From a Small Market Town to the Metropolis: The Cities/Towns in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice and Persuasion

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Abstract

The long eighteenth century (1680–1820) saw a remarkable growth not only of London but also of provincial, regional and smaller towns. Historians have dubbed this period the "English urban Renaissance", a term first used by Peter Borsay in his *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town 1660–1770* (1989), from which this paper derives much of the historical account needed to examine the small market town, the resort town and the capital in Jane Austen's novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* and their relationship to the rural community. The aim is to show that these three different types of towns, and their complex relationship with the rural village, firstly, are able to explain some of the differences in the kind of transactions, be it romantic and business, of the main and minor characters, and, secondly, are crucial to the plot development.

Keywords: Jane Austen, eighteenth–century novel, eighteenth century city/town

บทคัดย่อ

ในศตวรรษที่ 18 อันยาวนาน (1680-1830) มีความเจริญเติบโตของเมืองหลวงและเมืองต่าง ๆ ของประเทศอังกฤษ นักประวัติศาสตร์เรียกศตวรรษที่ 18 อันยาวนานว่าศตวรรษแห่งการฟื้นของเมืองในประเทศอังกฤษ (English Urban Renaissance) คำนี้มาจากหนังสือของ ปีเตอร์ บอร์เซย์ ที่มีชื่อว่า *ดิ อิงลิช เออร์เบิน เรเนซ็องส์ คัลเชอร์ แอนด์ โซไซตี อิน เดอะ พรอวินเชียลทาวน์ 1660-1770* (1989) ผู้วิจัยวิเคราะห์ลักษณะของเมืองค้าขายขนาดเล็ก เมืองแห่งการพักผ่อน และเมืองหลวงในนวนิยายเรื่อง ไพรด์แอนด์พรีจูดิส และเพอซูเอชัน ของ เจน ออสเตน โดยอ้างอิงเนื้อหาประวัติศาสตร์จากหนังสือเล่มนี้ ผู้วิจัยเสนอว่าลักษณะที่แตกต่างกันของเมืองสามประเภทนี้ และความสัมพันธ์ของเมืองสามประเภทนี้กับชนบท นอกจากจะสามารถอธิบายความแตกต่างของความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างตัวละครหลักและตัวละครรองได้แล้ว และยังมีความสำคัญต่อโครงเรื่องอีกด้วย

คำสำคัญ: เจน ออสเตน นวนิยายในศตวรรษที่สิบแปด เมืองในศตวรรษที่สิบแปด

In a letter dated September 9, 1814, Jane Austen told her aspiring novelist niece that, "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on" (1997, p. 275) when writing a novel. Her rural communities, however, are neither hermetically secluded nor are her heroines confined to the rural world. Austen brings urban intruders to her rural village and takes her heroines to the city, and their interaction brings about a collision between urban and rural values and creates significant events in the stories. Margaret A. Doody (2008) considers Fanny Dashwood's London mercenariness in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) to be a destructive urban force which turns John Dashwood greedy, and then causes him to neglect his brotherly duty towards his sisters. The arrival of Fanny Dashwood also compels the Dashwood sisters to leave Norland. The Crawfords in *Mansfield Park* (1814) have been seen as metropolitan intruders coming to the country to disrupt rural peace and order by many critics. In *Emma* (1815), the Coles represent not only the rich tradespeople who were becoming increasingly prominent in society but also the urban force which was invading the country in general. It should be noted that Highbury is close to London, and the force of the metropolis can certainly be felt there. As the collision between urban and rural values and the role of cities such as London and Bath play in her novels, such as *Northanger Abbey* (1817) and *Sense and Sensibility* have been variously explored by a number of critics[1], this paper will focus upon the three different types of towns in *Pride and Prejudice* (1818) and *Persuasion* (1818) and their complex relationship with their rural community. It aims, firstly, to examine Meryton in *Pride and Prejudice,* showing how

[1] See Paula Byrne's "The Unmeaning Luxuries of Bath: Urban Pleasures in Jane Austen's World." *Persuasions 26* (2004); Laurie Kaplan's "Sense and Sensibility: 3 or 4 Country Families in an Urban Village." *Persuasions* 32 (2010); A. Rose Pimentel's "All the rational pleasures of an elegant society: Re-examining Austen's View of London." *Persuasions* 33 (2012), for example.

a small market town such as Meryton, and the proximity between Meryton and Longborn, are crucial to the plot and the development of the relationship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy and, secondly, to illustrate the importance of Bath as a town of both sexual intrigue and reconciliation, and, finally, the importance of London as a city of diversion/distraction/business and its interconnectedness with the country represented by a country estate Pemberley.

