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# Jane Austen: 19th Century Novelist and Social Historian

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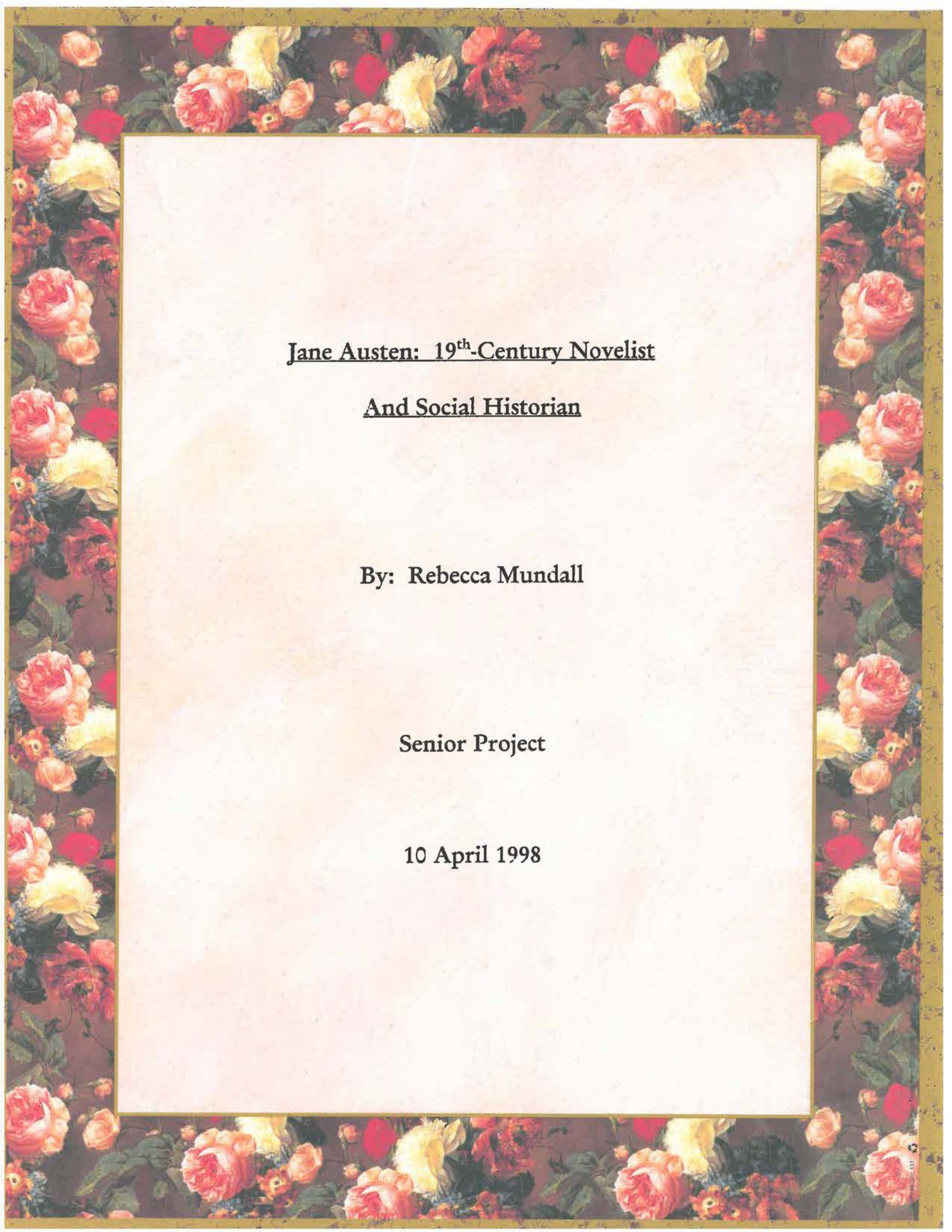
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Jane Austen: 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Novelist  
And Social Historian

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Senior Project

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### Jane Austen: 19th-Century Novelist and Social Historian

Jane Austen is among the most gifted novelists to emerge from 19th-century England. Her works have not only been a source of pleasure to readers for many generations, but they are also a treasure to the historian examining 19th-century English life. While the casual reader may see a ball held at Barton Park as simply another scene in the romance of Marianne and Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility, the ascertaining reader will see, in addition to this, the role of dances in English society and the importance placed on them. Pride and Prejudice's Mr. Collins may only be taking immaculate care of a garden, but this shows the Englishman's delight and value in gardening. Jane Austen takes simple, normal occurrences such as these and turns them into a commentary on English life.

Understanding Jane Austen, her family history, and family values is valuable in understanding the English life she portrays. Her family was, in fact, an average country minister's family with high morals and values--the very type of people who are often central in her novels.

Her father, the Rev. George Austen, was a Scholar and Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, and the parish rector of Steventon in later life. Her mother, Cassandra Leigh, was a witty, vivacious, energetic woman who herself wrote, in addition to taking tender care of her family (Bush 16-17). In the union of these two people one can foresee the values that would be instilled in their children--values of religion, knowledge, happiness, and family, among others. These very values, and indeed many of her own experiences, form the foundation of Jane Austen's works.

