Gender issues reflected within nature in Jane Austen’s novel

*Pride and Prejudice*
## Contents

Abstract 3

Introduction 4

Power, money and gender relations 9

Feminism discussions 12

Gender relations and nature imagery in *Pride and Prejudice* 15

The individual woman and the submissive woman 21

Nature and equality in Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth’s relationship 26

Conclusion 29

Works cited 31
Abstract

This essay will analyse Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice* from a feminist point of view, the emphasis being on how the environment and nature can reflect femininity and the relationships between men and women. The nature portrayed within *Pride and Prejudice* can also be looked at from a gender perspective in order to help understand how Jane Austen used nature to reflect the realities of gender differences in her society.
Introduction

This essay will look at Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice*, first published in 1813. The focus of the discussion will be on how the depiction of the environment reflects the gender characteristics of the characters in the novel and the effects of this will be analysed from a feminist point of view. For example how does nature, as described in the novel, reflect women’s rights, social class, gender perspective and character relationships. I wish to discuss how the natural surroundings of Georgian society help to create gender differences by analysing how men and women relate to nature. By understanding the differences in how men and women see and relate to nature I hope that I can convey the vision that men and women had of each other. Nature in this context includes everything from plants and trees to the weather while the term environment pertains to the surroundings, including both living and non-living things such as houses, gardens and people.

Critic Mavis Batey has also acknowledged the importance of nature in *Pride and Prejudice*:

Pemberley and its beautiful grounds play an important part in the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*. The heroine, who had been so prejudiced against Mr. Darcy on first impression, had to be shown that he was a man of morals and of good taste (Batey 68).

It is apparent that the Pemberley house makes a strong impression on Elizabeth and her feelings towards Mr. Darcy. One can acknowledge the importance that nature, buildings and the environment have on influencing the characters’ emotions in the novel. Elizabeth realizes that he is a man of morals and has good taste since the Pemberley estate is beautiful yet not over-embellished. This strengthens the argument that nature and the surroundings play a very important part in the novel since that is what makes the main protagonist Elizabeth fall in love with the character of Mr Darcy.
Austen allows the representation of nature in the novel to reflect upon the characters’ thoughts and feelings. William C Snyder claims that the strongest and cleverest women are those who have a connection with nature. Elizabeth is the primary female character in the novel and embodies this connection by feeling a kind of freedom while she is out in nature and refusing to accept complete male dominance in her life. Elizabeth is a young woman who seeks gender equality and does not want to accept the assumptions that society has about women needing to be submissive.

In Snyder’s article *Landscape in Women’s writing, 1770-1830* one can read:

In a way, Austen’s genius is in exposing the iniquities inherent in gentrification and possession, especially as women are reduced by these male constructs. Austen’s strongest, cleverest women – those who resist the machinations and delusions of society - are the only persons shown to have an intimacy with Nature, a symbiosis embodying their desire for intimacy in partnership (Snyder 148-149).

Elizabeth appears to have a closer connection with nature than men and nature is used to reflect her emotions. Elizabeth experiences a range of different emotions, from highs to lows, joy to confusion, when in nature. Furthermore she feels free to express these emotions when she is outside. When Elizabeth receives a letter from Mr. Darcy, she reads it during her walk, ‘Pursuing her way along the lane, she then began it’ (Austen 191). She experiences freedom when she is surrounded by nature and this helps her to reflect upon what Darcy has told her. Therefore Snyder’s argument about the link between Austen’s female characters and nature is important to this essay since it supports my argument.

Nature has long been compared with women since both can exist as wild and untamed yet both can also be maintained and in a sense tamed and domesticated, as is the case with the
representations of nature in *Pride and Prejudice*. The views of society in Austen’s time saw women as being wild in their emotions, yet at the same time it was possible for them to be tamed by a rational father or husband. Nature was seen as beautiful and at times elegant, as were women. The Irish author and philosopher Edmund Burke (1729 – 1797) noted this resemblance and used it to distinguish woman from man, ‘elements of the Beautiful – softness, smoothness, grace – (are) feminine, while he considered strength, power and rationality masculine’ (Snyder 144). Burke suggested that this is the reason why nature and women are considered to be alike and why men are not compared with nature. He referred to men as being rational and it is known that in 19th-century society, women were seen as irrational and over-emotional. Snyder claims that when comparing nature and gender in novels, masculinity can be compared with boldness and dynamism whereas femininity resembles delicacy, passivity and reflection. He goes on to claim that an author like Jane Austen uses nature in order to describe, ‘Community, generosity, sympathy, delight, connection and intimacy’ (Snyder 145). Austen linked all these aspects with nature and these are all elements that can be found in her novel *Pride and Prejudice*.

The claim of this essay is that the male characters of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* set out to tame and domesticate the women such as they do with nature. However, not all of the female characters fit into their preconceptions of how a woman should behave, most notably the novel’s protagonist, Elizabeth. My aim is to show that the nature portrayed within this novel can be looked at from a gender perspective in order to help understand how Austen used nature to mirror differences between the two genders.