It should be first noted that whilst the size and legal privileges of a community resist an attempt to distinguish between towns and cities[2], what distinguished a city/town from a rural settlement or what constituted an urban space in the eighteenth century can be outlined here. Peter Borsay (1989) argues that the definitions of towns in the eighteenth century hinged not only on a population, the social and political structure but also on the provision of administrative and cultural services. As Borsay explains, by the mid−eighteenth century, cultural services as assemblies, "had become part of the established urban scene", and by the 1770s a public place as an assembly room was "a regular feature of resorts, regional centres and provincial capitals, not to mention a number of ordinary market towns" (1989, p. 151). Rosemary Sweet also suggests that besides the demographic, socio−economic and administrative approaches historians have taken to define towns, "[t]he provision of these cultural and administrative services became an increasingly marked part of urban life" (1999, p. 230). That is to say, town halls, public buildings, and other urban facilities which

[2] Rosemary Sweet explains that by the eighteenth century, 'town' was commonly used to refer to larger centres although a settlement with a population of only 200 or 300 was called a town by some observers. And places which had acquired certain legal privileges were, under a charter, bestowed the status of the city, or borough, and in spite of their decline to a minimal size, they were still termed as such (1999, p. 7).

accommodated both administrative, social and cultural services, were urban features that varied from town to town in size and number, and constituted an urban space and made the urban community different from the rural one.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Meryton is referred to in the novel as a "small market town" (p.12), equivalent to "commercial towns" which are subdivided into smaller and larger ones, according to Borsay's categorisation. It is the bedrock of the urban system or the lowest point of the urban hierarchy, which includes regional centres, provincial towns and the metropolis. The fact that Sir Lucas has made "a tolerable fortune" (p.12) from trade in Meryton suggests that it is close to a larger commercial town which could boast "a few sophisticated trades and services" (Borsay, 1989, p. 6) from which Sir Lucas had acquired his wealth. A town of Meryton's ranking must have possessed a tolerably nice hall or assembly room in order to hold a ball for the Bingleys. In addition, Meryton is described as having a circulating library, Clarke's Library − an indication of the town's vibrancy. As shown above, Meryton's town hall which is a venue for the Mertyton assembly and Clarke's Library are instrumental in establishing an urban space.

The Meryton assembly, which is the first assembly in the novel, is held to welcome the new occupants of Netherfield Park. As Meryton is not a leisure or spa town, it can be argued that its assemblies were regularly organised once a month and held to celebrate special occasions which included national events such as coronations and royal birthdays, and local ones such as the one arranged by Preston corporation in 1747 to celebrate the fact that their patron, Lord Strange, had "lately brought his lady to town" (cited in Borsay, 1989, p. 155). Similar to the latter occasion, the Meryton assembly is arguably staged to mark an event of local importance—the occupancy of Netherfield Park

by Mr. Bingley. Mrs. Bennet's ardent expression—"Netherfield Park is let at last" (p. 1)—points to the fact that this large country estate had long been vacant and the town people had waited for it to be let. For obvious reasons, the presence of the wealthy is of considerable value to the town as it stimulates the town's economy, and, possibly, the wide variety of products at the milliner's shop which is frequented by Lydia and Kitty may owe a great deal to the presence of the affluent in the neighborhood. The nearby estates of the landed gentry also contribute to the reputation of the town for, as Daniel Defoe remarked of the town of Maidstone, "the neighbourhood of persons of figure and quality, makes Maidstone a very agreeable place to live in" (1962, p. 115); and for people like Mrs. Bennet, the presence of a rich man, is "a fine thing for [her] girls" (p. 1). This explains why the arrival of Mr. Bingley and his taking up occupancy of Netherfield creates such a stir in the neighborhood. In addition, a closer look at the Bennets's discussion of the ball emphasises this nature. After Mrs. Bennet has announced, at the beginning of chapter I, that Netherfield Park has been rented by Mr. Bingley, in the next chapter, readers learn from Elizabeth that "we [the Bennet family] shall meet him at the assemblies" (p. 3). The assemblies here could be the monthly assembly like the one at Basingstoke which Austen started to attend at the age of sixteen. Given the fact that Basingstoke at the end of the eighteenth century possessed a population of about 2,500, this puts the town in the same rank as Meryton, so the Meryton ball which the Bennets attend could be a monthly one. However, Elizabeth's assurance that they are to meet Mr. Bingley at the ball suggests that it is none other than the one arranged for Mr. Bingley or else Elizabeth could not be certain of seeing Mr. Bingley. Thus, it is highly possible that the Meryton ball is held to welcome Mr. Bingley.