Jane Austen was born in her father's country parish of Steventon on December 16, 1775--a period destined to become the cross-roads of the waning Classicism and emerging Romanticism that are both found in her novels. The countryside around Steventon became a haven to her and remained her beloved home for 25 years, and its environs were to become the backdrop of many novels. Jane shared this haven with seven very close brothers and sisters. Consequently, sibling loyalty and friendship play prominent roles in her books. While Jane loved her many immediate family members (and later the many nieces and nephews), her brother Henry and sister Cassandra were to forever hold very special places in her heart. It is to Cassandra that much of her correspondence was addressed and to Cassandra that she shared the larger portion of her affections--a habit and a closeness represented in the correspondence of the sisters Jane and Elizabeth in Pride and Prejudice. And it was Henry who was her closest advisor and friend (Bush 18). In fact, Henry helped her to finally publish her books after long years of writing, submitting to publishers, being rejected, and revising. In all, Jane Austen authored six novels, most of them published but a few years before her death in 1817 (Pinion 20-3).

The values of family and family loyalty are laced throughout Austen's many novels, and this seems natural because of the great love evident in her own family. What seems less natural is that romance and the virtues of a loving, happy marriage also figure heavily in her books, in spite of the fact that she never married. As a single woman, she lived with her parents, brother, or sister all her life. A question often asked is, "How can she understand love and marriage if she never experienced them herself?" A careful look at her remaining



letters shows, however, that she was indeed involved in at least four affairs of the heart in differing degrees. While not all of them were considered serious, there is evidence that, in one romance, Jane Austen surrendered her whole heart to her lover. Sadly, while expecting to hear news of his soon coming arrival, she was greeted with the news of his death (Bush 26-7). As no letters have survived from the interval following this tragedy, we can only imagine how Jane coped with it. We can probably find the best clues to this question in the books that she wrote and the heroines found in them. When faced with devastation in matters of the heart, Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice and Elinor Dashwood in Sense and Sensibility employ a staunch resolve to neither succumb to emotions nor become too dejected to function. As Jane Austen's characters often reflect personal experiences, we can guess that she herself would handle despair in a similar manner.

Since Austen's chief sources of information for her novels came from her own observations, experiences, and instincts, along with the knowledge that she gained from reading (which was highly encouraged in her youth), it is interesting to note that she never traveled abroad, and that roughly four-fifths of her life was spent in Hampshire, Steventon, or Chawton (Bush 34). Yet, this is quite appropriate to the country setting of her novels. Many of her countryside descriptions correlate very nicely to the green, rolling hills around Steventon and the beautiful gardens and small villages that could be found nearby. The English countryside was a very important part of Jane's life, just as it was important for the lives of many an Englishman. The countryside represented serenity, relaxation, escape, and also a source of pride to the English, and Jane Austen expresses this value throughout her

books.

In her books, the countryside and nature seem to be almost actors in the plot. In Sense and Sensibility, during one of Marianne's walks, it is the sudden downpour and the steep hill that cause her fall and consequent injury--occurrences that propel her into the arms of Willoughby (Sense 40-1). On the other hand, the countryside around Pemberley--Darcy's mansion in Pride and Prejudice--convince Elizabeth of the genuineness of Mr. Darcy because of its own lack of artificiality (Pride 267).

Sense and Sensibility, one of Austen's earlier novels, and Pride and Prejudice, probably her best known work, provide the reader with a portrait of 19th-century upper-middle class life in the rural English countryside. She takes England's "deep countryside" and in this setting deals "with the lives of the less wealthy gentry, an essentially middle-class world that appealed to her middle-class audience" (Matthews and Platt 433). These country gentry are the prime focus of Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice, and in them Austen deftly handles emerging views, traditions, politics, religion, family, manners, and morals.

During the late 1700s and early 1800s, the philosophical and literary world experienced a revolution in perspective from Classicism to Romanticism. The former, emphasizing form, organization, and order, was giving way to the latter, which emphasized beauty, freedom, imagination, and emotion. Austen's works form a transition. Even though she is in general considered a Romantic author--due to the period in which she wrote--her novels show her to provide a balanced picture of the two.

This balance is what a later generation would call "Victorian". While Austen herself attempts to mesh both Classic and Romantic virtues, the prevailing attitude of her time was Romantic: letting the feelings and emotions rule, and desiring to get back to the country--back to nature. Sense and Sensibility is the more Romantic of the two novels, due in large part to its emphasis on the Green World and emotionalism. Pride and Prejudice is almost Classic in a sense because of its rational view of relationships, society, and the surrounding landscape. Yet, as said previously, Jane Austen tries to provide a balance, and neither novel is devoid of the other extreme.

Romanticism is most clearly seen in Sense and Sensibility in the character of Marianne Dashwood--the young, vivacious, tender second sister. Her whole being cries to be true to self and to emotions, and she finds her greatest pleasure and fulfillment in wandering around the rills and meadows, enjoying the wild beauty all around her.

This very essence of Romanticism--the thrill with life and nature--is personified in Marianne. She has a life, a spirit, an eagerness whose innocence commands warm admiration. When viewing the countryside around her home at Barton, she comments, "I have sometimes kept my feelings to myself because I could find no language to describe them in but was worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning" (Shoben 529-31). This love and enthusiasm contrast quite favorably to the dull, selfish, avaricious, and proud society in which she moves.