In the book *Beyond Nature Writing*, Johan Elder states that we have to recognize that literature and nature are very closely interwoven (Armbruster/Wallace viii). By vividly describing nature and the environment, Austen allows the readers to relate to the novel and
imagine the surroundings that are described. Furthermore, this imagery reflects back on the characters’ personalities. For example the character of Elizabeth is portrayed as being rather untamed and independent if one compares her to the character of Charlotte, who is submissive and tamed by the rules of society. The majority of times that nature is mentioned in the novel it is described as tamed and forced to submit to human maintenance, such as the gardens, the streams and the estates. Nature is only ever not described in great detail when the characters are out for a walk beyond the boundaries of the garden. One cannot say that this nature is completely wild since all nature in Pride and Prejudice belongs to one estate or another, but it is not maintained to the same extreme as the gardens where everything is tamed and domesticated. Whenever the characters are out for a walk in the gardens the scene is very clearly described, but when they are outside of the gardens we do not get a description of how beautiful it looks and to what extent it is maintained. Austen used a literary representation of nature in order to make statements about the society she lived in without commenting on it directly. She used nature, buildings and the environment as tools of symbolic meaning. Women are symbolized by the beautiful and, to some extent, domesticated aspects of nature whereas men are represented as those that domesticate and tame nature, in the same way that they do with women. For example the character of Elizabeth is always interwoven with nature, as it is here that she feels free to express her feelings and emotions. Even though nature is tamed and domesticated by men with power and wealth Elizabeth still feels free because nature can never be completely controlled. The term Pathetic Fallacy (meaning ‘the attribution of human feelings and responses to inanimate things’ (Oxford Concise English Dictionary) can be used to explain how the environment can directly reflect the characters’ emotions. This next quotation shows how the environment reflects upon Elizabeth’s feelings:
Her favourite walk, and where she frequently went while the others were calling on Lady Catherine, was along the open grove which edged that side of the park, where there was a nice sheltered path, which no one seemed to value but herself, and where she felt beyond the reach of Lady Catherine’s curiosity (Austen 165).

Elizabeth enjoys walking this path since it is sheltered and this reflects her emotions as she does not want to share her feelings with Lady Catherine and the others. She wants to hide her emotions from them and be able to be by herself. She obviously feels that Lady Catherine is curious to know more about her and her life for the sake of gossip and not because she cares about her. Elizabeth is always out for a walk whenever she wants to be alone or when something crucial has happened in her life that she needs to reflect upon. She feels at ease to explore her feelings when out in nature because this is when she feels liberated from the stereotypical submissive female role and is free from the constraints of society. Birgitta Berglund claims that, ‘Apart from providing fresh air and exercise, the frequent walks constitute a way for the young women to escape the pressure of society and acquire this solitude, which is an absolute necessity for spiritual survival’ (214). This again shows that Elizabeth’s walks and her intimacy with nature are crucial in order for her to survive in this society since she is seen as more free thinking than most women at this time and needs space to express herself. Katrin R. Burlin also discusses the importance of nature for Elizabeth, ‘Elizabeth is more attracted to exterior than interior life. Whether she is at Netherfield, Rosings or Pemberley, she is anxious to get outside’ (Berglund 188). This shows that when Elizabeth is indoors she feels restricted and does not feel at peace. Her connection with nature enables Elizabeth to explore her emotions and opinions, and is symbolic of her freedom.
Power, money and gender relations

In order for us as readers to understand why Elizabeth felt that she had to escape her own reality we have to know how it was for women during this period. The story takes place in England during the early 19th-century and centres on the Bennet family, which is made up of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and their five daughters, Mary, Elizabeth, Jane, Kitty and Lydia. We see what the living conditions were like during the 19th-century for a family like this but also for other families who were wealthier than the Bennets. By looking at their lives we see the stark differences between the rich and the poor. Marriage during this period was an important aspect of society and crucial for the financial security of women, regardless of their families wealth. Mr. Bennet has no sons and therefore his wealth cannot be passed on to anyone because his daughters are not entitled to it. Instead the only way for the daughters to manage is to marry a wealthy man. If they do not succeed in getting married, they will have no way of supporting themselves as they are not entitled to their father’s fortune. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the mother Mrs. Bennet does everything in her power to get her daughters to marry men that have great fortunes. In chapter one, Mrs. Bennet is delighted when she hears about a rich and single man that has moved to Netherfield. She immediately thinks of her daughters saying, ‘A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for one of our girls!’ (Austen 6). As is seen from this quotation, the theme of marriage is introduced early on in the book. Laura Mooneyham White discusses the subject of marriage, ‘Unalterable after all, is the fact that each of Austen’s novels relies on the marriage plot as its central structuring device’ (Looser 71). One can acknowledge that marriage is, to some women, forced upon them by society’s views. Missy Dehn Kubitschek argues why it was crucial for a woman to get married during Austen’s time, especially for middle class women, such as those in the Bennet family. Kubitschek claims that women during this period
did not get a substantial education and that their only employment opportunities were to work as servants or factory workers. She also comments that these jobs were very poorly paid and that it was a struggle for women to manage on such a wage. It was therefore in their best interest to get married and receive financial support from their husbands. She quotes one of the characters in the book *Pride and Prejudice*, Charlotte Lucas, ‘that marrying nearly any husband is more pleasant than remaining single and poor’ (Fisher/Silber 237). This shows what was expected of a woman in order to fulfil her womanly duties as society dictated and that getting married would benefit the women more than if they were to stay unmarried and without financial support. Women were thought to need guidance and help from men and this may be compared with the way that men maintain nature within the novel. Mr Darcy’s garden is thoroughly maintained and this reflects back upon his wealth, his power and his ability to control the elements around him. The surroundings of Mr. Darcy’s estate are very carefully thought out and made to look beautiful. The nature is tamed since it is not allowed to be wild and free, and it is taken care of by someone much in the same way that men were expected to take care of and have control over women. So both the nature and the women are taken care of and maintained in order to please society. In both cases it is men with power that possess this control over nature and women.

