen has used several techniques concerning the sense of place to create a fine novel of mannerisms, misjudgements, and mayhem. Through usage of the objective correlative, readers can gain a great deal of insight into the characters themselves, and thus further enjoy the novel with an enhanced understanding of Austen's creations. She also establishes a sense of balance by having the more influential events of the story take place in the openness of the great outdoors, and those of less import occur within the boundaries of the inside. Additionally, Austen has her characters travel to various parts of Great Britain, which allows for correspondence in the form of letters (serving to facilitate the necessary delay of action) and for mistakes to be made. Austen has made great use of the sense of place in *Pride and Prejudice*, and her techniques coalesce to deepen the reader's understanding, to give a sense of balance, and to effectively enhance the enjoyment of a delightful story.