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THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF

SETTING

IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study examines the settings in Jane Austen's six novels. Chapter I introduces the topic generally, and refers briefly to Jane Austen's aims and methods of creating her settings. Short accounts are given of the emphasis put on setting in the criticism of Jane Austen's work; of the chronology of the novels; and of the use made of this aspect of the novel in eighteenth-century predecessors. Chapter II deals with the treatment of place in Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park and Emma. The consideration of five novels together makes it possible to generalize about aspects of place common to all, and to discuss particulars peculiar to individual novels without, I hope, excessive repetition. The chapter may be thought disproportionately long, but this aspect of setting is most prominent and important in the delineation of character. Chapter III discusses the handling of spatial detail and time in these five novels. Chapter IV offers a fuller analysis of what is the chief concern of this thesis, the nature and function of setting, in respect of the single novel Persuasion, and attempts to draw together into a coherent whole some of the points made in Chapters II and III. Persuasion separates conveniently from the other works, not only because it was written after them, but more importantly because in it there is a new development in Jane Austen's use of setting. Some critics, notably E.M. Forster and B.C. Southam, have found startlingly new qualities in the setting of Sanditon, and, certainly, the most striking feature of the fragment is the treatment of place. But Jane Austen left off

writing Sanditon in March 1817 because of illness, and the twelve chapters make up too small and unfinished a piece to be considered in the same way as the other novels. The Watsons, too, except for some references to it in Chapter I, does not come within the scope of this dissertation.

Another introductory point needs to be made briefly. Where it is necessary, the distinction between Jane Austen and the omniscient narrator is observed, but generally, partly because it is clear that Jane Austen's values are close to those of the narrator, and partly because it is convenient, traditional and sensible to do so, the name "Jane Austen" is used to refer both to the actual person and to the narrator of the novels.

The conventions of bibliographical style used in this thesis are those recommended by Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 4th ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1973); the MLA Style Sheet, 2nd ed., 1970; and, where necessary in order to conform to British conventions, Notes on the Presentation of Theses on Literary Subjects, 3rd ed. (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1967). Errors in spelling and punctuation in passages cited from Jane Austen's juvenilia are not indicated when these are clearly the young author's aberrations.

I should like to express my thanks to Miss Ruth Harnett for her encouraging supervision, to the Staff of the Rhodes University Library, and to Mrs H. Wells for typing the manuscript.

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## TEXT AND ABBREVIATIONS

The text used in this study is that of R.W. Chapman's edition of the novels, Oxford University Press, third edition, 1932-34; the Minor Works, Oxford University Press, 1954; and Jane Austen's Letters, Oxford University Press, second edition, 1952.

The following abbreviations are used in the text:

<u>NA</u>	<u>Northanger Abbey</u>
<u>SS</u>	<u>Sense and Sensibility</u>
<u>PP</u>	<u>Pride and Prejudice</u>
<u>MP</u>	<u>Mansfield Park</u>
<u>E</u>	<u>Emma</u>
<u>P</u>	<u>Persuasion</u>
<u>MW</u>	<u>Minor Works</u>
<u>L</u>	<u>Letters</u>

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

For Jane Austen (1775-1817) novel writing was an end in itself. She was, Mary Lascelles explains, "as deep in love with the novel as a poet is in love with poetry", and she lived her life "engrossed in making an artefact which pleased her".<sup>1</sup> From the age of twelve onwards she wrote works for the entertainment of her family and friends,<sup>2</sup> and the six novels for which she is known are the culmination of this long apprenticeship. In keeping with an already established tradition of the novel, her subject-matter is the courtship of the heroine, with the complications of the plot finally resolved by her marriage. The aspect of this topic which most interested Jane Austen is not the outer action of the heroine's story, but her inner life, and the central issues of the novels are the origin and development of the heroine's love for the hero, the growth of the protagonists toward self-knowledge, and the reconciliation of the individual and society. It is clear from her novels that Jane Austen, with her Augustan attitudes, and much of her morality and literary tastes acquired from her "dear Dr Johnson" (L, p.181), agreed with him in thinking that the more like life a fictional work is, the greater is the novelist's responsibility in presenting valid moral instruction.<sup>3</sup> The truth that she pursues

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Lascelles, "Jane Austen and the novel", in Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays, ed. John Halperin (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.241.

<sup>2</sup>See Minor Works, pp.1-240.

<sup>3</sup>Johnson, Rambler No.4.

unremittingly in her novels is that quality, that kind of wisdom, which according to Johnson is necessary to the regulation of life and which "is always found where it is honestly sought".<sup>1</sup> It is, perhaps, this honest search for truth and the consequent expression of universal values on the part of Jane Austen that give her novels their enduring quality and make them relevant to every age. Many readers have commented on their unusual modernity: Christopher Gillie attributes their special appeal in the twentieth century to the emphasis which Jane Austen places on the need to understand ourselves.<sup>2</sup> Other qualities which appeal to the modern reader are the "flexible medium" of narration<sup>3</sup> that enables the narrator to glide easily and imperceptibly from outside comment into a character's thoughts, and the remarkable illusion of actuality of the fictional worlds. The constituents of any novel--the plot, characterization, setting, atmosphere, structure, language, point of view, tone and themes--relate closely to each other, and Jane Austen's novels are particularly tightly integrated. This dissertation examines the nature and function of the settings in Jane Austen's complete and mature work, and, of course, such a study necessarily includes some consideration of all aspects of the six novels.

Jane Austen chose to present a particular social world, and the physical background against which the action takes place is much the same in each novel, although the atmosphere created by

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<sup>1</sup>Johnson, Rasselas, chap.11.

<sup>2</sup>Christopher Gillie, A Preface to Jane Austen (London: Longman, 1974), p.xii.

<sup>3</sup>Barbara Hardy, A Reading of Jane Austen (London: Peter Owen, 1975), p.14.

details of setting differs. The characters belong to the landed gentry and upper and middle classes, and they live in the country houses and villages of the England which Jane Austen herself knew. They may visit London and Bath, and seaside resorts. The outdoor scenes are set in the gardens, parks, streets and countryside of this realistic world, and the interior scenes, in the drawing-rooms and dining-rooms of houses, and in the assembly rooms of public places. In these rooms the characters are surrounded by the kind of objects that come into people's daily lives: furniture, food, clothes, possessions, books, and other articles associated with leisure. The period in which the novels are set seems to be that of Jane Austen's youth rather than one strictly contemporary with the years in which she revised or wrote them. For example, the action of Persuasion, which was written in 1815-16, takes place in 1814-15, but Jane Austen's twice mentioning the new improvements of the Cobb (p. pp.95, 109), made in 1793,<sup>1</sup> suggests that her settings go back in time a little. She visited Lyme in 1804,<sup>2</sup> and, walking on the Cobb,<sup>3</sup> would have seen the inscription recording the work done. All that we know about Jane Austen, including a remark made by her nephew in the Memoir (1871) about her style of dress in later life,<sup>4</sup> indicates that

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<sup>1</sup>An inscription on a stone set into the Cobb at Lyme Regis reads: "The Work extending 273 Feet west of this Stone was Erected by James Hamilton Builder and Contractor with the Honble Board of Ordnance to repair the Breaches made in the Cobb in Jany 1792 Under the Direction of Capt D'Arcy Engineer 1793".

<sup>2</sup>Letters, p.138.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.142.

<sup>4</sup>J.E. Austen-Leigh, Memoir of Jane Austen, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p.87.

she was naturally conservative; but her settings may belong, generally speaking, to the last decade of the eighteenth century simply because these were impressionable years for her.<sup>1</sup> Time in the novels is the linear dimension of the Newtonian world, and the essential chronology, the period during which the main action takes place, is one year or less. Most of the protagonists, at some point in their story, become aware of the import of past, present and future in their lives.

It was not Jane Austen's intention to evoke a strong emotional response in the reader through the presentation of place as a thing in itself divorced from action. A small proportion of each novel is devoted to the elements of setting--place, spatial detail and time; there is little authorial description of places and things; and what there is is given in general terms, not particularised. Most of the sparse, concrete details of the surroundings occur unobtrusively throughout the narrative and dialogue. Nevertheless, so significant is every reference to the physical background, so strong the power of suggestion, so fine the discrimination that governs the selection and treatment of such detail, that the setting plays an important part in forwarding theme, plot and characterization, and in creating the particular atmosphere of each novel. As has been said already,<sup>2</sup> Jane Austen believed, with Johnson, that fiction should "exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in

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<sup>1</sup>See Pride and Prejudice, pp.406-7 where R.W. Chapman makes the point that, despite later revision, Jane Austen seems to have conceived the events of Pride and Prejudice as belonging to the last decade of the eighteenth century--the years of the militia camps at Brighton.

<sup>2</sup>See p.1 above.

the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind".<sup>1</sup> At the same time as these qualities of verisimilitude, probability and naturalness increase the need for sound moral instruction, they also, in Jane Austen's hands, lessen the danger of the novels' becoming overtly didactic. In his review of Persuasion in 1821, Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin and an experienced writer and literary critic, praised Jane Austen for not letting the moral element of her novels interfere with their main purpose of entertaining. She keeps "the design of teaching out of sight", and "the moral lessons...spring incidentally from the circumstances of the story;...her's [sic] is that unpretending kind of instruction which is furnished by real life; and certainly no author has ever conformed more closely to real life, as well in the incidents, as in the characters and descriptions".<sup>2</sup> It is this conformity to real life that is one of Jane Austen's greatest achievements, and one of the functions of setting in the novels is to contribute to the illusion of actuality, and give a sense of a solid, "real" world; the remarkable impression of reality which a novel like Emma leaves is partly suggested by the presentation of the environment. In all the novels the realistic settings help to make the characters lifelike; and the more credible the people in these fictional worlds, the more convincing are their values and attitudes, their feelings and behaviour.

Jane Austen was not only an observer of people. Her novels and letters show that she enjoyed and was sensitive to her surroundings,

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, Rambler No.4.

<sup>2</sup> B.C. Southam, ed., Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p.95.



the seasons, and weather in town and country,<sup>1</sup> and Henry Austen describes his sister as having been "a warm and judicious admirer of landscape, both in nature and on canvass".<sup>2</sup> She admired William Gilpin's work,<sup>3</sup> and made extensive use of her knowledge of his principles of the picturesque in her writing. The creating mind builds on its own experience, and there is much in the novels--the delight of many characters in country walks, and Anne Elliot's dislike of Bath, for example--that reflects Jane Austen's own sense of beauty and attitude to her surroundings. The juvenilia show that from an early age she was aware of possible uses of setting in fiction. The crude humour of the earliest parodies, which mock the absurdities that she found in some contemporary novels, depends in part on the nonsensical names of places and exaggeratedly conventional or ridiculous descriptions of scenery.<sup>4</sup> In these burlesques Jane Austen enjoys making fun of aspects of setting which she later treats seriously--the "sympathetic habitat"<sup>5</sup> (MW, p.181), the opposition between country and town (MW, p.30), references to food (MW, p.53), the connection between objects and memory (MW, p.184), the handling of time in fiction (MW, pp.11, 12). The mature novels reveal her ideas on the close relationship between people and their environment. In the ironic "Plan of a Novel", written in 1816,

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Letters, pp.85, 116, 148, 233.

<sup>2</sup> The "Biographical Notice" in Northanger Abbey, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Minor Works, pp.5, 18, 26; and pp.28, 29 below.

<sup>5</sup> This is Barbara Hardy's term; see A Reading, p.137.

"according to hints from various quarters" for the entertainment of nephews and nieces,<sup>1</sup> the heroine's father has lived "much in the World" (MW, p.428) before retiring to the country, and then he and his daughter are "never above a fortnight together in one place" (MW, p.429). Such mobility is not for Jane Austen's protagonists, and the novels show that her ideal environment, that which nurtures the virtues that belong to "true gentility" (E, p.358), is established by time, tradition, the "country habit" (P, p.168), and good husbandry.

Such a place, of course, is Donwell Abbey, the excellence of which reflects Mr Knightley's character. The reader gains his impression of Donwell Abbey chiefly through Emma's reflections upon the place, and these reflections in turn reveal and confirm qualities in Emma. Thus the reader's impression of place, especially in the three later novels, is coloured by the cast of the mediating character's mind and the nature of his or, more often, her feelings; the character sees what she looks at in a characteristic manner, and selects the features to which she is able or wishes to respond. In this way the physical environment is made to convey a character's disposition or social status; it may occasionally have symbolic meaning or suggestion; or it may be shown as a force exerting an influence either morally harmful or beneficial. The emphasis may be on the description of the place, or on the qualities of the owner, or on those of the character responding to it, or on all of these aspects. The heroine's response to her surroundings is the most complex; and, given frequently at a crucial stage in her development, as well as describing

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<sup>1</sup>B.C. Southam, Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts: A Study of the Novelist's Development through the Surviving Papers (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.79.



or suggesting a place or object, it reveals her values, feelings and quality of mind.

Because their surroundings are mainly created in this way by the characters themselves and are therefore always connected to the personal drama, the physical environment never becomes more prominent than the characters, nor does it dwarf them. Scenery, landscape and houses in fiction can be made to appear much larger than the people in them, but Jane Austen does not set her characters as small figures against a dominating background in the way that a writer like Hardy, because of his ideas about the universe, does in Tess of the d'Ubervilles. For Jane Austen man is still the chief object of interest; her focus is always on people and their relationships with each other, and the whole fictional world is built on such a consistent and exactly-observed small scale that the ordinary becomes extraordinarily significant, apparent minutiae carry implications of weighty import, and humdrum moments of living take on an intensity which makes a seemingly trivial and lightweight situation revealing and important. Virginia Woolf examines one such situation and its effects in The Watsons, an unfinished work written in 1804-5.<sup>1</sup>

The Edwardses are going to the ball. The Tomlinsons' carriage is passing; she can tell us that Charles is "being provided with his gloves and told to keep them on"; Tom Musgrave retreats to a remote corner with a barrel of oysters and is famously snug. Her genius is freed and active. At once our senses quicken; we are possessed with the peculiar intensity which she alone can impart. But of what is it all composed? Of a ball in a country town; a few couples meeting and taking hands in an assembly room; a little eating and drinking; and for catastrophe, a boy being snubbed by one young lady and kindly treated by another. There is no tragedy and no heroism. Yet for some reason the little scene is moving out of all proportion to its surface solemnity. We have been made to see that if Emma acted so in the ball-room, how

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<sup>1</sup> See Southam, Literary Manuscripts, p.64 for this dating.

considerate, how tender, inspired by what sincerity of feeling she would have shown herself in those graver crises of life which, as we watch her, come inevitably before our eyes. Jane Austen is thus a mistress of much deeper emotion than appears upon the surface. She stimulates us to supply what is not there. What she offers is, apparently, a trifle, yet is composed of something that expands in the reader's mind and endows with the most enduring form of life scenes which are outwardly trivial.<sup>1</sup>

Mary Lascelles, developing Virginia Woolf's brief analysis, finds a further explanation of Jane Austen's method and achievement in this respect. She writes of the delight and powerful suggestion which is implied in understatement and which can operate only if scale is truly kept.<sup>2</sup>

This matter of Jane Austen's small-scale fictional world has led, especially in much nineteenth-century criticism, to the charge that the small section of society that she writes about, the absence of startling and unusual incident, and the narrow range of her settings, are due to her own inexperience and restricted life, and that such limitations of her art constitute a weakness.<sup>3</sup> Since 1939, when Mary Lascelles published Jane Austen and her Art, the trend in modern criticism has been to examine Jane Austen's narrative technique in close relation to her meaning, and to place the novels in a historical perspective. The result of these approaches is that Jane Austen is now widely regarded "as a far more considerable,

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<sup>1</sup>Virginia Woolf, "Jane Austen", in The Common Reader: First Series (London: Hogarth Press, 1948), pp.173-74.

<sup>2</sup>Mary Lascelles, Jane Austen and her Art (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939; Oxford Paperbacks, 1963), p.135.

<sup>3</sup>B.C. Southam, ed., Critical Essays on Jane Austen (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p.xiv.

serious and wide-ranging writer than previous generations had supposed".<sup>1</sup> She deliberately limited her subject-matter, and we cannot necessarily conclude, like Richard Simpson in 1870, that she "had no interest for the great political and social problems which were being debated with so much blood in her day".<sup>2</sup> The French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars touched directly on her life in that a cousin's husband was guillotined, and two of her brothers had distinguished naval careers. The tone of a letter, written in 1816 to the Reverend J.S. Clarke, the Prince Regent's Librarian (L, pp.452-53), makes it clear that it was with no difficulty, resentment or regret that she rejected his suggestion that her next novel might be a "historical romance, illustrative of the history of the august House of Cobourg" (L, p.451). Jane Austen's choice of material was more than the artist's recognition of the nature of her gift; working on "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village" was, she wrote to her niece Anna, "the delight of [her] life" (L, p.401), and her novels were, we know from many such remarks in her correspondence, a great joy and source of happiness to her. In 1811 when she was in London visiting friends, shopping, going to galleries and plays, and correcting the proofs of Sense and Sensibility, she wrote to Cassandra: "No indeed, I am never too busy to think of S & S. I can no more forget it, than a mother can forget her sucking child" (L, p.272); and when Pride and Prejudice was published, she called the first copy her "own darling child" (L, p.297).

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<sup>1</sup>B.C. Southam, "Jane Austen", in The English Novel: Select Bibliographical Guides, ed. A.E. Dyson (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p.153.

<sup>2</sup>Southam, Critical Heritage, p.250.

Jane Austen's contentment with the small range of her subject-matter and her relish in its fruitfulness may be reflected in the passage in Emma when Emma looks out from the doorway of Ford's shop and finds entertainment and food for thought in the sparse, ordinary scene before her: "a mind lively and at ease, can do with seeing nothing, and can see nothing that does not answer" (E, p.233). As has already been said,<sup>1</sup> littleness in these novels does not imply triviality. Three extant prayers composed by Jane Austen (MW, pp. 453-57) express her understanding of the moral challenge presented by the minutiae of everyday life. She realized that many human qualities --integrity, fortitude, self-control, patience, kindness, and the lack of these--are exhibited and fully tested in the daily round of domestic life. It may be that it is more difficult to express these virtues in ordinary day-to-day existence than it is in the wide and varied world of public life and great actions. The Jane Austen heroine has to find self-expression and fulfilment in an extremely restricted environment; many of the people close to her are uncongenial, and she cannot move out of the limited social circle consisting of her family, a few old friends, and some newcomers. Marriage is the only honourable provision for a young woman, especially one of small fortune, and a relationship based on love, mutual understanding and respect is difficult to establish in a social milieu in which any degree of intimacy between a young man and woman is generally only possible in large mixed gatherings. All the young women in the novels suffer under the limitations imposed upon them by society, and Charlotte Lucas, who believes that

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<sup>1</sup>See p.8 above.

"happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance" (PP, p.23), is an example of one who does not succeed in reconciling the personal and the social, and sacrifices "every better feeling to worldly advantage" (PP, p.125). The narrow range of settings in the six novels mirrors the confined society in which the heroines live; time and place are extremely restricted, and we see the effect of environment upon character, and the ways in which young women can yet find inner freedom and happiness despite the limitations and difficulties of their dependent situation. The hero's world is a wider one; the men, when they leave the balls and drawing-rooms, return to their estates, professions or sporting pursuits. It is, however, when he is sharing the narrow domestic life of the heroine that the hero often begins to understand himself and the heroine's true worth. At the same time marriage for the heroine is more than a move into the house and social circle of the man she loves; because of her own spiritual growth, it takes her into a world of richer emotional, intellectual and moral experience than the one in which she grew up.

When Jane Austen described her novels as "the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour", she was not serious. She did not really think that her concerns were unimportant and her subject-matter trivial. But in the humorous and kindly-made comparison of her own writing and her nephew's "strong, manly, spirited Sketches" (L, pp.468-69), we have her acknowledgement of her scale and method. Like the miniaturist, Jane Austen takes a delight in intricate detail and fine patterning, she draws clear but delicate outlines, and pays scrupulous attention to minutiae which she sensitively and economically selects. Mary Lascelles points out how small changes made in the



rough drafts of The Watsons and Sanditon<sup>1</sup> heighten effects and accentuate characteristics, and suggests that Jane Austen "positively enjoyed" rewriting;<sup>2</sup> and B.C. Southam in his examination of the extant literary manuscripts observes that, although faults and weaknesses remain in The Watsons, "the revisions show Jane Austen already providing links and bridge passages, tightening the structure and easing the narrative flow".<sup>3</sup> This was her method. She "lop't and crop't" (L, p.298), revised and rewrote,<sup>4</sup> finished and polished, until she was satisfied. Another aspect of her thorough workmanship and art is the scrupulous care which she took to get the facts of time and place exactly right. Times, seasons, days of the week, distances, facts about places, the locality of her characters' houses and lodgings are all so precisely and accurately worked out that the facts of the fictitious world chime harmoniously with those of actual life. Suggested reasons for this precision and some of its effects are given in Chapters II and III.<sup>5</sup>

It is partly because of such exactitude and the highly polished finish that, despite the extremely sparing use of description and reference to place and spatial material, we have a strong impression of actuality and a lively picture of the scenes which are not

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<sup>1</sup>The only surviving manuscripts of Jane Austen's work are those of the juvenilia, Lady Susan, The Watsons, the Plan of a Novel, two chapters of Persuasion, and Sanditon. See Southam, Literary Manuscripts, p.v.

<sup>2</sup>Mary Lascelles, Art, pp.99-101.

<sup>3</sup>Southam, Literary Manuscripts, p.67.

<sup>4</sup>See pp.22-25 below.

<sup>5</sup>See pp.34-35, 121 below.

described. What Southam calls Jane Austen's "masterful artistic economy in the relation of means to an end"<sup>1</sup> is a commonplace in the criticism of her work; by knowing the characters we can visualize their environment, and only when description of place is necessary does Jane Austen give it. In a letter to Cassandra she parodies some lines from Scott's Marmion:<sup>2</sup> "I do not write for such dull elves / As have not a great deal of ingenuity themselves" (L, p.298); she expects her readers, to whom she courteously attributes an equality of understanding, to participate intelligently and creatively in their response to her novels, and, where setting is not described, to be able to imagine the kind of surroundings suggested, and take them for granted as the narrator and characters themselves do. Readers of Jane Austen also have to use their intelligence to discern the implications underlying the smooth and humorous surfaces, and the subtleties of her ambiguous language. Her ironic vision penetrates the false emotions and values, the self-deceptions and stupidities of human-beings, and, sometimes kindly, sometimes severely, but always justly, she exposes the truth beneath.

The major episodes in the novels are generally fairly large social gatherings--that is, fairly large in proportion to the "population" envisioned in the novels<sup>3</sup>--which lead to some kind of

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<sup>1</sup>Southam, Critical Essays, pp.xiii-xiv.