Berglund also discusses this subject, ‘Marriage was after all almost the only way for a woman of the eighteen century to acquire a house of her own’ (159). Berglund claims that the men in Austen’s novels are aware that they are the ones that provide women with a home (168). One realizes the amount of power men held during the eighteenth century, at least amongst those who were fortunate enough to own a house of their own. Berglund discusses this power: ‘In Jane Austen’s world . . . men have the power not only of providing a woman with a home, but also very often of turning her out of it’ (165). Alternatively they could continue living
with their family but this was not considered to be very admirable. As the women in the novel are called to rely on the men for everything they are in a sense like nature as they must submit to the will of men and are to be domesticated and dominated. Nature, such as the gardens in *Pride and Prejudice*, is also not allowed to be wild rather it is maintained to display the wealth of these men, and this is well documented regarding the estates of characters such as Mr Darcy and Mr Bingley. It was typical of the period that people with money had estates with beautifully maintained gardens that reflected their power and social status. Gardens were in a sense a fashion statement and were evidence of a person’s taste and sense of style. A garden with an out-of-date design would be seen as unattractive and would not be an asset to a wealthy family. Alexander Pope speaks of the importance of balance, moderation and good taste when commenting on the appropriate maintenance of a garden, ‘But treat the goddess like a modest fair, / Nor over-dress, nor leave wholly bare’ (Rogers 69). Creating a garden which is overly embellished and indulgent displays as much bad taste as one which has received no thought or attention. Modesty therefore is a defining factor in good taste. A boastful and inconsiderate use of riches is to be detested. This can also reflect back to the women in the novel as it was assumed by the values of society that they should be modest, especially when it came to how they should act and dress. They should be beautiful and elegant but not spoilt and overbearing. They are expected to be polite and not question what is being asked of them. An example of this is the character of Charlotte, as she does what is expected from a woman in this society; she marries simply because it is seen as the proper thing for a lady to do. Elizabeth is not modest in that sense; she acts polite and ladylike but she is still her own individual and does not want to be submissive as women are supposed to be in her society. A beautiful garden, cultivated with good taste shows that you are rich in wealth but also reflects back on strength of character and appropriate taste when designing your estate. This relates back to Pope’s point that moderation is important in
beauty and a garish display of wealth is not to be admired as it only reflects greed in a person’s character. Mr. Darcy in particular is shown to display his wealth with modesty. When Elizabeth goes to Pemberley for the first time, she finds it pleasing to the eye. ‘Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste’ (Austen 235). This shows that although Mr. Darcy is a very wealthy man, he still cares to keep natural beauty on his estate. He has good taste and is modest as he does not want to expose his wealth. Mr. Darcy looks after his estate but he does not maintain it to an extreme and therefore it is beautiful without looking artificial.

**Feminism discussions**

By making a connection in Georgian society between the modesty of women and the reflection of moderation achieved through one’s garden it is relevant to discuss this situation from a feminist standing. To aid this essay, an attempt to define feminism will be made.

What is feminism? People have different views of what the definition of feminism is. Pam Morris claims that it is a political perception. She argues that it is based on two fundamental premises.

(1) That gender differences is a foundation of a structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and (2) that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the cultural constructions of gender differences (Morris 1).
Morris goes on to claim that these different assumptions are excuses made to make women seem subordinated. She also claims that these different feminine characteristics vary from country to country because of different cultures (2).