Another aspect of Romanticism that Jane Austen reflects is that imagination equals reality--that your mind produces its own reality. However, her development of it is almost a



warning against letting an imaginary world eclipse reality. Willoughby, Marianne's love, is a creation of her own imagination rather than a human being seen as who he really is, defects of character included. His ability to dance, sing, appreciate music and beauty produce from Marianne an exclamation, "That is what I like; that is what a young man ought to be" (Shoben 530). However, she fails to delve into his true character to discover the thoughts and intents of his heart. And the heartbreak that she experiences is a somber warning from Jane Austen not to let fancy and emotion govern the heart. At the same time, she emphasizes being true to oneself and avoiding social coercion. This is implied from the fact that by marrying Willoughby, Marianne would actually betray the values that she holds dear.

Marianne is also a vessel of the Romantic ideal in that throughout the book she violates the norms of her society, with each violation tending to be more serious than the last (Shoben 531). A proper young lady would never think of accepting a horse from a young man to whom she is not engaged, and yet Marianne accepts the gift of Queen Mab from Willoughby. A proper young lady would also never go on an unchaperoned visit to a young man's house, but Marianne does not think twice of visiting Combe Magna with Willoughby (Sense 66). The Romantic Age was an age in which individuals were encouraged to challenge societal norms and traditions and to act upon their own intuitions, for only in being true to oneself will one's reality be fulfilled.

Inextricably linked to Romanticism is the virtue and purity of living a country lifestyle. By Jane Austen's day, the picturesque attitude toward landscape, nature, and country living had become so fashionable that it was nearly impossible for a writer to avoid

it (Drabble 130). Jane Austen was no exception. She loved the countryside, and her descriptions show that she was obviously well acquainted with it. However, with her keen sense of the ridiculous, she takes an ironic view toward the excesses of this movement toward nature. A sense of criticism toward the uncontrolled, self-willed nature of Marianne's feelings for both people and nature pervades. Edward, Elinor's love, provides a striking--and Classic--contrast to this. While Marianne admires the beauty of the twisted trees and avenues, Edward describes his impressions of Barton with an admirable forthrightness:

I shall call hills steep, which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth, which ought to be irregular and rugged; and distant objects out of sight, which ought only to be indistinct through the soft medium of hazy atmosphere . . . I call it a very fine country--the hills are steep, the woods seem full of fine timber, and the valley looks comfortable and snug--with rich meadows and several neat farmhouses . . . It exactly answers my idea of a fine country, because it unites beauty with utility . . . (Sense 92).

This very reasonable look at the country through reasonable eyes casts a shadow of disdain on the popular, purely Romantic view of Nature as the perfect ideal. Even Marianne admits that "the admiration of landscape scenery is become a mere jargon" (Drabble 130)

This disallusionment with jargon seems to be precisely the perspective in Pride and Prejudice. In Charlotte Bronte's avidly Romantic view, she found in Pride and Prejudice:

An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully

fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses. (Pride 7)

This is a typically Romantic response to Austen's attempts to subdue extreme Romanticism. While the above quote does have some merit--the Green World is conspicuously absent--it is by no means forgotten. It is only made a more minor part of the overall story. In the beginning, the only inkling of the Green World materializes in the mud that Elizabeth gets on her shoes when she traipses to town. This is a reasonable and realistic look at nature: mud does get on shoes; it does make a mess. Nature is not all flowers and butterflies, no matter how much Romantics would like to idealize it.

Reasonableness extended to order and form play an important part in Elizabeth's admiration of Pemberley estate, and the consequent change of view towards its proprietor. Upon entering the estate, Elizabeth is awed by its tastefully elegant appearance:

The rooms were lofty and handsome, and their furniture suitable to the fortune of their proprietor; but Elizabeth saw, with admiration of his taste, that it was neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less splendor, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Rosings. (Pride 268)

Classicists placed much value on usefulness and elegance. Upon entering the dining room, Elizabeth was impressed with how well-proportioned it was (Pride 268)--another attribute of Classicism.

Perhaps Classicism can be seen best in the manner in which Pride and Prejudice (and Sense and Sensibility for that matter) ends. If this were a truly Romantic work, Mr. Wickham and Elizabeth would have floated off to a happy ending on their cloud of emotion and prejudice. But Jane Austen does not want such denouement; she wants her characters to take a rational and educated look at their situations and relationships and to choose with their minds and hearts coinciding. Thus, "A man changes his manners and a young lady changes her mind" (Pride 7), and Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are married with the knowledge that they are suited for each other intellectually, and that they are very much in love. Balance is what Jane Austen is all about.