<sup>2</sup>Marmion vi.38:

I do not rhyme to that dull elf,  
Who cannot image to himself...

<sup>3</sup>In Mansfield Park, for example, twelve persons--all the main characters and some others--sit in the drawing-room one evening to discuss the play; and in Emma Miss Bates mentions the names of at least sixteen people at the ball at the Crown Inn, and ten characters assemble at Donwell Abbey.

crisis for the heroine, and there sometimes follows a contrasting episode when she is presented as alone and reflecting. Whether scenes are out of doors or indoors, they resemble framed stage settings with the focus on one or some or all of the characters whom Jane Austen carefully places or groups to make conversations possible or incidents convincing. An exact statement of where people are in relation to each other and to furniture in a room is one of the means she uses to build up to climaxes. Objects are referred to only if they are necessary to the action, or if a character registers or responds to them, or if they reveal a character's feelings or values or way of life. Norman Page in his study of Jane Austen's language finds that her art depends on aural rather than visual effects; he suspects that "few readers ever see her characters or settings with much vividness", and cites Jane Austen's remark in a letter to Cassandra about her mother's reading Pride and Prejudice aloud-- "though she perfectly understands the characters herself, she cannot speak as they ought" (L, p.299)--which suggests that Jane Austen's conception of dialogue in fiction included an element of quality of voice.<sup>1</sup>

The reader is aware of the atmosphere of places rather than their appearance. Any description given or references to spatial detail suggest the kind of place a house is, not so much what it looks like. Logan Pearsall Smith, discussing the quality of aesthetic beauty that in his opinion characterizes Mansfield Park and Persuasion and is wanting in the earlier novels, defines a quality

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<sup>1</sup>Norman Page, The Language of Jane Austen (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), pp.119-20.



also characteristic of the three later novels: "...this effect of richer colour and chiaroscuro is still more due to one subtle and exquisite power which Jane Austen developed in the maturity of her genius, the power of rendering what I shall call, for want of a better term, the moral atmosphere of places, the tones, that is, of collective feeling, the moral climates which are produced by, and surround, different groups of people, and fill, as with a body of dense and saturated air, the places where they live."<sup>1</sup> Anne Elliot is the heroine most sensitive to the different moral climate of "every little social commonwealth" (P, p.43); when she sadly leaves Kellynch, we learn that she "had not wanted this visit to Uppercross, to learn that a removal from one set of people to another, though at a distance of only three miles, will often include a total change of conversation, opinion, and idea" (P, p.42).

Time in Jane Austen's novels is a straightforward, uncomplicated process. Novelists and critics have always acknowledged the problem of time in fiction: Richardson in his prefaces frequently discusses the questions of immediacy and suspense;<sup>2</sup> in Henry James's view "the stiffest problem that the artist in fiction has to tackle lies in giving the sense of duration, of the lapse and accumulation of time",<sup>3</sup> and in 1941 Stephen Spender writes: "Modern literature is obsessed with problems of time."<sup>4</sup> But to Jane Austen time

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<sup>1</sup> Logan Pearsall Smith, Reperusals and Re-collections (London: Constable & Co., 1936), pp.368-69.

<sup>2</sup> A.A. Mendilow, Time and the Novel (New York: Humanitas Press, 1972), p.18.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.14.

apparently presents no great problem. In keeping with the consistently small scale of her fictional world, the dimension of time in the novels is concentrated, ordered and manageable; there is no vast Tolstoian sweep of time covering an epoch in man's history. There may be references to events before the heroine's lifetime--the opening chapter of Mansfield Park, the account of Captain Weston's marriage to Miss Churchill in Emma, or the dates given in the Baronetage in Persuasion--and at the end of each novel the reader feels that he knows something of the kind of life that lies ahead of the protagonists; but the action does not go back to a period that the heroine cannot remember nor forward to a time much beyond her marriage. It is clear, however, that Jane Austen knew well that "one of the functions of the storyteller is to be everywhere at the same time, mindful of past history, conscious of the present and aware of the possibilities of the future".<sup>1</sup>

That Jane Austen appears to manage time in her novels easily and confidently is not to say that she was unaware of the difficulties that beset the novelist in this respect. In the juvenilia she parodies the kind of things that can go wrong with time in fiction--instances of which she found in the novels which the whole Austen family so much enjoyed.<sup>2</sup> Before she was fifteen she had written in Chapter the Fifth of "Frederic & Elfrida": "At the end of 3 days Captain Roger and Rebecca were united and immediately after the Ceremony set off in the Stage Waggon for the Captains seat in

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<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Raban, The Technique of Modern Fiction: Essays in Practical Criticism (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), p.57.

<sup>2</sup>See Letters, p.38.

Buckinghamshire" (MW, p.10); and two sentences further on: "Weeks & Fortnights flew away without gaining the least ground; the Cloathes grew out of fashion & at length Capt: Roger & his Lady arrived, to pay a visit to their Mother & introduce to her their beautifull Daughter of eighteen" (MW, p.11). In 1793 Jane Austen still enjoyed this kind of crude burlesque of the nonsensical--she makes a character travel "for three days & six Nights without Stopping" (MW, p.177)-- but in Northanger Abbey such mockery of the advance of fictional time has lost the note of hilarious absurdity. Chapter thirteen opens: "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday have now passed in review before the reader; the events of each day, its hopes and fears, mortifications and pleasures have been separately stated, and the pangs of Sunday only now remain to be described, and close the week" (NA, p.97); and Alan D. McKillop comments: "This mocks the day by day and hour by hour chronicle of Richardson's important sequences, with an echo perhaps of Fanny Burney's solemn indications of time in Camilla...."<sup>1</sup> By the time she had written and revised her novels, Jane Austen had mastered the techniques of dealing with the various aspects of time that she needed.

Time within the limited span of a year or less moves forward steadily. All the heroines at moments recall the past, but only in the last two novels does Jane Austen relate events of the past at some length in order to introduce an important episode on which the plot, or part of it, depends. Early on in Emma a brief passage

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<sup>1</sup>Alan D. McKillop, "Critical Realism in Northanger Abbey", in From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, eds. Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p.41.

gives a summary account of Mr Weston's first marriage and life up to his marriage to Miss Taylor; and in Persuasion, after Anne learns that the Crofts are taking Kellynch--she already knows that Mrs Croft is Frederick Wentworth's sister, her thoughts turn to her engagement seven years before and the reasons for her breaking it off. Anne's "recollections and feelings" (P, p.30) make the transition from present to past and back again natural and easy, as do the references, first to Mr Weston and his marriage, and then to Frank Churchill and his letter, in the passage in Emma. Jane Austen varies the narrative pace by developing the action in several major episodes, during which, because these are presented largely through dialogue, fictional time moves slowly and the texture is dense; and also by joining these episodes by means of passages of rapid narrative. Unobtrusive, naturally introduced references to days, months, seasons, indicate the advance of the year, and the general impression is one of continuity with no noticeable gaps in time. The satisfying sense of design, which most of the novels give, arises partly from the kind of setting that Jane Austen chose for her stories; the restriction of time and place helps shape their structure and determine their pattern. The lively dialogue and presentation of character give a vivid impression of the present and of dramatic immediacy. All the heroines at some stage become acutely aware of time and the relationship between past actions and present happiness; and the novels demonstrate the importance of time in the progress towards self-knowledge and in the understanding of complex personalities. One of the ways by which characters show their quality is in their attitudes towards time, and in their use or abuse of memory. Finally, the novels also express Jane Austen's own attitude towards tradition and the changes that time brings to a way

of life. All these aspects are developed and discussed in the section on time in Chapter III, and considered with particular reference to Persuasion in Chapter IV.

In Jane Austen's novels nothing is superfluous. But, although setting is important, it is only comparatively recently that readers have examined this unobtrusive element, and seen the close connection between it and theme. In the nineteenth century there was not much close criticism of Jane Austen's novels. Few critics of the period consider setting, and none puts any emphasis on it. Scott does not refer to it, and Whately mentions only the "vivid distinctness of description, the minute fidelity of detail, and air of unstudied ease in the scenes represented".<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Brontë finds both the characters and settings uncongenial: "I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses."<sup>2</sup> G.H. Lewes praises Jane Austen's underrated excellence and especially admires her dramatic powers, but he does not appreciate her deliberately limited range. Of her description, that "common and easy resource of novelists",<sup>3</sup> he writes: "She seldom describes anything, and is not felicitous when she attempts it."<sup>4</sup> Richard Simpson, in his excellent and generally perceptive essay of 1870, sees no significance in Jane Austen's settings: "In some of her novels she places her coterie of families in Bath, or even in London; and then Bath society comes in as a picturesque background; but it is only pictorial; it has no more to do with the development of her drama or the explication of her characters than the woods and the hills which she is much more

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<sup>1</sup> Southam, Critical Heritage, p.96.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.126.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.157.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



fond of describing."<sup>1</sup> It is not until well into the twentieth century, when the emphasis in criticism falls on Jane Austen's technique, that critics give attention to her settings.

A turning point came in 1939 with Mary Lascelles's Jane Austen and her Art, and since then the number of major studies has steadily increased. But with regard to commentary on aspects of setting, Virginia Woolf had written about the significance of apparent trivialities in 1923, and L.P. Smith about moral atmosphere in 1934. Mary Lascelles devotes about one tenth of her study to place and time in the novels. Speaking of Jane Austen's representation of time, she makes the important observation that "it is rooted in her (gradually mastered) technique for using the consciousness of her characters as a means of communication with the reader".<sup>2</sup> Of the 794 works entered in the Annotated Bibliography of Jane Austen Studies 1952-1972 by Roth and Weinsheimer, twenty-four entries contain references to setting. Most of these entries are studies of a single novel, about a quarter are full-scale readings of Jane Austen, and a few deal with specific aspects of setting. Since 1973 some valuable critical works on Jane Austen have been published, notably those by Stuart M. Tave, Gillie, D.D. Devlin and Barbara Hardy; and two collections of essays were assembled to celebrate the bicentenary. Of the December issue of Nineteenth-Century Fiction in 1975 (devoted entirely to Jane Austen) two of the ten articles discuss aspects of setting. Barbara Hardy has written in most detail about the physical environment in Jane

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p.251.

<sup>2</sup>Mary Lascelles, Art, p.178.

Austen's novels,<sup>1</sup> but all the critics mentioned above deal with some features of setting. The most important insight that emerges from modern criticism on this topic is the observation, first made by Mary Lascelles and stressed by Barbara Hardy, that Jane Austen's representation of the physical environment is mainly rendered through the consciousness of characters.<sup>2</sup>

The uses that Jane Austen makes of setting vary in each novel. She seems to have become increasingly more aware of the atmosphere of place and its effect on character, for, although people always remain central, aspects of place and time are more prominent and important in the later novels than in those she wrote when young and later revised. The dates of composition of some of the six novels are a complicated and sometimes a controversial matter,<sup>3</sup> and, in order to establish the chronology of the novels for the purposes of this dissertation, a short account follows. We know that in the long intervals between the first drafts and publication Jane Austen rewrote and revised the original compositions of Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice. In a note, made probably after her sister's death,<sup>4</sup> Cassandra

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter 6, "Properties and Possessions", in A Reading, pp.136-65. This appears slightly altered in Jane Austen's Achievement: Papers delivered at the Jane Austen Bicentennial Conference at the University of Alberta, ed. Juliet McMaster (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), pp.79-105. See also "The objects in Mansfield Park" in Bicentenary Essays, pp.180-96.

<sup>2</sup>See Mary Lascelles, Art, p.194, and Barbara Hardy, A Reading, p.137.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Q.D. Leavis, "A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings", Scrutiny 10 (1941-42): 61-87, 114-42, 272-94; and Kenneth L. Moler, Jane Austen's Art of Allusion (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), p.119.

<sup>4</sup>See Southam, Literary Manuscripts, pp.52-54.

recorded the dates when Jane Austen began and finished each novel, and it is on this memorandum and on references in the Letters that our knowledge of the genesis of the novels is based. According to the dates given by Cassandra, the earliest drafts of Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility and Northanger Abbey were written before Jane Austen was twenty-five, and Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion in the last seven years of her life, that is, after she was thirty-five. Cassandra noted that Northanger Abbey was written in 1798 or 1799. In 1803 the manuscript entitled Susan was sold to a London firm, Crosby & Co., for £10, but unaccountably was not published, and Henry Austen bought it back in 1816 after the publication of Emma. Jane Austen may at this time have revised the work--R.W. Chapman comments that "we are not bound to believe that nothing was altered after 1803" (NA, p.xiii)--and she certainly wrote the "Advertisement, by the Authoress" in 1816 to explain that the novel had been intended for publication in 1803, and to prepare readers for some parts of it "which thirteen years have made comparatively obsolete" (NA, p.12). In March 1817, however, she put "Miss Catherine" on the shelf (L, p.484) and was apparently not planning immediate publication. Five months after her death in July Henry Austen published the work, together with Persuasion, under the present title. As it stands, Northanger Abbey contains more of Jane Austen's early writing than either Pride and Prejudice or Sense and Sensibility, although the first versions of these novels were written before it, and for this reason in this study it always comes first when the novels are listed in chronological order.

Cassandra gives November 1797 for the composition of Sense and Sensibility, and mentions the earlier version, Elinor and



Marianne, which, according to W. and R.A. Austen-Leigh in Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters (1913), was in epistolary form.<sup>1</sup> In April 1811 Jane Austen was correcting the proofs of Sense and Sensibility (L, p.273), and it was published in November that year. The earliest form of Pride and Prejudice, called First Impressions, was written in 1796-97. In November 1797 Mr Austen wrote to the publisher Cadell offering a manuscript novel in three volumes, but nothing came of this attempt. Two references in letters of 1799 reveal that the work was read by the Austen family and their friends (L, pp.52, 67). Chapman believes that Jane Austen made substantial changes to First Impressions, or to a later version called Pride and Prejudice, in 1812, and his evidence for this opinion is convincing, although, according to Cassandra, Jane Austen was also working on Mansfield Park at this period. His reasoning is based on calculations made by him and Frank MacKinnon to demonstrate that Jane Austen used the almanac for 1811-12 for the chronology of Pride and Prejudice.<sup>2</sup> If we accept this fact, he argues, "we must infer that the book as we know it was substantially rewritten in 1812; for it is certain that so intricate a chronological scheme cannot have been patched on to an existing work without extensive revision" (PP, p.xiii). This recasting of earlier material connects Pride and Prejudice with the novels of Jane Austen's maturity, rather than with Northanger Abbey and Sense and Sensibility.

The dates of composition and publication of the novels which Jane Austen started to write after she settled at Chawton in July 1809 are straightforward. Mansfield Park was begun in

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<sup>1</sup>R.W. Chapman, Jane Austen: Facts and Problems (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p.42.

<sup>2</sup>See Pride and Prejudice, pp.401-8.

February 1811, finished about June 1813, and published soon after May 1814. Q.D. Leavis seems to be the only critic who thinks that this novel is a reworking of the early epistolary "Lady Susan".<sup>1</sup> For the composition of Emma Cassandra gives exact dates: Jane Austen began it on 21 January 1814 and finished it on 29 March 1815. Dedicated to the Prince Regent, it was published in December 1815, but the date on the title page is 1816. We also have exact dates for the writing of Persuasion: having started it on 8 August 1815, Jane Austen finished the first draft on 18 July, and had rewritten the second-last chapter by 6 August 1816. In March 1817 she told her niece Fanny Knight that she had "a something ready for Publication" and that it might "appear about a twelvemonth hence" (L, p.484). Mary Lascelles suggests that Jane Austen, as was her custom, intended to keep the manuscript by her in order to find out what faults still lurked there.<sup>2</sup> She was by this time very ill, and when she died four months later, she had not gone over the whole of Persuasion to give it the fine finish of the other major novels.

There is in the eighteenth-century novel a certain amount of precedence for what Jane Austen does with setting. With Defoe, Richardson and Fielding--although they wrote very different kinds of novels--a new form of fiction had appeared in the first half of the century, the defining characteristic of which, according to historians of the novel, is "realism", a term that Ian Watt, in The Rise of the

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<sup>1</sup>Q.D. Leavis, "A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings (II): 'Lady Susan' into 'Mansfield Park'", Scrutiny 10 (1941-42): 114-42, 272-94.

<sup>2</sup>Mary Lascelles, Art, p.38.

Novel, examines at length.<sup>1</sup> This new kind of novel rejected the traditional plots which had served tellers of stories in all forms since classical times; the plot now has to be acted by "particular people in particular circumstances", and "characters...can only be individualized if they are set in a background of particularized time and place".<sup>2</sup>

Defoe, Richardson and Fielding set their characters, who belong to all classes, in the contemporary social environment, and a common aim is to present an illusion of reality. A way by which Defoe achieves a sense of verisimilitude is his extensive use of movable objects; Robinson Crusoe, especially, is memorable for the list of provisions taken aboard ships, the hardware that Crusoe retrieves from the wreck, and the things that he makes on the island. Richardson, too, takes full advantage of the feminine point of view and fills Pamela with an abundance of seemingly unselected and minutely described domestic detail. All three novelists use actual place names. Defoe at times creates a strong sense of locale by including vivid details, for instance, of Newgate prison in Moll Flanders: there is no long description, but references to the noise, stench and general nastiness create the atmosphere that fills Moll Flanders with fear and horror. And the lists of London parishes with the precise numbers of the dead help to give A Journal of the Plague Year its documentary realism. Defoe's works show his knowledge and relish of all aspects of the great city, but Richardson's heroines are country-

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<sup>1</sup>See Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957; Pelican Books, 1972), pp.10-37.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 16, 23.

bred girls, and his own fear and distrust of London pervade his novels.<sup>1</sup> His details of day-to-day living give an impression of the physical reality and moral atmosphere of houses and interiors. He does not describe natural scenery. Fielding gives no description of London and few names of districts there, but the references to fashion, balls, the play and opera suggest life in the Town. He does not list minutiae as Richardson does, we have no sense of his interiors, and his descriptions of scenery are brief and conventional. Barbara Hardy gives Fielding the credit for introducing into fiction the sympathetic habitat because Squire Allworthy's house reflects his character, status and way of life.<sup>2</sup> This house is also the first Gothic mansion in the English novel.<sup>3</sup>

Time, like place, in these novels is wide-ranging. The action spans a period of years, and there is seldom an urgent sense that time is limited. All three novelists attempt to convey the reality of time. Defoe's works are the most loosely constructed in this respect: sentences like "The rainy season of the Autumnal Equinox was now come"<sup>4</sup> and "We lived in an uninterrupted course of ease and content for five years"<sup>5</sup> suggest the passing of time in Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders respectively, and his time scales are sometimes contradictory and inconsistent.<sup>6</sup> Richardson's

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.205.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Hardy, A Reading, pp.136-37.

<sup>3</sup> Watt, Novel, p.29.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), p.89.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Defoe, Moll Flanders (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1936), p.162.

<sup>6</sup> Watt, Novel, p.26.

extraordinarily detailed time schemes are unprecedented; the almost minute-by-minute account of inner life and daily experience in the dated letters gives a strong sense of continuous time, but the extremely slow and unvaried pace often makes tedious reading. Fielding, using the device of the intrusive narrator, manages the advance of time and the tempo of the novel with skill. Mary Lascelles describes his method: "He presents scenes of which the pace approximates, as nearly as the conventions of the stage demand, to clock-time, and links them to one another by his custom of addressing the reader in the intervals; thus pledging his credit for the continued existence of his characters, but varying the pace of that existence."<sup>1</sup> Another innovation in Tom Jones, appropriately pertinent to a study of Jane Austen's methods of presenting time and place, is the accurate time scheme: incidents are chronologically consistent with each other and with the historical events of the year 1745, and critics conjecture that Fielding must have worked with an actual almanac. He is also careful over the exact location of, and distances between, places, and the timing of journeys.

We can tell something about the settings in the popular sentimental novels of the eighteenth century from Jane Austen's burlesques of these in the juvenilia. Her mockery of the absurdities in the treatment of time has already been illustrated,<sup>2</sup> and her childhood compositions show a similar delight in ridiculing conventional descriptions of place. She may not have been much more than

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Lascelles, Art, p.186.

<sup>2</sup>See pp.17-18 above.



twelve<sup>1</sup> when she made her characters walk "in a grove of Poplars which led from the Parsonage to a verdant Lawn enamelled with a variety of variegated flowers & watered by a purling Stream, brought from the Valley of Tempé by a passage underground" (MW, p.5). At this age she could also juxtapose romantic cliché and the ludicrously banal: characters walk "in a Citron Grove which led from her Ladyship's pigstye to Charles Adams's Horsepond" (MW, p.18); and others rest themselves in a place suited to meditation: "A Grove of full-grown Elms sheltered us from the East--. A Bed of full-grown Nettles from the West--. Before us ran the murmuring brook & behind us ran the turn-pike road" (MW, p.97). The adult Jane Austen admired Maria Edgeworth<sup>2</sup> whose Irish stories, especially, have a realistic quality that is very different from the world of the sentimental novel. Marilyn Butler compares Maria Edgeworth's economy to Jane Austen's, and describes her method of presenting realistic background: "The sense of contemporary actuality is fortified by street-names in real towns; consistent dates, culled from almanacks; journeys timed with atlases and time-tables; lawsuits, carefully checked with legal experts."<sup>3</sup> Castle Rackrent (1800) is filled with realistic detail used to show character, Irish habits and farming activities, but in "Lame Jervas" (1799), a moral tale of honesty and hard work, there is no attempt to create the atmosphere of the tin mine, nor of London and the east when Lame Jervas makes good, and unconvincing

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<sup>1</sup> See Minor Works, p.1 for Chapman's dates of the juvenilia.

<sup>2</sup> See Letters, p.405.

<sup>3</sup> Marilyn Butler, Jane Austen and the War of Ideas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p.155.

conventional references to weather and scenery are used to indicate time and place. Jane Austen had read all the "horrid" novels mentioned by Isabella Thorpe (NA, p.40),<sup>1</sup> and the quality and tone of her parody of a Gothic atmosphere suggest admiration rather than scorn for Mrs Radcliffe's methods of creating her settings.<sup>2</sup> In her own representations of time and place Jane Austen adopted many of the devices used in the eighteenth-century novel, developing and refining them for her purposes; she also made innovations, some of which have become common techniques in modern fiction.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapman, Facts and Problems, p.39.

<sup>2</sup> See p.144 below.

## CHAPTER II

## PLACE

In his excellent Some Words of Jane Austen (1973) Tave summarises the nature and significance of place, spatial detail and time in Jane Austen's novels.

