

1B English HL1 - Summer Reading 2021 - 2022

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Before reading *Pride and Prejudice*, research the life of Jane Austen:

- Find at least one article about Jane Austen's life
- Print and annotate the article
- Be prepared to find similarities between Jane Austen's life and *Pride and Prejudice*

While reading *Pride and Prejudice*, annotate the novel, focusing specifically on the following:

- Characterization
- Satire
- The Role of Women and Societal Expectations
- Relationships

*** There are no specific annotation requirements - they are just for your understanding and retention! ***

After reading the novel, read and annotate the supplementary materials found on the next pages.

- Further your cultural understanding of *Pride and Prejudice* through the historical context
- Add to your annotations based on these new ideas

Be prepared to discuss the novel and the article in class.

Above all, *Pride and Prejudice* is a literary masterpiece rich with British history and intriguing characters; therefore, it is my hope you will enjoy your summer assignment and Jane Austen's witty commentary! Please remember to bring your annotated novel as well as your supplementary materials to class the first week of school, and I look forward to hearing your insights!

Supplemental Materials:

“Understanding the society in which Jane Austen sets *Pride and Prejudice*” by Pamela Whalan

Pamela Whalan has been a member of the Study Day Committee of JASA since 1999 and has been involved in the successful presentation of study days on *Emma*, *Mansfield Park*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*. She has directed successful seasons of *I Have Five Daughters* (an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*) and an adaptation for the stage of *Emma*. She has written a stage adaptation of *Mansfield Park* and directed this play for the Genesian Theatre Company Inc. in Sydney.

(This paper has been adapted from a talk given to students at Reddam House in June 2002.)

The purpose of this paper is to give some idea of the manners, habits and expectations of the English gentry of the late 18th and early 19th century. Having a working knowledge of the world in which Jane Austen

lived gives a 21st century reader some of the clues that Austen contemporaries would pick up immediately. Armed with this knowledge you will know why certain actions were performed or why something that might seem slightly irregular to you was considered the height of vulgarity or quite scandalous to someone who lived two hundred years ago. We have to be careful not to judge a character's actions by 21st century standards when the expectations and the opportunities of 18th century England were so different.

Let us take an excerpt from *Pride and Prejudice* that shows how different the world was and to give you some idea of approaching a reading of Austen's works without too much 21st century judgemental baggage intruding on an understanding of what she was doing.

If we judge this novel by 21st century standards it seems that it wouldn't hurt the [Bennet] girls to find a job and Mrs Bennet could get rid of the butler, the cook, the two housemaids and the housekeeper if she was worried about having no money. But look at that last sentence in the above passage. Marriage was the only honourable provision for women in the class of society to which the Bennet and the Lucas families belonged.

The number and kind of jobs available, especially for women, were far more limited then than they are today. Remember this was in the days before Information Technology. It was in the days before radio, television, telephone, electricity. Almost any job that a person leaving school today is likely to be thinking about as a career probably didn't exist when *Pride and Prejudice* was written.

The only respectable paid work open to a gentlewoman, i.e. of the class to which the Bennet family belonged, was the job of lady companion or of governess... a governess lived in a room close to the schoolroom, was on duty 24 hours a day, had, perhaps, a week's holiday per year and earned between 10 and 20 pounds per year. Of course she had her board and keep but you wouldn't get rich on that salary, nor could you do much to plan for your retirement and if you did not have agreeable and considerate employers your life could be very miserable indeed. The only other honourable occupation open to girls such as the Bennets was marriage and even here it was pretty hit and miss.