However, these trends aside, Austen does a praiseworthy job of painting the reader a picture of the typical English countryside. She describes the landscape that Marianne and Margaret see during one of their walks:

The whole country about them abounded in beautiful walks. The high downs which invited them from almost every window of the cottage to seek the exquisite enjoyment of air on their summits, were an happy alternative when the first of the valleys beneath shut up their superior beauties . . . They gaily ascended the downs, rejoicing in their own penetration at every glimpse of blue sky . . . they caught in their faces the animating gales of an high south westerly wind. (Sense 40)

Society considered it a privilege to be in an environment like this, away from the dirty, bustling, busy cities. Cities were filled with squalor and pollution, and saturated with the

poor, landless of England. Only the rich and the upper-middle classes were able to truly enjoy the beauty and privileges of the countryside. And as a part of that upper-middle class, Marianne feels, upon leaving the city and visiting Cleveland, "All the happy privilege of country liberty, of wandering from place to place in free and luxurious solitude" and vowing to "spend almost every hour of every day . . . in the indulgence of such solitary rambles" (Sense 293).

While the setting of Pride and Prejudice is not as conducive to such indulgences, it too shares the glory of country living. One aspect of country life that the gentry especially appreciated was the state of relaxation that could be found there: in hunts, in socializing, and in the annual dances. While out in the country, many people found themselves with a lack of professional responsibilities and an elevated freedom to do whatever they wanted to. In Pride and Prejudice, the highlight of the summer months in the country seem to be the arrival of the rich city folk—for this is when the ball season begins. When Mr. Bingley, a rich young bachelor, comes to Hertfordshire, the youngest Bennet girls are in raptures of excitement about the ball that he is planning (Pride 58). When they discover that "his being gone to London" was "only to get a large party for the ball . . . the girls grieved" because they found out that it was "a number of ladies" that he desired (Pride 58). However, they "were comforted the day before the ball by hearing, that instead of twelve, he had brought only six with him . . . his five sisters and a cousin" (Pride 58). This picture, along with the one from Sense and Sensibility, gives a picture of the happy ideal of the wealthy and country gentry.



The picturesque life of the wealthy and their affectations also provides Austen with a background of satire on the English aristocracy. With her observant, ironic, and often comic eye, Jane Austen investigates the society and class system of her day. She very effectively juxtaposes the upper classes' foolish pride and the fickleness of the lower classes when fortune comes into question (Price 270). An amusing example found in Pride and Prejudice encompasses a proud, wealthy matron, a simpering rector, and a formal dinner. The wealthy Lady Catherine, in her benevolence to the poor rector of her parish and his family, offers to have them over to the magnificent Rosings for dinner. Mr. Collins tells his guests about the great kindness of this wonderful lady, and that the dinner she provides for them will be the greatest they could ever know:

The dinner was exceedingly handsome, and there were all the servants, and all the articles of plate which Mr. Collins had promised; and, as he had likewise foretold, he took his seat at the bottom of the table, by her ladyship's desire, and looked as if he felt that life could furnish nothing greater.--He carved, and ate, and praised with delighted alacrity. (Pride 197)

This is precisely what "her ladyship" wants--and Mr. Collins is more than happy to provide her with this flattery. Unfortunately, this scene happens all too often when the lower classes are trying to put themselves in good standing with the people who control the money.

Sense and Sensibility also uses a slightly comical perspective to show that there really is not such a great difference in the manners and attitudes of the arrogant wealthy and the fortune-hunting poor. When Edward announces to his arrogant and disdainful mother his

engagement to Lucy Steele--a simple, poor, and economical country lass--Mrs. Ferrars promptly goes into a fit and transfers Edward's inheritance to his younger brother, Robert. Later, when Lucy breaks the engagement, Edward requests his mother's forgiveness. And,

After a proper resistance on the part of Mrs. Ferrars, just so violent and so steady as to preserve her from that reproach which she always seemed fearful of incurring, the reproach of being too amiable, Edward was admitted to her presence and pronounced to be again her son. (Sense 360)

The irony of this whole situation is that the long-standing engagement of Edward and Lucy is broken by the latter when she discovers a better way to further her own affluence--to marry the new heir, Edward's own brother Robert. So, how does Jane Austen describe this new conquest of Lucy's? In her own words, Lucy Steele:

May be held forth as a most encouraging instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, however its progress may be apparently obstructed, will do in securing every advantage of fortune, with no other sacrifice than that of time and conscience. (Sense 363)

The preposterousness that Austen sees in her society when it comes to wealth is very clearly seen in these instances, along with some other, even more amusing ones. One deals with the so-named Robert above. While in one of the quality shops in London,

He was giving orders for a toothpick-case for himself . . . after examining and debating for a quarter of an hour . . . The ivory, the gold, and the pearls, all received their appointment, and the gentleman having named the last day on

which his existence could be continued without the possession of the toothpick-case, drew on his gloves with leisurely care. (Sense 212)

While this highly apparent ridicule of high society's extravagance and the indiscretion of the lower class leaves the reader with an unfavorable impression of society, Austen also provides a sensitive picture of what life consisted of for the typical gentry. Art, needlecraft, and sewing were essential capabilities possessed by the refined young lady. Both Elinor and Marianne in Sense and Sensibility exemplify these attributes: Elinor with her beautiful artwork and Marianne with her love of and talent in music (Sense 226). In Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen uses the pompous and overbearing voice of Lady Catherine to echo the expectations of society for the proper upbringing of a girl:

Do you play and sing, Miss Bennet? . . . Do your sisters play and sing? . . . Do you draw? . . . Your mother should have taken you to town every spring for the benefit of the masters . . . Has your governess left you? . . . No governess! How was that possible? . . . I never heard of such a thing . . . Without a governess you must have been neglected . . . Are any of your younger sisters out, Miss Bennet? . . . What, all five out at once? Very odd! (Pride 199-200)