Owing to the close proximity between Meryton and Longbourn, the Bennet girls can attend the Meryton ball which allows Elizabeth

to first meet Mr. Darcy and, subsequently, allows her prejudices to be formed. Meryton is just a mile from Longbourn, and without a public ball (where anyone paying for a ticket could participate) at Meryton there would be no possibility of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy meeting each other, given that they (like Catherine and Mr. Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*) are strangers as opposed to other Austen's couples who have known each other well before the plot of the novels begin. Due to the fact that the Meryton ball is a public one, Mr. Darcy considers himself superior to the rest. Not only is it a public one but also it is the one held by a small market town that Mr. Darcy finds limited and unattractive as women in the room are not up to his par, both physically and socioeconomically. So, it is at the Meryton ball that Mr. Darcy's snobbery offends everyone around him and invokes Elizabeth's prejudice. He is reported to have danced twice, declined being introduced to other ladies, Elizabeth included, and has spent the rest of the evening walking about the room. Indeed, his rudeness does not only prompt Elizabeth's but also other people's first impressions. Therefore, the public ball at Meryton is crucial to the plot as it not only allows Mr. Darcy to meet Elizabeth, whose presence at the ball is made possible by her living close to Meryton[3], but also reveals Mr. Darcy's rudeness which is encouraged by the nature of a public assembly and which is a cause of Elizabeth's prejudice.

[3] A similar plot is to be found in the unfinished *The Watsons* in which the heroine, who lives in a village three miles distant from the town, is invited by her neighbour to, "[t]he first winter assembly in the Town of D" (p. 253). Due to the close proximity of her village to the town of D., the Watson sisters are usually asked to attend the assembly. The heroine meets and dances with Mr. Howard at the ball. As Austen told her sister Cassandra, Mr. Howard is to be the man the heroine marries. A ball introduces the heroine to the hero. It is an urban assembly that is important to their relationship and equally important is the fact that the heroine is given the opportunity to attend the ball, an opportunity easily provided by the short distance between the country and the city/town.

Meryton also becomes the militia regiments' base. As Meryton is a small market town, the limited availability of houses forces militiamen to be housed scatteringly and thus allowing them to have more leisure time to socialise and thus enabling Elizabeth and Lydia to meet Wickham. The presence of the militia at Meryton clearly signals wartime (as the militia is assembled only at times of national emergency) but it does not create any anxiety about the looming war for characters and the readers because the officers have been brought there to be dancing partners and potential husbands for the local ladies, and their removal to the coastal town of Brighton, which should have created more anxiety over imminent invasion, merely provides the chance for Wickham and Lydia to elope (Stafford, 2008, p. xiii). While many readers share Stafford's impression of being unable to imagine Wickham or Danny engaging in any action other than dancing at a ball or playing at a card table (2008, p. xiii–xiv), Breihan provides a historical explanation as to why they were idle. Since regiments were scattered to fit into the accommodation available in small towns and villages, effective training became impossible and so they had only a few military duties to distract them (1992, p. 14). They had time to play, drink and flirt. In *Emma,* Captain Weston's, "military life had introduced him to Miss Churchill, of a great Yorkshire family" (p. 12). This also explains why Elizabeth and Wickham can frequently meet and the close proximity between Meryton and Longbourn facilitates such frequent meetings.

The Phillips' house in Meryton functions as a public place where the Bennet sisters and officers can meet, largely owing to the fact that Mr. Phillip is a country attorney. The traditional quartering system which allowed soldiers to be housed within the civilian population permitted local attorneys and governmental officials, like Mr. Phillips and Sir Lucas, to supervise the billeted soldiers (Breihan, 1992, p. 21). The frequent presence of officers at his house is a result

of this and, probably, explains the set of "gentlemenlike" officers at Mr. Phillips' house. When the Bennet sisters visit their uncle, it is also reported that "the best of [officers are] of the present party" at his house (p. 57), Wickham included. Not only officers but women of the town are also present: "Mr. Wickham [is] the happy man towards whom almost every female eye was turned, and Elizabeth [is] the happy woman by whom he finally seat[s] himself" (p. 57). Thus, at her uncle's house, Elizabeth first makes the acquaintance of Wickham. Unlike two strangers meeting at a public ball where their conversation would be more strictly governed by rules of propriety, Wickham's conversation with Elizabeth is more relaxed and Elizabeth is, "very willing to hear him" (p. 58). In addition, not only Wickham's ill intention of defaming Mr. Darcy but also the more relaxing milieu at Mr. Phillips' house allows Wickham to speak ill of Mr. Darcy, and Elizabeth mistakenly concludes that there has been cruel treatment on Mr. Darcy's part. The short distance from Meryton to Longbourn has allowed the Bennet sisters to often visit their uncle even before the militia regiments arrive, but with the arrival of the troop, it is not surprising that their visits are more frequent, given the convenient distance they have to cover from their home to their uncle's.

A ball at Netherfield, although it is a country and private event, is enlivened with, "the cluster of red coats" (p. 67) from town. Austen herself from the age of sixteen attended a regular ball at Basingstoke, the town nearest her home at Steventon. As her biographers have speculated, Austen would have become acquainted and danced with the officers of the South Devon Militia who were quartered in Basingstoke in the winter of 1794–95. This experience might have been one of the sources of information for the shire in Meryton (Breihan, 1992, p. 17; Tomalin, 2012, p. 105). However, as Wickham has been invited and Elizabeth has expected to dance with him, his absence disappoints her and strangely creates, "every feeling of displeasure against

[Mr. Darcy] [which] was sharpened by immediate disappointment" (p. 68). As Elizabeth, "[is] not formed for ill–humour…she dance[s] next with an officer" (p. 68). The presence of officers here provides dancing partners with whom she can talk about Wickham. However, Wickham's absence from the ball is significant here since it leads Mr. Darcy to ask Elizabeth for the dance.