Once a girl married her property became her husband's. It was almost impossible for a woman to get a divorce even if her husband beat her, misused her money, was constantly drunk, was unfaithful or neglectful. She could only sue for divorce if her husband brought his mistress to live in the marital home. That was why it was so necessary for marriage settlements to be drawn up. A Marriage Settlement was a legal document drawn up before the marriage took place guaranteeing that the bride would have a certain sum "settled" on her i.e. she was entitled to the interest from that money during her lifetime and that money could be willed to her children. A marriage settlement also clearly stated what she would be entitled to if she were widowed or what would happen to any money she brought into the marriage were she to predecease her husband. The amount of a girl's marriage settlement was usually determined by how much money she brought into the marriage, i.e. her dowry or jointure. If the husband were very wealthy he might supplement this ... If a girl eloped and was married without a marriage settlement any money that had been legally hers at the time of the marriage became the property of her husband without any safeguards on how he could use it. He could disappear the next day and the girl could be left penniless...Elopement was not just a moral lapse but also a most imprudent step. A man who would talk a girl into eloping with him was not a gentleman according to the code of conduct of the time because by eloping he was ruining the girl's reputation and, even more importantly, he was profiting financially by preying on her innocence and ignorance of the world.

...You see, legally a man's wife was his property. If another man illegally used his property, i.e. his wife, she became "damaged goods" and the husband could take out a civil suit against the lover and could get quite a lot of money in damages based on rank and fortune, length of marriage, whether the men had been friends etc. The husband could get as much as 10,000 pounds to soothe his wounded pride. These civil actions were between men only. An injured wife could not get such compensation if her husband ran away with his mistress.

The Bennet girls had no brother. If they had had a brother he would have inherited the family property but he would also have been obligated to keep under his roof his mother and all the unmarried sisters and provide them with an allowance as well as bed and board. This would have affected his own chances of marriage, as he would have had the expense of keeping his mother and sisters as well as his wife and any children he might have...

Austen was acutely conscious of the cost of living and the price of everything, including the price of matrimony. So perhaps I should now give you some idea of the cost of living. One pound in 1810 had roughly the same purchasing power as \$100 today. This is a rough estimate and you also have to realise that there were periods of rapid inflation and recession as the Napoleonic Wars, which so closely followed the American War of Independence, provided a very unstable economic period throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Since Mr Darcy had 10,000 pounds per year his income today would be somewhere near one million dollars per annum. Of course from that he would have the upkeep of Pemberley and his living quarters in town as well as those of his sister whose London establishment would have been separate from his own. He would also have had many calls on his purse of the "noblesse oblige" kind, but you see that he was, indeed a good "catch".

Another thing to remember is that some things that are very inexpensive today were extremely expensive at the beginning of the 18th century and some things that were necessities then, are completely unnecessary today.

Travel is a good example. You could not expect to keep a horse and carriage unless you had an income of at least 1,100 pounds p.a., i.e. about \$110,000. In today's world you can own a car if you are earning much less than that, but feeding and stabling a horse and paying the wages of a groom were more expensive than paying the registration, insurance and petrol for a car.

Roads were rather hit and miss affairs too. Post roads were like tollways today. Businessmen built them and you were charged by distance, so even though you were using your own vehicle if you travelled on a post road each time you came to a tollgate you had to pay for the next stage. The cost in today's money was approximately 50c per kilometre.

Even if you used your own carriage you would have had to change horses about every twenty miles or else travel no more than forty miles in a day because you had to rest the horses. Very rich people could send horses that they owned ahead to be waiting for them at the various coaching inns, but that meant a long planned trip and incredible expense as they would have to send their grooms ahead and pay for stabling too. More commonly you hired horses for each stage of the journey. If you were travelling post, i.e. if you hired a chaise with two horses and a postilion (driver) the cost was 1/- per mile. The distance from Longbourn to Rosings we know was about 50 miles, so the cost of travelling there would be 50/-, 2 pounds ten, or in today's equivalent

about \$250. Of course three people, Sir William and Maria Lucas and Elizabeth Bennet, travelled together and they broke their journey at the Gardiner's London house so they did not have to pay for overnight accommodation or meals, still it worked out at about \$80 each, and that was one way. In the course of the novel Mr Collins makes at least three trips between Rosings and the environs of Longbourn so wooing and wedding from a distance was not an inexpensive business. He probably travelled by stage coach rather than post for most of the way but the costs would still have been considerable...

