

Západočeská univerzita v Plzni

Fakulta filozofická

Bakalářská práce

**Depiction of Contemporary English Country Life in
Jane Austen's Novels**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This bachelor thesis is concerned with the English country life during Jane Austen's lifetime as seen by this author. Its aim is to map to what extent and how the contemporary life and its individual aspects are reflected in her works. The focus on the country is due to the knowledge of Austen's interest in that particular section of English society whose residence was the country. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* were decided on as primary sources of information because they represent Austen's masterpieces. The secondary sources encompass works of various authors who deal with the second half of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, chiefly Kirstin Olsen and Charles More. The details of Jane Austen's life provided are based almost exclusively on Claire Tomalin's *Jane Austen – A Life*.

The thesis is divided into two main sections. The first section is more or less a theoretical introduction of the topic. It begins with a general outline of the events and historical facts of the period stated above (not only those of England but also those of the European continent with results affecting Britain). Further the literature and its tendencies come into focus and also the Austen's position among them. Then the attention is drawn to Jane Austen's person as an author and as a member of the Austen family. The family background is described as well as every family member. A special subchapter is concerned with Edward Austen whose life situation differed from that of his siblings considerably. The second main section is the actual processing of data supplied by the primary and secondary sources. At the beginning the main characters of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* and their circumstances are introduced. What follows is the presentation of nine areas of contemporary English country life – marriage, family, household, daily routine, social classes, social events, behaviour, education, and religion. In most cases, the realia description of the particular area is given first which is followed by examples from both Austen's works. Depiction of some issues such as engagement or housing is based solely on the primary literature as the secondary sources do not supply any piece of

information. The thesis contains the sort of information provided by the secondary sources that is presented in the primary sources.

The findings of the thesis – to what extent and how the facts are reflected in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* – are then presented in the conclusion.

2 BRITAIN-RELATED REALIA OF THE LIFETIME OF JANE AUSTEN (1775 - 1817)

The time period around the turn of the centuries saw many important events and changes, paradoxically unlike the life of Jane Austen which is regarded by many (as an example see *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* edited by Margaret Drabble) as uneventful. Britain under the reign of King George III saw the first decades of the Industrial Revolution and its still more obvious impacts on the whole society. Apart from these, the British Empire lost the 13 colonies in the New World, became involved in the war against the revolutionary France and united with Ireland into one state. The following paragraphs will be concerned with the major happenings of the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth centuries.

The king George III was the third monarch of the Hanover dynasty on the British throne but the first of his two predecessors to be born and brought up in Britain. He succeeded to the throne in 1760 and reigned until 1811 when replaced because of insanity. Altogether he is not regarded as a very successful monarch. [1] It was during the rule of the dynasty that the Crown's power declined and the powers of the Government increased.

In the course of the second half of the eighteenth century the British colonies in North America began to struggle for independence. Their stiff opposition against new taxes imposed by Britain, which was expressed by the slogan "No taxation without representation," is a good illustration of the situation. [2] This attitude of the colonies provoked the British to send in troops and the conflict grew into a war. On 4 July 1776 independence was declared and 1781 the colonists with the help of France (and its allies) won over the British army. Finally, in 1783, the United States of America were recognized an independent state by the Treaty of Paris.

In 1789 the French revolution began in order to bring about a new order of society and in 1793 France declared war on Britain. The fight against the French revolution transformed in 1803 into the war against Napoleon Bonaparte who seized the power in France and tried to expand abroad. A crucial moment for British army was the victory at Trafalgar in 1805 when it

destroyed the joined French and Spanish fleets and thus prevented a French invasion of the British Isles. The Napoleonic wars in Europe ended with the battle of Waterloo where Napoleon was defeated. In the years 1814 – 1815 Congress of Vienna took place to solve the situation in Europe. Britain found itself among the winners and gained new colonies such as Trinidad, Malta and the Cape of Good Hope. [3]

On the background of these events the Industrial Revolution was beginning to transform both the European economy and society. Britain is considered the country where the first signs of change appeared. Initially, it were numerous improvements in agriculture. A wider use of iron plough or improved crop rotations, for example, allowed higher production values and thus enabled a shift of development towards industry. The employment in the agricultural sector decreased while the number of workers in industry and services grew rapidly, which alongside other factors produced a thorough change in the structure of society. [4]

New jobs in mills and mines caused migration of the lower classes, new opportunities in trade and services attracted the middle class which step by step gained decisive influence and overshadowed the traditionally powerful aristocracy.

As it is clear from the examples above, the years of Jane Austen's life, as seen from a long-term perspective, were essential for the age to come.

3 EIGHTEENTH CENTURY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Among many events, the eighteenth century saw the birth of the novel as a new literary genre. Its individual features had already appeared some time ago only to be joined in the first true novel – *Pamela* – by Samuel Richardson in 1740. Soon it was followed by the successful *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding in 1749 and a number of other works. Some of them took the form of letters.

By the time of Jane Austen's lifetime the genre of novel had gained a vast popularity. Not only was it read by all sorts of people regardless their social position but writing novels also became a new kind of decent job for women. Let us take Austen's contemporaries Fanny Burney (1752 – 1840) or Ann Radcliffe (1764 – 1822) as an example.

In the eighteenth century literature two main currents can be distinguished – the classical and the romantic – the latter overshadowed the former towards the end of the century. Most of the contemporary works can be assigned to one of those tendencies, Jane Austen's, however, stand somehow aside. As Anthony Burgess puts it in *English Literature*: "The first important woman novelist, she stands above both the classical and romantic movements; in a sense she bridges the gap between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." [5] It can be even added that in her preoccupation with the family life she reaches forward to the Victorian era that was to come.

3.1 Jane Austen – an author

Her talent to clad the imagination (based on close reality) into words was revealed at her early age, short after she had learnt to read and write. Among her first attempts she created the stories *Jack and Alice*, *Lesley Castle*, and *Love and Freindship*. Already as a child Jane Austen displayed a unique sense of humour and satire which she proved in her mature novels. [6]

A list of Jane Austen's novels follows (in a chronological order):

Lady Susan (1794 – 1805 conclusion added)

Sense and Sensibility (originally *Elinor and Marianne*) (1795), published in 1811

Pride and Prejudice (originally *First Impressions*) (1796 – 1797), published in 1813

Northanger Abbey (originally *Susan*, later *Catherine*) (1798 – 99), published after her death

The Watsons (1804 begun but not finished)

Mansfield Park (1811 – 1813), published in 1814

Emma (1814 – 1815), published in 1815

Persuasion (1815 – 1816), published after her death

Sandition (1817 begun but not finished) [7].

4 JANE AUSTEN AND HER FAMILY

Jane Austen came from a large country family. Revd George Austen married Cassandra Leigh, a woman with aristocratic connections. They settled down in the village of Steventon, Mr Austen being in charge of the parish. Apart from his parson's duties he studied and acted as a headmaster and the only teacher of a boys' school that he and his wife were running at their parsonage. Mr Austen taught the sons of the local squires and aristocrats, who stayed with them at Steventon during the school year and Mrs Austen took care of their accommodation. [8] The Austens owned a farm with dairy, poultry yard and garden. This was the responsibility of Mrs Austen and a dairy maid. [9]

The Austens had eight children: James (1765), George (1766), Edward (1767), Henry (1771), Cassandra (1773), Francis (1774), Jane (16.12.1775) and Charles (1779). As it was a common practice at that time, Mrs Austen used to give her children out for nursing when babies. [10] When the Austen boys reached the proper age, they started their education as their father's pupils. The curriculum consisted of Latin, Greek and some geography and natural sciences. After that at about 12 – 14 years of age they were sent for further education to more established schools. Cassandra and Jane spent a short time at a girl's boarding school, Jane being only seven. The spare time of the Austen children was spent in games with their fellow pupils or rehearsing and performing theatre plays for family and neighbours. [11]

All the Austen sons (excluding George) went for higher education. James won a scholarship through his mother's connections and was sent to Oxford University at the age of 14. Edward was like his brothers educated at Steventon. When he finished the school, he set off for Grand Tour to improve his knowledge. Henry like his brother James graduated from Oxford University. Francis attended a naval school from the age of 12, and Charles followed him there. At 16 he was a midshipman at Portsmouth.