Elizabeth attends the Meryton ball whose public and local nature however disgusts Mr. Darcy. Because of this perception of the nature of the ball, he displays his extraordinary rudeness by refusing to be introduced to other ladies and (knowing or unknowingly) allows Elizabeth to overhear his, "tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me" (p. 7) remark of her. Not only does Meryton produce such a ball that Mr. Darcy finds unattractive but also, due to its status as a small market town which scatters officers to be housed and thus disabling effective training, it endows militiamen with more free time and allows Wickham to frequently talk to Elizabeth. It can be seen that Elizabeth's first impression of Mr. Darcy and her ability to oftentimes socialise with Wickham owes largely to the close distance between her house and the small market town of Meryton.

Before examining Bath, it is worthwhile looking at another important town in *Persuasion*—Lyme Regis where Austen allows an accident involving one of the principal characters, Louise, to happen and Louise's accident on the Cobb is important to Anne and Captain Wentworth's romantic relationship because it points out to Captain Wentworth the fault of being too resolute. Since Anne was persuaded by her godmother, Lady Russell, to break off her engagement with Captain Wentworth (eight years before the novel beings), he has seen Anne as a wavering, easily persuaded and irresolute person. But, at Lyme Regis, he learns the fault of being over–determined and over–resolute from Louise who, in spite of being repeatedly warned

not to jump, declares: "I am determined I will" (p. 91) and who is then found unconscious on the ground. At this critical moment, it is Anne who directs what is to be done everybody, "seem[s] to look for her directions" (p. 93). Anne is very resolute here but her resoluteness is clearly different from Louise's. After the incident, Anne wonders if it has escaped Captain Wentworth that, "a persuadable temper might sometimes be as much in favour of happiness, as a very resolute character" (p. 97). At Lyme Regis then Captain Wentworth starts to see the fault of being too determined and begins to recognise Anne's superior quality upon which the narrative comments near the end of the novel: "The scenes on the Cobb, and at Captain Harville's, had fixed her superiority" (p. 194) to Captain Wentworth.

While Captain Wentworth has learned the fault of being too resolute and Anne's superiority from the Cobb incident, it is in Bath that the hero and the heroin reconcile. The Bath in *Persuasion* is not only the city of intrigue as it is famous for, but also the city of reconciliations which are crucial to plot development. The nature of Bath as a spa town is necessary to such reconciliations, one is between Sir Walter and Mr. Elliot and another is between Anne and Captain Wentworth.

As a famous spa town, Bath not only attracts the Elliots but also other principal characters, including the hero, Captain Wentworth. Indeed, this is a form of the relationship between the country and the city in which the gentry and the middling sort spend a certain period of time in the city, particularly during its season. People came to Bath not only to be entertained but also to be cured by its famous mineral waters. Admiral Croft comes to Bath to cure his gout while Lady Russell is there to enjoy what Bath has to offer. Bath also had a reputation as a marriage market. Thinking that Captain Wentworth may be heart–broken and wanting to find a new potential wife after Louise

has become engaged to Captain Benwick, Admiral Croft half-jokingly intends to write to, "beg him to come to Bath. Here are pretty girls enough" (p. 140). What is more important is that Bath draws these rural characters together to develop various incidents which only the city of Bath can make happen.

To begin with, Mr. Elliot, an heir to Sir Walter's property and baronetcy, wishes to be reconciled with Sir Walter after they have long been on unfriendly terms, and Bath facilitates this reconciliation. In Mrs. Smith's account it is revealed that Mr. Elliot, who had previously despised the baronetcy, is now aiming for the title. Mr. Elliot learns that Sir Walter, who has moved to Bath, is accompanied by his daughter Elizabeth's companion, Mrs. Clay, who is thought by many people to be Lady Elliot one day. If she marries and produces an heir for Sir Walter, Mr. Elliot will be disqualified from the baronetcy. Alarmed by this news, Mr. Elliot sets off for Bath. It should be noted that this is the Bath where everybody knows everybody else's business. Mr. Elliot has been told this news by his friend who is in Bath and who must have heard the news around the town. Had Sir Walter remained at Kellynch-Hall, possibly Mr. Elliot would never have known Mrs. Clay. Bath becomes not only the place for intelligence but also reconciliation. After the long years of discord, it would be suspicious if Mr. Elliot suddenly showed up at Kellynch-Hall and tried to ingratiate himself with Sir Walter again but as a gentleman of fortune, spending his time during the season in the city as normal. So, his arrival in Bath with the specific aim of reconciliation can easily be cloaked with his general intention of visiting the town for its entertainment. "[Mr. Elliot] had passed through Bath in November, on his way to London, when the intelligence of Sir Walter's being settled there had of course reached him" (p. 112). This presents Mr. Elliot's visit to Bath as part of his annual routine and this is partly true, but, on this occasion, he certainly comes with a specific mission and of course the intelligence