If you travelled by stagecoach costs were about half what they were travelling post. Travel by stage was not as comfortable, respectable or as convenient as travelling post. A young lady of Elizabeth Bennet's class would travel by stage only in extreme emergency and never unaccompanied, so there would always be two fares to pay, therefore negating any savings. The stage also only travelled to the centre of a town so you had to find your own way to your village or country home.

Looking at the cost of travelling also shows us the economic position of the Gardiners whose holiday to Derbyshire would have cost an enormous amount of money. To have so much expendable income means that Mr Gardiner's business was doing very well.

Clothing was also very expensive. Remember that everything had to be handmade, as sewing machines did not come into general use until the 1880s. Shoes, stockings, hats and gloves for men and women had to be purchased and were expensive. In 1811 a pair of silk stockings cost 12/-, or \$A60 in today's terms. Men's shirts and underclothing were sewn at home but their other clothes had to be bought, as they required tailoring rather than plain sewing. Women's clothes were made at home or by a dressmaker (called a mantua maker) who would charge about 2 pounds (\$A200) per garment. The industrial revolution had reduced the price and increased the quantity of fabric available for sewing but you needed about 6 or 7 yards of fabric to make a dress and the cheapest fabric cost the equivalent of \$A15 per yard, so even if you made the dress yourself it would cost about \$A100. There was much remaking of old clothes. When fabric faded the dress was often unpicked, "turned" and re sewn so that it looked fresher. There was also much dyeing of old dresses, retrimming of hats and coats and when the use-by date of outer garments had eventually come they were often unpicked and remade into undergarments. We read of the Bennet girls retrimming hats. You may be sure that they resorted to other clothing economies too. We know that one of these economies was to retrim their dancing shoes. (*Pride and Prejudice*, I, 17, p.79)

How did people earn their money?

The most gentlemanly way of being rich was to live off the rents of your land; hence the term "landed gentry". The average farmer rented his farm from a landowner who had inherited large tracts of land that included whole villages and, sometimes quite large towns. Spare capital was invested in "the funds", i.e. in government bonds, which paid 5%. A girl's dowry and her marriage settlement money would be invested in the funds, so Mrs Bennet whose marriage settlement money was 5000 pounds would have had the use of 250 pounds a year most of which would have been spent on her clothes and the clothes of her daughters. Mr Bennet was a landowner... From the standard of living of the Bennets who did not exceed their income but spent every last penny of it, it would seem that Mr Bennet's rents and investments brought in about 2000 pounds a year.

Landed property went to the eldest son. Sometimes there was a smaller property that could be willed to a

younger son or something came on the market and was bought for a younger son but the younger sons of the gentry were expected to take up a profession and the only jobs classed as gentlemanly professions were those of the army, navy, the law or the church. Doctors, for instance, were only just emerging as a respectable group of people. The apothecary, who was a cross between a pharmacist and a doctor, and the surgeon, were seen more as respectable tradesmen than as social equals, so the son of a gentleman would not consider such work.

The army was the most favoured way of keeping younger sons occupied. You needed to have money to be an officer in the regular army as you had to buy a commission and promotion was a matter of patronage more than ability. The officers who were stationed in Meryton were not regular army but members of the militia which was a force of volunteers only existing in times of war to add to the country's defences. To join the militia as an officer you did not need to have the social background or the money that you needed to enter the regular army. George Wickham joined the militia as the result of a casual meeting with an old friend... Army pay was enough to live on but not much more, particularly if you wanted to maintain the standard of living of the wealthy family you may have come from. Many sons of wealthy parents who joined the army also had an allowance that helped them to live in the style that they had been accustomed to... however the cost of maintaining a genteel household, wife and family would require the supplementing of his income by the money that would come with his wife as her marriage portion...