There can be no talk about career of Cassandra and Jane. They were both educated at home except for the short stay at a boarding school mentioned above. Although Cassandra was about to get married at a time, her

fiance died of a disease in East Indies. It is known about Jane that there was a short love affair between her and a family friend Tom Lefroy but nor this relationship was brought to the happy end of marriage. [12] Thus both Austen sisters remained spinsters for their whole lives.

Steventon and its surroundings were inhabited by a diverse range of people. Some of them belonged to the aristocracy, others to the gentry or to the middle class. There were clergymen, doctors, entrepreneurs, lawyers and Members of Parliament and many lower class people who often depended on help from the better-off.

The Austen family were situated somewhere in the upper middle part of the social scale. On one hand, owning some land, having a few servants (the Austens had a dairymaid, a bailiff and once in several weeks a washerwoman-see *A Life* by C. Tomalin) and being a parson as well as having ties with the aristocracy could mean being a member of the gentry. On the other hand, being a headmaster or working at one's own land could shift one's social position to the middle class (*use a table of jobs and salaries and social position*). It is therefore conceivable that the Austens were what is called "pseudo-gentry" like many of their neighbours. [13] That meant behaving like the gentry but being of lower circumstances than them.

Although it was not easy it was possible to improve one's social status. A good example was the adoption of Edward Austen by the Knights which obviously pushed his social position up above that of his family. [14]

Now there will be a closer look at the life situations of the individual Austen children. After completing his studies, James was ordained a vicar. First he served in the parish of Sherborne St John, later, after his father died, he took over the Steventon parish and moved with his family into the rectory. Apart from this he was appointed the military chaplaincy. He was married twice. His first wife died having given him only one child. With the second he had two other children.

The second Austen son, George, who was born disabled, spent his life in care of an uncle but was not rejected by the family. [15]

Adopted by the Knights, an aristocratic childless couple, Edward entered the higher society quite easily. He was provided with a house and became a

wealthy landowner. He was also made an heir to the Knights and after inheritance he was obliged to change his and his children's names to "Knight". Edward and his wife Elizabeth had eleven children. They lived at Godmersham, a spacious house with large estates. They could afford to employ many servants, to keep horses and carriages, to make frequent trips. The daughters had governesses and the sons attended good schools. Unfortunately Elizabeth died early and Edward never married again.

As for Henry, while studying, he joined the militia and became an officer. He was introduced to the higher society through the aristocratic officers who he served with. After leaving the militia, he set himself up as a banker in London and lived a life of leisure. However, in 1815 the bank collapsed and eventually, considerably reduced, Henry took to the clergy. Apart from George, he, although married twice, was the only Austen son to remain childless.

Francis began his career at the age of 14, when he sailed for East Indies for five years. Soon he was promoted. This repeated several times and, finally, he became Admiral of the Fleet, which is the highest position in the navy. His good life situation allowed him to get married at the age of 32 and his wife bore him eleven children. She, like her sister-in-law, died after the last childbirth.

Charles rose in his career rather slowly than Francis and only shortly before he died he was promoted to Rear-Admiral. He, too, had two wives and as many as eight children.

4.1 Edward Austen

As was already mentioned above this Austen son had a good luck being chosen by the Knights as their adoptive child. He was given a large house at Godmersham where he moved to with his wife and children. The estate consisted among others of park, gardens, orchard, bathing house, and ice house. The Edward Austens could afford to keep horses and carriages, to employ governesses for the daughters and to send the sons to good schools. Edward was fond of shooting and fishing and often took his family for trips. [16] When the Knights died Edward inherited some more estates like Chawton, the

house of which he later offered his mother and sisters. As an heir he was obliged to change his and his children's names to "Knight".

The visits at the Edward Austens gave Jane a precious opportunity to observe the lifestyle of the higher classes which she reflects in her novels.

5 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND SENSE AND SENSIBILITY AND THEIR FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The following part will be focused on two of Jane Austen's best known works, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and sensibility*, and what part of the social spectrum they portray. The individual characters and families and their circumstances will be described. Further there will be a look at other aspects of that period life as seen by the author.

The social division is reflected in both these books, and in *Pride and Prejudice* the differences between the social strata are even an essential point in the main plot. Both stories are also similar in considering some contrasting matters – the social positions of the main characters in one, two strikingly different characters and the way they deal with life in the other.

5.1 Chief characters and families

5.1.1 *Pride and Prejudice*

The depiction will be begun with *Pride and Prejudice* and the Bennet family. The Bennets are a gentry family living in a Longbourn house near the town of Meryton. They have five daughters, the second-born Elizabeth being the heroine of the story. Mr Bennet is an owner of the Longbourn estate which is worth two thousand pounds a year and Mrs Bennet has inherited a fortune of four thousand pounds from her father who was an attorney in Meryton. The Bennet girls are each to inherit one thousand pounds. The Longbourn estate consists of a house, a farm, a shrubbery, and possibly of some woods. The Bennets keep a carriage and horses and they can afford to employ a cook, a housekeeper, two housemaids and a butler. However, the daughters has been raised without a governess. They acquired the necessary skills from books and by assistance of masters (Elizabeth, for example, can play the piano).

Mrs Bennet has a sister and a brother. Mrs Philips lives in Meryton with her husband, a country attorney. Mr Gardiner, a man of good education and breeding, lives in London with his wife and pursuits a respectable line of trade.

Because the Bennets have no son, their estate is about to be inherited by a male relation. Mr Collins studied at university but failed to make any useful acquaintance there. Later on, he was recommended to Lady Catherine de Bourgh who became his patroness and provided him with the church office of parson and a living – the Hunsford parsonage. Thus settled, he intends to find a wife in one of his Bennet cousins in order to make them amends for being the heir of Longbourn. At length, he marries a daughter of Bennets' neighbours, the Lucases. As his income is quite sufficient, the couple can afford to own a gig.

Mr Collins's wife, Charlotte, is the eldest from several Lucases' children. Mr Lucas used to be a tradesman at Meryton and made a good fortune there. Moreover, he was also a mayor and was knighted by the king. After his presentation at St James's he gave up the trade and his living in Meryton and moved to a country house not far from thence to enjoy the improvement of his status. When reading the book it comes to one's mind, that despite Mr Lucas's promotion, his situation is not so comfortable as to provide his children with great financial support.

There is another important person, Mr Bingley. He is a wealthy man from a respectable family who has inherited about a hundred thousand pounds which were earned by trade and is about to buy the Netherfield Park, a large manor house in the Bennets' neighbourhood. His single sister is to maintain his house. His another sister is already married to a man "of more fashion than fortune." [17] Both women were educated in a private seminary in London and the fortune of each is twenty thousand pounds.