Time and space in Jane Austen are not what a reader raised on twentieth-century literature is likely to assume they must be by nature. They are not problematic or oppressive. They are not puzzling mysteries and they are not impositions upon the human spirit to be rebelled against or transcended. On the contrary, they have coherence and help to give shape to human life; they are there to be used or abused. If they seem to simplify life they do not make it easier, because they allow no cosmic excuses. They are limited and must be understood, but the limits set the conditions within which action must be taken, here and now or not at all, and it is the ability to act with rectitude and grace under these inescapable conditions that distinguishes among human beings.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter on place in five of the novels shows how Jane Austen creates and suggests the physical surroundings in her fictional worlds, and stresses the remarkable care which she took to make the settings true to life. The major part of the chapter examines the ways in which she uses place to reveal character.

In her aim to avoid "improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation, which no longer concern any one living" (NA, p.38), and to present an imitation of life, we see Jane Austen as the successor of novelists like Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and Maria Edgeworth. Her methods and manner of achieving

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart M. Tave, Some Words of Jane Austen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p.6.



verisimilitude in her settings differ from theirs in many respects, but like them she makes use of the names of actual places, works to a consistent time scheme, and gives an impression of day-to-day living. She is unlike most of them, however, in her care to be scrupulously accurate and consistent in the factual aspects of her fiction such as time and place. We know a little of what Jane Austen thought of the novels of other writers from the burlesques in the juvenilia and from the few brief comments in her correspondence;<sup>1</sup> we can read her half-serious, half-playful account of the novel in chapter five of Northanger Abbey; but, although she must have thought about novel-writing a great deal, Jane Austen did not formulate and write down in a connected fashion her ideas and theories on fiction. There are many brief and casual references to her novels in her correspondence, but the only comments on her own methods and techniques occur in a few letters to her niece Anna and nephew Edward,<sup>2</sup> both of whom--to use Jane Austen's colloquial expression--took up the Novel Line,<sup>3</sup> and presumably asked their aunt for advice. Extracts from a letter to Anna express the same demand for realistic fidelity that Jane Austen herself practises:

...I have scratched out Sir Tho: from walking with the other Men to the Stables &c the very day after his breaking his arm--for though I find your Papa did walk out immediately after his arm was set, I think it can be so little usual as to appear unnatural in a book--& it does not seem to be material that Sir Tho: should go with them.--Lyme will not do. Lyme is towards 40 miles distance from Dawlish & would not be talked of there....

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Letters, pp.173, 180, 344, 422.

<sup>2</sup>See Letters, pp.393-96, 400-2, 468-69.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.462.

Yes--Russel Square is a very proper distance from Berkeley St.-- ...They must be two days going from Dawlish to Bath; They are nearly 100 miles apart.

...And we think you had better not leave England. Let the Portmans go to Ireland, but as you know nothing of the Manners there, you had better not go with them. You will be in danger of giving false representations.

(L, pp.394-95)

A letter to Cassandra, written in February 1813 when Jane Austen was probably revising Mansfield Park, shows the same painstaking care to have facts correct: "I learn from Sir J. Carr [that is, from his book Descriptive Travels in the Southern and Eastern Parts of Spain<sup>1</sup>] that there is no Government House at Gibraltar. I must alter it to the Commissioner's" (L, p.292).

In addition to feeling the effect of this kind of precision in the strong impression of actuality, and in the smooth, polished surfaces of the novels as well as in their profundities, the reader is aware of Jane Austen's consistent and punctilious use of apparent minutiae. We know that she knew more about her characters than she put into the novels,<sup>2</sup> but she seems also to have been able to imagine and keep in her mind details of their surroundings. There are many instances of this kind of thoroughness, and of Jane Austen's sure memory for detail. In Emma, for example, while sitting in Mrs Weston's drawing-room before dinner, Emma is disturbed to find herself unable to forget Mr Elton and his odd behaviour. He obtrudes his happy countenance on her notice, and after many solicitous attentions he "at last would begin admiring her drawings with so much zeal and so little knowledge as seemed terribly like a would-be

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapman's note in Mansfield Park, p.546.

<sup>2</sup>Memoir, pp.157-58.

lover" (E, p.118). It is not necessary to say here what drawings these are because seventy-five pages back, when the project of Harriet's portrait was proposed, Mr Elton had rapturously praised Emma's talent: "I know what your drawings are. How could you suppose me ignorant? Is not this room rich in specimens of your landscapes and flowers; and has not Mrs. Weston some inimitable figure-pieces in her drawing-room, at Randalls?" (E, p.43). Jane Austen's working in this way is more than an artist's inability to "do anything slovenly" (L, p.30), more than a means of giving the world of Emma its sense of solid reality, and critics have found varying reasons for such meticulous attention to the facts of her characters' surroundings. Chapman was the first to suggest that there is more in Jane Austen's singular "regard for accuracy in those parts of her fiction which were grounded on fact--such as dates and places.... It should seem that her creative imagination worked most freely within a framework fixed for her by small points of contact with reality. Once she felt herself at home, her fancy would soon be busy fitting and arranging every detail".<sup>1</sup> Alistair M. Duckworth states that he finds in the "ligature between fiction and reality a philosophic indication". He maintains that Jane Austen, realizing that the strength of a novel "depends upon frequent contact with the ground", recognized that the "ungrounded imagination is as dangerous for an author as it is for a character within the novel, and imaginative limitation is welcome, for it is proof that there is a center to reality other than the individual mind". He continues: "In her close attention to physical fact Jane Austen declares her belief, not

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<sup>1</sup> Chapman, Facts and Problems, pp.121-22.

in man as the creator of order but in man's freedom to create within a prior order. Thus her individualism as author, like the individualism of her heroines, respects finally the given structure of her world."<sup>1</sup> Other suggested reasons for Jane Austen's working in this way are given on page 121.

Jane Austen adopted from Fielding a simple and convenient method of representing reality convincingly; she based the time schemes of some of her novels on actual almanacs,<sup>2</sup> and she also seems to have used road-books for journeys and distances.<sup>3</sup> Mary Lascelles guesses that, because when suggesting improvements to her niece's novel, Jane Austen does not recommend that Anna use a road-book, and because her nephew and nieces do not mention it, this practice may have been her private game, or known only to Cassandra.<sup>4</sup> In the novels the distances between places correspond with the time taken to cover them. Catherine Morland and the Tilneys, for example, travelling at the "sober pace in which the handsome, highly-fed four horses of a gentleman usually perform a journey of thirty miles" (NA, p.155), leave Bath after ten o'clock, spend a tedious two hours' bait at Petty France (which is exactly fifteen miles from Bath), and arrive at Northanger at half past four. Again, Hunsford is fifty miles from Longbourn; Sir William Lucas, with Elizabeth Bennet and his daughter, having covered the twenty-four miles to Gracechurch

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<sup>1</sup>Alistair M. Duckworth, The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1971), p.34.

<sup>2</sup>See p.28 above.

<sup>3</sup>Mary Lascelles, Art, p.172.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

Street by noon, breaks the journey before going on to Kent, another four hours' travel, but Mr Darcy, thinking no doubt of riding a good horse, considers the distance an easy one and "little more than half a day's journey" (PP, p.178). In Sense and Sensibility, in which novel there is the most moving of characters from place to place, distances are vague: Barton lies in "a county so far distant from Sussex as Devonshire" (SS, p.24), and Willoughby travels the unstated distance from London to Cleveland in twelve hours, stopping only once for ten minutes. But when exactitude is significant Jane Austen gives the information; Mrs Dashwood's news that she and her daughters are moving to Devonshire provokes a pointed response from Edward: "[He] turned hastily towards her, on hearing this, and, in a voice of surprise and concern, which required no explanation to her, repeated, 'Devonshire! Are you, indeed, going there? So far from hence! And to what part of it?' She explained the situation. It was within four miles northward of Exeter" (SS, p.25).

The same precision and consideration for fact operates in the choice of locale. The action of all the novels, except Mansfield Park and the Pemberley scenes in Pride and Prejudice, takes place in the southern counties of England, which Jane Austen herself knew. She sets Pemberley in Derbyshire because the county is on the way to the Lake District--the first destination of the Gardiners' tour--and near the celebrated beauties of Matlock, Chatsworth, Dovedale, the Peak, which she had read about in Gilpin,<sup>1</sup> and these attractions serve as a pretext for getting Elizabeth to

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<sup>1</sup>Frank W. Bradbrook, Jane Austen and her Predecessors (London: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p.57.



Pemberley. A reason for choosing Northamptonshire for Mansfield Park was perhaps that she wanted a hunting county, and had already used Devonshire and Somersetshire in Sense and Sensibility. (Chapman suggests that it is good hunting country that attracts Henry Crawford to Mansfield.<sup>1</sup>) The settings of the great houses and country villages for the other novels all seem to be carefully chosen so that they are located in a suitable area, and distances between certain places and people are appropriate to the demands of the plot. Fullerton in Wiltshire is one long day's journey from Northanger Abbey in Gloucestershire; it would be unrealistic for Catherine to have to travel more than seventy miles alone. In Pride and Prejudice Longbourn, Meryton and Netherfield are within walking distance of each other. Mr Bennet has only one carriage and the horses also work on the farm. Jane has, therefore, to ride the three miles to Netherfield, gets wet and catches cold; and Elizabeth's walk through muddy fields both heightens the brilliancy of her complexion, which attracts the admiration of Mr Darcy, and shows "a most country-town indifference to decorum" (PP, p.36), which draws scorn from Miss Bingley. The plot of Emma requires that Frank Churchill should never have visited Highbury before his father's remarriage; Enscombe is, therefore, a hundred and ninety miles away in Yorkshire. This distance, together with Mrs Churchill's ill-health and temperament and the young man's character, makes us accept the fact that he has never yet visited Highbury. It is the cold of Yorkshire that brings the Churchills south, first to London, which is understandably too noisy for Mrs Churchill, and then to

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<sup>1</sup> Chapman, Facts and Problems, p.84.



Richmond, which is an hour's ride from Highbury. Mansfield Park is half a mile away from the Parsonage, and not in sight of it. Fanny's expressly walking the fifty yards from the hall door to a point from which she can see the Parsonage and its grounds, when Edmund is giving Mary Crawford a riding lesson, emphasises her anxiety and subconscious jealousy. Mansfield is two days' travel from Portsmouth in order that there may be no easy intercourse between the two families. The journey is a difficult one to make, especially for a young woman, and Fanny has to curb her impatience at the delay that prevents Sir Thomas's fetching her from Portsmouth when Tom is ill at Mansfield. Jane Austen frequently mentions the difficulties of arranging a journey in her letters.<sup>1</sup> It was not at that time desirable for a young middle-class woman to make a journey in a public vehicle: Edmund Bertram travels from London to Portsmouth on the mail, but Miss Steele is quick to assure Mrs Jennings that she and her sister had not come to London from Exeter in the stage. (Her exultation over their type of conveyance, however, is mainly due to their having shared a post-chaise with a very smart beau who paid most of the cost.)

There may be difficulties in arranging a journey, but once on the road Jane Austen's heroines suffer no hardships or dangers, they experience no incidents or adventures, as do Harriet Byron, Pamela Andrews and Fanny Burney's Madame Duval. They travel in order to move to a new home, to pay visits to friends and relations, to spend the season in London, or to go on pleasure tours to places of interest and beauty. And Jane Austen spends little narrative time

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<sup>1</sup> See Letters, pp. 16, 121, for example.

in describing particulars of the journey; she generally gets her travellers to their destinations as quickly as possible without jerking the narrative thread or being guilty of absurdities such as those which she mocks in the juvenilia,<sup>1</sup> and dwells only on the aspects of a journey which the heroine registers. A few lines take the Dashwoods from Norland to Barton, but when Elinor and Marianne go to London, we are given one paragraph on Elinor's wonder at their being Mrs Jennings's guests and her speculations about Marianne and Willoughby, and another on Marianne's unsociable behaviour, Elinor's consideration for Mrs Jennings, and a brief reference to the inn and dinners. By the end of the passage the long journey is over: "They reached town by three o'clock the third day, glad to be released, after such a journey, from the confinement of a carriage, and ready to enjoy all the luxury of a good fire" (SS, p.160). The same pattern occurs in Pride and Prejudice. When the Gardiners and Elizabeth, returning hurriedly from Derbyshire, are in the carriage, they discuss the likely situation between Lydia and Wickham at some length, and only one short sentence deals with the actual journey. The conversation during the second part of Catherine Morland's journey to Northanger Abbey, when she sits next to Henry Tilney in his curricle, relates to important action: it gives the opportunity for some information about Henry's life in Gloucestershire, a reminder of Catherine's expectations of the Abbey, and Henry's Gothic imaginings of her welcome and first night there, which unintentionally helps to stimulate her already over-active imagination. We are not told whether Fanny Price, happy to be with William and

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<sup>1</sup>See pp.17-18 above.

her mind full of ten hundred thoughts, sees anything of the road to Portsmouth besides the "hasty glimpse of Edmund's College" (MP, p.376) as they pass through Oxford. When she is at last on her way back to Mansfield, Fanny is not so entirely concerned for Edmund's silent suffering that she does not notice her surroundings, but it is not until they enter the park that we are given any description of the scenery--and this is because of the symbolic suggestion of the beauty which Fanny sees.<sup>1</sup>

Short excursions in carriages, as opposed to journeys from one place to another, are a form of amusement for Jane Austen's leisured people, and she uses such outings to reveal character. That Catherine Morland rides in his gig to Claverton Down with John Thorpe is a consequence of Mrs Allen's "vacancy of mind and incapacity for thinking" (NA, p.60) which might have harmed Catherine, but the episode mainly serves to reveal the character of John Thorpe; four pages of talk which "began and ended with himself and his own concerns" (NA, p.66) expose his vanity, boorish manners and inferior mind. Fanny Price, on the road to Sotherton and ignored by the others inside Henry Crawford's barouche, "was very happy in observing all that was new, and admiring all that was pretty" (MP, p.80). The interested observation of inanimate nature indicated here is only one way in which Fanny differs from Mary Crawford, whose attention is all for men and women, and who has "none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling". As they approach Sotherton Maria Bertram's "Rushworth-feelings" (MP, p.81) prompt her to point out the woods and property, and landmarks in the village and park, in

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<sup>1</sup>See p.145 below.

terms which reveal her materialistic values and desire for position and wealth. Emma Woodhouse makes no long journeys out of Highbury; we learn that after her marriage she and Mr Knightley will go on a tour to the sea-side, but this does not take place in the course of the novel. The only time Emma leaves Highbury is on the short excursion to Box Hill, and on this occasion, because the emphasis is exclusively on the discord amongst groups and individuals, the outward circumstances of the episode are not significant. A few words refer to the journey there, and on the return all that matters are Emma's agitated feelings and mortifying self-examination; in the carriage there is only Harriet, and "Emma felt the tears running down her cheeks almost all the way home, without being at any trouble to check them, extraordinary as they were" (E, p.376). It is the second time that Emma experiences self-revelatory feelings of mortification and unhappiness while travelling. This is partly because a carriage offers a kind of privacy not easily found in Jane Austen's time. Mr Elton excitedly seizes the unexpected opportunity to propose to Emma, and returning from Box Hill with only Harriet, who is dispirited and silent, Emma does not need to speak or restrain her thoughts and emotions. However, there may also be some significance in the fact that on both these occasions, when Emma is literally suspended above the ground and bumping along in a carriage, she suffers a metaphorical jolt out of her usual complacency. In the second episode especially, Emma's world, seemingly firm, solid, down-to-earth, is so shaken that it is not the same again. Separated from Hartfield, Randalls and the places in Highbury where she has been allowed to think too well of herself, exercise her own judgement, and indulge her fancy, Emma is now in a kind of limbo, imprisoned with the new knowledge

of herself and her faults and, as Tave notes, on this carriage ride, "unlike the ride with Mr Elton, the anger and concern are properly directed".<sup>1</sup>

The names of the places where her characters live and which they visit contribute to our sense of reality in the novels, and in her choice of these Jane Austen has two methods. Aiming at verisimilitude, she follows the practice of novelists since Defoe and uses the names of actual countries, towns and streets, and these are, as has already been mentioned, mainly in the south of England. None of the novels is set in Jane Austen's own county of Hampshire (a stratagem, perhaps, to help preserve her anonymity as a novelist), but from Wiltshire, Devonshire, Hertfordshire, Surrey, Northamptonshire and Somersetshire, characters travel to Bath, London, Portsmouth and Lyme, where they may live in Pulteney Street or Harley Street, shop in Milson Street or Bond Street, walk to the naval dockyards or on the Cobb. Her characters may be familiar with resorts such as Dawlish, Brighton, Weymouth and Tunbridge, and the snobbish amongst them may be superior about Birmingham and Gracechurch Street. The names of the small towns and country villages where the heroines live, however, are fictitious and the places unidentifiable; Jane Austen made up names such as Fullerton, Barton, Meryton and Highbury, and yet, even in her fictitious names of places and people there is sometimes a hidden link with reality. She places Highbury near Leatherhead in Surrey, and Chapman notes that it was in Leatherhead that she found the names "Randalls" and "Knightley".<sup>2</sup> Her inventions are

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<sup>1</sup>Tave, Some Words, p.246.

<sup>2</sup>Chapman, Facts and Problems, p.122.



well-sounding English names, and some perhaps suggest the kinds of places that they are. Certainly, Mrs Philips and her younger nieces have a merry time with the officers in Meryton. Names of houses and estates--Northanger Abbey, Longbourn, Mansfield Park--are, of course, inventions. Chapman considers that "the resemblance of Pemberley and Everingham to Miss Burney's Pemberton and Everington can hardly be accident".<sup>1</sup> Mention of places further afield in England and abroad reminds the reader of a wider world; characters go to Newcastle, Ireland or Antigua, and there are references to Barbados and Avignon; but the action of the novels never moves further north than Derbyshire or out of England.

Jane Austen places her characters' houses or lodgings in areas of London or Bath with the same precision that is evident in her presentation of other aspects of setting. Nikolaus Pevsner, in a detailed account illustrated with maps, shows her careful choice of addresses.<sup>2</sup> In London the wealthiest characters and those with the greatest social pretensions live in Mayfair and north of Oxford Street: Admiral Crawford's house is off Berkeley Square, the Hursts live in Grosvenor Street, the Palmers in Hanover Square not far from Sir John Middleton in Conduit Street and Mrs Jennings in Berkeley Street. North of Mayfair are the new squares and streets built in the late eighteenth century,<sup>3</sup> and here in Manchester, Wimpole and Harley Streets live the Churchills, Rushworths and John Dashwoods. The

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, "The Architectural Setting of Jane Austen's Novels", Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes 31 (1968): 412-16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 412.



bachelors generally have lodgings south of Piccadilly in St James's Street and Pall Mall, the area which became after 1827 the centre of the men's clubs.<sup>1</sup> The superior shopping district is also in Mayfair. Several families live further away from this smart and rich area. Sensible and wealthy Mr John Knightley lives closer to the law courts in newly-built and elegant Brunswick Square; the poor and ill-bred Steele girls stay with a cousin near Holborn Circus, and a mile still further east, in the heart of the city and "within view of his own warehouses" (PP, p.139), gentlemanly Mr Gardiner has his house in Gracechurch Street. In Bath, too, the wealthy live at the best addresses in the fashionable area, built in the eighteenth century north of the city on the slope rising away from the River Avon. General Tilney takes a house in Milsom Street, Admiral Croft in Gay Street, Lady Russell has lodgings in Rivers Street, and Sir Walter Elliot's house is high up in Camden Place. East of the river in New Town, built in 1788,<sup>2</sup> lives the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple, socially the most exalted of Jane Austen's characters, and the Allens with Catherine Morland. (The situation of ~~her~~<sup>his</sup> lodgings in Bath may have contributed to John Thorpe's and General Tilney's misconception about Mr Allen's financial position.) From 1801 to 1804 the Austens themselves lived in Sidney Terrace at the far end of New Town. After the death of the Reverend Mr Austen in January 1805, Mrs Austen, Cassandra and Jane moved to 25 Gay Street, but for about a year before this they had lived in Green Park Buildings to be near the Pump Room. Here they were not far from Anne Elliot's friend

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 414.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 416.

Mrs Smith, who has lodgings in Westgate Buildings, which when Anne visited there "must have been rather surprised by the appearance of a carriage drawn up near its pavement" (P, p.157). The Thorpes, lower down the social scale than the Allens, are in Queen Square. This, the first of the squares to be built by John Wood the Elder during the years 1728 to 1735,<sup>1</sup> had already declined in fashionability by the end of the century. Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove know this; demanding a good situation, they say to their father: "...none of your Queen-squares for us !" (P, p.42).

This kind of reference to place, handled in such a way that, as well as suggesting the "real" world, it reveals a character's disposition, constitutes the most important function of setting in Jane Austen's novels. Not all the characters show a response to their physical environment, and that some do not has no special significance; others are sensitive or insensitive to it in various ways that Jane Austen uses to develop or confirm their qualities. The small amount of descriptive detail that she gives and her references to places and spatial material suggest the world that her contemporary readers knew, recognised, and could take for granted--a world that we, living nearly two hundred years later, can also recognise. Because Jane Austen assumed that her readers were her social and intellectual equals, a historical perspective and the kind of background to the novels supplied by Chapman increase our understanding and appreciation of her writing; but, because what is central to the novels is human nature and human relationships, it is not the landscapes of England at the end of the eighteenth century, the towns,

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<sup>1</sup>R.A.L. Smith, Bath (London: Batsford, 1944), p.70.

houses, furnishings, fashions and modes of transport that signify, but the characters' attitudes and responses to them, and the human values which these features of the environment reflect.

In spite of this secondary function of setting, however, and, although, as Barbara Hardy says, "Jane Austen's creation of environment depends very much less than any later novelist on description",<sup>1</sup> each of the novels communicates a firm impression of place. Mary Lascelles finds a "far greater power over atmosphere of place in the Chawton novels" (that is, in Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion) than in the rest,<sup>2</sup> and it is Mansfield Park in which a sense of locality and atmosphere is most powerfully evoked. The title suggests the important rôle of the house in the novel, and the Portsmouth scenes contain some of Jane Austen's most detailed, realistic and evocative descriptions. The symbolic meaning of some of the action in the grounds of Sotherton also sets this novel apart from the others in the treatment of setting. Fanny Price and Anne Elliot are the two heroines most conscious of their surroundings, and Emma, though less conscious, is as much influenced by her environment as they are. There is little variety of place in Emma--Highbury has made Emma what she is, and in Highbury she has to change. In the three earlier novels, too, character, action and background are integrated, but to a lesser extent. Place, except in the Pemberley scenes, is least functional in Pride and Prejudice. In much of the novel--the opening chapter, for example--space is "a place for argument".<sup>3</sup> In such

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Hardy, A Reading, p.34.

<sup>2</sup>Mary Lascelles, Art, p.179.