The navy was not quite so socially acceptable as the army because, although you still needed influence to get promoted, you also had to have a few brains. If you didn't know your job in the navy it was more evident more quickly and often with fatal results. And, of course, the opportunity for attending social functions was far more limited.

The law had various levels of respectability. Mrs Bennet's father had been a country lawyer and as such had sufficient local standing to marry off his eldest daughter to his assistant; his pretty daughter to the son of the local landowner; and to send his son off to be educated respectably and to set himself up in business. But to be a country attorney had none of the cachet of a successful London lawyer who would expect to make his mark in society, at the bar and possibly as a judge. Mr Darcy had an uncle who was a judge. To become a successful London lawyer one would need, not only some brains, but also social connections and money to back you.

The other alternative for younger sons was the Church. Remember that in England there is an Established Church, i.e. the Church of England has official state recognition as the religion of the people. The Head of State appoints the bishops and the Church of England receives state funding. In the 18th century there was also considerable patronage. If you were the local landowner you had the power to appoint the local clergyman. This meant that it was possible to buy the position of the parish parson. When you were appointed as the vicar of a parish, whether you had bought the right, had it bought for you, or were presented with it as a favour, the position was yours for life. With the job went the parsonage house, rent-free and the glebe, i.e. some farmland that you could farm yourself or rent out. You were also entitled to tithes from the parishioners. When you died the parsonage and any lands that went with it reverted to the local landowner who would appoint your successor. You therefore had to make your own provision for your wife and family who would have to vacate the parsonage, without any pension, as soon as you died. You could appoint a curate to do most of the work but if you did, you paid his wages. To become a parson all you had to do was to complete your undergraduate studies at a recognised university and then apply to a bishop who would ask you some basic questions about the beliefs of the Established Church before ordaining you. Many parsons were good and worthy men who carried

out their duties of caring for the spiritual welfare of their parishioners and alleviating hardship through applying parish funds for worthy cases but the system was obviously open to abuse. Often a landed gentleman would have one or more parishes available for his son or sons regardless of their suitability for the work of a clergyman...

If you did not have a patron and wanted to be a clergyman you might “hold a living” for a set period of time i.e. you would perform the duties of the parish, live in the parsonage and have the income from the tithes and the glebe until the person who was to become the parson was ordained and could take over the duties himself. The other alternative was to be a curate who worked hard for little money in the hope that one day someone would consider you good enough to become your patron.

Younger sons of genteel but not very wealthy parents might work in a counting house – what we would call a bank- but generally this put you beyond the pale socially...

However, times were changing rapidly. Remember, this was the time of the Industrial Revolution. Jobs that hadn't existed twenty years earlier were gaining respectability and recognition. It was possible to make lots of money and buy your way into social circles that had been exclusively the province of those born to rule. There are two examples of this in *Pride and Prejudice*. Mrs Bennet's brother, Mr Gardiner, had he followed in his father's footsteps, would have been a country attorney – respectable in a modest way - but he had branched out. Mrs. Phillip's husband had taken over the family law business and Mr Gardiner was engaged in trade, probably in the import/export business. It may not have been so socially acceptable as law but in a time of rapidly expanding markets it was far more lucrative. The other is Mr Bingley. He came from the north of England which meant that his father who had left him property to the value of 100,000 pounds would most likely have made his money through the cotton industry. He did not have landed property as Mr Darcy had but was an extremely wealthy young man receiving income, not only from the factories that his father would have left but from investments too. Whilst Mr Bingley's father would have spent his days managing his factory, he had made sufficient money for his son to be brought up as a gentleman. Mr Bingley would probably only have to go to a meeting of his Board of Directors several times a year. The rest of the time he could devote to pleasure.

So how did a gentleman spend his time?