The main male character to match Elizabeth Bennet is Mr Darcy. He comes from a noble line at the mother's side and from a respectable, honourable and ancient although untitled family from the father's side. [18] He is the owner of Pemberley, a large house and estate in Derbyshire yielding ten thousand pounds a year, and moreover a man of "extensive patronage" [19] including in the Church. [20] From among dozens of servants a steward can be mentioned who manages the whole estate for its owner. Miss Darcy, Mr Darcy's sister went to school and now lives in London with a lady to take care of her further education. Her fortune forms thirty thousand pounds.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh already mentioned above is an aunt of the Darcy's. She owns Rosings Park, a large estate and a house. Like Mr Darcy, Lady Catherine is an influential person among the high rank. The young Miss de Bourgh, the only child, is the heiress to her mother's fortune. She is educated at home by a governess.

The last person to be described is Mr Wickham, a son of the Pemberley steward and a godson of Mr Darcy's father. He was raised alongside Mr Darcy and was financially supported at school and university by his godfather. Moreover, he would be given a good living if he became a clergyman. Nevertheless, this was not the case with him. He took to the militia and thus lost the claim on the provision of house.

5.1.2 *Sense and Sensibility*

In the centre of the story there is the Dashwood family, specifically the two eldest daughters, Elinor, aged nineteen, and Marianne, aged seventeen. Mr Dashwood is an heir to his uncle and takes possession of a large estate and a house called Norland Park. His genuine fortune, however, consists of seven thousand pounds and his wife disposes of no fortune at all. Unfortunately he dies and all the property goes over to Mr John Dashwood, his son from his first marriage. The widowed Mrs Dashwood and her three daughters receive ten thousand pounds and each of the girls owns one thousand pounds. There will be an annual income of five hundred pounds.

Soon after her husband's death, Mrs Dashwood is offered a living by her relation, Sir John Middleton. The house in question is a nice country cottage on the grounds of Barton estate and near Barton Park, the residence of the Middletons. As the rent is a low one, the Dashwoods accept and move in. Upon their removal from Norland Park, they sell horses and a carriage left them by Mr Dashwood as those are of no use to them. They are given some game from Sir Middleton. To maintain a degree of convenience, they keep three servants, two maids and a man servant.

Unlike the Dashwood women Mr John Dashwood and his family possess a large fortune. Mr John Dashwood is an heir to Norland Park after

the death of his father and, moreover, there is a considerable fortune left him by his mother and the wealth of his wife.

Mr John Dashwood's brother-in-law, Edward Ferrars, is one of the key characters. He received a private education and went further to study at Oxford. Like any well educated gentleman he is fond of books. His mother is a very rich woman of high rank and wants her two sons to marry wealthy women of high social position likewise. Edward should pursue a career in politics or army, which is in Mrs Ferrars' opinion sufficiently prestigious, and make connections to people of consequence. Edward himself would prefer the church but it is not "smart enough" in the eyes of his family. As to his property he disposes of two thousand pounds and upon the condition of marrying well he has the prospect of gaining a considerable support from his mother.

Sir John Middleton is a gentleman and a sportsman about forty years old and very fond of shooting and hunting and society. His wife, Lady Middleton, an elegant woman of about twenty-seven is chiefly occupied by their four young children. Barton Park, their home, is a large and comfortable house.

Another character to be introduced is Mrs Jennings, Lady Middleton's mother. She is a widow more than sufficiently provided for by her husband who used to be a tradesman in London. There she also owns a house which she inhabits during the winter season. The rest of the year, she spends with her two daughters or friends.

The younger daughter of Mrs Jennings is married to Mr Palmer of Cleveland whose ambition is a seat in parliament.

Nancy and Lucy Steele are two young cousins of Mrs Jennings. Nancy is about thirty and is only a minor character in the story. Lucy slightly over twenty is Elinor's rival in love. The sisters have no property of their own.

Not a very flamboyant personality is presented in Colonel Brandon, a friend of the Middletons. At the age of thirty-five he is still without a wife. His home is Delaford and its estate which brings him about two thousand pounds a year. Apart from being rich, he is described as a sensible and good-hearted gentleman, "well-bred and well-informed." [21]

Mr John Willoughby is an alleged suitor of Marianne Dashwood. A young man of twenty-five years who owns a little estate at Combe Magna and

as an heir to an elderly relation he will inherit Allenham Court. He keeps a carriage, horses and hunting dogs. Of his servants a groom is mentioned. He is not particularly rich, his estate yields about six or seven hundreds per annum and his expenses are told to be more than he can afford. Being independent he is often away from home and on his journeys he is accompanied by the groom. He is involved in politics in the opposition to Mr Palmer. [22]

5.2 Areas of the eighteenth century English country life

5.2.1 Marriage

Marriage in Jane Austen's days was so inextricable a part of one's life situation that both men and women strived to find a spouse. Earlier it was common that parents chose a partner for their child who answered their parental wishes. Towards the end of the eighteenth century more opportunities for young people of higher rank to meet emerged as the popularity of balls, assemblies and parties rose. This helped to provide the youth with more freedom of choice. However, the consent of family was still crucial and the money alongside the social position was often a decisive aspect. (It was probably the money question which caused the separation of Jane Austen and her lover Thomas Lefroy. [23]) Examples of the importance of these factors, family's opinion and wealth and social status, can be found in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. In the former, Mr Bingley's sisters object strongly to the family of Jane Bennet and so does Lady Catherine de Bourgh in the case of Mr Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet. Lady de Bourgh's scheme is to marry her daughter to Mr Darcy and thus to join the two respectable family lines and their wealth. In the latter, the family disapproval is expressed in the strictest imaginable way. Edward Ferrars who is not willing to break his four-year-long engagement to a girl of inferior circumstances without any property is cast off by his family and left without any means. An alleged match of Elinor Dashwood and Colonel Brandon is, on the contrary, pronounced by Mr John Dashwood as giving "universal satisfaction" and being "exceedingly welcome

to all parties.” [24] This suggests the strong dependence on relations’ approval which leaves only a little room for the couple’s will.

There were several incentives to marry. On the whole it was a socially desirable state with advantages especially for women. As the gentry and aristocratic women did not earn money, they needed to be taken care of both materially and spiritually. In addition to this, marriage was also women’s only means to rise in social status.

To mention the negative side of marriage as well, it sometimes happened that the social pressure made the objective reasons for marrying overweigh the personal objections and the match was merely a duty or even proved a misery. [25] Sometimes a match was formed that did not suit one of the spouse, such as Mr Palmer in his marriage with Mrs Jennings’ daughter. Jane Austen on page 108 wittily comments on it through Elinor Dashwood’s thoughts: “His temper might perhaps be a little soured by finding, like many others of his sex, that through some unaccountable bias in favour of beauty, he was the husband of a very silly woman – but this kind of blunder (...) was too common for any sensible man to be lastingly hurt by it.” [26]

Another nice illustration is given in the case of Charlotte Lucas and her marriage to Mr Collins. She is described by the author as having high opinion of neither matrimony nor men but she chooses to marry in order to find establishment despite her quiet dislike of her future husband. Elizabeth Bennet, on the contrary, is not willing to marry for the sake of material comfort but is looking for a man of character. It is also her who mentions in a conversation with her father, that she dare not expect to marry a rich man. This sober attitude probably reflects a general approach to marriage at the time – it was the privilege of the wealthy to make a “free choice”; those of smaller fortune had to satisfy themselves with getting married at all.