<sup>3</sup>Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Rinehart, 1953; Perennial Library, New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p.124.

scenes Jane Austen does not specify the background because there is no need to do so. Sense and Sensibility has most changes of scene, and the different settings generally relate to character in some way. The beauties of Barton Valley and the winding shrubberies of Cleveland allow Marianne to indulge her individualism, but they do not excite her sensibility as Northanger Abbey feeds and stimulates Catherine Morland's imagination. In Northanger Abbey Jane Austen's burlesque intention requires her to create settings, both in Bath and at the Abbey, that contrast with the unrealistic backgrounds of the sentimental and Gothic novels.

Northanger Abbey and its grounds, both of which are described in some detail, inspire two false responses to place: Catherine, who supposes that life is like that which she reads about in Gothic romances, does not see what is before her eyes; and greedy, materialistic General Tilney is as blind in his way as she is in hers. Thinking that he is impressing an heiress, he boastfully displays his house and garden, and his pride prevents him from realizing the significance of Catherine's honest replies about the modesty of Mr Allen's property. A rare use of metaphor, which yet has a strong touch of the literal, suggests the extent and range of the kitchen garden: "The number of acres contained in this garden was such as Catherine could not listen to without dismay, being more than double the extent of all Mr Allen's, as well as her father's, including church-yard and orchard. The walls seemed countless in number, endless in length; a village of hot-houses seemed to arise among them, and a whole parish to be at work within the inclosure" (NA, p.178). If Catherine had visited Blaise Castle with the Thorpes and her brother, her illusions would probably have been dispelled before she



came to Northanger. As it is, her expectations of the Abbey are high; she imagines that it is "a fine old place, just like what one reads about" (NA, p.157) with long, damp passages, narrow cells and a ruined chapel, and the very name of the place winds up her feelings "to the highest point of exstasy" (NA, p.140). The few brief references to the Gothic world in the Bath section, together with Henry Tilney's tale of Gothic horrors in the carriage, prepare us for Catherine's experiences at the Abbey. So deluded is she that the modernity and comforts of the house make no appeal to her reason. Comparatively long descriptions convey the daylight world of Catherine's surroundings: in the common drawing-room "the furniture was in all the profusion and elegance of modern taste. The fireplace, where she had expected the ample width and ponderous carving of former times, was contracted to a Rumford, with slabs of plain though handsome marble, and ornaments over it of the prettiest English china" (NA, p.162), and her bedroom "was very unlike the one which Henry had endeavoured to alarm her by the description of.--It was by no means unreasonably large, and contained neither tapestry nor velvet.--The walls were papered, the floor was carpeted; the windows were neither less perfect, nor more dim than those of the drawing-room below; the furniture, though not of the latest fashion, was handsome and comfortable, and the air of the room altogether far from uncheerful" (NA, p.163). It is Catherine's imaginative mind that creates the Gothic setting, whereas in The Mysteries of Udolpho it is the setting and atmosphere of the gloomy castle in the Apennines and the events which take place there that build up the "horror". (The atmospheres of both Jane Austen's parody and Mrs Radcliffe's romance contrast greatly with the more authentic Gothic--

the sombre background, for example, that is in tune with Antonio's tragic sorrows in The Duchess of Malfi:<sup>1</sup>

Delio. Yond's the Cardinal's window. This fortification  
Grew from the ruins of an ancient abbey:  
And to yond side o' th' river lies a wall,  
Piece of a cloister, which in my opinion  
Gives the best echo that you ever heard;  
So hollow, and so dismal, and withal  
So plain in the distinction of our words,  
That many have suppos'd it is a spirit  
That answers.

Antonio. I do love these ancient ruins:  
We never tread upon them, but we set  
Our foot upon some reverend history,  
And, questionless, here in this open court,  
Which now lies naked to the injuries  
Of stormy weather, some men lie interr'd  
Lov'd the church so well, and gave so largely to 't,  
They thought it should have canopi'd their bones  
Till doomsday. But all things have their end:  
Churches and cities, which have diseases like to men  
Must have like death that we have.

Echo. Like death that we have.

Delio. Now the echo hath caught you.

Antonio. It groan'd, methought, and gave  
A very deadly accent!

Echo. Deadly accent.<sup>2)</sup>

Catherine, though over-susceptible is not presented as completely foolish at Northanger; the cedar chest with its tarnished lock, the storm outside, the black cabinet, the sudden extinction of her candle suggest enough of the genuine Gothic trappings to justify her fears to a certain extent. It is later, when she entertains fancies about the General and Mrs Tilney that have no basis in the reality around

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Quennell, in Romantic England: Writing and Painting 1717-1851 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), pp.10-11, points out this rare use of Gothic background in seventeenth-century writing.

<sup>2</sup>The Duchess of Malfi 5.3.1-21.



her, that Catherine is guilty of a graver error. In the Bath scenes, too, the setting points the contrast between illusion and reality. The realistic descriptions of the unpleasantly crowded ball-room on the "important evening...which was to usher [Catherine] into the Upper Rooms" (NA, p.20) and of the busy crossing in Cheap Street are full of commonplace discomforts and difficulties that should not be the lot of a "heroine".

Marianne Dashwood is also guilty of a false response to place; her extreme sensibility shows itself in her excessively emotional reaction to outdoor scenes. In her farewell speech to Norland, for example, the conventional language and rhetorical devices expose her exaggerated and affected feelings (SS, p.27). Marianne does not look at and describe the woods; her attention is on herself and on the repetitions, rhetorical questions and studied instances of apostrophe that she uses to express what she thinks she feels. The elevated style of the narrator's introductory sentence underlines the parody of the sentimental novel, and deluded Marianne is here no more an individual than is Amanda Fitzallen in Regina Maria Roche's The Children of the Abbey (1798). Instead of giving a general description of Barton Cottage Jane Austen uses a few details to describe the comfortable house and the valley, downs and woods that surround it in order to prepare us for Marianne's behaviour. It is these rural beauties which attract her, especially when she is happily in love with Willoughby. After his departure she courts misery by frequenting scenes of past enjoyment in solitary rambles. (Such indulgence might have been less easy for Marianne to enjoy in a town setting. She wishes to be alone, and, as Chapman observes in his notes on "The Manners of the Age", a young woman's walking alone was "imprudent if

not actually indecorous" (E, p.512). It is difficult to imagine Jane Austen's allowing even unconventional Marianne to wander by herself in Kensington Gardens, for instance, or up Beechen Cliff. Jane Fairfax, who has her reasons, walks alone to the village post office, and is desperate when she walks home from Donwell Abbey and later wanders about the meadows at some distance from Highbury, but Emma, having once ventured by herself to Randalls, finds the walk alone unpleasant, and is glad of Harriet as "a walking companion" (E, p.26). Jane Austen seems to have felt that she had to give Harriet a friend to walk with when she is frightened by the gipsies half a mile out of Highbury--Miss Bickerton serves no other purpose in the novel.) Contrasting humorously with Marianne's violent and romantic response to outdoor scenes are Elinor's common sense and Edward's practical outlook; "It is not every one...who has your passion for dead leaves" and "It is a beautiful country,...but these bottoms must be dirty in winter" (SS, p.88) are their respective comments. Cleveland is also bad for Marianne. Our knowledge of its proximity to Combe Magna and a short descriptive passage again prepare us for her once again "wandering from place to place in free and luxurious solitude", experiencing "moments of precious, of invaluable misery", and rejoicing "in tears of agony" (SS, p.303).

Other characters, most of them stupid, some of them misguided, also view their surroundings wrongly or see them in their own terms. Isabella Thorpe, who changes facts to suit herself, sits on a bench between the two doors leading into the Pump Room because "it is so out of the way" (NA, p.143). Sophisticated Mary Crawford good-naturedly mocks country ways when she finds that she cannot have her harp fetched from Northampton during hay-time; she had thought "that

every thing is to be got with money" (MP, p.58). And Mrs Elton displays "all her airs of pert pretension and under-bred finery" (E, p.279) when she compares Hartfield to Maple Grove. A few characters do not know where places are, and this ignorance of geography is an indication of their mindlessness: to Mrs Bennet Newcastle is "a place quite northward, it seems" (PP, p.336), and silly little Harriet Smith wonders whether Mr Frank Churchill, travelling from Yorkshire to Surrey, will "pass through Bath as well as Oxford" (E, p.189).<sup>1</sup>

Catherine Morland and Marianne Dashwood respond to certain kinds of surroundings in a way so positive and so misguided that the folly and dangers of their feelings, thoughts or actions are clear to the right-thinking people who love them. But the influence of Highbury upon Emma, while being just as strong and harmful as scenes of rural beauty are to Marianne and Gothic ruins to Catherine, is subtler and more insidious, and goes unperceived by all but one of the people close to her. The danger for Emma, "handsome, clever, and rich" (E, p.5), is that her situation offers her considerable freedom of action; the people around her and the setting in which Jane Austen places her allow her to assert her individualism almost unchecked. She has no mother, her invalid father has no parental function, her older sister is married and lives out of Highbury, and Miss Taylor has gone. Emma's liveliness, intelligence, strong personality and good looks have always drawn admiration and flattery from her family and governess. The small town of Highbury affords her no equals and,

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<sup>1</sup>Tave discusses this "simple geography joke" and the propensity of some characters "with varying degrees of foolishness and awareness...who...reshape the space and time they inhabit to make it a creation of their own wishes". See Some Words, pp.3-6.

because the Woodhouses are "first in consequence there" (E, p.7), friends and neighbours also flatter and look up to her. Only Mr Knightley finds fault with Emma, and at the beginning of the novel she does not take him seriously. In her small world Emma's powers are paradoxically almost unlimited. It is the restricted setting that made the creation of Emma Woodhouse possible; if Jane Austen had sent her heroine to Bath or London--places that other characters visit-- she could not have shown her thinking too well of herself and too frequently having her own way without turning her into a kind of Mrs Elton and making her folly and snobbishness ingrained. Emma is surely too intelligent, has too much elegance of mind, to behave badly when away from the people and surroundings that permit her to be as she is. It is only on her home ground that she can "play God",<sup>1</sup> and retain the reader's sympathy. Another outcome of her situation is that Emma, having no satisfactory occupation for her lively mind, allows her reason to be dominated by her imagination, that faculty which, as Johnson and Jane Austen knew, if not controlled, clouds the judgement so that the mind loses the power to distinguish the real and the fanciful. Emma, until the end of the novel, does not see reality or know herself because she does not control "that very dear part of [her], her fancy" (E, p.214). However, that she has sense and can use her judgement and reason, Jane Austen frequently makes clear. In the opening chapter, for instance, before Mr Knightley arrives at Hartfield, Emma's words to her father about Miss Taylor's marrying spring from sound reason and good sense, and are very similar to what Mr Knightley himself later says to Mr Woodhouse. Two other

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<sup>1</sup>Marvin Mudrick, Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p.194.

important episodes show Emma responding sensibly and naturally to her surroundings.

Emma's mind is not often idle, but when she stands alone outside Ford's shop and views the street scene, for a few moments she forgets about Harriet, the Martins and Frank Churchill, and clearly sees what is in front of her: "...the butcher with his tray, a tidy old woman travelling homewards from shop with her full basket, two curs quarrelling over a dirty bone, and a string of dawdling children round the baker's little bow-window eyeing the gingerbread..." (E, p.233). She is here profitably entertained, even if momentarily, by external fact, not internal fancy.<sup>1</sup> Similarly at Donwell Abbey her appreciation of the house and grounds shows a healthy and right-minded attitude. Walking in the "delicious shade of a broad short avenue of limes", from which there is a "sweet view" (E, p.360), is for Emma the "pleasantest part of the day" (E. p.361). The description, as well as giving a background for Mr Knightley, conveys Emma's feelings which, being "a nice mixture of almost proprietary pleasure and a proper estimate of Mr Knightley's social worth",<sup>2</sup> are not wholly deceived by vain imagination.

Similarly, it is seeing Pemberley that makes Elizabeth recognise Darcy's valuable qualities and her own deficiencies. The beauty

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Hardy interprets this passage differently. She sees Emma as illustrating Jane Austen's professional interest in the strengths and weaknesses of the human imagination, and finds the few accounts of Emma's mind almost more striking than the major events of the novel. "On this occasion it is revealed when idling, and off-duty. She expects little, and sees little. Both expectation and actuality show the characteristic working of her mind..." See A Reading, pp. 85-86.

<sup>2</sup>W.A. Craik, Jane Austen: the Six Novels (London: Methuen & Co., 1965), p.158.



of the grounds and house delights her; "she had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste" (PP, p.245). Before she hears the housekeeper's commendation of Darcy as master, landlord and brother; sees his portrait in the gallery; experiences his surprisingly changed manner towards herself and the Gardiners, she rejoices in the place, and feels "that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" (PP, p.245). She has the good taste to admire his taste, and her newly-acquired knowledge of his worth turns her criticisms away from him and on to herself.<sup>1</sup>

A few passages from Mansfield Park may serve to show how Jane Austen uses Fanny Price's consciousness of her surroundings. When Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park as a timid, shy little girl of ten years, the size and grandeur of the house contribute to her unhappiness: "the rooms were too large for her to move in with ease; whatever she touched she expected to injure, and she crept about in constant terror of something or other" (MP, pp.14-15). When she leaves Mansfield about eight years later on her first visit to Portsmouth, although happy to be going to what she thinks is her home, she has "tears for every room in the house, much more for every beloved inhabitant" (MP, p.374). Sir Thomas is relying on Fanny's sensitivity to setting to "bring her mind into a sober state" (MP, p.369) and make her appreciate Henry Crawford's offer of marriage. In an unusually sensuous description Jane Austen shows us the effect of a beautiful outdoor scene on Fanny. Henry Crawford

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<sup>1</sup>In "Setting and Character in Pride and Prejudice", Nineteenth Century Fiction 19 (June 1964): 65-75, Charles J. McCann discusses the ironic manner in which Jane Austen creates an impression of Pemberley, and the subtle correspondence between the house and its owner.



comes to Portsmouth, and on an "uncommonly lovely" March morning, he accompanies the Prices on their Sunday walk on the ramparts.

"Somehow or other--there was no saying how", Fanny finds herself walking with her arm under Henry Crawford's, and, succumbing to the combined charms of the warm sun, gay sights and fine sounds, she becomes "gradually almost careless of the circumstances" (MP, p.409) in which she is enjoying them. The view of the sea seems to impart something of its joy and vigour to Fanny, and she is again conscious of finding Henry Crawford nearly agreeable. The loveliness of the day and of the view also affects him. "They often stopt with the same sentiment and taste, leaning against the wall, some minutes, to look and admire; and considering he was not Edmund, Fanny could not but allow that he was sufficiently open to the charms of nature, and very well able to express his admiration" (MP, p.409). His response raises Fanny's estimation of him, and by the time they part she is "quite persuaded of his being astonishingly more gentle, and regardful of others, than formerly" (MP, p.413), and hopes that his kindness to her will lead to the ultimate consideration of his ceasing to distress her by his suit.

Much of the description of Pemberley and Donwell Abbey is given by the omniscient narrator, or comes to us in free indirect style from the consciousness of the heroine. There are other descriptions of houses and estates in the novels which are given by a character, generally in direct speech, and which tell us about the speaker himself. In Sense and Sensibility Mrs Jennings's short but full description of Delaford (SS, p.196) reveals just as much about her as it does about Colonel Brandon and his property. Her indelicate style of speaking and her emphasis on the comforts,

good food and proximity to the road are typical of kindhearted, vulgar, gregarious Mrs Jennings. And that the house is old-fashioned and close to the church, that the estate is well-cared for and productive assures us of Colonel Brandon's good stewardship and sense of social responsibility. In the same novel Jane Austen uses a descriptive passage to show how ill-judged Marianne is to go over Allenhurst House with Willoughby. The more detail Marianne gives about "one remarkably pretty sitting-room upstairs" (SS, p.69) with its beautiful views and "forlorn" furniture, the greater her impropriety in going there appears. In Emma there are many short speeches about places which reveal character or indicate a situation. When he first comes to Highbury, Frank Churchill, walking with Mrs Weston and Emma, does not join his companions in finding fault with Mr Elton's house--"No, he could not believe it a bad house; not such a house as a man was to be pitied for having. If it were to be shared with the woman he loved, he could not think any man to be pitied for having that house. There must be ample room in it for every real comfort. The man must be a blockhead who wanted more" (E, p.204). Of course, neither Mrs Weston nor Emma can understand this reaction: Mrs Weston thinks that, accustomed to a large house himself, Frank can be no judge of the privations of a small one; and Emma deduces that he shows an inclination to give up the wealth of a place like Enscombe, marry and settle early. She is nearer the mark; on a second reading we realize that Frank Churchill's warm feelings express his discontent with his own circumstances and his envy of Mr Elton's being able to marry so soon after becoming engaged. His remarks about the house simultaneously obscure and reveal the truth. Again, the carefully selected details of Harriet Smith's

account of Abbey Mill Farm (E, p.27) give an impression of a world in which Harriet is happy among people who genuinely like her; her words convey her pleasure, and the naïve reiterations suggest her wish to shape the report to gain Miss Woodhouse's approbation.

The accounts of Abbey Mill Farm also create a picture of a successful farm well run by kind, hard-working, affectionate people. They are just the sort of tenants that Mr Knightley would desire and ensure that he has. Robert Martin, "a respectable, intelligent gentleman-farmer" (E, p.62), and the farm "with all its appendages of prosperity and beauty, its rich pastures, spreading flocks, orchard in blossom" (E, p.360) reflect the fine qualities of the land-owner who "with his farm, and his sheep, and his library, and all the parish to manage" (E, p.225) is always busy and fully aware of his social responsibilities. Jane Austen reaffirms Mr Knightley's character and values, evident in all his words and actions, in the description of Donwell Abbey at the beginning of Volume III. Barbara Hardy observes: "Ever since Fielding designed an appropriate dwelling for Mr Allworthy in Tom Jones, the houses in fiction have been carefully planned and furnished." She continues: "Jane Austen's comic imagination founded her sympathetic habitats more firmly, more craftily, and yet more naturally in her fictions, by using her characters as architects and builders. It is their insight and projection which make the houses so sympathetic.... She saw environment as a case both forming and formed by people."<sup>1</sup> Together, Mr Knightly and the Donwell Abbey that we see through Emma's eyes represent the moral worth that grows out of long-established

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Hardy, A Reading, pp.136-37.

cultural and religious tradition:

She felt all the honest pride and complacency which her alliance with the present and future proprietor could fairly warrant, as she viewed the respectable size and style of the building, its suitable, becoming, characteristic situation, low and sheltered--its ample gardens stretching down to meadows washed by a stream, of which the Abbey, with all the old neglect of prospect, had scarcely a sight--and its abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up.--The house was larger than Hartfield, and totally unlike it, covering a good deal of ground, rambling and irregular, with many comfortable and one or two handsome rooms.--It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was--and Emma felt an increasing respect for it, as the residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding.

(E, p.358)

This description and the view from the avenue of limes--"sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive" (E, p.360)--comprehend the values that Jane Austen believed were typified by what is best in country life.

Pemberley is also a model estate and a similar reflection of Darcy. The different settings of the action in Pride and Prejudice contrast greatly with one another, and, until he becomes engaged to Elizabeth, we see Darcy at ease and truly himself only at Pemberley. That he is sensitive to his surroundings and conscious of the effect of environment we learn from his behaviour at Longbourn, Netherfield, Rosings and Pemberley. This awareness becomes explicit in a remark he makes to Elizabeth at Rosings: they have been talking about the distance that separates Charlotte Collins from Hertfordshire, when Darcy with unwonted feeling in his voice draws his chair a little towards Elizabeth and says, "You cannot have been always at Longbourn" (PP, p.179). At Pemberley everything that Elizabeth looks at contrasts with the grandeur and ostentation of Rosings, and is evidence of Darcy's taste and intelligence:

Every disposition of the ground was good; and she looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks, and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with delight. As they passed into other rooms, these objects were taking different positions; but from every window there were beauties to be seen. 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 of splendor, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Rosings.

(PP, p.246)

What Elizabeth infers about Darcy from the natural beauty and cultivated taste of his estate is confirmed by Mrs Reynolds's account of him and by his subsequent behaviour towards her. Although Jane Austen describes Pemberley in general rather than particular terms, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, the "Bengali Hindu who never learnt English from Englishmen, did not meet them socially until he was fifty-five, and did not see England till the age of fifty-seven", received such a vivid impression of Pemberley, when he first read Pride and Prejudice in 1914 at the age of sixteen, that in 1976 he writes: "Since then Pemberley has remained the archetypal country house for me, as real as any I have seen with my eyes."<sup>1</sup>

In his review of Barbara Hardy's A Reading of Jane Austen Chaudhuri also comments on Jane Austen's "full commitment to the assumption of her age that one of the outward signs of an inward grace was material splendour".<sup>2</sup> The beautiful park of Pemberley, the "large, handsome stone building" (PP, p.245), the lofty well-proportioned rooms, the picture-gallery with "many good paintings" (PP, p.250), in addition to reflecting Darcy's good taste and

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<sup>1</sup>Nirad C. Chaudhuri, "Woman of the World", Times Literary Supplement (16 January 1976): 55.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



intelligence, wealth and social status, convey the suggestion of an inward grace. However, there is less of this resonance of moral worth in the description of Pemberley than there is in the descriptions of locality in the later novels; what L.P. Smith calls the moral atmosphere of places<sup>1</sup> is richer and stronger in Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion. The diversity of moral climates that he describes is most evident in Mansfield Park with the strongly contrasted settings of Mansfield Park, the Prices' house in Portsmouth, and the destructive influence of London. In Emma he finds the air of the busy, full world of Highbury "so dense that Jane Austen seems to have felt that no contrast of climate was needed to enhance its rich effect".<sup>2</sup>

Mansfield Park is the only novel which Jane Austen herself called by the name of a place. Although she told Cassandra that, having finished Pride and Prejudice, she was going to try to write of something else which was to be "a complete change of subject--ordination" (L, p.298), the title of the new work indicates the central theme, that of the importance of environment in a person's moral education. Unperceived by Sir Thomas, the effect of the moral atmosphere of Mansfield Park upon his daughters is harmful. In chapter two there is much emphasis on education, learning and memory. Maria and Julia Bertram find little Fanny "prodigiously stupid" and ignorant; she "cannot put the map of Europe together", does not know "the Kings of England, with the dates of their accession, and most of the principal events of their reigns" (MP, p.18), nor those "of the

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<sup>1</sup>See p.16 above.

<sup>2</sup>L.P. Smith, Reperusals, p.369.