With regards to feminism in a historical context, Arlene Young discusses the situation for pre-emancipated women and their lack of freedom in a male dominated society: ‘In all cases, her identity and her fate are defined and controlled by men – by fathers, husbands or seducers’ (119). The Victorian and Georgian woman’s destiny lay within male power and her identity was created by values that she received from men. First it is her father that controls her fate until she gets married and then it is her husband that controls her fate until she dies. This shows that as a woman in 19th-century society you could never have control over your own identity or fate. From the day that you entered the world until the day you died it was a man that possessed control of your life. This issue is reflected in Austen’s novel where wealthy men tame and domesticated nature around their estates much in the same way as women are tamed and domesticated by men and society. Young also argues that, ‘The sum of the matter is that unless Woman repudiates her womanliness, her duty to her husband, to her children, to society, to the law, and to everyone but herself, she cannot emancipate herself’ (121). From this quotation one can assume that a woman has to sacrifice herself and her identity in order to please her husband, children, society and the law. This pre-emancipated woman has but one duty to please everyone besides herself and in order to do this she must lose her womanliness. Young compares women with parrots in a cage:

If we come to think that the nursery and the kitchen are the natural sphere of a woman, we have done so exactly as English children come to think that a cage is the natural sphere of a parrot: because they have never seen one anywhere else (Young 120).
The problem is then that it is seen as a ‘natural sphere’ for women to spend their time in the nursery and the kitchen. Young uses the parrot as an example, as children believed that a cage was a parrot’s natural sphere since they have never seen one somewhere else and it is the same with women. The kitchen has been seen as their natural sphere for so many centuries that it would be strange to see them somewhere else. What Young is trying to say here is that it is hard to change the assumptions that were made about women because their role in society was entrenched in the 1800’s way of thinking. Young takes this example further, arguing that the example concerning women and the parrot exemplifies

The kind of impossible box in which independent-minded women found themselves at the end of the nineteenth century. The absurdity of traditional attitudes towards women is evident only through an analogy that is itself absurd (Young 121).

Because women are put in a symbolic box it is hard to get beyond the traditional attitudes that exist in society. In order to go beyond the traditional attitudes towards women, women must first venture out of the box and then struggle to change the attitudes in society. If they do so they can take care of themselves and do not need a wealthy man to take care of them or domesticate them as they do with their gardens and estates.

Young also claims that, ‘women were seldom seen outside the cage of conventional domesticity and were not readily accepted in roles that seemed to challenge traditional assumptions about feminine identity’ (122). This shows that women were not allowed to explore what they were capable of achieving, as they had to act as was expected of them. This can be linked with Austen’s character of Elizabeth, as she resists this treatment of women. She wants to explore her emotions and her potential without male control and attempts to do this even though society is slow to accept it.
Devoney Looser argues how everything in society was geared towards men.

Conceived primarily in masculine terms, it was to serve what were understood to be the character, needs activities, and interests of men. Yet women were supposed to have a central role in its development, mostly by leading men into society through their “natural” desire for female company and, once men had joined such society by “polishing” their otherwise rough and too-masculine manners (Looser 20).

Although men created a society in masculine terms they still wanted the company of women in order for it to be complete. From this quotation one sees the importance of female roles in society; women play a central role to care for their families. Furthermore, Looser discusses Jane Austen’s novels and what they protest against, ‘They protest, however mutedly against the social, legal, and economic injustice of male primogeniture, restriction of women’s property rights and female economic dependence’ (24). All of these aspects occur in Austen’s novel therefore they can be seen as a protest or an attempt to highlight the injustices that women during this era lived by.

**Gender relations and nature imagery in *Pride and Prejudice***

Austen wants readers to be familiar with the surroundings in order for us to be able to relate to these places and understand how they influence the characters’ emotions. To achieve this she uses strong imagery. For example:

They entered the woods, and bidding adieu to the river for a while, ascended some of the higher grounds; 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 (Austen 242).

Austen uses powerful imagery to create a realistic scene of nature yet at the same time the
picturesque view is beautiful and romantic and reflects the themes of love and friendship in
the novel. The word ‘charming’ in particular adds to this feeling of happiness and romance
and as this passage describes Mr. Darcy’s garden, this word reflects not only the garden but
also an aspect of Mr. Darcy’s character.

We read also of other wealthy members of society who live on large estates with extensive
parks in front of their houses. Mr. Bingely for example owns a large estate where he throws
balls to entertain his guests. His large house is a sign of power not only in terms of wealth but
also masculine power. Usually it is only men who own large estates like those described in
the novel and their estates reflect back on their power and social status. The estates become a
sign of the masculine conquest to control nature. It is important not to confuse the
architecture with the surrounding nature since they symbolise different things, however in
order to analyse the nature one should also consider the houses since the one would not exist
without the other. The size of the house and the amount of wealth the owner has is reflected
in the presentation of the surrounding gardens.