5.2.1.1 Age of marrying

The age of marrying for women at the turn of centuries was about twenty-four years of age and men used to be slightly older. [27] It is therefore obvious that Charlotte Lucas at her twenty-seven with no substantial sum of

money and being not particularly pretty had almost no chance more to attract a man. It was feared by her family that she would grow a spinster. Colonel Brandon finds himself in a similarly unpleasant situation being thirty-five and still single. By the two younger Dashwood girls he is even considered an old bachelor. A strict opinion regarding the age is given by Marianne Dashwood: "A woman of seven and twenty can never hope to feel or inspire affection again, and if her home be uncomfortable, or her fortune small, I can suppose that she might bring herself to submit to the offices of a nurse, for the sake of provision and security of a wife (...) to me it would seem only a commercial exchange (...)." Although this is probably an extreme point of view it conveys the idea of what a key role the age played.

5.2.1.2 Courtship

The marriage itself was preceded by a courtship. During this period the mutual interest was more or less obvious and the couple met as often as possible to know each other. Typically the man visited the woman in her family's place as Mr Bingley did when courting Jane Bennet. Towards the end of the book he often spent the whole day at the Bennets. Similarly, Mr Willoughby who stayed almost every day at the Dashwoods paying his attentions exclusively to Marianne was believed to be her suitor. Mr Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon also stayed the whole day long at the Dashwoods when the mutual affections of the two gentlemen and the two eldest Dashwood girls were obvious.

5.2.1.3 Engagement

The courtship usually ended in an engagement which could be secret or announced to parents and acknowledged in public. Edward Ferrars and Lucy Steel present an example of a secret engagement. For four years they struggled to keep it to themselves because of fear of family disapproval. Jane Bennet and Mr Bingley, on the other hand, made their engagement known immediately.

5.2.1.4 Wedding

When everything necessary was settled, the wedding took place. First, there was a ceremony in a church and after that a celebration was held. [28] In *Pride and Prejudice*, two weddings are mentioned but neither is followed by such a celebration. For instance, the Collinses left for their new home immediately after the ceremony. *Sense and Sensibility* displays the same situation when Mr John Willoughby with his wife left London right after their wedding. In some cases the cause of omitting the celebration might have been the circumstances of the marriage, such as its being some sort of financial bargain (Mr John Willoughby and Miss Grey) or saving family's reputation (Mr Wickham and Lydia Bennet).

5.2.2 Family

Although the cult of family and domestic happiness fully spread in the Victorian era, some marks of it appeared already in Jane Austen's time. The family picture in her work can be seen as a herald of what was to come.

5.2.2.1 Nuclear family

Typically, an eighteenth century household contained the nuclear family only. [29] In *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* this rule is proved. But as the gentry and the aristocracy used to travel a great deal, the nuclear family was often enlarged by visitors. Mrs Jennings is a fine example of a long-term visitor because she was in the habit of dividing her time between her two daughters' families.

5.2.2.2 Children

After settling down the married couple were expected to have children and it was not uncommon that the woman bore as many as ten in a quick succession. (Mrs Jennings expresses her opinion on the expected marriage of Lucy Steele and Edward Ferrars: "Then they will have a child every year and

lord help them!” [30]) Exhausted as she must have been by such an exertion, it could happen that the mother died. This was the case with Edward Austen’s wife as already mentioned. It suggests that it was not only the poor who died but even the members of higher ranks. More frequent than the mother’s was, nevertheless, the baby’s death. According to Claire Tomalin, up to fifty percent of children died younger than five. [31] It was most probably due to the insufficient hygiene and limited medical knowledge, an improvement in which was step by step brought about by the many changes of the Industrial Revolution.

In *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* Jane Austen portrays almost exclusively smaller families, the Bennets being an exception. The children-mortality is not reflected in either of the two books and there are only two births mentioned: “(...) the lady of Thomas Palmer, Esq. was safely delivered of a son and heir.” [32] The second example is a fourteen-year-old girl seduced by Mr John Willoughby.

Mothers sometimes let their children be nursed by another woman who was feeding her own baby and had a plentiful milk supply. This woman was called a wet nurse. [33] Charlotte Palmer’s child had a nurse and it might have been particularly the wet nurse which was, however, not directly stated.

5.2.2.3 Primogeniture

In context of the family theme, a mention of primogeniture should not be omitted. The term is defined by Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary as “the fact of being the first born child” and legally as “the system in which the oldest son in a family receives all the property when his father dies.” [34] In the Austen family there was an example of this “system” when James Austen as the eldest son took over the Steventon rectory. From among the fictional characters Mr John Dashwood inherited his father’s property. And it was Mr Bingley and not his sisters to inherit their father’s fortune. Another case is that of Edward Ferrars who lost the primogeniture due to his intention to marry a woman disapproved of by the family. Thus the right of the eldest son passed over to his younger brother. This being probably an exception, the younger

sons had to choose a profession and make their money themselves. Most of them went to the army, navy, law or Church, or joined the East India Company. [35] The younger Austen sons joined the navy, army and two became clergymen. Colonel Fitzwilliam, Mr Darcy's cousin and the younger son of a squire summed up the matter as follows: "A younger son must be inured to self-denial and dependence," and "younger sons cannot marry wherever they like." [36]

5.2.3 Household

5.2.3.1 Country housing

Different aspects of housing have already been noted. In this part, they will be put together as a short description of several houses and grounds which the characters of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* inhabited. The result should be an illustration of the upper classes country housing conditions.

Pemberley is the first to be described. The house, a spacious stone building, was surrounded by a large park with woods and a river and many pleasant walks. Because of its size, only a few parts of the house are mentioned – a hall, dining parlour, lobby, sitting room and several bedrooms, all fitted up with elegance and taste. Another room was a gallery of paintings and other pieces of art portraying, for instance, the family members. The rooms described were open to public and it was possible to be shown around. Further, there was Norland Park. The estate was told to be large with nice woods on it. A farm was also purchased to extend the property and a greenhouse and a flower garden were intended to be built. Barton Cottage was a moderate multi-storey tiled-roofed dwelling with a small green court in the front and a back garden, parlour, sitting room, offices, four bedrooms, and two garrets. It was pronounced by Mrs Dashwood to be too small for parties of friends. The house of Cleveland could boast of its considerable size and a modern disposition. Although it had no park, there were sufficiently large pleasure grounds with a Grecian temple. The estate accommodated woods of

various kinds of trees, walks, a plantation, open shrubbery, and kitchen garden. Apart from this, a poultry yard supplied the household with meat and eggs. As well as Edward Austen's Godmersham, the garden of Delaford was surrounded by walls. "Modern land-owners did not want their tenants' cottages cluttering the view." [37] Fruit-trees and the exotic mulberry-tree were grown there. Several fishponds and a canal were built on the grounds and behind the house a yew arbour was placed.

5.2.3.2 Servants

Every household of the higher social classes accommodated several servants, the wealthiest up to fifty, and even the less prosperous took care to have at least one. Not only was it a matter of status but a mere necessity, as the housework was done by hand. [38] Most servants were females but men were thus employed likewise, although in a far lesser degree.

According to the duties to fulfill, several servant positions were distinguished: butler, groom, coachman, footman, running footman, gamekeeper, steward, and gardener. [39]

Now the individual positions will be introduced. A butler was a person to look after the dining room and wine cellar. Among his duties were decanting and bottling of wine and ale and serving liquor. It is obvious that this servant would be found only in the well-off families because none of lower circumstances could afford to drink wine and liquor. The Bennets kept a butler. A groom took care of the horses and riding equipment, accompanied his employer on horseback, held the master's horse or riding jacket. As well as anyone who rode a horse, Mr John Willoughby and Mr Edward Ferrars were known to have grooms. When they rode to visit someone they had the groom riding with them. For example, Mr Edward Ferrars arrived to Barton to visit the Dashwoods and met them on a walk. He handed his horse to the groom and walked the women back home.