While the women are relegated to playing, drawing, sewing, and singing, the men pour their efforts into the hunt. Being a sportsman was very important to the wealthy male. When questioned about the character of Willoughby, Sir John Middleton states, "As good a kind of fellow as ever lived, I assure you. A very decent shot, and there is not a bolder rider in England" (Sense 42). Pride and Prejudice's Mr. Gardiner--Elizabeth's uncle--is also a

lover of gaming. Upon meeting Mr. Gardiner, Mr. Darcy invites him to come with him on a hunt the following day:

Mr. Gardiner left them soon after breakfast. The fishing scheme had been renewed the day before, and a positive engagement made of his meeting some of the gentlemen at Pemberley by noon. (Pride 285)

Sir John's life revolved around hunting and gaming, as did the recreation of Mr. Gardiner and the lives of many other gentlemen in the 19th-century. This very amusement often became the yardstick for measuring the worth of one another. Even though this attitude toward accomplishments may seem shallow, these were the characteristics that made a man a gentleman and a woman a lady, and they were viewed with very high regard by all classes.

As can be seen, Jane Austen's characters are entirely absorbed with their own affairs and their own neighborhoods. She presents an almost abstracted picture of the world. It is only when a regiment of scarlet-clad militiamen is stationed nearby (like the regiment of Hertfordshire in Pride and Prejudice), or when a man who just recently returned from the military (like Col. Brandon in Sense and Sensibility) arrives in the neighborhood, that the problem of war is even alluded to (Wilcox 272). During this time, England was engaged in a war with Napoleon, and economic trials at home and abroad plague the government. Austen's characters, however, are able to continue in their merry way, enjoying the isolation and oblivion of the countryside. Elinor, Marianne, Edward; Elizabeth, Jane, Mr. Darcy-- they all seem untouched by anything outside the peace and tranquility of the country. They do, however, reflect how life progressed in reality. While every Briton did experience to

some degree the social changes evolving around them, many of the country folk were so far removed from the politics and social issues of London, that they continued on in the tradition frame of their society (Wilcox 272).

While Jane Austen does not directly focus on political and social issues of the age in her writing, she subtly addresses the major issues. A very subdued ridicule of Parliament is found in Sense and Sensibility in Mrs. Palmer's jovial discussion of her husband's involvement in politics and what it will be like once he is an M. P. (Member of Parliament):

We are so gay now, for Mr. Palmer is always going about the country canvassing against the election; and so many people come to dine with us that I never saw before, it is quite charming! But, poor fellow! it is very fatiguing to him! for he is forced to make every body like him . . . how charming it will be when he is in Parliament! . . . It will be so ridiculous to see all his letter directed to him with an M.P. (Sense 108)

This is a very light, amusing treatment of something that was considered serious and a symbol of position.

The political concerns of the day were often heard in the men's after-dinner conversations. One of the more important issues at hand was the enclosure movement, and being country gentility, this was a topic of interest to John Dashwood and John Middleton of Sense and Sensibility. In one of their conversations, Mr. Dashwood is saying to Sir John Middleton, "The inclosure of Norland Common, now carrying on, is a most serious drain" on his finances (Sense 216). While only a passing remark, it illustrates the reality that it was



expensive to enclose land and that it affected the future of many a country landlord.

Something that is very closely connected with politics and society is religion. In 19th-century England, there was no separation between church and state, and consequently, church positions were often used as vehicles of affluence. This is one reason why upper-class families thought it respectable for their younger sons to enter church-work, as they were unable to inherit the estate. This exact situation emerges in Sense and Sensibility. Edward, the eldest son of Mrs. Ferrars, is disinherited upon the disclosure of his engagement to the poor Lucy Steele. As the inheritance falls on the younger brother, Robert, Edward is now free to do what he wanted to do in the first place: take the religious orders and live a simple life (Sense 360-1). While this is by no means the average reaction by an older son to being invested in the church, it still illustrates the role that rectorship had in the upper-class gentry.

Realizing that religion was viewed more for its prestige and social values goes far in understanding in what stead the 19th-century upper-class held religious values. Religion almost seemed a social expectation: family members became rectors out of necessity--as seen above; it was a symbol of wealth and prestige to have a parsonage on your property (Pride 191-2); and church became a place to conceive relationships with those in power. As Mr. Collins tells Elizabeth:

Yes, Miss Elizabeth, you will have the honour of seeing Lady Catherine de Bourgh on the ensuing Sunday at church, and I need not say you will be delighted with her. She is all affability and condescension, and I doubt not

but you will be honoured by some portion of her notice when service is over.

(Pride 193)

Here, Mr. Collins--the rector himself--is discussion the church service in rather shallow terms of social ties rather than in matters of religious importance.

Jane Austen also uses her comic and observant eye to address the apparently shallow manners of her day, around which society seemed to revolve. Understanding the little manners and rituals characteristic of her day is immensely important in understanding the basic framework of that society:

Calling herself a miniaturist, she concentrated her author's eye on a soon to be swept away world where the smallest important unit was the family and the most significant problems involved the adjustment of social relationships.