of Sir Walter settling there does not reach him by chance but is told to him. When the knowledge of Sir Walter's settling there *accidentally* reaches Mr. Elliot while he is in Bath as usual at this time of the year, he repeatedly visits Sir Walter until he is admitted and reconciled with him. Also, in Bath, everybody is likely to meet each other; Sir Walter cannot avoid seeing Mr. Elliot for long even if he does not wish to see him.

It is not only Mr. Elliot who comes to Bath with a motive disguised by a general inclination to enjoy Bath, but Captain Wentworth also enters Bath with the specific desire of meeting Anne in order to find out if she still loves him. Near the end of the novel Captain Wentworth confesses that it is Anne alone who brings him there. He knows that Bath will allow him to meet Anne either accidentally or intentionally. Indeed, in Bath, everybody is forced by the social round to meet and associate with one another. Borsay explains that a spa/seaside town was a, "special community with its own code and conventions" which projected people into, "an orgy of socializing" (1989, p. 272). At Bath, people started their day with a visit to the baths and the Pump Room. They then met for public breakfast, concerts and lectures. The hours between noon and dinner were leisure time which they usually devoted to card−playing, walking along the street or in the gardens or in promenades. After dinner, people gathered at the assembly rooms. The existence of an organized daily routine of activities, "ensured that they were generally doing the same thing, at the same time, and in the same place" (Borsay, 1989, p. 273). Indeed, this is precisely what leads Anne to remark: "so liable as everybody was to meet everybody in Bath" (p. 144).

Anne accidentally meets Captain Wentworth at Molland's shop on Milsom Street where the latter is aroused to jealousy by his friends' talk of Mr. Elliot's possible attachment to her. Anne, Mr. Elliot and

Captain Wentworth, who are present at the same time and in the same place, are forced by the rain to take shelter at the Molland's shop and, thereby, accidentally meet each other. Given the fact that Milsom Street was a famous street where both ladies and gentlemen shopped and met each other, the possibility of their meeting one another at this time of day was very high. "Captain Wentworth himself, among a party of gentlemen and ladies, evidently his acquaintance, and whom he must have joined a little below Milsom−Street" (p. 142) enters the shop, and his being surrounded by quite a number of his acquaintances is made possible by his walking to/along Milsom Street. It is specifically, "the ladies of Captain Wentworth's party" (p. 143) who start to talk about Anne and Mr. Elliot after they have left the shop, praising Mr. Elliot's looks and character and mentioning their possible attachment. Captain Wentworth's presence in Bath affords him the opportunity not only accidentally to meet Anne but also to hear what other people think about Anne and Mr. Elliot. As he admits near the end of the novel, this increases his jealousy.

Bath not only provides an opportunity for Captain Wentworth to overhear public opinion but also to meet Anne at another public place, a concert, where his jealousy is, again, aroused. This public event allows Anne to meet Captain Wentworth with whom she converses quite freely without being interrupted by her sister and father who are unable to fathom the subject of their conversation due to, "the various noises of the room, the almost ceaseless slam of the door, and ceaseless buzz of persons walking through" (p. 148). Next to come into the room is Mr. Elliot and again a public event like this which is available in the city brings these three characters together. Anne is separated from Captain Wentworth because she is obliged to sit with her family and has Mr. Elliot next to her. The two, from Captain Wentworth's perspective, appear to have a lively conversation, particularly during the part where Mr. Elliot teases Anne by telling her that he has long been acquainted

with her character. Anne's questioning him "eagerly" appears to Captain Wentworth and other onlookers to indicate that she is paying more particular attention to Mr. Elliot. Immediately afterwards she turns her attention from Mr. Elliot and looks for Captain Wentworth, "her eyes [fall] on him, his [seem] to be withdrawn from her" (p.152). Captain Wentworth must have observed her conversation with Mr. Elliot and, indeed, there is every reason for Captain Wentworth to believe that they are intimate, especially given the fact that they are appearing to be intimate in a public place, as Deidre Le Faye suggests, "when in public the slightest expression of interest or concern for a member of the opposite sex—'being particular'—could be taken by onlookers as an indication of matrimonial intentions" (2002, p. 113−114). Captain Wentworth leaves the concert because of jealousy and Anne correctly speculates: "Jealousy of Mr. Elliot!...Captain Wentworth jealous of her affection!" (p. 154). The public event leads Captain Wentworth to witness what he perceives to be the developing relationship between Anne and Mr. Elliot. It should be noted that this relationship is made possible by a reconciliation between Sir Walter and Mr. Elliot in the first place.