Even though it is mostly men that own large estates with beautiful gardens there is one
example in Pride and Prejudice of a woman who shares in this possession of wealth and
power. Lady Catherine is a widow who lives alone in a great mansion. This shows that
women are fortunate enough to have power but only through money, which for a woman
during this time is rare. Despite Lady Catherine being rich and having a beautiful house there
are significant differences in how her house is described if one compares it with Mr. Darcy’s.
This difference is highlighted when Elizabeth visits Lady Catherine at her house:
After sitting a few minutes, they were all sent to one of the windows, to admire the view, Mr. Collins attending them to point out its beauties, and Lady Catherine kindly informing them that it was much better worth looking in the summer (Austen 159).

When talking about Lady Catherine’s house, the emphasis is more on the nature and the surroundings than on the house itself. This can be analysed as symbolic of women having a closer link with nature than men through nature’s beauty and domestication. The outside of the house is significant since they view it and talk about how beautiful it and the surroundings are. Without the nature the house would just be another building and would lose its beauty. Therefore we can recognize the power nature possesses even if its beauty and influence is not valued as highly by men as it is by women. In another passage, the house is described from the inside ‘the fine proportions and finished ornaments’ (Austen 158). This can be viewed as women needing to have ‘fine proportions’ even inside their houses and not just outside in nature. This can also be perceived as women being seen only as ornaments in a man’s world. They are there to make it more beautiful but they do not hold a more important role than this, they are like the ornaments in a house that someone else possesses and cannot do as they choose. They are to act as proper ladies just as society wants them to do.

Men on the other hand are allowed to do as they please and it is their outward appearance and wealth that society notices. When looking at Mr. Darcy’s house, it is the outside that is very clearly described rather than the interior or the surrounding nature. This can be seen as a sign that the outside strength and scale of a building can reflect masculinity. A significant symbol of masculinity is presented through the depiction of Mr Darcy’s mansion in Pemberley when Elizabeth, her uncle Mr. Gardiner and his wife go there for a visit.
It was a large, handsome, stone building standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; and in front a stream of some natural importance was swelled into a greater, but without any artificial appearance (Austen 235).

When reading this passage it is clear that the description of the mansion could also be a description of the owner Mr. Darcy, but it can also act as a general reflection on masculine characteristics as well. Berglund argues that, ‘Basically, one can say about Austen’s houses... that they reflect their owners, bearing witness to their tastes and dispositions, their values and morals’ (130). Mr. Darcy’s masculine strength is reflected in the description of the mansion. Men are seen as strong and can therefore be compared to stone. They are also seen as the gender that stands steadily in contrast to the vulnerability of women. The adjectives ‘large’ and ‘handsome’ can also be associated with masculinity as a man is often seen as being large and if he is large we refer to him as handsome and a ‘real man’. This could be how Elizabeth sees him and it could also be a general view of him by society. He is seen as someone wealthy, important and handsome, subsequently meaning that he belongs to the upper class of society. Mr. Darcy stands strong like his mansion and the high woody hills surrounding can be seen as his protection. He is also protected by his fortune. He is rich and he is a man and therefore entitled to power and authority within society at this time. The last sentence in the quotation, “but without any artificial appearance” can be taken to imply that Mr Darcy has balance of character, he is not artificial, and he has good morals. Furthermore, there is genuine warmth to his personality and he has refined his character but his appearance is still genuine. In a sense he has a wild yet controlled character similar to his garden and he can mix these two elements together. He has good taste and although he has control he does not want himself or his garden to appear completely artificial. Paradoxically, the stream in the front garden can be interpreted as Mr. Darcy controlling nature since the stream is
domesticated and controlled to some extent; it is not free to choose the path it must take and this is symbolic of women not being allowed to choose the path they must follow in life. All of this also reflects an aesthetic ideal where everything is controlled, however without appearing too blatantly to be so.

During their visit at the Pemberley estate they go for a walk in the park which belongs to Mr. Darcy: ‘Mr. Gardiner expressed a wish of going around the whole Park, but feared it might be beyond a walk. With a triumphant smile, they were told, that it was ten miles round (Austen 242-243). This passage shows us that men with power have to be feared, since men with a lot of power always get what they want and to some extent can ‘rule’ the world if they choose to. People respect men with power but also fear them because of their status and influence in society. Mr. Gardiner wants to take a walk around the park however it is possible that it is too far for him. The park is domesticated and therefore reinforces the image of Mr. Darcy as a powerful man. We can assume by analysing what Mr. Gardiner says that a powerful man like Mr. Darcy is expected to own such a garden. Mr. Darcy’s park is beyond a walk because of how large it is, symbolically stating his power as few people could conquer such a walk. Austen goes on to describe the park:

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 (Austen 243).