Roman emperors as low as Severus; besides a great deal of the Heathen Mythology, and all the Metals, Semi-Metals, Planets and distinguished philosophers" (MP, p.19); nor does she want to learn either music or drawing. Although they know much, they realize that there is still a great deal more for them to learn--until they are seventeen. An authorial comment confirms the reader's estimation of Maria's and Julia's characters from their attitudes and behaviour: they are "entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility" (MP, p.19); like the two Miss Beauforts in Sanditon they are "very accomplished & very Ignorant" (MW, p.421). Sir Thomas is content to leave his daughters' education to a governess and to their aunt, who spoils and flatters them, and because "he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him" (MP, p.19), they, and Fanny, are afraid of him. Lady Bertram's interests do not extend as far as the education of her children, and she indulges them when this involves no inconvenience to herself. This blend of neglect, severe discipline and indulgence forms a moral climate that, according to D.D. Devlin, "is not an admirable bulwark against the corruptions of the great city, but is itself corrupt, and must change, must be cleansed as the novel progresses".<sup>1</sup> The influence of London, represented by Henry and Mary Crawford, nearly destroys Mansfield Park; the guilt and misery involved in the visit to Sotherton, in the episode of the theatricals, in Maria's marriage and subsequent elopement, in Edmund's infatuation with Mary Crawford, are largely the result of this taint. Sir Thomas, head of the house,

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<sup>1</sup>D.D. Devlin, Jane Austen and Education (London: Macmillan Press, 1975), p.125.

realizes this, but too late:

Here had been grievous mismanagement; but, bad as it was, he gradually grew to feel that it had not been the most direful mistake in his plan of education. Something must have been wanting within, or time would have worn away much of its ill effect. He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice. To be distinguished for elegance and accomplishments--the authorised object of their youth--could have had no useful influence that way, no moral effect on the mind. He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-denial and humility, he feared they had never heard from any lips that could profit them.

(MP, p.463)

The Mansfield Park for which Fanny longs after a week or so at her parents' house in Portsmouth is the Mansfield which Sir Thomas mistakenly thought nurtured his family. To Fanny, schooled by "self-denial and humility", it represents all that is good, all that is lacking in Portsmouth. Tranquillity and noise characterize the two places respectively, and for Fanny, who like Sir Thomas values quiet, the ceaseless tumult of the Prices' house is the greatest misery. Sir Thomas's "medicinal project" (MP, p.369) works, but not in the way for which he hopes. Fanny knew that she loved Mansfield, Sir Thomas and her Aunt Bertram before she left Northamptonshire, and she now realizes that Mansfield is home to her; she has to admit that Portsmouth is, "in almost every respect, the very reverse of what she could have wished. It was the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety" (MP, p.388). She cannot respect her parents: her father cares for nothing much beyond his rum and newspaper and the navy list, and her mother is "a partial, ill-judging parent, a dawdle, a slattern, who neither taught nor restrained her children, whose house was the scene of mismanagement and discomfort from beginning

to end, and who had no talent, no conversation, no affection towards herself; no curiosity to know her better, no desire of her friendship, and no inclination for her company that could lessen her sense of such feelings" (MP, p.390). By means of realistic and evocative details of setting, described always from Fanny's point of view, Jane Austen makes the reader share with Fanny the experiences that sharpen her awareness of place, and heighten her appreciation of Mansfield Park.

So forcibly does Fanny feel the difference between the two places that even a letter from Mary Crawford bringing news of the "set where [ Fanny's ] heart lived" is "thoroughly acceptable" (MP, p.393) to Fanny in her exile; even a visit from Henry Crawford is "not so very bad as she would have expected, the pleasure of talking of Mansfield was so very great!" (MP, p.406). Devlin, in his full discussion of Jane Austen and education, compares the three worlds of Mansfield Park, Portsmouth and London, all of which Jane Austen shows to be responsible to some extent for the moral deficiencies of the people brought up in them.<sup>1</sup> The Crawfords have lived with their uncle in London, which in Mansfield Park, writes Devlin, "typifies rootlessness, triviality and a licence which is mistaken for freedom".<sup>2</sup> They are so charming, intelligent and agreeable at Mansfield that only observant Fanny perceives their insidious power. It is not until there is proof at the end that Sir Thomas, formerly always concerned with appearances, understands the selfish vanity of Henry Crawford, and that Edmund, blinded till then by his emotional

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p.112.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.80.

involvement, recognises Mary's "faults of principle, ... of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind" (MP, p.456). When she leaves Mansfield, Mary Crawford half unwittingly reveals to Fanny the moral atmosphere of her environment in London: her friends who gossip about others' private affairs, for whom the norm is unhappiness in marriage, who are without self-respect, judgement or principle contrast pointedly with Fanny. Mary herself is aware of the result of "bad domestic example" (MP, p.467), and she thinks that her brother still has time to escape the effects of Admiral Crawford's influence, but she is less concerned with principle and virtue than with etiquette and courtesy. Edmund Bertram, too, influenced more by his heart than his head, believes that Fanny, "firm as a rock in her own principles" (MP, p.351), will change Henry Crawford. But Henry cannot shed the effects of habit and of his upbringing. Some critics think that Jane Austen is too hard in her judgement on Henry and Mary Crawford.<sup>1</sup> But the Crawfords' tribulations at the end of Mansfield Park are the logical outcome of the morality postulated throughout the novel; Mary, who has always shown "a mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of being so; darkened, yet fancying itself light" (MP, p.367), is trapped in a web of tragic irony woven by herself and her circumstances; and Henry is betrayed, not by his author, but by the powerful force of his environment and faulty education, which, he finds, he cannot escape.

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<sup>1</sup> See Lionel Trilling, "Mansfield Park", in The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism (London: Secker & Warburg, 1955), pp.206-30; Kingsley Amis, "What became of Jane Austen? [Mansfield Park]", Spectator 6745 (4 October 1957): 339-340; Howard S. Babb, Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962), p.163, among others.



The Crawfords are not the only characters in Mansfield Park who are corrupted by the moral climate of London. That Maria and Julia do not leave London to go to the support and comfort of their mother when Tom is ill, disposes Fanny to think "the influence of London very much at war with all respectable attachments" (MP, p.433). The culmination of Maria's guilt and Julia's folly occurs in London; in all the novels eloping couples either start out from or conceal themselves in London, and irregular liaisons are set up there. If events of this kind are not set in London, they take place in resorts, places where, to quote Henry Tilney, people are "in pursuit only of amusement all day long" (NA, p.79). Jane Austen knew Bath well, and both her comments and Anne Elliot's attitude convey her--and Cassandra's--dislike of that city. In 1808 she writes to her sister: "It will be two years tomorrow since we left Bath for Clifton, with what happy feelings of Escape!" (L, p.208), and again in 1814: "Instead of Bath the Deans Dundases have taken a house at Clifton...and [ Martha Lloyd ] is as glad of the change as even you and I should be, or almost" (L, p.391). But although Jane Austen did not like Bath, she realized its usefulness to her as a novelist, and made good use of her knowledge of it. Because people attend resorts like Bath for their health as well as for its society, these places are a convincing setting for the meeting of unlikely or incompatible characters. Good, sensible people like the Crofts go there, as well as husband-hunting mothers and determined flirts like the Thorpes. All the novels give an impression of the moral atmosphere prevailing at these places where the fashionable world meets and where the "advantages...to the young are pretty generally understood" (E, p.275). The meeting of heroine and hero in Bath, such as happens in Northanger Abbey, is

unusual in the novels; most of the characters who frequent resorts are empty, conceited creatures, and most of the marriages that result from acquaintances made in public places are unhappy. As a child Jane Austen was aware of the notoriety of Brighton: it and London were Lady Lesley's "favourite haunts of dissipation" (MW, p.120). The description of Brighton (PP, p.232) at the time of the famous military camps stationed there in 1793-95<sup>1</sup> was possibly the dream of all Lydia Bennets. In Emma there is an explicit criticism of relationships formed in fashionable resorts: distressed by his quarrel with Jane Fairfax, Frank Churchill bitterly gives vent to frustration and his envy of the Eltons. His ironic outburst suggests that he has misjudged Jane, and that he and she are not suited; but this is an emotional reaction, and he is forgetting that it is possible to meet the right person at a resort, and that, as Jane Fairfax, controlled and reasonable, tells him, an unfortunate acquaintance need not be an inconvenience or an oppression for ever. Jane Austen predictably sets seductions and betrayals in resorts and London: Georgiana Darcy is at Ramsgate when Wickham plans to take her thirty thousand pounds and his revenge on her brother, and Willoughby seduced Colonel Brandon's ward in Bath and marries Miss Grey in London.

It is a commonplace of all time that "In cities vice is hidden with ease, / Or seen with least reproach",<sup>2</sup> and Jane Austen's associating unpleasantness and positive ills with the city is by no means unusual; the idea appears in the literature of most ages. Charles Peake, discussing the popularity of landscape and night poetry

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapman, Facts and Problems, p.80.

<sup>2</sup> Cowper, The Task, l. 689-90.

in the eighteenth century, suggests possible causes for the growing interest in the countryside:

There can be no adequate explanation of this (or any other) development in taste--too many things are involved--but there are some factors of obvious relevance. In the late seventeenth century, memories of the Civil War and subsequent uncertainties encouraged a dream of escape from the dangerous involvements of power, and many poets and essayists praised the charms of rural retirement. Sometimes they celebrated a Stoic withdrawal from the corruptions of the court and city, sometimes an Epicurean withdrawal to the comfortable and carefree delights of life on one's country estate, sometimes a Christian or neo-Platonic withdrawal to examine one's soul and commune with one's Maker--but, whatever the reason offered, a return to Nature was frequently advocated, in language and literary forms particularly indebted to Horace and Virgil, as the way to true peace of mind.<sup>1</sup>

Peake lists other interests, discoveries and changes which helped to determine the preference for rural scenes: landscape painting, landscape gardening, scientific advances, improved communications, increased urbanization, the Agrarian Revolution.<sup>2</sup> The Augustan age, however, was also the age of the city: "The happiness of London [said Johnson] is not to be conceived but by those who have been in it. I will venture to say, there is more learning and science within the circumference of ten miles from where we now sit, than in all the rest of the kingdom."<sup>3</sup> The change in sensibility that came in the second half of the eighteenth century encouraged the country bias, and Jane Austen shared with many contemporary writers a preference for the country to the city. She may have read with appreciation

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Peake, ed., Poetry of the Landscape and the Night: Two Eighteenth-century Traditions (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), pp.9-10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.10-11.

<sup>3</sup> Boswell's Life, Saturday, 30 September 1769.

Gilpin's account of the approaches to London in his Observations on the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland, written in 1772 and published in 1786. In vigorous terms he describes the smoke from the brick kilns, the filth from the sewers and ditches, the dusty roads crowded with waggons, the lack of green, and the "stinks of every denomination".<sup>1</sup> But, although she seems in her letters and novels to be in sympathy with Cowper's opinion that "God made the country, and man made the town",<sup>2</sup> Jane Austen was too balanced a person and too sensible of the city's place in civilization to condemn it utterly. The note of exaggeration and the tone of Fanny's view of the immoral effects of London convey a gently humorous, if sympathetic, criticism by Jane Austen of her naïve heroine's attitude.<sup>3</sup>

In all the novels the heroines and heroes live on country estates or in country villages, and belong to the landed gentry, the class of people whose qualities, at their best, Jane Austen most admired, and to which she herself belonged. But it is only in Mansfield Park that the values of town and country are set clearly in opposition to each other. The Crawfords represent a destructive force that comes from London to harm and subvert the Bertrams and Fanny, and the potential qualities of Mansfield, latent or perverted in the Bertrams until the end of the novel but always embodied in Fanny, are the virtues of Christian morality. The third world in Mansfield Park, Portsmouth with its moral climate that is very different from that of either London or Mansfield, is not necessarily typical of

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<sup>1</sup> See Bradbrook, Predecessors, pp.60-61.

<sup>2</sup> Cowper, The Task, l. 749.

<sup>3</sup> See p.66 above.

a city. Houses in towns are not always as squalid and unpleasant as the Prices'; the Harvilles' small but shipshape and comfortable lodgings in the admittedly much smaller Lyme show what the house of a naval officer who is not wealthy can be like.<sup>1</sup> Jane Austen places Fanny in the Portsmouth surroundings for a special purpose,<sup>2</sup> and in a passage in which she may be expressing her own dislike of the heat and glare of a town, she makes the unusually realistic and sensuous description of the Prices' parlour aggravate Fanny's distress, horror and shame, when she learns of Maria Rushworth's elopement with Henry Crawford.

The remembrance of her first evening in that room, of her father and his newspaper came across her. No candle was now wanted. The sun was yet an hour and half above the horizon. She felt that she had, indeed, been three months there; and the sun's rays falling strongly into the parlour, instead of cheering, made her still more melancholy; for sun-shine appeared to her a totally different thing in a town and in the country. Here, its power was only a glare, a stifling, sickly glare, serving but to bring forward stains and dirt that might otherwise have slept. There was neither health nor gaiety in sun-shine in a town. She sat in a blaze of oppressive heat, in a cloud of moving dust; and her eyes could only wander from the walls marked by her father's head, to the table cut and knotted by her brothers, where stood the tea-board never thoroughly cleaned, the cups and saucers wiped in streaks, the milk a mixture of motes floating in thin blue, and the bread and butter growing every minute more greasy than even Rebecca's hands had first produced it.

(MP, p.439)

There is, however, another passage in the Portsmouth section which shows how Jane Austen uses Fanny's sensitivity to her surroundings to point a less disputable contrast between town and country. When she is in Portsmouth, Fanny feels her loneliness and prolonged absence

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<sup>1</sup>See Persuasion, p.98.

<sup>2</sup>See p.55 above.



from Mansfield all the more keenly because she is not in the country:

It was sad to Fanny to lose all the pleasures of spring. She had not known before what pleasures she had to lose in passing March and April in a town. She had not known before, how much the beginnings and progress of vegetation had delighted her.--What animation both of body and mind, she had derived from watching the advance of that season which cannot, in spite of its capriciousness, be unlovely, and seeing its increasing beauties, from the earliest flowers, in the warmest divisions of her aunt's garden, to the opening of leaves of her uncle's plantation, and the glory of his woods.--To be losing such pleasures was no trifle; to be losing them, because she was in the midst of closeness and noise, to have confinement, bad air, bad smells, substituted for liberty, freshness, fragrance, and verdure, was infinitely worse....

(MP, pp.431-32)

The isolation that Fanny experiences at Portsmouth is an instance of an aspect of a young woman's situation that Jane Austen deals with in all the novels. None of the heroines lives alone, and each has a family or set of relatives on whom she depends for a home and companionship. Neighbours also provide company. But for all the heroines except Catherine Morland the society of the immediate family is mostly uncongenial, and their spiritual growth involves adjusting themselves in some way to this deprivation. Anne Elliot and Fanny Price are the most isolated in the places where they live; Anne has to leave Kellynch in order to fulfil herself, and Fanny is as lonely and ignored at Mansfield in the first two volumes of the novel as she is at her parents' house in Portsmouth. In the early episodes--the visit to Sotherton, the theatricals--she is always, as Devlin notes,<sup>1</sup> the detached observer, outside the group and looking in on it. She sleeps in the little white attic near the governess and housemaids; she uses the east room, unwanted by anyone else; she is included in

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<sup>1</sup>Devlin, Education, p.89.

the party to Sotherton only by Edmund's efforts; in the wilderness there she is by herself for nearly an hour; and in the Parsonage drawing-room she sits alone by the window when Edmund joins the glee singers at the piano. This physical separation from the people amongst whom she lives reflects (among other things) the difference from theirs in Fanny's moral outlook. Mansfield, unlike Kellynch, improves; the moral atmosphere after a generation of mismanagement changes, and Fanny returning from Portsmouth can at last be "comfortable" there.

Other heroines, too, feel the restriction of their environment and limitations of their society. Emma's reflections and the narration in the opening chapter reveal her feelings of isolation and her consciousness of "intellectual solitude" (E, p.6); intelligent, well-informed Miss Taylor has left Hartfield, and Mr Woodhouse is no companion for his daughter. At the end of the novel it is a measure of Emma's maturity and self-knowledge that, when she knows she loves Mr Knightley and thinks she has lost him, she is prepared to face her ruined happiness and the loneliness ahead of her with rationality and composure. Elizabeth Bennet also suffers from the intellectual poverty of her surroundings. Her father's intelligence and wit have shrivelled to ironic cynicism, and she has little in common with her mother and younger sisters. But Elizabeth is not isolated and alone at Longbourn; although Jane cannot equal her in quality of mind, sparkling wit and vivacious spirits, Elizabeth has a companion and confidante in her cheerful elder sister. She also has a congenial and sympathetic friend in her aunt Mrs Gardiner. Jane Austen (whose brothers had thirty-two children in all) seems to have been more than ordinarily conscious of the relationship between

aunts and nephews and nieces. The references to aunts in the letters are lighthearted,<sup>1</sup> but in them the reader senses the unmarried woman's delight in her connection with the children of her family. The novels reflect this pleasure, and also that of having a ~~good~~ congenial brother or sister as companion. In addition to the instances in Pride and Prejudice already given, there are the close relationships between Henry and Eleanor Tilney, George and John Knightley, Fanny and William Price. One is fortunate to have such a relative as a friend; but Fanny seldom sees her sailor brother, the Knightleys lead their own separate lives, and Henry Tilney's duties take him away from Northanger. Jane Austen's idea of the best company goes beyond Mr Elliot's conception of its being "the company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation" (P, p.150); it is the profitable, improving relationship which develops between hero and heroine, who learn from each other. Only after her marriage does the heroine live in an entirely congenial social setting. The word "friends" occurs in the last paragraphs of Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion, and the final chapters of all the novels suggest Jane Austen's ideal community: the happy home of married lovers with sympathetic relatives and friends accessible or living in the neighbourhood.

This kind of society is the best. According to Jane Austen it is not easily attained; it is the prize for moral integrity, and is sometimes the virtuous character's reward only by a measure of

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<sup>1</sup>See Letters, p.421, for example. Another remark, made to her niece Caroline in 1815, is characteristic: "Now that you are become an Aunt, you are a person of some consequence & must excite great Interest whatever you do. I have always maintained the importance of Aunts as much as possible, & I am sure of your doing the same now" (L, p.428).

good luck. Another, though less important, condition of living difficult for the Jane Austen heroine to achieve is privacy, and the novels show the necessity and desirability of being able sometimes to be alone. For the dependent woman of moderate means of this period, physical privacy was not easily found. Jane Austen herself shared a bedroom with her sister all her life. In 1799 she attended the christening of her brother James's son, and unexpectedly prolonged her visit; she describes her accommodation to Cassandra, but not, it seems, on account of the novelty of the situation: "...I did not return home that night or the next, as Martha kindly made room for me in her bed, which was the shut-up one in the new nursery. Nurse and the child slept upon the floor, and there we all were in some confusion and great comfort" (L, p.50). Catherine Morland (at Bath and Northanger Abbey), Elizabeth Bennet, Fanny Price and Emma Woodhouse are fortunate in having rooms of their own, and they seek the privacy of these rooms at times of emotional stress. Catherine after Henry Tilney's admonishment runs off to her own room in tears of shame; after Darcy's untimely proposal Elizabeth avoids Charlotte and hurries to her room, and later, sick of her mother's folly on hearing that Lydia is to be married, we are told that she "took refuge in her own room, that she might think with freedom" (PP, p.307); Fanny goes to her "nest of comforts" in the east room "to try its influence on an agitated, doubting spirit" (MP, p.152) when Tom importunately demands that she take part in Lovers' Vows; and Emma, perturbed as never before by Mr Elton's proposal, has to make "a very strong effort to appear attentive and cheerful till the usual hour of separating allowed her the relief of quiet reflection" (E, p.133). It is, of course, bad manners to lose control of one's feelings in



public, and Marianne Dashwood's emotional breakdown, which embarrasses, enrages or distresses the company at Mrs John Dashwood's evening party in Harley Street, is understandable but not justifiable.

Whereas Jane Austen also disapproves of Marianne's ultra-Romantic seeking out of solitude to indulge her feelings after Willoughby's sudden departure from Devonshire, the kind of solitude that Fanny Price, for example, sometimes enjoys is desirable. Conscious of her surroundings, interested in ideas, books, plants, Fanny is not always distressed at being ignored by her cousins at Mansfield and family at Portsmouth. She, like Anne Elliot, is able to survive the isolation that she suffers from having uncongenial company and from being alone. When Edmund and William leave Mansfield after the ball, Fanny at first feels lonely and depressed, but in explicit contrast to Mary Crawford, she endures her loss, even finds Edmund's absence a relief, and is consoled by the stillness of the house, for "what was tranquillity and comfort to Fanny was tediousness and vexation to Mary" (MP, p.285). Although virtuous characters like Mr Knightley and Captain Wentworth are outgoing and active, Jane Austen sometimes associates tranquillity and stillness with virtue, especially in her heroines. Those who are strongest and most active morally throughout the course of their stories are Fanny Price and Anne Elliot, both quiet and reserved young women. It is a mark of some of the unpleasant characters that they cannot enjoy repose; the play Lovers' Vows provides Mrs Norris with "the comforts of hurry, bustle and importance" (MP, p.129) that delight her, and Mrs Elton, too, having no resources, busies herself uselessly and is unfit for solitude.

An alternative to the privacy of one's own room is the outdoor walk. Marianne Dashwood escapes from small Barton Cottage to be



alone, and Jane Fairfax, distressed almost beyond endurance by Frank Churchill's delay in arriving at Donwell Abbey, and by Mrs Elton's officious offers of the desirable situation, insists on walking back to Highbury; Emma recognises that "her parting words, 'Oh! Miss Woodhouse, the comfort of being sometimes alone!'--seemed to burst from an overcharged heart" (E, p.363). Walks both in the country and town are one of the few occasions when lovers can talk privately, and at the end of all the novels except Sense and Sensibility the hero and heroine walk together. In a comic scene Emma tries to give Mr Elton and Harriet the opportunity of being together; she thinks that their meeting on such an errand as a charitable scheme "will bring on a great increase of love on each side" (E, p.87)--even the declaration of it, and tries to separate herself from the couple by choosing "a narrow footpath, a little raised on one side of the lane, leaving them together in the main road" (E, p.88). Large country gardens also provide privacy and solitude: Emma walks in the shrubbery at Hartfield to refresh her spirits and relieve her thoughts, and Mr Knightley proposes to her there; Edmund and Fanny wander about and sit under trees on summer evenings in Mansfield park; and even Mr Bennet, having read in his brother-in-law's letter of the financial arrangements made for Lydia's marriage to Wickham, is moved to walk towards a little copse where his elder daughters find him in an uncharacteristic state of distraction.