(Matthews and Dewitt 433)

If one stops to think about it, family and relationships are what makes a person who he or she is, and it is the interactions of these individuals that characterize society. Jane Austen does a delightful job of representing her world through a few carefully drawn characters who symbolize pervading values of society.

Austen is not concerned with only good manners and values, however. She paints, with equal clarity, manners that are boorish, insolent, graceful, rigid, pompous, or easy (Price 267). Some of her bores and fools include the incredibly sociable Sir John Middleton, who is obsessed with sportsmanship; or Sir John's mother-in-law, Mrs. Jennings, who fulfills many of the common characteristics associated with that set; or even the simpering Mr.

Collins, who is always trying to polish the apple of the Lady Catherine (Price 273). Jane Austen realizes that one can only laugh at the simpering manners of Mr. Collins--which is precisely her point. In addressing weaknesses in society in a humorous manner, the people to whom the comments are addressed are much more disarmed and more accepting of the reprimand.

Addressed also in a humorous--though more positive--light is the importance that people placed on marriage and family. The preface of Pride and Prejudice says that, "Everything tends towards the achieving of satisfactory marriages--which is exactly how such a society secures its own continuity and minimizes the possibility of anything approaching violent change" (Pride 8). Security was found in marriage and the family--security in the emotional sense and in the progenitive sense.

Even though many people of her day did not think that love was the most important aspect in contracting a marriage, Jane Austen believed that it was vitally important--that marriage was not just a business contract. At this time in history, "connections" were of the utmost importance when one considered a marriage partner. It just would not do to marry someone lower in wealth or nobility, and the pressure was often to marry for pounds. If the couple actually loved each other, that was an added benefit. Austen defies this societal norm and emphasizes the importance of love, happiness, and fulfillment in marriage. When Sense and Sensibility's Willoughby abandons the true love of Marianne and finds himself in a marriage with a very wealthy woman whom he grows to despise, he finally realizes that happiness is not found in 30,000 pounds, but in the genuine love of a loyal heart. He

discovers that, in the words of Marianne, "Money can only give happiness where there is nothing else to give it" (Sense 87). In Pride and Prejudice, the pressure is on for Darcy to marry someone of equal wealth--namely, his cousin, Miss De Bourgh. Upon hearing that Darcy is engaged to Elizabeth instead, Lady Catherine makes an unannounced visit to Elizabeth--for the express purpose of breaking the engagement:

Mr. Darcy is engaged to my daughter . . . The engagement between them is of a peculiar kind. From their infancy, they have been intended for each other. It was the favourite wish of his mother, as well as of her's. While in their cradles, we planned the union: and now, at the moment when the wishes of both sisters would be accomplished, is their marriage to be prevented by a young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family! (Pride 364)

Elizabeth resolves not to be manipulated by this over-bearing woman--the same resolve that Darcy makes. He has come to realize that the fulfillment and completion that come with real love more than make up for want of money. Money itself is simply a frivolity.

Jane Austen makes this clear at the end of Sense and Sensibility as well. Both of her heroines are married to the desires of their hearts: Elinor to Edward and Marianne to Col. Brandon. Infinite happiness and fulfillment follows, and it would be futile to tell their hearts that greater wealth would be superior to the joy that they were now experiencing (Sense 353-67).

Happiness and domestic fulfillment were very dear to Jane Austen. Even though she

skillfully sketched pictures of the romantic ideal, and of country gentility, society, and even of politics and religion, what remained most important to her was family. Her own family was very loving, and indeed her world often revolved around them. She was not a "professional" writer in the sense that we consider it. No, she was first a daughter, sister, and an aunt, and in her spare moments she was a writer. Now, generations later, we can still look back at her life and her novels, and see the values she held dear, how she saw her world, and what she would have liked the world to be. Thank you, Jane Austen, for the lovely portrait of your England that you have left for all of us.