A coachman was employed where the family kept a coach. The ownership of a coach was, again, a matter of status. The wealthy ones such as Lady Catherine de Bourgh could own more than one and often purchased

carriages which they could drive themselves such as a phaeton or a curricle. Phaeton was a four-wheeled coach driven by two to six horses, the curricle had two wheels and was driven by two horses. [40] A phaeton is mentioned to be possessed by Miss de Bourgh and a curricle by Mr Willoughby. Another type was a gig, a two-wheeled light carriage pulled by one horse. [41] One was owned by Mr Collins.

“Only the poorest people walked such roads,” writes Kirstin Olsen. [42] Further she suggests that people walking were often considered dishonest. Here it could be proper to mention Elizabeth Bennet and her fondness of walking. Her trip to Netherfield Park was unanimously condemned by both Mr Bingley’s sisters: “To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ankles in dirt (...) It seems to me to shew an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to decorum.” [43] People who did not own a coach used to hire one in order to avoid walking or when travelling long distances. Several types of coaches were to be chosen from. Stagecoaches could accommodate more people and therefore were not very convenient. The travellers were all sorts of people, both more and less agreeable. Hackney coaches served as taxis in London. Lydia Bennet and Mr Wickham hired a hackney coach on their elopment. The fastest and also most expensive type of coach was a post chaise. It offered privacy as only two passengers could travel. The Miss Steeles boasted of travelling to London by a post-chaise and not by a stagecoach.

Another servant position was a footman who served food and ran errands for the master. For example Mrs Jennings had a footman as well as the Bingleys who sent a letter to Jane Bennet by means of a footman. A gamekeeper was employed by hunters. He took care of the game on the master’s estate. An owner of an estate usually had a steward. This was a relatively high position. A steward was responsible for managing the estate and communicating all the matters to the owner. In *Pride and Prejudice* the reader learns that Mr Wickham’s father was a steward of Pemberly. In *Sense and Sensibility* a steward was in charge of Mr John Dashwood’s country estate. A gardener is the last male servant to be introduced. His service was

necessary where the gardens or parks were to be maintained such as at Pemberly or at the Palmers’.

The male servants usually served men, the female servants served women. A woman in domestic service worked as a kitchen maid, laundry maid, dairy maid, housemaid, chambermaid, housekeeper, cook or lady’s maid. The former positions were situated at the bottom of the hierarchy, the latter at the top. As to the female servants in the two Jane Austen’s books, a dairy maid was employed at the Palmers’ as well as a housekeeper. Mrs Jennings kept a housemaid and a lady’s maid. Sometimes the role of housekeeper was played by an owner’s single sister like that of the late owner of Norland Park. (For more information see pp. 124 – 129.)

5.2.4 Daily routine

5.2.4.1 Rising

Although there is no specific information at what time it was common to rise, it can be supposed that the lower classes got up early in the morning in order to manage the work and housework. The higher classes did not usually have anything necessary to do, therefore they could afford to rise later.

5.2.4.2 Meals

The time of raising affected the course of the day, especially the meals. Kirstin Olsen notes that the rich used to eat all their meals at later hours which proves the above mentioned assumption. [44]

The first meal of the day was breakfast. Typically, it consisted of tea with sugar, coffee, or hot chocolate and buttered bread toasted over the fire. Jane Austen herself used to prepare tea and toasts for breakfast when living at Chawton [45]. Dinner, the main meal, was served at 2 or 3 p.m. but as already mentioned the meals of the rich were shifted in time and a piece of evidence of this is given when Jane and Elizabeth Bennet stay at the Netherfield Park. Dinner came as late as at half past six. (Another proof is a breakfast at the Gardiners or the Barton Park at ten a.m.). Several dishes were served such as

soups, various kinds of meats, meat pies, fish, vegetables, salad, jellies and fruits. [46] When a large party was assembled at the Bennets, including Mr Darcy and Mr Bingley, there was roasted venison, soup and partridges. After dinner, in higher-class-households, the ladies left the dining room while the men remained and enjoyed smoking pipes and drinking alcohol. All met again for coffee like the Netherfield party did. The traditional tea came later in the afternoon. Not only tea was drunk but also some refreshment in form of bread was eaten. Pouring out tea to visitors was usually a task for a young single lady which should be an opportunity for her to show her fine manners and gentle movements. [47] Jane and Elizabeth Bennet did so. The last meal – supper – was only a light one consisting of eggs, salad or cold meats. It was eaten a short time before going to bed. [48] As the reader of *Pride and Prejudice* learns supper, in fact, often formed a part of a social event such as a visit, party or ball and it was followed by further entertainment. For example Mrs Philips giving a party promised a hot supper after a game of lottery tickets.

5.2.4.3 Food and beverages

Jane Austen also confirms the fact that the rich could afford more, both in quality and quantity of food. Fruits, for example, were not so commonly available as it is nowadays. Elizabeth Bennet and the Gardiners calling at Pemberley were offered refreshment in form of “the finest fruits in season.” [49] Marianne and Elinor Dashwood were asked by Mrs Jennings whether they preferred salmon or cod, or boiled fowls to veal cutlets. It can be supposed that such a menu could have been called luxurious. The lady also provided them with wine, olives, dried cherries and various sweetmeats. French cuisine was also popular among the wealthy and Mr Darcy was supposed to keep a French cook.

Among beverages favourite with the rich were the expensive sorts such as wine, liquors, champagne, brandy, punch. Tea was an expensive commodity likewise as it was imported. Therefore the tea leaves were used several times – first by the buyer, usually a rich person, second by servants or staff to whom it was sold, and finally by the poor. [50]

5.2.4.4 Occupations

Besides meals, the day was spent in various occupations. It should be said, however, that the range of them was very different in different social spheres (the upper classes solely had the privilege of leisure time and entertainment) and also between men and women. As the higher class women were not involved in money making, their principal task was to supervise the household and to raise children. The girls and married women in their spare time pursued handicrafts such as embroidering and other needlework, painting, then singing or playing musical instruments. The most popular were the piano and the harp. Elizabeth and Mary Bennet played the piano, the latter even practiced very hard in spite of the lack of talent. Playing the same instrument was a passion of Marianne Dashwood which she, at a time, shared with Mr Willoughby. Miss de Bourgh's natural talent for playing was highly exalted by her mother and Miss Darcy's improvement on harp praised by Miss Bingley. Taking walks and reading books, especially the lately formed genre of novel, was also very popular. The men were fond of reading likewise as this was an essential part of one's education and formed one's taste a great deal. Many of the rich could be proud of their extensive libraries. The Pemberley library was called delightful by Miss Bingley and Mr Darcy added that it had been "the work of many generations" and that he himself could not "comprehend the neglect of a family library." [51] Mr Bennet maintained one as well although certainly not as large as his wealthier neighbour. People also liked to gather to listen to someone's reading aloud. Mr Collins visiting at Longbourn considered it appropriate to read a piece of sermon to his cousins and Edward Ferrars performed Cowper's verses to the Dashwood family. A different kind of leisure was billiard. Mr Palmer owned one and spent his mornings in playing it. He considered it a necessity for comfort and wondered at Sir John Middleton's not having one.

A special sort of entertainment was shooting and hunting. Kirstin Olsen presents hunting as "a complex social issue." [52] Not every man, however, was allowed to hunt. There was a condition "to own land worth £100 a year or lease land worth £150 a year." Keeping and breeding hunting dogs was

connected to this sport which both Sir John Middleton and Mr John Willoughby pursued. Mr John Willoughby's public figure was even associated with his two pointers by which he was often accompanied. In the other Jane Austen's book, Mr Bennet went shooting with his son-in-law-to-be, Mr Bingley, and Mr Gardiner was invited to join a fishing party at Pemberley, fishing being another male occupation.