As Devlin reminds us, we do not think of Jane Austen as a symbolic writer,<sup>1</sup> but, whereas she very seldom uses metaphor, she does occasionally in the Chawton novels suggest that the importance of

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<sup>1</sup>Devlin, Education, p.91.

certain episodes and objects lies in their figurative rather than literal significance. Her use of symbol is most evident in Mansfield Park. Douglas Bush views Sir Thomas's house and estate as "a symbol of a traditional, desirable stability", even though Jane Austen "lays bare the excesses and defects of the persons who live there".<sup>1</sup> Charles Murrah similarly sees Mansfield Park as "a symbol for all the elegance, refinement, order, and decorum" which Fanny and Edmund prize.<sup>2</sup> There is obvious symbolic significance in Sotherton church's being placed at a distance from the Great House, and in the unused chapel: Sotherton Court is lifeless and dull because it lacks the religious belief that would give meaning to it and to the Rushworths' existence. Objects in Mansfield Park with a symbolic function are discussed later,<sup>3</sup> but the explicitly symbolic setting of the grounds of Sotherton is relevant here. Their earlier discussion of improvements and of Mr Rushworth's country house defines various characters' attitudes towards the place, and prepares the reader for the emotional and moral significance of the events that occur there. By the time the party arrives, we have learned that Mr Rushworth thinks the house is "a dismal old prison" (MP, p.53), that he himself is in need of improving as much as his estate, that Maria Bertram is aware of his deficiencies and is attracted to Henry Crawford, and that Henry Crawford fancies himself as an improver. It is clear at the outset that for the Bertram sisters, the Crawfords and Mrs Norris

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Bush, Jane Austen (London: Macmillan Press, 1975), p.110.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Murrah, "The Background of Mansfield Park", in From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, p.25.

<sup>3</sup> See pp.115-16 below.

the purpose of the visit is not to assess the "capabilities" of the grounds. After the guests have looked over the house, they drift outside and divide into three groups. A brief description is given of the lawn surrounded by a high wall, the bowling-green, the terrace walk and iron palisades, and of the "wilderness" as a planted wood "laid out with too much regularity" (MP, p.91). The idea of contrivance and hidden meaning that the enclosed grounds and cultivated wildness suggest prepares us for the importance of the setting in the symbolic drama that follows. Fanny, Edmund and Mary Crawford walk in the shade and coolness of the wood, and because Fanny is tired they sit on a bench looking over a ha-ha into the park. But resting fatigues Mary, and Edmund--yielding to temptation in this wilderness--walks away with her, leaving Fanny alone. They do not return, but after some time Maria Bertram, Mr Rushworth and Henry Crawford approach and join her on the bench, Maria and Henry Crawford animatedly discussing improvements. Then Maria sees the iron gate and wishes to enter the park, Henry Crawford sees a knoll "which would give them exactly the requisite command of the house", and Mr Rushworth is obliged to fetch the key for the gate from the house. The other two rationalise their going to the knoll, and Henry Crawford, skilfully manipulating Maria's feelings, changes the tone of their talk:

"It is undoubtedly the best thing we can do now, as we are so far from the house already," said Mr. Crawford, when he was gone.

"Yes, there is nothing else to be done. But now, sincerely, do not you find the place altogether worse than you expected?"

"No, indeed, far otherwise. I find it better, grander, more complete in its style, though that style may not be the best. And to tell you the truth," speaking rather lower, "I do not think that I shall ever see Sotherton again with so much pleasure as I do now. Another summer will hardly improve it to me."

(MP, p.98)

Further innuendos and double-entendres follow, and Maria expresses her jealousy of Julia, whom Henry Crawford had seemed very happy to have next to him on the barouche-box. Adept, he flatters her with apparent frankness, and the flirtation continues. Crawford remarks on Maria's prospects and the "smiling scene" before her, and her response makes explicit the method Jane Austen is using here: "Do you mean literally or figuratively? Literally I conclude. Yes, certainly, the sun shines and the park looks very cheerful. But unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha, give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. I cannot get out, as the starling said" (MP, p.99). In Henry Crawford's wily persuasion, in Maria's obstinacy and wilful disregard of what is taboo, and in his assisting her to pass round the edge of the gate without hurting herself against the spikes or slipping into the ha-ha, dialogue and action are completely integrated with the setting in order to reveal character and foreshadow future events. Jane Austen rarely relies on figurative meaning in this sustained way.

The subject of improving the grounds of country estates according to principles governed by contemporary taste is an important theme in Mansfield Park, and also occurs, but less obviously, in some of the other novels. As has been shown,<sup>1</sup> the appearance of estates and the changes made reflect their owners' characters. The kind of use that Jane Austen made of the topic suggests that she, like Cowper, disapproved of such improvements. (In "The Garden", Book 3 of The Task, the poet condemns this destructive and extravagant

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<sup>1</sup>See pp.54-60 above.

fashion of his time.<sup>1</sup>) In Mansfield Park Mr Rushworth, enthusiastic about the fine new approach to a friend's house and prepared to cut down old trees, reveals his concern with outward appearances and his lack of responsibility as well as of judgement and taste. The metaphorical undertones of his words suggest his inability to understand what is wrong with his life and how it can be improved. Mrs Grant, perhaps flattering Mrs Norris, predicts that Mr Rushworth's marriage to Maria will bring "every improvement in time which his heart can desire" (MP, p.53), and Mrs Norris, expressing her usual pleasure at the thought of someone else's spending money and her own "prodigious delight in improving and planting" (MP, p.54), shows a similar love of display. The most significant revelations, however, come from Fanny, Edmund and Henry Crawford. When she hears that an avenue of oak trees is to be cut down, Fanny's mind turns at once to Cowper, with whom she shares a love of the countryside and sensitivity to the beauty of ordinary things, and she quotes his lines, "Ye fallen avenues! Once more I mourn / Your fate unmerited..."<sup>2</sup>. She expresses a wish to see Sotherton before any changes are made, but, unlike Mary Crawford, she also says that she would take pleasure in seeing the progress of improvements as they are made. Edmund states that, had he "a place to new fashion", he would not put himself into the hands of an improver, but "would rather have an inferior degree of beauty, of [his] own choice, and acquired progressively" (MP, p.56). Henry Crawford admits to being excessively fond of improving and says that he envies the happiness which Mr Rushworth

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<sup>1</sup>Cowper, The Task 3. 764-83.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., l. 338-39.



has before him. But, whereas his pleasure in "improving" other people's situations to suit his desires is real enough, this professed enjoyment in improving grounds is suspect: Everingham, before he executed his plan, had seemed perfect to Mrs Grant, and in his brief account of his alterations, although he does refer to "the natural advantages of the ground" (MP, p.61), he does not mention its beauty, but only the insignificance and inappreciable extent of his estate. His suggestions for Thornton Lacey are grandiose and costly, aiming at an ostentatious beauty which would give the house "such an air as to make its owner be set down as the great landholder of the parish" (MP, p.244). Duckworth notes that Crawford's proposals for Thornton Lacey closely resemble Humphrey Repton's plans for Harlestone Hall in Northamptonshire.<sup>1</sup> Repton succeeded Capability Brown in his reputation as a landscape gardener, and was a controversial figure of his time. Jane Austen was familiar with his work: she mentions his name and his fee in Mansfield Park, and Chapman conjectures that she must have seen his Red Books.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas Jane Austen uses improvements and Repton chiefly as a satirical device for exposing character, the influence on her work of William Gilpin, the exponent of the principles of the picturesque, was profound. The picturesque was an aspect of thought and aesthetics which interested Jane Austen, and she introduced it into her novels as a topic of conversation for intelligent and well-educated characters; but more important than the various uses that she made of Gilpin in the novels is the formative influence <sup>that</sup> his ideas had on her

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<sup>1</sup>Duckworth, Estate, p.51.

<sup>2</sup>Mansfield Park, p.558.

art of novel writing.<sup>1</sup> Gilpin was first a critic of prints, and, later in the 1780s and 90s, published his many books, essays and poems on the picturesque beauties of the New Forest, the Peak district, Wales, the Lakes and the Scottish Highlands.<sup>2</sup> He defined the picturesque as "that kind of beauty which would look well in a picture. Neither grounds laid out by art, nor improved by agriculture are of this kind".<sup>3</sup> Henry Austen writes of his sister in the "Biographical Notice": "At a very early age she was enamoured of Gilpin on the Picturesque; and she seldom changed her opinions either on books or men" (NA, p.7). Bradbrook discusses fully how Gilpin's writings "provided Jane Austen with ideas which were related to the problems which she had to solve as a novelist",<sup>4</sup> and shows how Gilpin's comments on "the true philosophic stile" partly determined Jane Austen's plain, lucid expression.<sup>5</sup> There is evidence of her early interest in Gilpin in "Love and Freindship" (MW, p.105) and again in the account of Henry VIII's reign in "The History of England" (MW, p.142).

It was in Gilpin's guidebooks that Jane Austen found information on parts of the country about which she wrote, many of which she herself did not know. He has descriptions of the country around Matlock, of hedgerows in Northamptonshire, of the beauties of Surrey

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<sup>1</sup>Gillie, Preface, p.85.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.86.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted from Observations on the Western Parts of England, relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty by Bradbrook in Predecessors, p.53.

<sup>4</sup>Bradbrook, Predecessors, p.52.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.54.

with the celebrated Box Hill, and of the view of Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight from Portsdown Hill.<sup>1</sup> Jane Austen makes use of her knowledge of Gilpin in all the novels, but there are direct references to the picturesque only in the three earlier works. It is one of the subjects talked about by Eleanor and Henry Tilney on the walk with Catherine up Beechen Cliff; when Catherine confesses and laments to Henry Tilney her want of knowledge, "a lecture on the picturesque immediately followed, in which his instructions were so clear that she soon began to see beauty in every thing admired by him, and her attention was so earnest, that he became perfectly satisfied of her having a great deal of natural taste. He talked of fore-grounds, distances, and second distances--side-screens and perspectives--lights and shades;--and Catherine was so hopeful a scholar, that when they gained the top of Beechen Cliff, she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath, as unworthy to make part of a landscape" (NA, p.111). There may be an acknowledgement here, or a joke against another writer on the picturesque: Duckworth gives the information that in 1798 Uvedale Price had first argued that Bath was not picturesque.<sup>2</sup> If there is any criticism of the picturesque implied in Northanger Abbey, it is obscure to modern readers; in Sense and Sensibility, however, the satire, though more complex, is clear. Marianne's emotional response to the beauties of nature is, as has been shown,<sup>3</sup> exaggerated, but her farewell to the trees at Norland, for example, indicates a fundamentally sound sense of values, lacking

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp.59-66.

<sup>2</sup> Duckworth, Estate, p.98.

<sup>3</sup> See pp.50-51 above.

in the John Dashwoods, who cut down old walnut and thorn trees to make room for a greenhouse. Duckworth points out "how often the presence of trees betokens value"<sup>1</sup> in Jane Austen's novels; the trees that Marianne sentimentally addresses are not going to "continue the same" (SS, p.27), are not going to be enjoyed by the new owners of Norland. Similarly, although Jane Austen criticises Marianne's over-enthusiasm for the picturesque, she at the same time shows Marianne's underlying sense in realizing "that admiration of landscape scenery is become a mere jargon. Every body pretends to feel and tries to describe with the taste and elegance of him who first defined what picturesque beauty was". Edward, when Marianne is about to question him closely on the scenes of Barton that had particularly struck him, disclaims any knowledge of the picturesque, but in doing so exhibits an understanding of the principles which he cannot accept as criteria for a fine prospect. Edward does not affect "greater indifference and less discrimination" (SS, p.97) than he possesses, as Elinor tells Marianne he does--in saying this she is only trying to conciliate her vulnerable sister. His attitude coincides with Jane Austen's; we can imagine the creator of Pemberley and Donwell Abbey also saying: "I do not like crooked, twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight and flourishing. I do not like ruined, tattered cottages. I am not fond of nettles, or thistles, or heath blossoms. I have more pleasure in a snug farm-house than a watch-tower --and a troop of tidy, happy villagers please me better than the finest banditti in the world" (SS, p.98). Intelligent Elizabeth Bennet also shows that she is familiar with the subject, when she gaily uses

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<sup>1</sup>Duckworth, Estate, p.54.

the word "group" in its technical sense. Jane Austen employs the setting of the shrubbery at Netherfield to point to the rudeness of Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst towards Elizabeth, and to introduce in passing a reference to the picturesque. A narrow path allows only three people to walk together, and when Darcy, aware of their rudeness, suggests that they go into the avenue so that they may include Elizabeth, she, glad to escape, responds: "No, no; stay where you are.--You are charmingly group'd, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth. Good bye" (PP, p.53). Jane Austen seems to have thought--at least when she wrote and revised her first three novels--that a knowledge of the principles of the picturesque, a subject of interest and importance to her, would be part of an intelligent woman's education.

There are, of course, many outdoor scenes that have nothing to do with the picturesque. In all the novels major episodes are set out of doors, and in Emma there seems to be an especial use of such a setting. In the first two volumes most of the events take place indoors: the conversations at Hartfield, the dinner-parties, Emma's painting Harriet's portrait, the charades, visits to Miss Bates; and for most of these incidents the setting has no or little significance and is not specified. In Volume III, however, Emma's world starts to extend beyond Hartfield and Highbury, an expansion that seems to correspond to her increasing understanding of herself, and two extremely important scenes are set out of doors: the visit to Donwell Abbey, and the expedition to Box Hill. The idea that the enlargement of Emma's physical world mirrors her greater self-knowledge culminates in the otherwise uncharacteristically gratuitous piece of information that their wedding journey takes Emma and Mr Knightley to the sea,



which she had never seen before. This half-figurative use of outdoor scenes occurs only in the three later novels, but that Mr Knightley proposes to and is accepted by Emma in the garden at Hartfield is typical of most of them. Possibly because it was difficult to find the necessary privacy inside, all the heroines except Elinor Dashwood accept their husbands while walking out of doors. Edward Ferrar's proposal to Elinor is reported and we do not hear where it takes place. In Persuasion Captain Wentworth writes a letter to Anne indoors, but she gives him her answer while they walk slowly up Union Street in Bath.

The Jane Austen heroine does more than marry the right man--her marriage takes her into the right world, and each novel clearly establishes what the setting for the heroine's married life will be. Catherine Morland visits Woodston only when all illusions about Northanger Abbey have quite gone, when the Abbey is "no more to her now than any other house" (NA, p.212). Although her excited expectations and reaction to the Parsonage are coloured by her emotions, she does see it as it is; her response to the house that will be hers exhibits an honest simplicity and pleasure that promise well for her happiness there. About Delaford Parsonage, Elinor's home at the end of Sense and Sensibility, we are told little; the brief and general references to it must suffice to suggest that it will in time under Edward's stewardship come to reflect his "good principles and good sense" (SS, p.370), as Delaford House does Colonel Brandon's. As well as Mrs Jennings's description of Delaford (SS, p.196), there is Mr John Dashwood's account of it (SS, p.375) which, even though it comes from him, reminds us that the owner has values which Marianne eventually finds herself able to appreciate. The fullest descriptions

of the heroine's home after she is married are those of Pemberley and Donwell Abbey--the estates where Darcy and Mr Knightley have always lived. In Mansfield Park one of the functions of Henry Crawford's long account of Thornton Lacey and Edmund's rejection of his elaborate improvements is to convey to the reader something about the place where Fanny and Edmund will live after their marriage. In addition to this description of the house and its surroundings we are told that Fanny and Edmund are "equally formed for domestic life, and attached to country pleasures", and that "their home was the home of affection and comfort". When they move to Mansfield, we suppose that the Parsonage, which "under each of its two former owners, Fanny had never been able to approach but with some painful sensation of restraint or alarm" (MP, p.473), becomes, like the Park, a place of excellence reflecting "the sterling good of principle and temper" (MP, p.471) of its owners. The kind of world in which Anne Elliot will live is also fully described. The moral atmosphere of most of these settings contrasts with that of another home in each novel: the naval world of Captain Wentworth with Kellynch Hall, Mansfield Parsonage with the Park as it was, Pemberley with Rosings and Longbourn, Woodston with Northanger Abbey.

In these domestic novels, houses, of course, form the most usual interior setting for the action. Jane Austen's method of conveying a sense of place through her characters has already been discussed and illustrated,<sup>1</sup> but the particular uses that she makes of interiors of houses and of positioning people in rooms has not yet been emphasised. Generally speaking, there is very little description

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<sup>1</sup>See pp.7-8, 54-60 above.

of the insides of houses, but where such details are given they serve to reveal character, as well as to create a background for the action. In Sense and Sensibility, for example, Jane Austen describes the exact arrangement of the rooms in Barton Cottage so that the reader may assess the characters' various attitudes towards the small but "comfortable and compact" house (SS, p.28). Mrs Dashwood's ideas for enlarging it (SS, p.29) remind us of her optimistic but unrealistic outlook and her lack of sense--qualities which prepare us for her attitude towards Marianne's relationship with Willoughby. She and Marianne are gratified by Willoughby's effusive praise for the cottage, but Elinor's ironic remarks to him show that she feels his insincerity and affected sensibility (SS, p.72). Silly Mrs Palmer's comments on the sweet place made so charming and her wish to have such a house for herself ring hollow, coming from the mistress of Cleveland and a house in Hanover Square. Characteristically, Lady Middleton has nothing to say about the little house. Many of the remarks made about rooms and furnishings in the novels come from the ill-bred or naïve characters. One of the few comments on the interior of Netherfield Park is made by Mrs Bennet whose obvious compliments (PP, p.42) are intended to lead to questions about Mr Bingley's plans. Mr Collins and Mrs Elton both make vulgar and revealing remarks about the size of rooms in houses they visit, condescendingly comparing them to other--and in their eyes superior--establishments. Elizabeth Bennet is at first silently surprised that Charlotte Collins should be content to have her drawing-room at the back of the house, but when she realizes that, had Charlotte chosen the better-sized room and pleasanter aspect for herself, "Mr Collins would undoubtedly have been much less in his own apartment" (PP, p.168),

she gives her friend credit for making the best of her situation.

Many of the short descriptions of or references to interiors of houses are made by the narrator in order to convey characters' emotions. When Jane and Elizabeth Bennet hear that their father has received a letter from Mr Gardiner, their anxiety is expressed by authorial references to various rooms: "Away ran the girls, too eager to get in to have time for speech. They ran through the vestibule into the breakfast-room; from thence to the library;--their father was in neither; and they were on the point of seeking him up-stairs with their mother..." (PP, p.301). A similar example in Mansfield Park suggests Fanny's agitated anticipation of her dear William's arrival: when his carriage is expected, she is "watching in the hall, in the lobby, on the stairs" (MP, p.233) for the sound of it. Every item of the description of the house in Portsmouth makes us understand the change in Fanny's feelings for her parents' home and Mansfield Park. While she sits in the small hot parlour, Fanny's melancholy makes her more than usually sensitive to her surroundings, and we have the detailed account of the squalid room.<sup>1</sup> There is another more complex use of an interior in Mansfield Park. When the idea of acting first comes to Tom Bertram and Mr Yates, Tom sees the potential of the billiard room: "It is the very room for a theatre, precisely the shape and length for it, and the doors at the farther end, communicating with each other as they may be made to do in five minutes, by merely moving the book-case in my father's room, is the very thing we could have desired, if we had set down to wish for it. And my father's room will be an excellent green-room. It seems to join

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<sup>1</sup>See p.70 above.

the billiard-room on purpose" (MP, p.125). Having this information, the reader fully appreciates Sir Thomas's astonishment when he looks into "his own dear room" (MP, p.181); he finds candles burning, "other symptoms of recent habitation", and "a general air of confusion in the furniture", the most striking being "the removal of the book-case from before the billiard[-] room door" (MP, p.182). Because we have earlier learned of the connecting doors, we share the suspense of his family and anticipate Sir Thomas's walking through onto the stage. His embarrassment, bewilderment and anger arise from his sensing that changes more serious than rearrangements of furniture and the misappropriation of his room have occurred. The confusion that confronts him represents the changed values that have directed his children's lives in his absence; their choosing Lovers' Vows, the influence of the Crawfords, the behaviour of all the Bertrams, even Edmund, strike at the heart of the morality which Sir Thomas thought he was inculcating; <sup>and</sup> their using his special room as a green-room, making the billiard room into a theatre, and removing the billiard table signify their turning away from what he stands for in their lives. The use of symbol in Mansfield Park has already been mentioned,<sup>1</sup> and this instance of changes made inside Mansfield Park is part of the general figurative significance of the house. (Duckworth is surely mistaken in thinking that the room next to the billiard room is Sir Thomas's bedroom.<sup>2</sup> When Sir Thomas tells Fanny that Mr Crawford "is in my room, and hoping to see you there" (MP, p.314), and Fanny says that she cannot go down to him, they must be referring to this

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<sup>1</sup>See pp.76-79 above.

<sup>2</sup>Duckworth, Estate, p.55.



room. Although neither word is used in Mansfield Park, it must be a book-room or study.)

Jane Austen does not often need to describe the interior of a room, but she frequently states exactly where people are placed in relation ~~to~~ to each other or to furnishings in order to convey the emotions and attitudes of groups or individuals, to clarify a situation, or to make an event probable. A small incident in Pride and Prejudice illustrates how the positioning of people indicates their feelings. When Elizabeth arrives at the Gardiners' house in Gracechurch Street, Jane is at the drawing-room window, and then in the passage to welcome Lizzie; a troop of little boys and girls is half-way down the stairs--too eager to wait above, too shy to advance lower. Jane Austen's dwelling for a moment on these groupings and movements highlights Jane's eagerness to see her sister, and Elizabeth's popularity with her young cousins; it shows that, in truth, "all was joy and kindness" (PP, p.152). A more significant disposition of groups occurs in Mansfield Park. After dinner on the day on which Lovers' Vows is decided upon, two groups form in the drawing-room: Lady Bertram, Fanny, Edmund and the silent Julia round the fire, near which, too, sits Mrs Norris at the tea-table, and Tom, Mr Yates, Maria and Mr Rushworth at a separate table. When the Crawfords arrive, Henry joins the latter party, but Mary is unsettled, and, crossing the room three times in all, she reveals both her willingness to play the part of Amelia and her desire that disapproving Edmund should be her Anhalt. Tension arises between Tom and his brother, between the actors and Fanny, between Aunt Norris and Fanny, and "everybody is cross and teasing". The significant placing of people emphasises the principle of separation and the discord that

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 ■ going to increase as the scheme progresses. When Mary Crawford moves her chair away from the scolding Mrs Norris, saying pointedly, "...this place is too hot for me" (MP, p.147), and kindly tries to comfort Fanny, Jane Austen has got her into a position where her considered aside to Fanny (about her distress following Tom's suggestion that a stranger will have to take the part of Anhalt) can be heard by Edmund. The following day he admits to Fanny that he had heard what she said, and Mary's manoeuvres to bring Edmund into the play are thus successfully concluded. In Emma a brief description tells us exactly where three people are placed, and in doing so, points to the truth of the situation: "The appearance of the little sitting-room as they entered, was tranquillity itself; Mrs. Bates, deprived of her usual employment, slumbering on one side of the fire, Frank Churchill, at a table near her, most deedily occupied about her spectacles, and Jane Fairfax, standing with her back to them, intent on her pianoforté" (E, p.240). The carefully chosen words--"appearance", "slumbering", "deedily",<sup>1</sup> "intent"--create a scene that is dramatically ironic, and we realize that the seemingly tranquil tableau had arranged itself only as Miss Bates's voice was heard on the stairs.