As Bath, like other marriage market towns, was known for its social and sexual intrigues, it also becomes the place where Mrs. Clay and Mr. Elliot develop their clandestine relationship. Mr. Elliot has attempted to stop Mrs. Clay from marrying Sir Walter. He expects to marry Anne and then, as his son−in−law, uses his influence to prevent Sir Walter's remarriage. However, Anne and Captain Wentworth's marriage puts an end to his plan so Mr. Elliot goes to London with Mrs. Clay and takes her under his protection. Mrs. Clay consents because she loves him and believes that he loves her too. Her consent springs from her affection for him, as the readers are told, "Mrs. Clay's affections had overpowered her interest, and she had sacrificed, for the young man's sake, the possibility of scheming longer for Sir

Walter" (p. 201). So, at the same time that Mr. Elliot is courting Anne, he has to try to develop his clandestine relationship with Mrs. Clay. Their only secret meeting that the reader is shown is the one on the street witnessed by Mary. Even though the reader does not hear their conversation, the fact that it has, "an appearance of friendly conference" (p. 179) strongly hints at its clandestine nature (Mr. Elliot has all along professed a dislike for Mrs. Clay). Is this "friendly conference" their first one? Possibly not. Elizabeth Newark observes that Mrs. Clay is not likely to have been given only money and clothes under Mr. Elliot's protection since she can get all these when she marries Sir Walter, so it must be love (1993, p. 250), and this love is made possible by a few secret meetings. Here, Bath facilitates their secret rendezvous.

At the end of the novel, Bath becomes the city of another reconciliation or, to a certain degree, the marriage market when one considers Anne's consent to marry Captain Wentworth in Bath. A clandestine aspect of Bath's marriage market is represented in Mrs. Clay who represents a rural character finding her lover in Bath and possibly marrying him someday. On the other hand, Bath can proclaim itself to be a romantic place and this is why Austen takes her rural hero and heroine to be reconciled in Bath. At the end of the novel, after Captain Wentworth has declared his unceasing love in a letter to Anne, the two reunite at "Union−street" in a sign of Austen's attention to romantic urban geography. Furthermore, in the reconciliation scene, the two retire to the quiet gravel walk and agree to marry. The gravel walk is certainly a romantic path, a rising walk from Queen Square to the Royal Crescent and Deidre Shauna Lynch suggests that their, "gradual ascent along the walk, in a sense, presents the past that is gradually being left behind" (2004, p. 194).

The young Catherine and the old Anne (27 is old for marriage by Austen's standards) go to the city; the former gets a husband and

latter is reconciled to her inamorato. Austen is similar to other female writers of the late eighteenth century when it comes to the representation of Bath. Burney, Edgeworth and Austen favour polite consumer aspects of Bath. This is because as their novels are concerned with love and marriage, a city, like Bath, becomes a crucial setting for both social and sexual liaisons. The representation of London in Austen's novels is different from the representation of Bath since the London of her novels is not much featured as a distinctive setting. London is usually embodied by its people such as the Crawfords or Mrs. Fanny Dashwood who are considered to represent the destructive force of London on the country. Nevertheless, Austen was aware of the diversions and distractions of London, as the capital, and its complex interconnectedness with the country.

The London of *Pride and Prejudice* is represented as a place of diversion and distraction. Its diversions are not much portrayed[4] but rather are much thought of by characters. To separate Mr. Bingley from Jane, Austen has him taken to London and Mr. Darcy and Miss Bingley immediately follow in an effort to keep him there. This is one of the ways in which Austen exploits the inseparableness of the country and the city and allows rich characters to crisscross between the two spheres. Even though Mr. Bingley is persuaded to stay in London and to restrain himself from loving Jane by Mr. Darcy's confidence in Jane's indifference, there is a strong sense in which both Mr. Darcy and Miss Bingley are aware of aspects of London society which can divert Mr. Bingley. In *Sense and Sensibility,* Willoughby tells Elinor how he thinks London will cure his sorrow: "I say awakened, because time and London, business and dissipation, had in some measure quieted it,

[4] Even in *Sense and Sensibility* in which London is a setting, the metropolis diversion is not much portrayed except through a few occasions when the Dashwood sisters go shopping, stroll in a pleasure garden and attend the ball in which Marianne is jilted by Willoughby, a sign of Austen's negative portrayal of London, according to some critics' interpretation.

and I had been growing a fine hardened villain, fancying myself indifferent to [Marianne]" (p. 247). Austen of course will not turn Mr. Bingley into, "a fine hardened villain" (p. 247), given the fact that he is a friend of the hero but believes himself to be indifferent to Jane which is what Miss Bingley, with the aid of London entertainment, wishes from her brother.