The gentry and the aristocracy liked to organize trips. Either they just drove about the country admiring its beauties or visited some interesting site. Such trips, as was already mentioned, took place frequently at the Edward Austens. In *Sense and Sensibility* the party of the Barton Park planned a trip in open carriages to see the magnificent grounds of Colonel Brandon's acquaintance, which would include a sail in boats and a cold meal. Instead of this, however, a mere drive about the countryside took place. Not only trips but travels to remoter places were popular. In the early nineteenth century, popularity of seaside resorts increased. They became places of interest of the high society, like the spa towns had done before. The aristocracy both invested in promoting the pleasures of these resorts and enjoyed them. [53] Lydia Bennet and her mother would like to spend some time in Brighton, a seaside town in South England. Elizabeth Bennet was invited to a summer travel with the Gardiners. They would go in their own carriage spending the nights at the inns. During the four weeks they would visit all places worth seeing in Derbyshire.

5.2.5 Social classes

The problem of social division has been already touched many times and the following lines will offer a closer look on the class issue.

At the beginning it is necessary to say that the categories are no clear-cut division and that there are many subtle nuances that make it difficult to assign individuals to a particular class. Nevertheless, there are some factors that enable an approximate outline of the structure of society. For instance, wealth, the way it was acquired, ancestry, family, connections, education,

profession, manners, style of living, leisure and hobbies are some of these factors, which are, in fact, narrowly interconnected and influencing each other.

On this basis, three rough categories are traditionally distinguished: the higher or upper, the middle, and the lower class. Various authors, such as David Cannadine or Kirstin Olsen, give a similar account of them. The concept given by the latter was chosen to be used here.

On the top of the hierarchy right under the royal family, the aristocracy was placed. They were people of noble origin, extensive wealth and honourable titles. They had strong influence upon the course of social life. In all measures the aristocracy was followed by the gentry. Its members were mostly “magnates, petty squires, military officers, bishops, parsons, and MPs” [54] who owned some land and hired labourers to till it for them. As well as the aristocrats the gentry invested in stocks, trading companies and other ventures and were in charge of numerous positions in the Church. The Darcys and de Bourghs had such a privilege. The late Mr Darcy intended to give a parish to his godson Mr Wickham if he joined the clergy. Lady Catherine de Bourgh entrusted Mr Collins with a parsonage and the post of parson.

The middle class were predominantly educated people who earned their living as “merchants, shopkeepers, bankers, clerks, attorneys, schoolmasters, or industrialists.” [55] Some of these positions were connected with the development caused by the Industrial Revolution. To mention the Austen family, at a time Henry and Francis Austen ran a bank while their father was a schoolmaster. Mr Philips in *Pride and Prejudice* was a town attorney, Mr Gardiner a tradesman and Mr Pratt in *Sense and Sensibility* a schoolmaster.

The lower class encompassed the rest of society. The range of jobs in this category began with the field and factory labourers, domestic servants, fishmongers, soldiers or miners, and ended with prostitutes and other similarly destitute people. However the lower class folk was not the object with Jane Austen, the two books contain a few almost imperceptible hints. One of them are the circumstances of a foster child of Colonel Brandon and her late mother. They both fell to the very bottom of society, the former seduced at the age of fourteen and left with a baby without any means. But beyond these suggestions Jane Austen relates nothing more.

5.2.6 Social events

The Industrial Revolution had a great impact on the society and one of its effects was a decline of aristocracy. The public importance of the higher classes came step by step over to the lower classes who became the key social strata for further development. The aristocracy also became more urbanized, although they still inclined to the country life. Nevertheless, in the time of Jane Austen, these changes were not yet obvious and the high society divided their year between their country and town residences. [56]

5.2.6.1 Winter in London

In summer when it was possible to enjoy the country life people resided there. In winter, then, the cultural life moved to towns and cities, the most fashionable of which was London, by Austen sometimes referred to as “the town.” Many of the rich either owned a house there or hired one for the season. Thus Mrs Jennings, the Gardiners or Mr Hurst, Mr Bingley’s brother-in-law, had each a house of their own in London and the Middletons took a “very good house for three months.” [57] Those of the gentry and others who could not afford any such luxury or for whom it was inappropriate to stay on their own lived with some of their acquaintances. The Miss Dashwoods were accommodated at Mrs Jennigs’s, the Bennet girls at the Gardiners’ and the Miss Steeles lived with some relations.

Next to the fact of spending some time in London it was also decisive for one’s status where the house that one inhabited was situated. There was an “ultra chic area” around St. James’s Street, especially St. James’s Square. [58] The opposite of it was an area of Cheapside where tradesmen and their families lived. The latter was looked down on by the aristocracy and the gentry as the middle class was trying to imitate the noble manners which rendered them even more ridiculous in the eyes of the rich. There was a very fitting saying: “St. James’s giving the Ton, a Soul without Body. Cheapside aping the Mode, a Body without Soul.” [59] [See appendix.]

Colonel Brandon who took a house in St. James's Street could be considered a man of fashion. By contrast the reader of *Pride and Prejudice* witnesses Mr Bingley's sisters' despising the Bennets' connections: "(...) they have another [uncle], who lives somewhere near Cheapside (...) If they had uncles enough to fill all Cheapside, (...) it would not make them one jot less agreeable." [60]

Winter in London and spa towns such as Cheltenham or Bath was a season of entertainment and as such was spent in attending balls, organizing and visiting parties, concerts, in theatre going or informal visits at friends and relations. As an example, Mrs John Dashwood's friend gave a musical party. Mrs Jennings devoted most of her time to visiting her friends and her daughters' families and often took the Miss Dashwoods with her so that they could amuse themselves among people.

In general, regardless season, London was a centre of fashion and luxury. At the same time it was a place where the poor lived in most miserable conditions. [61] These two worlds, however, were strictly separated and to the latter Jane Austen does not pay attention. The higher class members who were fortunate to visit it, to stay there some time or even to live there were in the habit of reporting the latest news in fashion and society when they visited their friends or family in the country. Mrs Gardiner's first thing to do after arriving at the Bennets is to describe what the latest fashion was. [62]

5.2.6.2 Socializing

Not only London and not only winter offered a range of amusements. The balls, in general, were either public or private. Public balls were held in assembly rooms – public places for people to meet, which were built in towns – and were designed mostly for the rich as an entrance fee was collected. [63] A ball at the assembly rooms in Meryton was intended where Mr Bingley's presence was expected. Private balls were organized by a person or a family at their own place. Such balls were often given at the Middletons' and encompassed friends and neighbours. At the Lucases' there was once a large assembly and Mr Bingley gave a ball at the Netherfield park. This ball offered

dancing, supper, playing the piano and singing in which, among others, Mary Bennet took part. Neither in *Pride and Prejudice* nor in *Sense and Sensibility* a public ball is described. Sir John Middleton once intended to organize a private ball for a few friends in London but this idea was resolutely declined by his wife who considered it inappropriate in such a place as London where “the reputation of elegance was more important.” [64]

Apart from balls people invited each other for meals, mostly for dinner or tea. Mr Bingley was invited by the Bennets to a family dinner and Lady Catherine de Bourgh frequently invited the Collinses and their respective guests to tea or dinner. The event could consist of a dinner, coffee, conversation, tea, playing the piano and a game of cards. When it came to music at Rosings as well as at the Lucases', for example, Elizabeth Bennet and other musical girls were asked to play. At the Middletons it was usually Marianne Dashwood who sat down to the pianoforte and sang.