The bridge can be seen to symbolise society’s view of women as being simple and also not allowing them to be anything but simple. The stream can be analysed as being undomesticated, uncontrolled and changeable, this can reflect back on men - that they must change their ideas about the way they see women if there is to be any positive social progress.
For example at the beginning of the novel Mr. Darcy could not see himself with any of the girls at Longbourn, ‘Darcy, on the contrary, had seen a collocation of people in whom there was little beauty and no fashion, for none of whom he had felt the smallest interest, and from none received either attention or pleasure’ (Austen 18). Even though he felt like this in the beginning, through the course of the novel he changes and falls in love with Elizabeth, therefore the changeable aspect of nature reflects back on Mr. Darcy’s changeable side. Mr. Darcy is not the only one that changes his views; Elizabeth also changes from feeling nothing but contempt for Mr. Darcy to falling in love with him. In the beginning, ‘Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feelings toward him’ (Austen 14). Nature is symbolical of freedom and beauty and therefore neutralizes the differences between the genders and instead highlights equality. Elizabeth has an excitable quality and is delighted with her surroundings whenever she is out in nature whereas Darcy seems more controlled and calm. When seeing Darcy’s house and garden, Elizabeth understands the importance of this man, which in turn is clearly reflected in his house and garden. Both he and the house could be viewed as representing something artificial like a manmade status of wealth or something very real and genuine like strength of character. It is only upon seeing the beautiful grounds of Pemberley that Elizabeth sees for the first time a different, more genuine and gentle side to Mr. Darcy:

Elizabeth, after slightly surveying it, went to a window to enjoy its prospects. The hill, crowned with wood, from which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was scattered on its banks, and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with delight (Austen 236).

Snyder claims that when Elizabeth sees Mr. Darcy’s house she also sees a new side of Mr. Darcy:
The lack of dialogue with others at this point in the novel constitutes an aside in which Austen achieves a deeper tone of intimacy. Elizabeth’s clarifying and purifying of her thoughts and sensibilities are prompted by natural elements in a picturesque scene (Snyder 150).

It is only these natural elements that make an impression on Elizabeth to the extent that she could have misunderstood Mr. Darcy’s personality by not looking below the surface in order to see more.

The individual woman and the submissive woman

Whilst Elizabeth can be seen as a relatively free-spirited individual, it is the character of Charlotte that represents the submissive woman in *Pride and Prejudice*. Charlotte agrees to marry Mr. Collins even though she is not in love with him. She does this because she would rather be married than live as an unmarried woman. Austen lets us as readers know what Charlotte thinks of marriage:

Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want (Austen 120).

One realizes from this quotation that some women only got married because it was seen as the right thing to do as a woman and (as previously mentioned) because that was the only opportunity to get a house of their own. Charlotte’s link with nature is not obvious if one should compare it with Elizabeth’s love for nature. The only link one can find is when
Elizabeth, Charlotte and her husband Mr Collins are out in the garden. ‘Collins invited them to take a stroll in the garden, which was large and well laid out, and to the cultivation of which he attended himself’ (Austen 154). One can read that Charlotte encourages her husband in his interest of maintaining the garden but she does not have any interest in doing it herself. Charlotte prefers to take care of the interior of the house, cleaning and taking care of her husband just as a good wife should during this era. Charlotte even gets advice from Lady Catherine on how to be a good wife, ‘She enquired into Charlotte’s domestic concerns familiarly and minutely, and gave a great deal of advice, as to the management of them all; told her how everything ought to be regulated in so small a family as her’s’ (Austen 160).

Charlotte is submissive in the sense that she first agrees to marry Mr Collins and then allows herself to be domesticated, just as the garden is domesticated and maintained by Mr Collins. Therefore Charlotte has a link with nature, but it is tamed and domesticated nature such as that found in their garden. She does not experience nature outside of the house’s grounds where it is not maintained to the extent of the garden. Charlotte does not have the same link with nature as Elizabeth and therefore she cannot escape her own reality and feel free from the constraints of society, not even briefly as Elizabeth does. She does not experience intimacy and joy when out in nature as Elizabeth, rather seeing it as a reflection of herself, tamed and domesticated by the views of society and by her husband.

Even though Elizabeth and Charlotte are friends the differences between these two are very clearly shown in the novel. Mr Collins proposes first to Elizabeth but she refuses to marry him since she does not love him, whereas Charlotte accepts his offer immediately. When Mr Collins has proposed several times Elizabeth says to him, ‘Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart (Austen 106). She wants to make him see beyond the typical thoughts society holds
about women. Elizabeth uses the word ‘rational’, which is interesting as women were often seen as irrational and men as rational during this era. Elizabeth is making a very strong point by saying to him do not see me as irrational because I can be as rational as you are. This shows that rationality is not governed by gender.