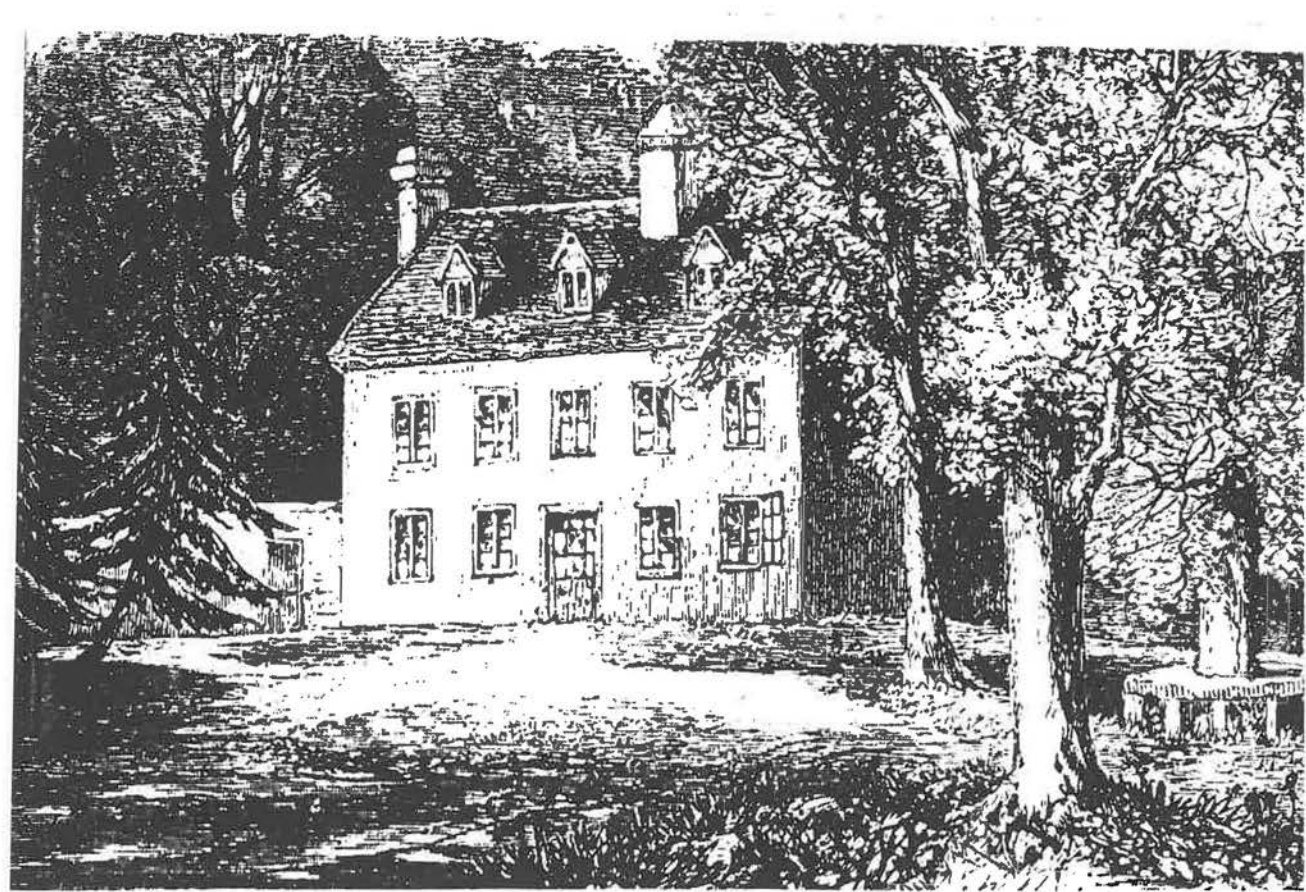


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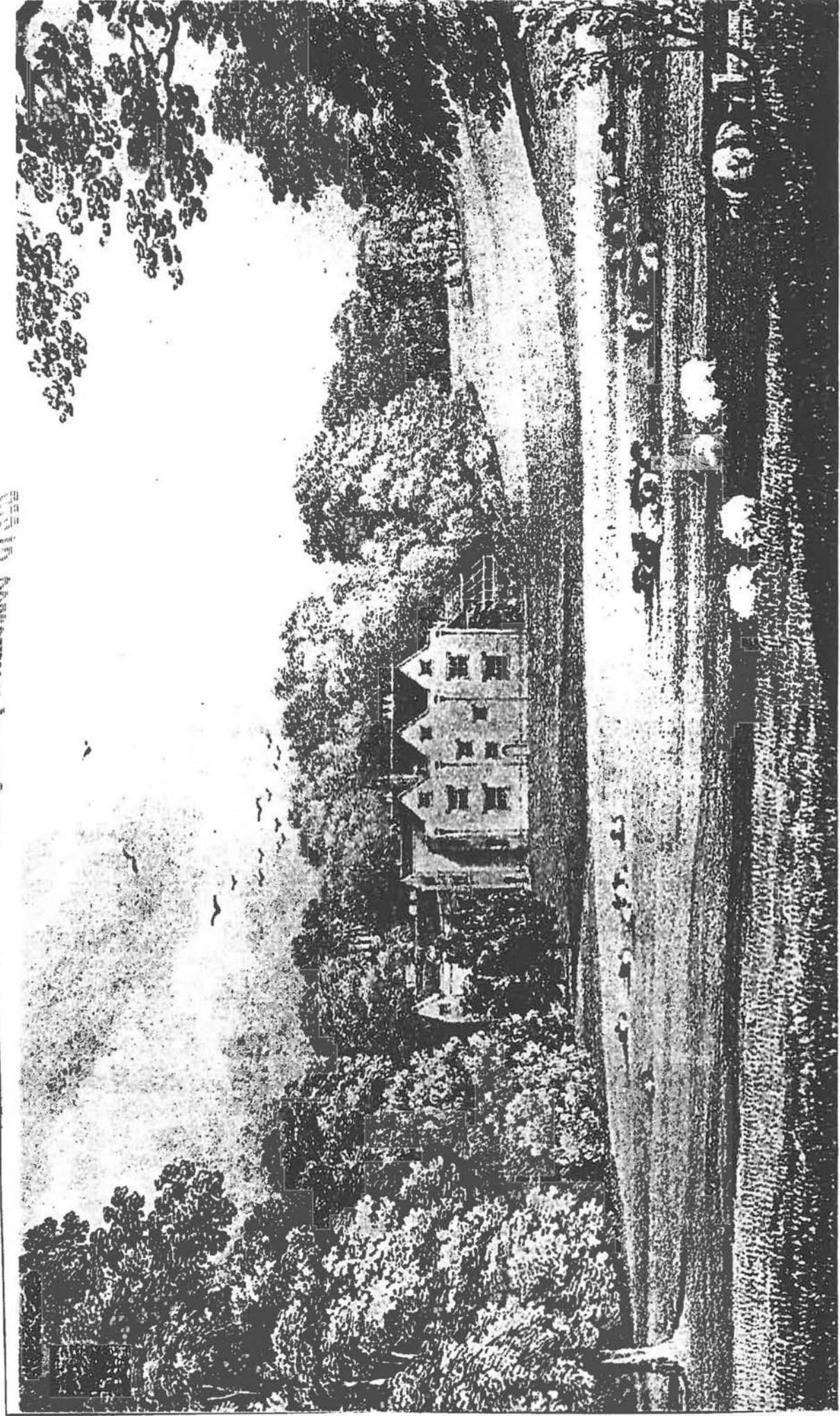
Neither portrait of Jane Austen was considered completely satisfactory by the relatives who knew her best. The upper sketch (1a) was made by Cassandra Austen, and is reproduced by courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery; from this, and notes based on recollections, the portrait below (1b) was prepared by Mr Andrews of Maidenhead for the 1870 Memoir. In this her nephew described her as a rather tall and slender brunette, animated in her whole appearance, with round cheeks, small and well formed mouth and nose, bright hazel eyes, brown hair 'forming natural curls close round her face', and a complexion of 'rich colour'. See p. 18.