Card games were a highly popular form of entertainment which diverted all sorts of people from king to servants. [65] To mention only a few, quadrille, backgammon, whist, vingt-et-un, loo, or piquet were played. At Netherfield the assembled party was once suspected by Elizabeth Bennet to play for money. At Barton the evenings were spent in cards, dancing or playing consequences, a parlour game.

5.2.6.3 Invitations

Invitations were an issue connected to social events. In Jane Austen's books the invitations were given in form of a card or orally. It can be assumed that the former means was preferred for more formal or significant occasions. The person inviting either handed the card personally or had it delivered by a footman.

5.2.7 Behaviour

5.2.7.1 Addressing

An important part of socializing was addressing, which initiated a communication, and referring to people. Kirstin Olsen states that every well-dressed gentleman should have been addressed “Sir” and his wife “Madam”. [66] (To be more precise, the title “Sir” as such was used in front of names with people honoured by the king or queen. Sir William Lucas, for instance, was knighted which entitled him to attach “Sir” to his name.) Even parents were sometimes addressed “Sir” and “Madam” by their children. There are several pieces of evidence of it in both Jane Austen’s books. Elizabeth Bennet called her father “Sir” and her mother “Madam” and so did Elinor Dashwood. Marianne Dashwood and Mrs Palmer addressed their mothers “Mamma”. “Madam” was used by Margaret Dashwood towards Mrs Jennings and by Elizabeth Bennet towards Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Kirstin Olsen further indicates that Mr and Mrs were common address-forms towards the end of the eighteenth century and that they were used for middle-class members or to show respect and deference to someone superior.

5.2.7.2 Introduction

“Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the stress that is laid on them, as nonsense?” asks Mr Bennet his wife on the fifth page of *Pride and Prejudice*.

The issue of introducing oneself is not discussed in any of the selected secondary sources but it is very often touched in Jane Austen’s works. In general it was the privilege of the superior in rank to address someone in order to introduce oneself. Further it can be deduced that in the society it was polite to be introduced to unknown persons by someone already acquainted with them. On the very first pages of *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth Bennet informed her mother that Mrs Long had promised to introduce Mr Bingley to them. A former acquaintance of Mr Bingley and Mrs Long could be thus presumed. Similarly Mr Wickham is introduced to the Bennets. Self-

introduction, on the contrary, was considered impolite or even rude. A precise illustration of such a situation was Mr Collins directly addressing Mr Darcy. Not only did not Mr Darcy know Mr Collins but also the latter was socially inferior. According to Elizabeth Bennet, “Mr Darcy would consider his [Mr Collins’s] addressing him without introduction as an impertinent freedom, rather than a compliment to his aunt.” [67]

5.2.7.3 Conversation

There were certain rules in conversation as a part of socializing. Being a good conversationalist was a mark of good breeding and polite manners. A person should be an attentive listener and a modest speaker. They should not express their opinions vehemently, should respect those of their partner and when contradicting, act tactfully. To avoid jargon and not to pay too much attention to insignificant details belonged to a good conversation likewise. Mr Bingley, Mr Darcy, Elizabeth and Jane Bennet, Mr Edward Ferrars or Colonel Brandon respected all this rules and acted as a well behaved person should. The opposite example present Mrs Jennings, Mrs Palmer and Mrs Bennet who rendered bad conversationalists in all aspects. Exactly as Kirsten Olsen put it they were “argumentative, laughed too often at foolish things, bored their listeners, dominated the conversation, gossiped, interrupted, made cruel jokes, boasted.” [68]

5.2.7.4 Letters

Letters served as a means of long distance communication in Jane Austen’s time. Neither envelopes nor stamps were used and the rate depended on the number of sheets and distance. At the beginning of the nineteenth century it made from four to seventeen old pence per sheet and, surprisingly, it was payed by the recipient. The letters were written on large sheets of paper which were then folded and sealed with wax. [69] Jane Austen herself was a keen correspondent. It is a well known fact that she and her sister wrote to each other very often when apart. Her heroes and heroines did likewise. Jane and Elizabeth Bennet kept in touch per letters whenever one of

them went away. Marianne Dashwood sent letters to Mr Willoughby and Lucy Steele informed Mr Edward Ferrars of her marriage with his brother by means of a letter. Mr Darcy wrote a long letter to his sister. There are many more examples of letter correspondence in both books.

5.2.8 Education

As already mentioned earlier, education formed an inextricable part of one's social status and, vice versa, the social status defined the choice of the form of education.

At the lifetime of Jane Austen there were various means of education neither of which, however, was the government's initiative. That meant that each family held responsibility for education of their children. It is also important to note that education of boys and girls differed considerably, especially in the overall orientation. The girls' curriculum was focused mainly on practical skills necessary for running and supervising a household such as sewing, knitting, cooking, dealing with servants. Apart from these, common skills were trained such as reading or writing. Then there were socially required skills to be enhanced such as etiquette, religion, dancing, posture, singing, playing an instrument, drawing, or speaking French. Thus structured curriculum answered the needs of the middle-class and higher-class life. In *Pride and Prejudice* a conversation took place concerning a woman's education. Mr Darcy declared he did not know more than half a dozen of accomplished women and Miss Bingley described such a woman as a person who must possess following qualities: "thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word (accomplished) will be but half deserved." [70]

The boys' curriculum was indicated in the chapter about Jane Austen's family and their boys' school. In addition, it can be assumed that deeper theoretical knowledge of the world was desirable along with the social skills acquisition.

Theoretically, both girls and boys could attend a school or receive education at home. Schools at those days were often no established institutions, except for a few renowned ones such as Eton, Westminster or Rugby. Education these “exceptions” offered was an expensive matter and therefore affordable only for the sons of the rich (as they were boys’ schools). Mr Robert Ferrars boasted of having been educated at Westminster whereas his brother Edward received education only at a private school ran by Mr Pratt near Plymouth. He spent there four years from his fourteen to eighteen.

The remaining majority of schools educated all sorts of children, both poor and well-off. Apart from the boys’ schools, there were a number of schools for girls. They were boarding schools, which meant the girls lived there during the school year and were taken care of in all aspects. Nevertheless it is known that sometimes the living conditions there were terrible (poor diet, cold, ill-treatment, illnesses). Jane and Cassandra Austen themselves experienced a school stay where a dangerous disease spread among the pupils and the school mistress did not allow the parents to be informed. [71] However, not all of the girls’ schools were probably bad, as Mrs Palmer in *Sense and Sensibility* spent seven years at a great school in London where she was taught, for instance, to draw very well.

Some better-off parents decided to have their children (more often daughters than sons) educated at home. They hired private tutors to provide the offspring with the required knowledge and skills. As well as Miss de Bourgh’s, Miss Darcy’s education was superintended by a lady who lived with her, supposedly a governess. Mrs Bennet’s raising her five daughters without one is viewed by Lady de Bourgh as insufficient. In the latter case it is suggested that private tutors were hired.

Nursery rhymes, books, advice from relatives, or church sermons could be considered as supporting sources of education but many children, mainly the poor, never experienced anything beyond these. Miss Lucy Steele was pitied by Elinor Dashwood for her ignorance and lack of information which was due to the neglect of education.

For men who received a good basic education a further possibility opened – the university. Mr Edward Ferrars entered Oxford at nineteen and Mr Wickham studied at Cambridge.