We see that Mr Darcy had to attend to the business of his estate and was conscientious in doing so. He rode on ahead of his visitors to consult with his estate manager. He would do this a number of times in the year and would have letters of business from his manager fairly regularly but his estate was very large and his manager would have had a staff to carry out the day to day business... Mr Bingley did not have an estate to manage but he would have spent some time in consultation with his business manager who would have been in charge of the running of the factories and his investments. Colonel Fitzwilliam was able to spend quite a lot of time away from his regiment even though England was always in a state of war or preparedness for war at this time. When the militia moved to Brighton there would have been more for them to do militarily than when they were going through drill manoeuvres in Meryton but the officers could still find time to spend on leisure activities...

May and June were the months called “The Season”. Many balls and dinner parties were given in

London during this time, particularly on Wednesdays and Saturdays, when Parliament rose early. There were also lots of race meetings in June and July many of which were easily reached from London. Notice that the families in the Meryton district who had “been in town for the winter” (*Pride and Prejudice*, II,19,p.192) began to come back towards the end of June and summer engagements, i.e. balls and dinners in the country, began. If you were going to go on a holiday such as that taken by the Gardiners you did so during July when the days were longest and you were not likely to be troubled by wet weather and muddy roads. The height of summer was not a pleasant time to be in London. The smell of all that horse manure and open sewers and the disease they spread made the country seem a more desirable and healthy place.

Parliament rose early in August allowing members to return to their country estates for the grouse-shooting season, which began on 12 August. This was followed by the partridge shooting season, that began on 1 September, and the pheasant-shooting season that began on 1 October. Shooting birds was not just a sport. It was an important food source and a good landowner was careful not to shoot all of the birds on his property so that there would be coverts enough for the following years....

When the bird shooting season was over there was still plenty to do as the fox hunting season began on the first Monday in November and continued right through December. Again, this was more than just a sport. A hungry fox was a danger to flocks and poultry in the winter as well as to rabbits and birds. To preserve one's property a fox cull was prudent.

The fox hunting could go on until January, depending on the weather and if you had to be in London for the opening of Parliament. That meant that Christmas was usually spent in the country, but Christmas festivities were not so important in Regency times as they became later. Turning Christmas into a major celebration was the work of the Victorians...

Another duty that a landowner had was to act as a local magistrate. Disputes between neighbours and violations of the law such as poaching or theft were dealt with in the first instance by the landowner sitting as a magistrate. More serious crimes would be referred on to a court of law but local landowners oversaw quite a lot of the justice of the country.

So a gentleman would hunt, go to race meetings, shoot and fish. We also know that many of them read a good deal – Mr Darcy and Mr Bennet being two avid readers. Playing at billiards was another favourite pastime and most country homes had a billiard room. One of the other favourite pastimes was gambling. The gentlemen's clubs that were set up about this time such as Whites were basically gambling clubs and they were established so that it was more difficult to load the dice or deal from the bottom of the pack.. A number of “gaming hells” were not so scrupulous and would fleece young men of large amounts of money by giving them free drinks and then getting them to play cards with “ivory turners” i.e. cheats. Even genteel games of cards could cost a lot of money...Loo is a game in which each hand is played quickly and therefore, even if you were playing for very little money for each hand you could lose a lot of money very quickly.

Gambling was a major problem of the period, particularly among young men with plenty of time on their hands...The code of conduct of the gentleman of the period meant that a gambling debt was a “debt of honour”. It had to be paid before you paid tradesmen, the rent or any other legitimate debt. If you did not pay your gambling debts you forfeited your right to respect from your fellow officers and gentlemen...

Most of the other activities a gentleman would participate in were activities in which the ladies would also share so this might be the time to talk about how the day was spent.

Daylight had to be used to its fullest extent, as you could not create the artificial daylight of electricity. That is why country dinners and balls were given during the summer months when long stretches of dark country lanes would not have to be negotiated at night. Even during the summer, balls were usually held on or near full moon so that travel at night would be safer. This was also the reason why dinner hours in the country were much earlier than they were in London. In London streets were lit by flares and the way was marked by the houses lining the roads and so travelling by night was not so dangerous.