Jane Austen makes overheard conversations and private conversations between two people in a crowded room convincing by placing groups of people strategically. One evening after dinner at Barton

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<sup>1</sup>James Kinsley in Emma, ed. David Lodge (London: Oxford University Press, 1971; Oxford Paperbacks, 1975), p.444, quotes an explanation of this Hampshire word given by Mary Russell Mitford in Our Village: Sketches of Rural Character and Scenery, 1 (1824), p.244. "It means (and it is no small merit that it has no exact synonym) any thing done with a profound and plodding attention, an action which engrosses all the powers of mind and body."

Park, circumstances, the employments of the company, and the seating arrangements enable Elinor at last to talk privately to Lucy Steele about Lucy's engagement to Edward Ferrars. Sir John Middleton, who on such occasions generally unites his guests "in one noisy purpose" (SS, p.143), is away; Lucy has to finish a filigree basket for a Middleton child; Marianne, who detests cards, is at the piano; and Elinor, instead of playing casino with Lady Middleton, Mrs Jennings, Miss Steele and Margaret, offers to help Lucy with her work. "Lucy made room for her with ready attention, and the two fair rivals were thus seated side by side at the same table, and with the utmost harmony engaged in forwarding the same work. The piano-forté, at which Marianne, wrapt up in her own music and her own thoughts, had by this time forgotten that any body was in the room besides herself, was luckily so near them that Miss Dashwood now judged, she might safely, under the shelter of its noise, introduce the interesting subject, without any risk of being heard at the card-table" (SS, p.145). Later in Sense and Sensibility Jane Austen again, but in humorous vein, makes use of the protection of the piano to allow Colonel Brandon to talk privately to Elinor about the Delaford living for Edward. Mrs Jennings, thinking that the Colonel is proposing marriage to Elinor, honourably moves her seat to one nearer the piano so that she may not overhear them, but in the opportune pauses in Marianne's performance she catches at sentences which confirm her suspicions.

The purpose of most of the description of the interior of Northanger Abbey is to contrast the bright modernity of the house with Catherine's expectations, and to characterize General Tilney by emphasising the grandeur and costliness. One room mentioned, however, is important for neither of these reasons, but because of its

position. On her tour of the magnificent house Catherine passes through "a dark little room, owning Henry's authority, and strewed with his litter of books, guns, and great coats" (NA, p.183). It is through this room, near the stable-yard, that Henry enters when Catherine, alone and terror-struck in Mrs Tilney's bedroom, hears someone ascending the stairs. In this way the setting makes Henry's chance meeting with Catherine probable. There is in Mansfield Park another instance when a clear reference to characters' positions in a house determines important action. Fanny has been visiting Mary Crawford at the Parsonage, and on Edmund's joining them, they talk with Mrs Grant in the garden. Fanny, distressed by the conversation between Edmund and Mary Crawford, wishes to leave but is too embarrassed to speak out. The striking of a clock strengthens her resolution, and Edmund recollects that he had come to fetch her. Fanny, thinking that Edmund is staying behind, hurries on, but the others follow. We learn that "they all accompanied her into the house, through which it was necessary to pass", and that "Dr Grant was in the vestibule" (MP, p.215). Dr Grant greets Edmund and asks him to dine there the following day, and Mrs Grant immediately invites Fanny too. Again, it is by means of the setting of the little episode that Jane Austen brings about the novel event of dining out for Fanny, and initiates the span of action that ends only with Maria Rushworth's elopement with Henry Crawford.

Barbara Hardy writes that it is not surprising that Jane Austen, having developed the sympathetic habitat most fully in Mansfield Park, should in her next novel turn away from houses to the "significance of smaller and more shifting things".<sup>1</sup> As has been shown,<sup>2</sup> the short

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Hardy, A Reading, p.159.

<sup>2</sup> See pp.58-59 above.

but relatively full description of Mr Knightley's house and grounds serves a particular purpose, but there is very little description of the Woodhouses' home, Hartfield, which is a suitable rather than a sympathetic dwelling for Emma. A few references give an impression of the house: the narrator mentions the separate lawn and shrubberies in the opening chapter, Mr Woodhouse remarks that the house is three times as large as Randalls, and Mrs Elton compares features of the property to Maple Grove. This information, together with the reader's knowledge of the sort of house in which people like the Woodhouses would live, is sufficient for Jane Austen's purpose. The sense of place in Emma is so strong, however, that Ioan Williams, in a study of the development of realistic fiction, considers that the book has "the authority of natural history"; it was the first time that individual and social experience had been presented "within a sharply realized social and geographical context".<sup>1</sup> Many readers have noted this quality of realism in Emma. Chapman comments that the topography of Highbury is so detailed that it is almost possible to construct a map of it, and so realistic that it has been identified with various villages in Surrey. He suggests that Jane Austen precludes the possibility of false identification by stating exact distances from Highbury; no actual place could possibly be sixteen miles from London, nine from Richmond, and seven from Box Hill.<sup>2</sup> The powerful sense of milieu in the novel derives partly from the concentration of the action in one place, and the consequent cumulative effect. Unlike the other heroines, who move away from their homes, Emma does not

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<sup>1</sup>Ioan Williams, The Realist Novel in England: A Study in Development (London: Macmillan Press, 1974), p.10.

<sup>2</sup>Emma, p.521.



leave Highbury; there is no visit to another setting with a different set of people which would provide "a total change of conversation, opinion, and idea" (P, p.42). It is necessary for theme and plot that Emma should not leave her surroundings, and to compensate for the lack of variety and contrast, Jane Austen creates a little world crowded with people, their activities and the objects that come into their daily lives. The society of "the large and populous village almost amounting to a town" (E, p.7) is not confined to the three or four families of Emma's immediate acquaintance; in addition to the fourteen or sixteen characters who play a part in the action of the novel, Chapman lists about seventy others who are mentioned. The main characters meet at various social gatherings, and their talk casually suggests a busy background of magistrates' decisions, parish business, doctors' advice; of farming matters such as drains, fences, crops; of errands to Ford's and to the post office, journeys to London, and purchases made there. One of the loquacious Miss Bates's functions is that she peoples Highbury. Mrs Stoke's room at the Crown Inn becomes a rich scene of brilliant lights, elegant people, and good food in profusion as Miss Bates's words flow. As well as by means of the many people and their day-to-day activities, Jane Austen creates what Ioan Williams calls the "concrete social environment" of Emma<sup>1</sup> by including, naturally and seemingly casually, an abundance of objects--the "smaller and more shifting things" referred to by Barbara Hardy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ioan Williams, Realist Novel, p.13.

<sup>2</sup>See p.94 above.

## CHAPTER III

## SPATIAL DETAIL AND TIME

1. Spatial Detail

So far in this study only the larger and fixed features of the physical environment surrounding the heroines have been discussed --the gardens, parks, streets, buildings and rooms. Like real life, Jane Austen's fictional worlds contain numerous small, movable objects, both man-made and natural, that impinge to a lesser or greater extent on her characters' daily activities. These objects are quietly and unobtrusively introduced, and seldom described, and their chief function, like that of other aspects of setting, is to define character. After the reader has become acquainted with a character's disposition by means of authorial comment and his own words and actions, Jane Austen sometimes reminds us of that character's qualities by showing his response to the things around him. The spatial material in the novels is, of course, chiefly of a domestic nature, and at the same time as Jane Austen reveals a character's quality of mind or emotional attitudes by means of references to pot-plants, food, furnishings, musical instruments, books, games, letters, clothes, ornaments and possessions of various kinds, she economically and skilfully uses these objects to advance the plot, animate the action, and give a solid sense of her fictional world.

Whatever the functions of such objects, Jane Austen, as Mary Lascelles observes, uses them sparingly and significantly.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Lascelles, Art, p.136.

in action, in a world naturally filled with things."<sup>1</sup> Such spatial detail sometimes serves a special purpose and requires description, but generally objects are only named. Fanny Price has books, work-boxes, geraniums in the east room, and any particulars of these would not add to what Jane Austen wants to convey through them; only when the fact tells us something about a character or situation are we told that a footstool is faded or a sofa shabby. It is partly the lack of qualifying description that, while helping to keep them subdued and subordinate to character, at the same time endows Jane Austen's objects with their power. Their concrete quality, clear outlines and personal associations give them a precision and clarity which contribute to an important general effect, well accounted for by Virginia Woolf in a comment on the evening scene at Netherfield Park when Darcy writes a letter to his sister and the characters present join in the conversation which Miss Bingley tries to initiate with him.

The talk is not mere talk; it has an emotional intensity which gives it more than brilliance. Light, landscape--everything that lies outside the drawing-room is arranged to illumine it. Distances are made exact; arrangements accurate. It is one mile from Meryton; it is Sunday and not Monday. We want all suspicions and questions laid at rest. It is necessary that the characters should lie before us in as clear and quiet a light as possible since every flicker and tremor is to be observed....For, in order to develop personal relations to the utmost, it is important to keep out of the range of the abstract, the impersonal; and to suggest that there is anything that lies outside men and women would be to cast the shadow of doubt upon the comedy of their relationships and its sufficiency.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Hardy, Bicentenary Essays, p.195.

<sup>2</sup>Virginia Woolf, Granite and Rainbow: Essays (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), p.115.

The assumption that things surround the characters is so much taken for granted that on occasion--for example, in the first two chapters of Pride and Prejudice--there is very little indication given by narrator or characters of the physical setting. As with other aspects of the external world in the novels, spatial detail is presented both by the narrator and the characters, and references and description are given in narrative comment, free indirect style or direct speech. Generally speaking, only when a character registers an object is it significant, and only when it is significant is it introduced. Jane Austen's objects have little life of their own; their presence is subdued; they have virtually none of the sensuous appeal that things in Henry James's novels have; and man-made artefacts are never valued purely for their intrinsic or aesthetic qualities. There is little in the novels of what Barbara Hardy calls the "mild comic animism"<sup>1</sup> which characterizes Jane Austen's attitude towards objects in her letters, such as the two tables which, covered with green baize, "send their best Love" to Cassandra (L, p.82).<sup>2</sup> Barbara Hardy sums up her findings on the presentation of objects in Jane Austen's novels thus: "[Her] method is not to set objects in a carefully prepared social scene, like many of Thackeray's, in which the details of pictures, ornaments, carpet, furniture and food are sociologically exact. Nor is it to make the objects totally resonant, like the cruel, small, jealous windows of Osmond's house in The Portrait of a Lady....Nor does she combine the two methods, as George Eliot does in Middlemarch. Jane Austen sets her characters

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Hardy, A Reading, p.140.

<sup>2</sup> For other examples see Letters, pp.256, 297, 473.

Objects in the novels, in keeping with the scale of the fictional worlds, are usually small and seemingly trivial, but Jane Austen, like Wordsworth, builds up "greatest things / From least suggestions";<sup>1</sup> these domestic articles and personal possessions can carry weighty import: a single gold chain rouses a strong and true emotional response, and the dropping of a pen has momentous significance. But they do not do this in isolation; their connotative power derives from the immediate context and from the accumulative effect of the way objects have been used throughout the novel.

Some of the uses of spatial detail mentioned above predominate in certain of the novels. In the Northanger chapters of Northanger Abbey Jane Austen describes household furnishings and objects in order to suggest the mock Gothic world of Catherine's imagination, and to indicate the modern stylishness of the house, to the significance of which Catherine is at first blind. In Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice there is relatively little spatial detail, and its chief use is to develop character. Just as there is a stronger sense of place in the three later novels,<sup>2</sup> so objects in Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion are more numerous and more assertive.<sup>3</sup> Acquisitiveness and a certain kind of liking for material things are generally the mark of an inferior mind, but in Mansfield Park Fanny's possessions have a special significance, and a few objects like the cross and gold chain take on an almost symbolic meaning. Emma is crowded with objects, though Emma herself is not

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<sup>1</sup>The Prelude 14. 101-2.

<sup>2</sup>See p.46 above.

<sup>3</sup>Barbara Hardy makes this point in Bicentenary Essays, p.181.



often associated with them. One result of this abundance of domestic detail is that, combining with the references to everyday activities and the many names of characters, it makes Highbury the most realistic and substantial community of all places in the novels.

One of the aims of this dissertation is to show how Jane Austen uses the setting of her novels to create an impression of actuality--to suggest a likeness to the material world, in order to intensify the realism and credibility of her characters and their actions. The sense of verisimilitude, of a solid background to the action, is most pronounced, as has been said already, in Emma, and it is partly because of the number and range of objects, some described briefly and others merely named by a character or the narrator, that the world of Highbury becomes real in our imagination. Ford's shop, a suitable place for chance meetings, assumes a third dimension when we read of "the sleek, well-tied parcels of 'Men's Beavers' and 'York Tan'" (E, p.200), which are displayed when Frank Churchill patriotically buys gloves there. Miss Bates's breathless references to garters, caps, workbags, bread and butter, slices of mutton, baked apples, thick shoes and spectacles suggest much busy-ness behind the scenes. The minutiae of their daily lives confirm what we learn of characters through their speech and actions: Mr Knightley's apples and family collections of engravings, medals, cameos, corals and shells express his kind consideration for people very different from himself; Mr Woodhouse's concern with gruel and a boiled egg or leg of pork is indicative of his limited imagination and his valetudinarian habits; Mrs Elton's preference for trimmings, wax-candles, routcakes and ice signifies her vulgarity and shallowness. Food, frequently mentioned, is not always something banal.

Commonplace gastronomic detail shows the reader clearly the nature of the relationship between Mr Elton and Harriet Smith: his account of the "Stilton cheese, the north Wiltshire, the butter, the cellery, the beet-root and all the dessert" (E, p.89) makes a humorous contrast to the romantic exchange which Emma imagines is taking place. But when Emma liberally helps her father's guests to minced chicken and scalloped oysters, to large slices of cake and full glasses of wine, we sense the potential of the warm heart and vital, generous spirit that will flourish when she loves and gives herself to Mr Knightley. Many gifts, mostly food, pass between people--walnuts, a goose, apples, pork, a dish of arrowroot, a shawl, a piano; and Barbara Hardy sees hospitality and donation as one of the prominent themes in Emma.<sup>1</sup> The novel leaves us with the impression of an abundance of good things, not hoarded or begrudged, that is in harmony with the rich and pleasant amplitude of such a place as Donwell Abbey.

Some of the objects in Emma have a more particular function than those already mentioned. Emma's portfolio of drawings is an economical means of exposition as well as of characterization. Through it we hear more of Emma's lack of perseverance, and some details about Isabella, her husband and four children. Emma's portrait of Harriet is the perfect vehicle for the confusion and misunderstanding involving Mr Elton's admiration for the painter, not the painted. The letters of the alphabet game by which Frank Churchill communicates his apology to Jane Fairfax are part of the larger double game that, always "manoeuvring and finessing" (E, p.146),

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Hardy, A Reading, p.159.

he plays with the people of Highbury, especially Emma; and, like the piano, broken spectacles and borrowed scissors, they serve as a clue to the truth about his relationship with Jane. Jane Austen's correspondence shows that she herself enjoyed games of all sorts-- "bilbocatch, . . . spillikins, paper ships, riddles, conundrums, and cards" (L, p.225)--as a form of recreation and means of entertaining nephews and nieces, but in the novels a liking for such games almost always indicates irresponsibility or a moral or social deficiency.

Like the things connected with Frank Churchill's intrigue, objects in the other novels occasionally determine the action. In the parody of the Gothic novel, spatial material is important to the plot. We need to know how the large, heavy chest and old cabinet in Catherine's room at Northanger look: "[The chest] was of cedar, curiously inlaid with some darker wood, and raised, about a foot from the ground, on a carved stand of the same. The lock was silver, though tarnished from age; at each end were the imperfect remains of handles also of silver, broken perhaps prematurely by some strange violence; and, on the centre of the lid, was a mysterious cypher, in the same metal" (MA, pp.163-64). The black cabinet "was not absolutely ebony and gold; but it was Japan, black and yellow Japan of the handsomest kind" (NA, p.168). The point of view shows us how Catherine's mind partially creates what she sees, and we understand with amusement how the descriptive detail gives these objects a presence and mystery that combine dramatically with the storm and darkness to rouse Catherine's fearful curiosity, and lead to her confusing literature with life. Despite signs that clearly indicate otherwise, the atmosphere created and her experiences with the lock of the cabinet and her candle make Catherine imagine past scenes of

horror and entertain suspicions of a dreadful nature. The bright and opulent modernity of Northanger is suggested by references to many objects: the eighteenth-century furniture, the ornaments of the "prettiest English china" (NA, p.162), the general's Staffordshire breakfast set. But these things, like the magnificent, lofty rooms and Rumford fireplace, instead of proclaiming to Catherine the true nature of the house and its owner, only distress her by their being less than her imagination hoped for, and she consequently discounts them. In Sense and Sensibility the pair of screens painted by Elinor have a thematic use in that the conversation about them reveals the cold, mercenary "sense" of John Dashwood, Mrs Ferrars and Fanny Dashwood, and, in contrast, Marianne's "strong impulse of affectionate sensibility" (SS, p.236). Some objects in this novel also further the plot: Lucy Steele's filigree basket makes it possible, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> for Elinor to hear more about Lucy's engagement to Edward, and her mother's old-fashioned jewellery which Elinor takes to the jeweller's determines that she see Robert Ferrars and without prejudice recognise his "strong, natural, sterling insignificance" (SS, pp.220-21) and self-centred dandyism before she knows who he is. Towards the end of Pride and Prejudice, when Elizabeth, sure of her feelings for Darcy but uncertain about his for her, is puzzled by his silence, gravity and apparent indifference towards her, an empty coffee-cup serves to bring them together for a brief and constrained conversation, and to convey to the reader more than it does to Elizabeth.

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 93 above.

The coffee-cup used in this way has a function similar to that of properties on the stage. Jane Austen's experience in family theatricals, her youthful efforts at writing plays,<sup>1</sup> and her life-long interest in stage productions,<sup>2</sup> are evident in the way she frames her scenes and in the use she occasionally makes of objects. There are several instances in the novels, like that of Darcy and the coffee-cup, when a character conveys a response, not through words, but by means of an action involving an object. For example, in Mansfield Park there is a scene in which characters talk about acting, Shakespeare and reading aloud. Fanny has been reading to her aunt and stops as soon as she hears Edmund and Mr Crawford enter. When Henry Crawford continues reading from the volume which she has put down, she takes up her needlework and is determined not to be interested. But she is greatly moved by his dramatic reading from the scene of Henry VIII, and Edmund, eager that Fanny should accept Henry Crawford's offer of marriage, is gratified to see her gradually stop sewing and become totally absorbed in listening to the words and watching the reader. Fanny's responding in this way allows Edmund to misinterpret her feelings and see in her actions encouragement for his friend that Fanny does not intend. Another example of this stage device

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<sup>1</sup>See Minor Works, pp.49-57. The recently discovered Sir Charles Grandison, or The Happy Man, a Comedy was probably written between 1796 and 1800; see Times (London), 1 December 1977. According to the information given in this review, it is a very free adaptation of Richardson's novel--the only known adaptation by Jane Austen of another work--in manuscript form and possibly written for the family theatricals. The review is by Philip Howard.

<sup>2</sup>Whenever she was in London, Jane Austen visited the theatre. In 1811 she wrote to Cassandra: "Our first object to day was Henrietta St. to consult with Henry, in consequence of a very unlucky change of The play for this very night--Hamlet instead of King John-- & we are to go on Monday to Macbeth, instead, but it is a disappointment to us both" (L, p.271). See also Letters, pp.275, 321, 386.



occurs later in Mansfield Park when Edmund, sitting in a corner, takes up a newspaper that it may indicate to Fanny and Henry Crawford that he is occupied and not taking part in their conversation. Again, Fanny is rescued from this tête-à-tête with Henry Crawford by the entrance of the tea-tray and urn behind which she is busy and protected. There are instances in the other novels of characters using objects in a similar way--Emma, for example, leans down to her workbasket to conceal her exquisite feelings of delight when Mr Knightley tells her that Harriet has accepted Robert Martin--but this dramatic technique is particularly suited to the novel in which theatricals and acting are dominant ideas.

There are two main groups of characters which Jane Austen creates largely through their attention to things: the greedy, selfish, mercenary people who in varying degrees are harmful and unpleasant, and the silly, harmless ones who have more heart than head. Mrs Allen is one of the latter; her positive qualities, "the air of a gentlewoman, a great deal of quiet, inactive good temper, and a trifling turn of mind" (NA, p.20), are exhibited by her frequent and comic references to clothes. Dress is her passion, and she sees nearly everything in life in terms of muslins, gowns, muffs and tippets. Harriet Smith, too, comes alive for us through her talk of the things that pleased her at Abbey-Mill Farm, her collection of riddles, her admiration for the yellow curtains of Mr Elton's house, her parcel of muslin and ribbon at Ford's, and her box of "Most precious treasures" (E, p.338). Mrs Price, less of a type than Mrs Allen and Harriet Smith, and presented with less humour, is so hemmed in and worn out by the objects in her disorganised domestic life that, kind-hearted as she is, her mind cannot range beyond the

ragged parlour carpet to dwell for more than a moment upon her distant sister's suffering. Mrs Price's enforced and habitual preoccupation with domestic affairs is not as harmless as Mrs Allen's passion for clothes--perhaps because Mrs Price is not protected by wealth and comfort--but it cannot be compared with the cold-hearted materialism of the second group of characters whose desire for money and possessions has destroyed their love and concern for people.

In each of the novels there are some of these characters. In Northanger Abbey General Tilney's acquisitiveness and inordinate pride in his possessions are important because it is his greed and his desire that Henry marry an heiress that prompt him to invite Catherine to Northanger, and so place her in the setting of the Gothic burlesque. We have seen how the descriptions of the house and its furnishings suggest both the reality of the Abbey and Catherine's fantasies about it;<sup>1</sup> they also reveal the general's disposition. Fashionable taste in the late eighteenth century preferred modern household objects to "antiques", and General Tilney's china and furniture are the latest, newest sorts; the names "Rumford"<sup>2</sup> and "Staffordshire"<sup>3</sup> are enough to convey the reason for his feelings of superiority and contempt for rich men with inferior or fewer or smaller possessions. Food is prominent in the General's life--that he is "very particular in his eating" (NA, p.211) becomes clear even

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<sup>1</sup>See pp.47-48, 103-4 above.

<sup>2</sup>Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford (1753-1814), invented a fireplace which conserved heat and did not smoke.