There is a link made between tamed nature and female characteristics (as mentioned earlier), where women are seen by society as needing to be tamed and domesticated (as represented by Charlotte), yet Austen uses the character of Elizabeth to resist the stereotype of the submissive woman and uses nature to represent her gentleness and strong will. When Elizabeth is out in nature she does not feel submissive and she also feels that she can revolt against the views that society has about women in general. Berglund argues that, “Going for a walk is thus one way of escaping the imprisonment of society and obtaining liberty of solitude; we are told about Elizabeth Bennet’s ‘love of solitary walks’ ”(216). Since these walks are a way for her to feel free from the imprisoning views of society one can understand that Elizabeth sees nature as comforting and gentle. Despite the fact that it is tamed and domesticated she still feels free when out in nature. This might be because she mostly experiences nature when she is out for a walk outside the gardens and the estates, where the nature is wilder. For her it is a neutral place, she feels accepted here. Men are expected by society to be free and have authority over women yet the relationship that develops between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth appears to be more equal. Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy step out of the stereotypical gender roles. Elizabeth is wild and tame at the same time – she resists delusions of society as Snyder discusses in his previously mentioned quote, ‘Austen’s strongest, cleverest women – those who resist the machinations and delusions of society - are the only persons shown to have an intimacy with Nature’ (148-149). Since she is one of these strong and clever women she can step out from the stereotypical role and in that sense allows Mr
Darcy to view her as an equal rather than him having power over her. They both can be seen as representing a wild element of nature and when they are outside in nature together they can be free.

A significant passage depicting this freedom in the novel is when Elizabeth walks in the dirt to Mr. Bingley’s house in order to visit her sick sister.

Elizabeth continued her walk alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with warmth of exercise (Austen 33).

Austen uses nature, the mud, the fields, the rain and the puddles as a revolt against the control of society. The nature described in this passage is different, since the mud, the rain and the fields are not things that can be controlled by human beings. They are part of the environment; they are unrestrained and not subject to any masculine control. This is especially apparent if one compares them to Mr. Darcy’s house or his garden where everything is tamed, controlled and thoughtfully constructed.

Elizabeth is not seen as ladylike according to the views of society in the novel. First of all she walks alone and that is not appropriate for a woman to do during this era. Either a male family member or a senior female family member should always accompany a woman. Secondly she walked to the house, which is considered unacceptable in this society since ladies often travelled by carriage when they went somewhere. Another significant point is that it was raining and that it was very dirty meaning that Elizabeth herself would get dirty. A lady should always look her best and act ladylike; running around in the dirt is not at all how a proper lady should act. Furthermore, this becomes more obvious when she arrives at the
house and Mr. Bingley’s sisters are appalled that she came alone, walking in the mud and also by her muddied appearance. For us as readers it is quite the opposite, because we sense some kind of freedom in Elizabeth’s behaviour. She ignores the prejudices concerning how a woman should act and does as she pleases and enjoys doing this. She revolts against the idea of the typical woman and shows that women can also be impulsive and do things on their own, that they do not need to be protected, that they are not afraid to get dirt under their nails and that if faith was put in them, they would manage fine on their own. All they lack is the freedom to act as they choose, because the society that they live in has different views on the behaviour of men and women.

Samuel Kliger has also acknowledged the fact that there are passages in the novel that directly associate Elizabeth with nature. One of these is the passage quoted above, when she runs in the mud. He argues that *Pride and Prejudice* uses familiar eighteenth-century views in direct opposition between art and nature ‘as the ground of the book’s action and its mode of organization’ (Butler 320). A direct opposite between these two would not work since art can reflect nature and nature can reflect art but to some extent they can also be very different from each other. One could say that men are represented on the side of art and women on that of nature. One example of this is Mr Darcy’s estate. It is displayed like art since it is made to look in a certain way yet still it is made to look completely natural, “but without any artificial appearance” (Austen 235). From this quotation one recognizes that it does not appear artificial even though it is completely constructed by Mr. Darcy. Since Elizabeth is out running in the mud she associates herself with nature. Art is more sophisticated and valued very highly in society whereas nature is viewed as being wild and in need of control. He further claims that by making these links with Elizabeth and nature Austen makes her a heroine. Kliger claims that Elizabeth can be compared with the Levellers of that time because
of the fact that she does things like running in the mud alone (Butler 321). The Levellers were people that fought for equality or at least advocated equality in aspects such as gender. They fought for a society that would support equality between men and women.

**Nature and equality in Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth’s relationship**

Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth do not give up their relationship although people around them question their love since they belong to different classes in society. The quotation below is evidence of Mr. Darcy’s and Elizabeth’s love towards each other as their love is allowed to blossom in the elements of Mother Earth even though they to some extent are maintained: ‘They walked on, without knowing in what direction. There was too much to be thought, and felt, and said for attention to any other objects’ (Austen 346-347). This is taken from the passage when Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are out for a walk and they decide that they will get engaged. They both empathize with each other or rather they acknowledge their feelings towards each other. What is important in this passage is that they are out for a walk when deciding something very important; that is their marriage and future life. The question is whether Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy will get married or not? In this passage we find out that their love conquers everything else. Was this a coincidence that all this took place during a walk? Or is this very thoughtfully constructed by Austen? They are out in nature which is domesticated and tamed but not in the same way as the gardens and since Elizabeth feels at ease when she is out in nature this becomes a neutral place for them. What is significant with their walk is that Austen keeps coming back to it: ‘after walking several miles in a leisurely manner, and too busy to know anything about it, they found at last, on examining their watches, that it was time to be at home’ (350). This environment can be seen as neutral
ground and symbolic for gender equality since it is the only place Elizabeth can escape the views that society had about women during the 19th-century. This does not mean that they are equal in a biological sense, only in a social and cultural context. Mr. Darcy does not feel that he is superior towards Elizabeth because of the fact that he is a man. Furthermore, Elizabeth does not feel inferior towards Mr. Darcy because of the fact that she is a woman. One can interpret this walk as a way for Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth to leave their world of cultural constraint behind. They enter into a new world that seems to belong only to them. They leave their pride and prejudice behind and therefore are able to accept each other as they are.