Although people, particularly the servants, rose early, breakfast was not until quite late, usually ten o'clock. This was because fires had to be lit, water had to be carried inside, heated etc, so it took some time for breakfast to be prepared no matter how much preparation had been done the night before. Many more activities were carried out before breakfast than we would think of doing today. If you were in a town you might ride in the park before breakfast, visit a lending library or go shopping. If you were in the country you might ride about inspecting the estate or consult with your groom or gamekeeper or steward. It was normal to attend to your correspondence before breakfast and the lady of the house usually consulted with her housekeeper before breakfast.

Breakfast lasted about an hour. Jane Austen's mother wrote home when she was visiting rich relations and described breakfast as consisting of coffee, chocolate and tea, plum cake, pound cake, hot rolls, cold rolls, bread and butter and toast (*Jane Austen's World*, p.40). Presumably there was not quite such a large selection at their home breakfast but the Austens had a home farm when Mr Austen was rector of Steventon parish so there would have been plenty of fresh eggs and dairy products.

Because breakfast was so late there was not a regular lunch. If you were out shopping you might eat a pastry or cake and if you went visiting you would be offered refreshments which could be quite substantial – look at the cold meats and pyramids of fruit that were provided for the ladies when Elizabeth and her aunt visited at Pemberley. Another time when you might eat a “nuncheon” was if you were travelling. Elizabeth and Maria Lucas were treated to a “nuncheon” of cold meat and salad (which Elizabeth had to pay for) when they were travelling home from Hunsford. By the way, Lydia had included a cucumber as part of the meal which was very extravagant as a cucumber was a luxury item of food costing about 1/-, i.e. about \$A5 in today's money. Lunch as a regular meal did not come into existence until towards the end of the 19th century.

We think of the morning finishing at midday, but at the beginning of the 19th century they referred to the time until going to your room to dress for dinner as morning i.e. until 3.00 or 4.00 p.m.. So when they talk of “morning visits” it means a visit paid sometime between 11.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. Morning visits were one of the main social activities of the ladies. If you were at home you might occupy your time by reading, practising your music, painting or doing one of the ladylike craft activities that was popular at the time or by sewing. When ladies referred to their “work” they meant their sewing. Jane Austen referred to her literary activities as “writing” when she talked of her “work” she meant her sewing and she was a very fine seamstress. At Chawton, where she spent the last eight years of her life there is a patchwork quilt of fine workmanship which she made. There is also a delicate needle case that she made as a gift for her niece. Jane Austen was also a very good

pianist and spent at least an hour each morning practising her music.

It was usual to change one's clothes before sitting down to dinner which took place much earlier than it does today. If you were in the country it could start any time between 3.00 p.m. and 5.00 p.m. It was usually later in town – sometime between 6.00 p.m. and 8.00 p.m. These hours had much to do with daylight. If you were inviting guests for dinner in the country you had to consider their safe journey home and it was much safer to drive home in the twilight than in the dark.

One of the things that puzzles the modern reader about the eating habits of the period was how the food on the dinner table was organised. "Mrs Bennet had been strongly inclined to ask them to stay and dine there, that day; but though she always kept a very good table, she did not think anything less than two courses could be good enough for a man, on whom she had such anxious designs, or satisfy the appetite and pride of one who had ten thousand a year." (*Pride and Prejudice*, III, 11, p.268) If Mrs Bennet kept such a good table obviously a "course" was not the same then as it is now. This is confirmed by Mrs Bennet's description of the food at the dinner party she had the following Tuesday where she talks of the haunch of venison, the soup and the partridges which seem to have formed only a part of the meal (*Pride and Prejudice*, III, 12, p.271).

