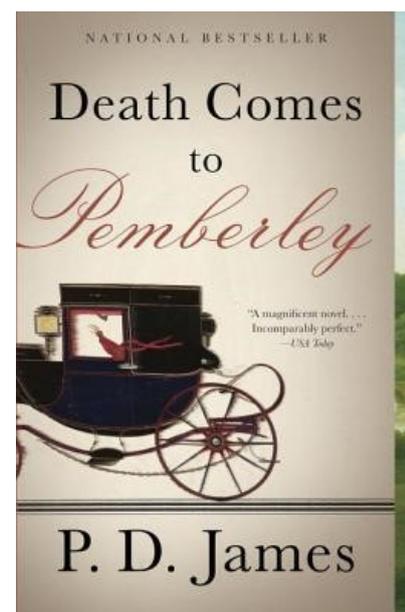


# *Death Comes to Pemberley*

By P. D. James

## Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Good crime writers like P.D. James embed clues early on in their stories. What seemingly inconsequential clues are dropped that later turn out to be decisive in solving the mystery. How cleverly does James bury her clues?
2. Mystery writers also like to throw in red-herrings. Are there any false clues in *Death Comes to Pemberley* that fooled you, leading you to expect a different outcome?
3. In what ways does P.D. James highlight class distinctions in this work? Why, for instance, does the Magistrate Selwyn Hardcastle not wish to waste his time at Pemberley? How are servants treated at Pemberley; compare that to how they're treated at Mrs. Hurst's in London?
4. Why does the colonel speak to Elizabeth rather than to Darcy about his desire to marry Georgiana?
5. Elizabeth watches Georgiana and Alveston interact and realizes the two are in love. She reflects on "that enchanting period of mutual discovery, expectation and hope. It was enchantment she had never known." Why does Elizabeth think this? Is she not in love with her husband?
6. Follow-up to Question 10: When Elizabeth gazes down at Wickham, who is sleeping with "his dark hair tumbled on the pillow, his shirt open to show the delicate line of the throat," she thinks he looks "like a young knight wounded in battle." Is Elizabeth a bit in love with Wickham? She wonders whether she would "have married him if he had been rich instead of penniless." This is the second time Elizabeth has questioned her motives for marrying Darcy: wondering if she had been attracted to Darcy primarily for his wealth and position. What do you think?
7. Darcy knows that this latest scandal will threaten the family reputation. Yet he seems almost relieved that, as a result, his cousin, Colonel Fitzwilliam, will not make an offer for Georgiana's hand. Why is he relieved? It would be a brilliant marriage for Georgiana; she would eventually become a countess.
8. An existential dread hangs over the characters at Pemberley even before the murder takes place. Elizabeth, especially, feels a deep unease, a "turmoil in her own mind." Looking from the vantage of historical hindsight, how might James be using the violent wind at the beginning of the novel as a symbol of something threatening the aristocracy?
9. How are women generally viewed in this society? How does Alveston's ideas challenge those views? Alveston mentions Mary Wollstonecraft. Who is she? You might do a little research on Wollstonecraft—a vital figure in the



18th century, whose ideas influenced future generations. (You also may be surprised to learn the identity of her daughter.)

10. Why is Lydia Wickham never questioned about what happened in the carriage between her husband and Captain Denny? Might the fact that she isn't questioned have anything to do with Questions 8 and 15?

11. Aside from ignoring Lydia, what other holes occur in the investigation—gaps that seem like missteps to modern readers steeped in police procedural novels and TV-series? (Don't neglect the ironic quip regarding 18th-century science's inability to distinguish blood types.) What about the inquiry and ensuing trial—how does the justice system fail there? What safeguards, present today, seem to be missing in Wickham's court trial?

12. How does Darcy see his role as a great landowner? What responsibilities do the upper classes have in his society? As Darcy reflects back on his decision to marry to Elizabeth, does he believe it was a wise choice for a man in his position? How might his marriage have undermined his family's position?

13. When Darcy meets Wickham at the Gardiner's London house, what conflict does he hold with regards to proper social behavior vs. his own feelings toward Wickham? Why, in Darcy's mind, is social etiquette necessary? What was his mother's explanation for good manners? What role do manners play in modern society? Has today's culture dispensed with, or maintained, good manners?

14. What is Louisa Bidwell's chance for happiness? Is her fate a fair one? The Reverend Oliphant considers her "a highly intelligent" girl" who...

*had been given a glimpse of a different and more exciting life, but undoubtedly the best had been done for her child and probably for her.*

Do you agree? Why does Elizabeth, a few lines later, feel "a twinge of regret" when she considers Louisa's future as parlormaid at Highmarten?

15. What do you think the future holds for Wickham and Lydia?

16. Can you pick out the allusions to two other Austen novels—*Persuasion* and *Emma*?

17. Were you surprised by the revelations at the end of the mystery?

18. Is *Death Comes to Pemberley* a good mystery? Is it a good sequel to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*?