Darcy and Elizabeth cannot escape entirely however because the other people in their lives will notice that they are gone. At some point they have to come back to reality:

My dear Lizzy, where can you have been walking to? Was a question which Elizabeth received from Jane as soon as she entered the room, and from all the others when they sat down to table. She had only to say in reply, that they had wandered about, till she was beyond her own knowledge (Austen 352).

From this quotation one sees that everyone is surprised to see how long they have been gone. They take a walk again the next day before they tell everyone that they are engaged. It is during this walk that they decide that they will tell everyone and ask Mr. Bennet for his consent. It is as if the only leisure time they have together is during these walks. They could have decided to get engaged at the house or in the garden or anywhere else, however it happened during their walk and this is because it is a neutral place for them both, especially Elizabeth. After they have told the family about their engagement Elizabeth is alone with her sister Jane, who questions Elizabeth about her relationship with Mr. Darcy. The answer Elizabeth gives is important because she says that she first fell in love with Mr. Darcy when she saw the Pemberley estate. This shows the importance of the surrounding nature and the
beautiful grounds. Elizabeth falls in love with him when she sees that he has good taste and by that she makes the judgement that Mr. Darcy also has good morals:

Let me know everything that I am to know, without delay. Will you tell me how long you have loved him? It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful ground at Pemberley (Austen 353).

Elizabeth saw Pemberley for the first time when she went there with her uncle Mr Gardiner and his wife. She equates the condition of Mr. Darcy’s gardens with a new side of his character. This quotation strengthens both my and Batey’s argument about how important nature and the surroundings are in making strong impressions on the characters in the novel.
Conclusion

The environment and the natural surroundings carefully described in the novel can be seen to speak of the differences between the two genders. Austen describes the surrounding nature as tamed and domesticated. From this we can draw a comparison between nature and the genders, and how they are viewed differently by Georgian society. Having made these comparisons one can acknowledge that gender inequalities and the description of nature share a lot of important similarities in the novel. One can draw parallels between the way men tame and domesticate nature with some of the female characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, since they are also described as being tamed and domesticated by men. The character of Elizabeth is not wholly subjugated whereas the character of Charlotte is, for example. These two different female characters offer us the opportunity of acknowledging the fact that there are two types of women in the novel, those who are totally subjugated by the views of society (majority) and those that try to escape from the inequalities in society (minority).

Nature is described as being domesticated and tamed, yet viewed as beautiful. It is the platform from which Elizabeth experiences freedom and can temporarily escape from the expectations of society. Even though all nature represented in *Pride and Prejudice* is controlled one can find instances where it is controlled to a lesser extent, such as that which is experienced by Elizabeth during her many walks. It is tamed and domesticated but not in the same way as the gardens and the estates, where every detail is thoughtfully constructed. The intimate relationship Elizabeth has with nature is described as unique and unusual for female members of Georgian society. The beautiful and yet tamed nature is a representation of the typical female characteristics. It’s clever how Austen uses the tamed nature in the immediate surroundings of the homes in order to offer a description of the submissive women, which ironically are described as a place where they can feel free and at ease with themselves.
When reading Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice* one realises that the major themes are marriage and the distinction between the two genders within Georgian society. It is clearly described that women do not possess much power in society in relation to men. It is crucial for a woman in this society to get married and if possible, to a wealthy man, since the males are seen as the providers for their families. They take care of their wives much in the same way as they take care of their estates and gardens, and therefore the comparison between nature and women is obvious. If a woman does not get married there is a risk of being homeless since it is the spouse that provides her with both financial security and a home. Austen also uses nature and the estates to reflect back on the characters feelings and their personalities. One example of this is Mr. Darcy’s estate where we can find resemblances between the description of the estate and Mr. Darcy’s character.

Finally we can state that the descriptions of nature in Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice* are an outstanding tool for understanding and analysing the relationship between men and women and comprehending the perception of masculinity and femininity during the Georgian era. The novel offers clear images of how the relationships between different genders were at that specific point in time, and that nature can reflect and symbolize these differences. It is clearly displayed in the novel that men try to tame and domesticate women as they do with nature.

This thesis shows that by looking deeper into the classic work that is *Pride and Prejudice* we can see that Jane Austen’s descriptions of nature reflect the core differences between the sexes.
Works Cited