In Austen's time dishes were put on the middle of the table and, with a little assistance from the servants, you helped yourself to the things that were nearest to you, got passed your way or you were bold enough to ask to have passed to you. I have an idea that a shy young person who was sitting near food that they did not like might well get up from the table hungry. Each course would consist of three or four main dishes with about three or four more side dishes. Usually a first course would consist of soup, several baked dishes such as a joint of meat, a fish and/or a poultry dish and a vegetable dish. The side dishes could include vegetable or mushroom or pasta dishes and could include sweet dishes such as an apple tart. If you were having a second course the table was completely cleared and then you got another four main dishes and four side dishes. A second course might include some cold joints and perhaps more sweet dishes such as blancmange or stewed fruit. When this was finished the table was again cleared and dessert was placed. This consisted of nuts, dried and preserved fruits. During dessert the children of the house sometimes came in to meet the guests. When dessert was finished the ladies would move to the drawing room and the gentlemen would "pass the port". It seems that during this drinking session the conversation could get very bawdy. In Jane Austen's works if a gentleman is among the first to join the ladies after dinner it is a sign of her approval. She is telling you that this man has a higher mind than to spend the evening getting drunk and swapping dirty stories.

The evening was spent in conversation, listening to the musical members of the party perform, playing cards or parlour games and quite often reading aloud formed part of the evening's entertainment...

Several hours after dinner was finished it was time for supper, or , as it was sometimes called "the tea board". Sometimes important guests were invited for dinner and less important ones were invited to join the party for supper. As people knew their station in life and their pecking order in the social scheme nobody seems to have taken offence at such discrimination. In town, supper was usually a light meal of tea and cakes after returning from the theatre or some such entertainment. It tended to be a bigger meal in the country as dinner was earlier and if people had to travel any distance to their own home they needed some fortification. It was a buffet meal - "finger food". Notice that at the Bennets' home, tea and coffee are served when visitors are invited. There would have been several types of cake, biscuits, pastries and sandwiches or savouries. When the

tea board was cleared from the room that was the polite time for guests to take their leave.

Supper was a much more formal meal when it was given as part of a ball. People would sit down to a more substantial repast about half way through the evening's entertainment and before resuming dancing or going back to the card table they might be entertained by some music.

Another aspect of Regency England that was very different from today's norm was a young girl's introduction to society.

"...Are any of your younger sisters out, Miss Bennet?"

"Yes, Ma'am, all."

"All! What, all five out at once? Very odd! And you only the second. The younger ones out before the elder are married! Your younger sisters must be very young?" (*Pride and Prejudice*, II,6, p.138)

When Lady Catherine questions Elizabeth about her sisters she is not enquiring about their sexual preferences. When a girl "came out" it meant that she had left the schoolroom and had officially entered society. She was now on the marriage market. When a girl was about 17 she was introduced to society, usually by her parents throwing a party or ball and she then accompanied her mother on morning visits. It was then proper for friends and acquaintances to include her in invitations to "grown up" events such as dinners and balls. If she were sufficiently high on the social ladder she would be presented at court... Traditionally the younger girls in the family did not "come out" until their elder sisters were married or had been in society for a sufficient number of years that they had fallen into the category of "old maid". Mrs Bennet did not observe this tradition as she was anxious to get any or all of the girls married as soon as possible, and she also wanted them to enjoy themselves...

Other aspects of society have changed in the two hundred years since Jane Austen was writing but space does not include their inclusion here, however, I hope that this glimpse into her world will show that Jane Austen did not write to baffle her audience but because customs have changed in two hundred years some of the subtleties of her work can be unrecognised by a modern reader. Look again at the quotation about the reception of the news of Charlotte Lucas's engagement that I used at the beginning of this paper. Does it make more sense now? It would be a shame to miss out on Jane Austen's sharp critical comment simply because you did not understand a reference which she made in good faith about something that has changed over time.

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The Diary of a Village Shopkeeper 1754-1765, Turner, Thomas ed. By David Vaisey, 1998 *Pamela Whalan*