*Both sketches of Steventon Rectory were made by Jane Austen's niece Anna (Mrs Ben Lefroy), who lived there for almost ten years before her marriage at the age of twenty-one. For this reason, the view of the front (2a, which appeared in the Memoir of 1870) can be assumed to be generally representative of the original, although it was described as 'not perfectly correct'. It seems more in proportion with the back of the house, 2b, sketched in 1814, than the front of the house presented in Anna Lefroy's sketch of 1820, which she simply designated 'Steventon'.*

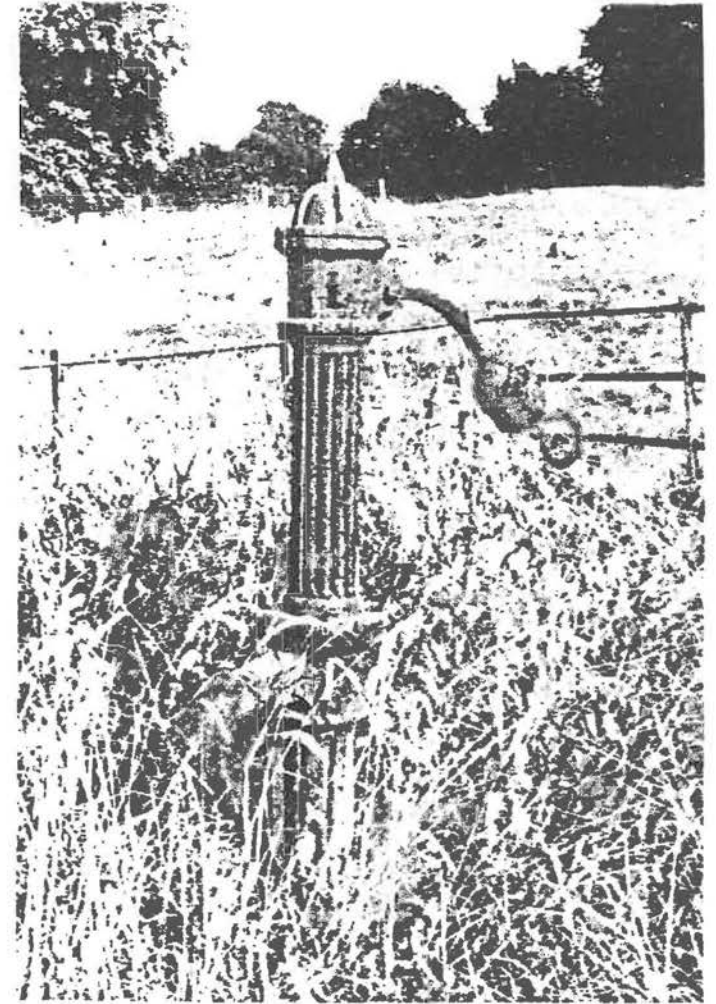


CHAWTON HOUSE, 1875



Chawton House, by G. F. Prosser (17). The church is below the trees on the left.





*A view of the ha-ha and the stables at Manydown in 1971 (19a). The house, which stood directly between them, was demolished a few years earlier. All that can be seen of Steventon Rectory, where Jane Austen spent the first twenty-five years of her short life, is the iron pump which stood in the wash-house (19b).*





*Manydown (3), the home of Lovelace Bigg Wither (by G. F. Prosser). Jane Austen rejected the marriage proposal of his son and heir, but remained a life-long friend of his daughters Elizabeth (Mrs Heathcote), Catherine, and Alethea.*

Over-leaf

view of English  
countryside  
(Drabble)