In order to support the gained knowledge with the experience of the real world, young men after leaving the university often set off for the so called Grand Tour – usually a travel abroad. It could take up to three years and consisted of visiting famous places over Europe. A friend of the Austens', William Chute, went on a European Grand Tour. [72] [For more information see Olsen, pp. 222 – 228]

5.2.9 Religion

The Anglican church was the most significant religious body in the England of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Its firm connection with the state and the monarch as the head of the church involved and influenced the whole society. Religion with its values and habits was a common part of life. It is just to say that as such it was probably not pursued in any enthusiastic or keen way. [73] It was considered one's duty to attend the Sunday services, to listen to the sermons and to mind the poor in neighbourhoods. The actual belief in God was also more or less traditional. In the two discussed books, Jane Austen touched this issue only very slightly. Marianne Dashwood once spoke of atonement to "her God" – probably for the blindness of her former infatuation. She said: "Willoughby's remembrance shall be checked by religion, reason, constant employment." [74]

The religious life was based on parishes, the smallest units of the church, managed by a parson. He lived in a parsonage, often under the patronage of a local aristocratic family. His duties consisted of delivering sermons, performing christenings and funerals and visiting the poor and sick. He was also supposed to be on good terms with his patron or patroness which meant socializing with them, paying them attention and showing deference. This role was played extraordinarily well by Mr Collins whose behaviour towards his patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, was more than flattering.

He took great pains to oblige her in every possible respect. She, in return, provided him with her advice or praise and invited him to meals.

In the Anglican church the clergy were allowed to marry. According to Mr Collins it was even a desirable state as the parson could thus give a good example to his parishioners.

One's decision to take orders was not so often based on the desire to serve God and other people as simply on the wish of securing one's life. [75] But, of course, this was not the only incentive. Mr Edward Ferrars decided to become a parson because he preferred the view of a happy domestic life which this position could support to becoming an influential public figure.

6 CONCLUSION

This bachelor thesis dealt with nine chosen aspects of the English country life during the period of 1775 – 1817. Its main focus was to find out how these aspects are reflected in two works of Jane Austen – *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

The thesis was introduced by a short overview of the major historical events of that time with respect to Britain. Also the situation in literary field and the position of Jane Austen were looked at. Further, the family background of the author was presented. The lately named areas were theoretically oriented. The following part was concerned with the actual depiction of the English country life in secondary literary sources as well as with the examples of the facts in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Nine areas of the contemporary country life were presented – marriage, family, household, daily routine, social classes, social events, behaviour, education, and religion.

Although several printed sources were used for the aims of the thesis not all of them supplied the relevant information. Kirstin Olsen's *Daily life in eighteenth century England* was, on the contrary, of great use and it was one of the most frequently cited sources.

The findings of the thesis are valid for *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* only as no other piece of Jane Austen's work was considered. It was found out that the author portrays chiefly the lives of the aristocracy and gentry such as the Darcys, the Ferrars or the Bennets and partly the upper middle class such as the Gardiners. The former two groups were at that time closely connected to the country where Austen herself spent a considerable period of her life. She was therefore familiar with the environment of the country and the upper classes life, among others, due to her brother Edward and his improved circumstances. In comparison to the whole spectrum of society her authorial focus may be called very narrow. Thanks to its limitation her reflection of the upper classes country life was a deep one and it was therefore possible to discover a range of examples of the nine examined issues. Further it was found that Austen reflected the reality either directly through description or indirectly through the characters' opinions, expressed or

thought. The border line between the author's imagination and the reality reflection, especially in the details and the characters' opinions, should be considered carefully. Even then it may render uncertain. Measuring the objectivity of Jane Austen's historical facts perception and inclusion was not purpose of this bachelor thesis. However, it could be a subject to further analysis.

7 ENDNOTES

1 Kramer, Jürgen. *Britain and Ireland – A Concise History*, p. 149.

2 Ibid., p. 130.

3 Ibid., p. 138.

4 More, Charles. *The Industrial Age*, p. 7.

5 Burgess, Anthony. *English Literature*, p. 174.

6 Tomalin, Claire. *Jane Austen – A Life*, pp. 63, 66.

7 Jane Austen Society of North America

8 Tomalin, op.cit, p. 26.

9 Ibid., p. 30.

10 Ibid., p. 6.

11 Ibid., p. 58.

12 Ibid., pp. 120, 121.

13 Ibid., p. 87.

14 Ibid., pp. 39, 134.

15 Ibid., p. 8.

16 Ibid., p. 134, 135.

17 Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*, p.14.

18 Ibid., p. 343.

19 Ibid., p. 348.

20 Ibid., p. 175.

21 Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 51.

22 Ibid., p. 110

23 Tomalin, op.cit, p. 121.

24 Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*, pp.211, 212.

25 Olsen, op.cit, p. 44.

26 Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 108

27 More, op.cit, p. 14.

28 Olsen, op.cit, p. 40.

29 Ibid., p. 31.

30 Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 261.

31 Tomalin, op.cit, p. 6

- 32 Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 232.
- 33 Olsen, op.cit, p. 51
- 34 *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*
- 35 Cannadine, David. *Lords and Landlords*, p. 30.
- 36 Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 177.
- 37 Tomalin, op.cit, p. 134.
- 38 Olsen, op.cit, p. 124.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 128, 129
- 40 Ibid., p. 178.
- 41 *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*
- 42 Olsen, op.cit, p. 175.
- 43 Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 33.
- 44 Olsen, op.cit, p. 236
- 45 Tomalin, op.cit, p. 214.
- 46 Olsen, op.cit, p. 235.
- 47 The Jane Austen Centre Exhibition, Bath
- 48 Olsen, op.cit, p. 235.
- 49 Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 258.
- 50 The Jane Austen Centre Exhibition, Bath
- 51 Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 35.
- 52 Olsen, op.cit, p. 148.
- 53 Cannadine, op.cit, p. 63.
- 54 Olsen, op.cit, p. 15.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Cannadine, op.cit, p. 30.
- 57 Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 218.
- 58 Olsen, op.cit, p. 16.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 34.
- 61 Olsen, op.cit, p. 57.
- 62 Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 136.
- 63 Olsen, op.cit, p. 157.
- 64 Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 160.

65 Olsen, op.cit, p. 165.

66 Ibid., p. 19.

67 Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 93.

68 Olsen, op.cit, p. 256.

69 The Jane Austen Centre Exhibition, Bath

70 Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 36.

71 Tomalin, op.cit, p. 34.

72 Ibid., p. 94.

73 Olsen, op.cit, p. 299.

74 Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 329.

75 Olsen, op.cit, p. 281.

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9 ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis is concerned with the English country life at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and with its depiction in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. The objective of the thesis is to map how and to what extent Austen reflects the contemporary reality. At the beginning the reader learns basic information about the crucial historical events at that time as well as about the field of literature and Austen's position among other authors. An account of her works in chronological order is also given. In the core of the thesis, nine areas of the contemporary country life are looked at. First, the factual background of a particular area is given, then examples from the two chosen works follow. The thesis may contribute to revealing the link between Jane Austen's works and historical reality.

10 RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá životem na anglickém venkově na přelomu osmnáctého a devatenáctého století a jeho obrazem v dílech Jane Austen, konkrétně v *Pride and Prejudice* a *Sense and Sensibility*. Cílem této práce je zmapovat rozměr a způsob reflexe dobové skutečnosti v těchto dvou dílech. Na začátku je čtenář seznámen s klíčovými historickými událostmi doby a situací v literatuře. Zmíněno je také místo Jane Austen mezi ostatními autory. Následuje výčet jejích děl v chronologickém sledu. Jádrem celé práce je pak zkoumání devíti oblastí dobového venkovského života. Nejdříve je vždy uvedena faktická stránka dané oblasti a poté následují příklady z obou vybraných děl. Bakalářská práce se takto snaží přispět k odhalení souvislosti mezi obsahem děl Jane Austen a historickou skutečností.

11 APPENDIX