Next to be conveyed to London is Jane with the same belief that London's diversions can alleviate her disappointment. It should be noted here that Elizabeth as well as Jane is a heroine who crisscrosses most frequently between the country and the city because, "they [have] frequently been staying with [the Gardiners] in town" (p. 108). As Mr. Bennet hates town and the Bennets themselves are not rich enough to regularly visit London, the Gardiners' house facilitates their frequent association with the city. It is proposed that Jane stays with the Gardiners in London because a, "[c]hange of scene might be of service" (p. 109) after she has been dispirited by Mr. Bingley's departure.

London had been long been associated with vice and moral corruption and the portrayal of innocent rural characters being corrupted by, and ones voicing their opinion against, the ills of the city are common in eighteenth-century novels (Sweet, 1999, p. 223; Sussman, 2012, p. 65). However, as the city in the eighteenth century started to be associated with learning, politeness and refinement, historians of the city have argued that the late eighteenth-century novels, particularly those written by women, started to capture the positive aspects of the city and to portray rural characters of moral worth as being in favour of associating themselves with London, as epitomised by the popular *Evelina* (1778) by Burney. Austen views the inseparableness of the country and London as having both a threatening and a constructive effect. While Willoughby's and Tom Bertram's (from *Mansfield Park*) moral recklessness leads them to be corrupted by their association with

the city, Catherine is entertained in Bath before getting a husband, and nothing at all happens to Jane, mainly because she is a character of true moral worth who has not been brought there to be much entertained in the first place. The only description of Jane and Elizabeth's life in London states: "the morning in bustle and shopping, and the evening at one of the theatres" (p. 117).

Yet, the negative aspect of the city is still there when Jane, among other things, is brought to London to be shown the real character of Miss Bingley. Back in Hertfordshire, Miss Bingley quickly forms a friendship with Jane whom she thinks is the sweetest and prettiest among the Bennet girls. In London, however, this friendship turns out to be insincere and Miss Bingley shows herself eager to end their friendship mainly because she perceives a threat to her attempt to separate Jane from Mr. Bingley if her friendship with Jane continues and because she does not really wish to have Jane as her friend. When Miss Bingley returns Jane's visit she, "[has] no pleasure in it… [and says] not a word of wishing to [Jane] again" (p. 114). Jane knows right away that their friendship has come to an end. In addition, the fact that they settle in a different part of the town makes this friendship particularly undesirable because, in London, addresses matter, particularly for the snobbish Miss Bingley. She has previously talked contemptuously of the Gardiners living in Cheapside, an area associated with trade and commerce. So, Miss Bingley's visit is short not only because she is so desirous to terminate for good an acquaintanceship, but also because she does not wish to be long in this part of the town. London conventionally portrayed as a place of vice is captured by Austen in this manner. It becomes a place where the friendship between Jane and Miss Bingley ends.

The Londoner business man, Mr. Gardiner, becoming friends with the landed gentleman, Mr. Darcy, at the end of the novel can be

seen as one form of the interconnectedness between the country and the city and a clear sign of Mr. Darcy's transformation. Mr. Gardiner is described as "a sensible, gentlemanlike man", the quality which "[t]he Netherfield ladies would have had difficulty in believing that a man who lived by trade, and within view of his own warehouses, could have been so well−bred and agreeable" (p. 108). These new moneyed people or the middling rank had long been sneered at by the landed gentry, who considered that they were not "gentlemen" and "ladies", according to the traditional qualification that solely relied on birth. As early as the early eighteenth century, the definition of a gentleman had shifted from a parental to a cultural one, owing to the growing numbers of the middling rank who could enjoy a range of cultural services which had hitherto been available only to the gentry and the upper class. Due to their participation in these cultural services, their behaviour became refined and their manners polished and by this they had the opportunity to be acquainted with the elite. The so−called urban pseudo−gentry:

> enjoyed a cultivated life−style that imitated that of the rural elite with whom they often had close association…[which] were stimulated not only by the growing recreational opportunities to be found in towns, but also by common participation in charitable projects and by the lavish extent to which corporations wined and dined the rural elite (Borsay, 1989, p. 231)

At a personal level, Borsay mentions Sir Roger Newdigate who had a close connection with Birmingham society and who had a particular friend, Dr. Burgh, at whose house he frequently dined (1989, p. 230). The relationship between Mr. Gardiner and Mr. Darcy can be seen in this manner. They quickly become friends and the Gardiners become the Darcys' favourites. At the end of the novel, it is stated that Lady Catherine, "condescend[s] to wait on them at Pemberley,

in spite of that pollution which its woods had received, not merely from the presence of such a mistress, but the visits of her uncle and aunt from the city" (p. 297). The presence of an urban trader, according to Lady Catherine, pollutes the landed gentleman's country seat, but with the ever increasing intercourse between the country and the city throughout the course of the eighteenth century, the country, let alone Pemberley, could not remain unpolluted. Through the relationship between Mr. Gardiner and Mr. Darcy, Austen shows that the country and the city are inseparable and the association between the urban and rural gentry is inevitable. In addition, through Mr. Darcy's treatment of the Gardiners, Austen shows that Mr. Darcy has changed and this alteration starts to impress Elizabeth.

The novel not only shows that a Londoner as represented by Mr. Gardiner is far from being an urban destructive force but also hints that an association with London is necessary. A country gentleman like Mr. Bennet, who despises London, is forced to go to London by his youngest daughter's elopement. Mr. Bennet, however, is unable to find her there, in part, due to his lack of association with the place. Celia A. Easton explains Mr. Bennet's inability to find Lydia. She points, firstly, to the fact that Mr. Bennet's fruitless attempt to obtain information from hackney coachmen is due to "his ignorance of the city" and he does not follow "[*Clarissa's*] Lovelace's lead in finding a runaway by bribing the coachmen" (2004, p. 129). Indeed, Mr. Darcy who is thoroughly acquainted with the city not only threatens but also bribes Mrs. Young. Next, Mr. Bennet intends to inquire after Lydia and Wickham in, "all the principal hotels in town" (p. 224) in spite of knowing that they have little money. His geographical ignorance of the city is apparent in the way that he is unable to fathom where people with very little money tend to stay in London (Easton, 2004, p. 130). Lydia's elopement and her subsequent hiding in London also represent the interconnectedness between the country and the city as,

for one thing, narratives of an innocent country girl running away with her man to London were common in literature. Indeed, where else to hide if it is not London as Miss Howe tells Clarissa in Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748): "London, I am told, is the best hiding-place in the world" (1986, p. 331). Because Mr. Bennet excludes himself from the city, when he is forced to associate with it through his sojourn in search of his daughter, he is unable to find her. One might argue that Austen does not allow Mr. Bennet to discover this couple because otherwise Mr. Darcy would not have a chance to show Elizabeth that he has changed, or that Mr. Bennet's fruitless attempt to find Lydia results from his not knowing Wickham as Mr. Darcy does; nevertheless it can be denied that Mr. Bennet's unsuccessful pursuit results partly from his lack of association with London.

To a certain extent, in *Persuasion*, the Crofts' settlement in Kellynch-Hall partly depends on the connection with London. The Elliots are forced to let their house, Kellynch-Hall, to save themselves from the financial embarrassment. Mr. Shepherd, Sir Walter's agent and attorney, is consulted and assigned to find a suitable tenant. Sir Walter wishes that the whole business be kept secret and it is, "not to be breathed beyond their own circle" (p. 18) for fear of losing his dignity and reputation, however, this proves to be impossible. Mr. Shepherd has to rely upon his connection with the city to find a tenant and meets a prospective tenant, Admiral Croft, at Taunton during the quarter sessions. This is not an accidental meeting since Mr. Shepherd has received, "a hint of the admiral [who is looking for a place to rent] from a London correspondent" (p. 23). Admiral Croft, "accidentally hearing of the possibility of Kellynch Hall being to let" (p. 23) comes to see the place, and it is likely that news of it must have come from the same "London correspondent" as Mr. Shepherd. Admiral Croft taking up occupancy at Kellynch-Hall is as significant to the plot as the Bingleys' occupation of Netherfield Park. Through the Crofts, Anne is reintroduced to Captain Wentworth who is Mrs. Croft's brother.

Austen's characters are not totally confined to what Charlotte Bronte, in a letter dated January 12, 1848, sneeringly called, "a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers" (2005, p. 62). Her characters are brought into contact with different types of cities and towns. These contacts at different urban arenas produce various episodes crucial to the plot development. A town assembly at Meryton introduces Elizabeth to Mr. Darcy whose snobbery, driven by the nature of such a public local ball, offends everyone and forms Elizabeth's first impression. Militiamen, by stationing at a small market town, gain more freedom to enjoy themselves and socialise and Wickham has much time to tell his own version of Darcy's unfair treatment of him to Elizabeth. Larger than Meryton is the city of Bath which facilitates two reconciliations necessary to the plot development of *Persuasion.* Both Captain Wentworth and Mr. Elliot are able to disguise their real motive of coming to Bath due to Bath being a spa town with its own seasons to draw visitors. Crowning the urban hierarchy is London. In *Pride and Prejudice,* London is portrayed as a place of diversion, distraction and vice. Nonetheless, a contact with the capital and the knowledge of it is necessary.

Austen's last unfinished novel *Sandition* is particularly interesting as it is about the old Sandition which is transformed into an urbanised seaside resort. It is not just about how the country and the city interact or how urban and rural values clash, it is about the urbanisation process; the village is changing physically into a town and villagers are also changing, mentally, into urban people. As it is left unfinished, it is impossible to know how this type of town shapes the relationship and interaction among characters. But it is certain that from *Pride and Prejudice* to *Persuasion* and finally to *Sandition*, the city/town plays a crucial role and a number of incidents crucial to the plot are the result of both characters' interaction with the city/town and the interaction between the country and the city.

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