<sup>3</sup>Owing to technical improvements and the prime influence of Josiah Wedgwood (1730-95), the name of the Staffordshire potteries had become one of national importance in the industry by the last decades of the eighteenth century. See W.B. Honey, English Pottery and Porcelain, 5th ed. (London: A. & C. Black, 1964), pp.68-89.

to Catherine. He himself had built and stocked the excellent kitchen garden at Woodston; his own, he boasts, is "unrivalled in the kingdom"; and he cultivates the "most valuable fruits" (NA, p.178). Jane Austen does not stop with this generalization; she economically brings his snobbery and his greed together by giving him a pinery which, if we are to understand his way of speaking, had done exceedingly well the previous year, yielding one hundred pineapples. The pineapple, first cultivated in England in the late seventeenth century, was rare and highly prized, and must have held Augustan literary associations for Jane Austen. Cowper published the light-hearted fable, "The Pine-apple and the Bee", in 1782,<sup>1</sup> and much earlier Thomson (1700-1748) had included the pineapple in his list of exotic and delicious fruits in Summer, first published in 1727:

Witness, thou best anana, thou the pride  
Of vegetable life, beyond whate'er  
The poets imaged in the golden age:  
Quick let me strip thee of thy tufty coat,  
Spread thy ambrosial stores, and feast with Jove!<sup>2</sup>

Jane Austen had surely read The Seasons: she quotes from Spring in Northanger Abbey (NA, p.15), and in Sense and Sensibility makes Edward Ferrars mention Thomson as being one of Marianne's favourite poets.

General Tilney's love of possessions and food reveal his excessive concern for rank and social status, but he is not sufficiently convincing as a character for the reader or his creator to take him seriously. Jane Austen makes a more earnest criticism of cold-hearted and mercenary John and Fanny Dashwood, who exemplify

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<sup>1</sup>The companion poem, "The Bee and the Pine-apple", was not published until 1890.

<sup>2</sup>The Seasons, Summer 685-89.

the abuse of sense in one of its most extreme forms. Their narrow-minded selfishness is evident in their attitude to things as well as to money; Fanny Dashwood regrets the loss of the Stanhill china, plate and linen almost as much as she and her husband mind the idea of giving away any sum of money, whether it be three thousand pounds to his sisters or a hundred a year to their mother. The John Dashwoods, however, like many of Jane Austen's unpleasant characters, do not succeed in doing permanent harm to anyone except themselves. Mrs Norris is the only character in the six novels whose evil influence has a lasting effect, and in order to exhibit her mean and selfish spirit in the daily life of Mansfield, Jane Austen shows her cadging, purloining and accepting any thing that she can get for nothing: eggs, cheese and a plant from Sotherton, the green baize curtain, roses to dry for pot-pourri. "On [Jane Austen's] scales little things weigh heavy", writes Barbara Hardy,<sup>1</sup> and these seemingly venial acts of selfish greed, in conjunction with Mrs Norris's lack of moral sense, her begrudging meanness, and her bullying, irritable temper, denote a darkness of the soul, a littleness of spirit, that is at the furthest extreme from the magnanimity and sunny generosity of Emma Woodhouse. The Miss Steeles, who always have an eye to the main chance, are also portrayed by their attention to material things and to appearances. As Elinor recognises, they exhibit "some kind of sense" (SS, p.120) in their understanding of the power of objects to charm; they please and flatter Lady Middleton by bringing with them a whole coachful of playthings for her children. Lucy is also fully aware of the power that objects have to hurt, when she slyly shows

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Hardy, A Reading, p.21.

Elinor the miniature of Edward Ferrars and the letter addressed to her in his hand. The sight of these and the painful memory of Edward's ring with Lucy's hair almost overcome Elinor as she realizes that Lucy's claim to be engaged to Edward is true.

Jane Austen generally reserves this method of portraying character through a response to objects for her people who are types, or in E.M. Forster's terms, flat rather than round.<sup>1</sup> She depicts as two-dimensional the characters who, being either unpleasant or stupid or both, tend to become, as Barbara Hardy describes them, "restricted and even reified by living too much in the company of objects".<sup>2</sup> The deep, intricate characters like most of the protagonists as a rule show little concern for things. This reticence about the objects in their lives, which is not the same as an undervaluing of them, is related to a sense of proportion which, Barbara Hardy comments, "does not force itself upon us as an imperative, but simply seems to resemble the implicit attitude of the author".<sup>3</sup> The heroines and other characters with wisdom and moral excellence reflect Jane Austen's own concern for human values; like hers, their preference is for men and women,<sup>4</sup> rather than for things. For Elizabeth Bennet, for example, it is people not things that are interesting and important; she appreciates what is wise and good, and laughs at the "follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies" (PP, p.57) of

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<sup>1</sup>E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1927; Pocket edition, 1949), pp.65-75.

<sup>2</sup>Barbara Hardy, A Reading, p.149.

<sup>3</sup>Barbara Hardy, Bicentenary Essays, p.195.

<sup>4</sup>See Letters, p.267.



her fellow-beings. Although she is associated with the piano in one memorable scene (PP, pp.174-76), the only object in which Elizabeth is shown to take a deep interest is the painting of Darcy in the picture-gallery at Pemberley, and her emotional response to it is implied, not described. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, on the other hand, are shown to some extent in Volume I of Sense and Sensibility in relation to their possessions. The books, drawings and piano that they take to Barton suggest their intelligence and tastes, and are frequently mentioned. The point is stressed when Edward Ferrars humorously imagines their enthusiastic buying of prints and books, had they fortunes to spend (SS, p.92). Willoughby's shooting-jacket and the mare that he wishes to give her are used to indicate the beginning and the degree of Marianne's passion for him. Fanny Price and Anne Elliot are the two heroines who are most conscious of their surroundings, and Fanny is the only heroine whose possessions Jane Austen lists and dwells on, and whose character is developed through her response to the objects around her.

The novels suggest that Jane Austen considered that possessions are misused and abused when an interest in them leads the owner away from a concern for people, and that they are rightly used when they direct the owner's or donor's thoughts towards people. Objects which are mere ornaments and accessories that feed a character's vanity, like Mr Rushworth's pink satin cloak and Mrs Elton's "apparatus of happiness" (E, p.358), are suspect. Presents given quietly out of kindness or love, such as those which Edmund Bertram and Mr Knightley give, bring pleasure and strengthen bonds between people; but giving a present like Jane Fairfax's piano is "the act of a very, very young man, one too young to consider whether the inconvenience of

it [may] not very much exceed the pleasure" (E, p.446).

Fanny Price is different in many respects from the other heroines. She is quietly intellectual, but without the lively intelligence of Emma Woodhouse or the intelligent wit of Elizabeth Bennet; strongly principled, but without the mature confidence in her own judgement of Elinor Dashwood or Anne Elliot. Her character and circumstances until the end of the novel set her apart not only from the other heroines, but also from the Bertrams and Crawfords. We see her first as an undersized child, afraid, tearful and isolated, and later as a young woman, still isolated, fearful, delicate and reticent. When she is with people, she cannot easily communicate her feelings and thoughts, and she is not active physically. Jane Austen, however, by endowing her silent and outwardly passive heroine with, amongst other qualities, an extremely loving heart, keen sensibilities, and the powers of memory and imagination, is able to use Fanny's response to her surroundings as a method of characterization. Fanny, frequently alone or distressed, seeks the solace and solitude of the east room, and it is here, where the grown-up Fanny keeps her possessions, that the reader often learns from the authorial comment or free indirect style the state of Fanny's heart and mind. Fanny also finds pleasure and comfort in the beauty of nature, which evokes from her a strong emotional reaction. But it is almost always her feelings for people that colour her response to her surroundings: objects, natural or otherwise, do not appeal to her purely for themselves; they claim her care, appreciation or admiration because of the associations that they hold for her with the people in her life.

The description of the contents of the east room and other

occasional references to objects in Mansfield Park make up the longest account by Jane Austen of any character's possessions. The things are unobtrusive and hardly differentiated or made visual by any specific detail. Occasionally some particulars of the books, furniture, ornaments, plants and presents are given, casually, naturally and significantly. When he goes to Fanny for advice on whether to play the part of Anhalt, Edmund comments on some books in the room, and the titles--the Idler, Crabbe's Tales, and one of Macartney's volumes on China--indicate Fanny's taste and range of interests. The "small sketch of a ship sent four years ago from the Mediterranean by William, with H.M.S. Antwerp at the bottom, in letters as tall as the main-mast" is a token of the brother's and sister's loving relationship, executed with all the pride of the boy in his profession. The three transparencies, of a cave in Italy, Tintern Abbey, and a moonlight lake in Cumberland, recall Fanny's romantic strain, which she has already shown in her mistaken expectations of Sotherton chapel (MP, pp.85-86). The geraniums, which Jane Austen humorously makes Fanny air that she may "inhale a breeze of mental strength herself" to resolve her doubts, are part of Fanny's love of natural things, expressed in her regret that an oak avenue should be cut down, her admiration for the beauty of a lovely night, her rhapsody on the evergreen, and her sorrow at missing the pleasures of spring in the country when she is in Portsmouth. Fanny finds in the objects that she has gathered in her "nest of comforts" (MP, p.152) two general uses: they help to take her mind off anything unpleasant that has happened, and they serve as mementos of the people associated with them. Jane Austen also makes them serve the reader: these ordinary things that comfort Fanny in distress, take her out of herself,

extend her knowledge and experience, and stir her imagination and memory, contribute to the novel's structural unity; all the objects mentioned above send the reader's mind back and forwards, recalling and connecting episodes. We see Fanny's possessions in the context of the whole novel: the objects in the east room bring to mind the fragile ornaments that frightened the child in the grand drawing-rooms; the presents that she accumulates take us forward to the silver knife that she buys for Betsey; and her books, to those she borrows from a circulating library in Portsmouth. Her different responses to the things around her indicate her progress to maturity, and for the reader, as well as for Fanny, they bring past and present together.

Some of Fanny's possessions, like the room itself and the shabby furniture, are cast-offs, which no one at Mansfield Park wants or needs; and some are presents given to her over the years by her cousins: "she could scarcely see an object in that room which had not an interesting remembrance connected with it" (MP, pp.151-52). Even if an object had been associated with an incident that had brought sorrow and pain, Fanny feels that the past suffering had never been without some consolatory kindness, "and the whole [is] now so blended together" (MP, p.152) in her memory, imagination and loving heart that every thing in the room is a friend or bears her thoughts to a friend. These personal associations are important to her; she regards presents and the giving and receiving of them with a seriousness and intensity little understood by, for example, Mary Crawford or even Edmund. Because she remembers all that she observed in Henry Crawford's past behaviour, and has noticed the change in his manners towards herself, Mary's gift of the gold necklace which Henry had once given to her fills Fanny with doubts, and

adds to her worries about the ball instead of decreasing them. Throughout the novel little things carry deep meanings, but it is through a combination of elements, not only by use of the small scale, that Jane Austen achieves the remarkable effect of the episode of the cross, necklace and chain. We know that the "very pretty amber cross" (MP, p.254) that William brought Fanny from Sicily, and perhaps, too, the simple gold chain that Edmund gives her, have their origin in Jane Austen's own experience. Eleven years before she wrote Mansfield Park Jane Austen, after reading a letter from her brother Charles, had written to Cassandra: "He has received 30£ for his share of the privateer & expects 10£ more--but of what avail is it to take prizes if he lays out the produce in presents to his sisters. He has been buying gold chains & Topaze crosses for us;--he must be well scolded" (L, p.137). The qualifying phrase (in the novel) "very pretty" does not surprise the reader for the words express Fanny's thought, but the use of the adjective "amber" with its connotations of colour, beauty and value, its visual, even tactile, impression is rare in Jane Austen's writing, and suggests that she was intentionally commemorating her own brother's gift. Changed though the fictitious cross is, this unusual treatment gives it a sensuous quality that makes it unique among the objects in the novels. A third element that intensifies this episode is Jane Austen's giving to the whole issue of the provenance of the ornaments and Fanny's anguished decision which to wear an almost symbolic significance. As in the Sotherton episode,<sup>1</sup> the near-symbolism is explicit but subdued. Fanny, after much uncomfortable deliberation, finds that Mary Crawford's

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<sup>1</sup>See pp.77-79 above.



necklace will not go through the ring of the cross, and is obliged to wear Edmund's chain: "His therefore must be worn; and having, with delightful feelings, joined the chain and the cross, those memorials of the two most beloved of her heart, those dearest tokens so formed for each other by every thing real and imaginary--and put them round her neck, and seen and felt how full of William and Edmund they were, she was able, without an effort, to resolve on wearing Miss Crawford's necklace too" (MP, p.271). (In his commentary on this incident Tony Tanner misunderstands Jane Austen's subtle touch. He sees in Fanny's wearing Edmund's chain with William's cross a foreshadowing of the final emotional situation, but he does not take into account that she also wears the Crawfords' necklace.<sup>1</sup>)

It is as memorials of the people she holds dear that Fanny treasures her possessions. Her memory, and her capacity and need for love invest everything with a preciousness that is her chief source of happiness. When Mr Norris dies, it is not only that she will live with her Aunt Norris that distresses the fifteen-year-old Fanny; "I love this house and every thing in it" (MP, p.26), she says vehemently to Edmund. Fanny's strong sense both of the past and of the value of time, which binds people, places and things together in her heart, and partly forms her moral strength, is discussed further in the next section of this chapter.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Mansfield Park, with an introduction by Tony Tanner (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p.24.

<sup>2</sup> See pp.136-38 below.

2. Time

The year which the main action of each of these five novels spans is a crucial one for the protagonists. In this relatively short period of time the heroines have to go through an educative process: they have to learn to know themselves, face problems and make decisions which will determine their moral characters and therefore their future happiness. Tave develops this point:

The heroine is usually in a year in which her character is indeterminate, in the sense that if she makes the wrong decisions, in this place, in these months, the girl who, for all her faults, seemed to have such potential at the start will be a defective woman by the end. The dangers of her faults, often the accompaniment of her strength, will have become real evils that fix what she is henceforth. Even those heroines who are in need of little development must prove themselves by facing the tests of a year that requires either the proof or the end of all their strength. The marriage is important not for itself...but because the ability to be worthy of or to make the right marriage is dependent on the growth that the time of decision has required.<sup>1</sup>

In Northanger Abbey the eleven weeks of Catherine's story, the shortest time span of the six novels, does not, and perhaps cannot, effect a great moral change in the heroine; but a profound change of feeling or attitude is not necessary. Catherine has always been honest, unselfish, affectionate. Her gravest error is her equating life with literature as represented by the Gothic romances. Her naïvety and immaturity are due to a lack of experience, which the visits to Bath and Northanger Abbey, and her relationships with the people whom she meets there, to some extent remedy. After six weeks in Bath Catherine shows that she can learn; she begins to suspect Isabella Thorpe's sincerity, and a few more weeks reveal to her the truth about her friend. She

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<sup>1</sup>Tave, Some Words, pp.10-11.

stays about a month at Northanger, but it is only after three days there that Henry Tilney's admonition, and her own mortification and good sense, awaken her from her absurd visions of romance. She now understands clearly that her folly sprang from "a voluntary, self-created delusion, each trifling circumstance receiving importance from an imagination resolved on alarm" and that "the whole might be traced to the influence of that sort of reading" in which she had indulged while in Bath (NA, pp.199-200). In the remaining four weeks Catherine understands the strength of her love for Henry Tilney, and experiences some genuine fear and distress, anxiety and suffering. Mrs Morland hints at an improvement in Catherine when she acknowledges that her daughter, once "a sad little shatter-brained creature" (NA, p.234), must have had her wits about her to manage the journey from Northanger alone. A more significant sign of maturity is Catherine's wise decision to make the difficult letter to Eleanor Tilney very brief. Her illusions about life, resulting from her misguided response to Gothic fiction, are temporary and not deep-seated. She learns to respond to The Mysteries of Udolpho and other "horrid" novels in the right way, as Henry and Eleanor Tilney do; and that her schoolroom reading included works by Pope, Gray, Thomson and Shakespeare (NA, pp.15-16), and that her mother frequently reads Sir Charles Grandison, are perhaps indications that Catherine's judgement and disposition are fundamentally sound. Mary Lascelles comments: "[Catherine] is never deceived about those people in her little world who are true to themselves...nor is she deceived about herself."<sup>1</sup> Her cure therefore is quickly and happily effected.

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Lascelles, Art, p.63.

Marianne Dashwood, on the other hand, having resolved at an early age never to be taught how to govern her strong feelings, has a harder lesson to learn. She takes about a year "to discover the falsehood of her own opinions" (SS, p.378), and to exchange for reality the illusionary world that her imagination has created from her reading. Elinor's happiness depends on the complicated set of circumstances from which Edward Ferrars has honourably to extricate himself, and the testing time during which Elinor proves herself worthy of marriage by her patient exertion of will and reason coincides roughly with the period of Marianne's love, suffering and recovery.

Sense and Sensibility is the only one of the six novels for which Chapman did not work out a time scheme in his Oxford editions of 1923. It seems that Jane Austen had not yet adopted her method of using an almanac,<sup>1</sup> and for most of the story no dates are given and the length of intervals between events is unspecified. As Chapman realized, it is not possible to fit all the events into a coherent time scheme, but from the few references to months and seasons one can chart an outline of the year which the essential action covers. We know that the Middletons entertain the Dashwoods and Willoughby at Barton Park during October (SS, p.53), that Mrs Jennings, Elinor and Marianne journey to London in the first week of January (SS, p.158), that they leave for Cleveland early in April (SS, p.301), and that Elinor marries Edward early in the autumn (SS, p.374). With this framework and other references, specific or indeterminate, almost every week--except at the beginning and end of the novel--can be

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<sup>1</sup>See p.35 above.

accounted for. And in two short sections, when time is of the greatest importance to either Elinor or Marianne, we are given a day-by-day, sometimes hourly, account of events.<sup>1</sup>

This rough timetable for Sense and Sensibility is one indication that, even though she does not refer to specific dates, Jane Austen always knew where she was with regard to possible weather conditions, activities determined by seasons, like hunting, and events which occur on certain days of the week. This awareness is particularly evident in Pride and Prejudice in which the references to time are so frequent, consistent and accurate that it is possible, according to Chapman, "to date almost every event with precision and with virtual certainty" (PP, p.400). Chapman maintains that the calendars which he and Frank MacKinnon made for the events in Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park show that Jane Austen used an actual almanac when writing or revising these two novels--that of 1811-12 for Pride and Prejudice (PP, p.401), and that of 1808-9 for Mansfield Park (MP, p.554). And after working out a day-by-day time scheme for Northanger Abbey Chapman finds that "the dates are consistent not only with each other, but also with the facts of Bath" (P, p.299). (Balls, concerts, theatres took place only on certain days of the week.<sup>2</sup>) On these facts he bases his assumption that Jane Austen used an almanac, probably that of 1798, the year in which Susan was originally written.<sup>3</sup>

Such studies of the chronology of the novels have provided evidence for the possible dating of Jane Austen's revisions and

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<sup>1</sup>See Sense and Sensibility, pp.161-65, 310-16.

<sup>2</sup>See Persuasion, pp.299-300.

<sup>3</sup>See p.23 above.



reworkings;<sup>1</sup> they also reveal the degree of care and trouble that she took to be accurate in particulars of time and place. This kind of punctilious precision, while not being essential, contributes to the impression we have of the solid, "real" world of the novels, and, together with similar consideration for other aspects of her work, it makes possible what Mary Lascelles calls the "subtle integrity" of the Chawton novels.<sup>2</sup> It has already been shown that the same scrupulous observance in matters of local detail is a means of achieving verisimilitude and of creating the impression of an authentic and realistic setting for the novels.<sup>3</sup> In a discussion of time and the novel Jonathan Raban reminds the reader of the "inherently fact-based nature of fiction" in general, and states that: "Language, manners, architecture and the like must be consonant with the 'real' place and time of the novel."<sup>4</sup> This consonance Jane Austen understood, but we may also assume that she worked in this way for her own convenience and the kind of satisfaction to which Mary Lascelles refers: "Surely a satisfying sense, as of a challenge fairly met, must come from making the facts of your imaginary world rhyme (as it were) both with those of the actual world and with one another--correspond with those by simple resemblance, with these by ironic likeness in difference."<sup>5</sup> (One wonders what was Jane Austen's response when her brother Edward pointed out to her the mistake in Emma of having apple trees blossom in June.<sup>6</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> See pp.23-24 above.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Lascelles, Art, p.173.

<sup>3</sup> See pp.31-45 above.

<sup>4</sup> Raban, Modern Fiction, p.59.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Lascelles, Art, p.172.

<sup>6</sup> See Emma, ed. David Lodge (London: Oxford University Press, 1971; Oxford Paperbacks, 1975), p.445.

Generally speaking, time in Pride and Prejudice is restricted to one year, and, unlike Anne Elliot, for example, Elizabeth Bennet lives with no heavy burden of the past. Nevertheless, her life and future are to a certain extent affected by past actions of people close to her: her father's mistaken choice of a wife whom he cannot respect and her parents' foolish upbringing of the younger sisters with Lydia's consequent marriage are errors of the past that threaten Elizabeth's future. Furthermore, Elizabeth cannot understand the truth about Darcy and Wickham until she has explored the past in connection with each of them. Thus the time scheme is extended a little. But the chief function of time in this novel is to show how the twelve months of the story convincingly bring about a reversal of feeling and attitude in the heroine and hero. In Elizabeth we see the gradual change which her estimation of Darcy undergoes; and Darcy acquires a new understanding of himself and a new attitude towards Elizabeth; it is not his feelings for her that change. A few weeks after the initial insult he wishes to know more of her and soon feels that he is in some danger of being too much attracted to her. Six months after their first meeting, having struggled in vain to repress his admiration and love for her, he proposes to Elizabeth, and then spends a painful three months attending to the reproofs which she so angrily administered. His self-conquest, evident at Pemberley in his strikingly altered behaviour, is attested by his kindness to Lydia and all the attendant pain and embarrassment involved. Elizabeth, on the other hand, feels a "deeply-rooted dislike" for Darcy (PP, p.189), and some months later, on hearing that he is expected at Rosings, she thinks that "there were not many of her acquaintance whom she did not prefer" (PP, p.170). Her feelings for

him, until she reads his letter, are coloured to a certain extent by his insulting remark about her and very much by his supposed treatment of Wickham and the knowledge that he is responsible for Jane's unhappiness. Their conversations at Netherfield and Rosings reveal the moral superiority and intelligence of both, and "the rich ambiguity of ironic dialogue"<sup>1</sup> prepares us for Elizabeth's reassessment of Darcy in the second half of the novel. All Jane Austen's novels demonstrate that the deep, intricate characters are difficult to know; discussing the meanings of "amiable" and "agreeable", Tave notes that "the perception of a real amiability requires time".<sup>2</sup> Only after another four months of confusion and agitation does Elizabeth truly know her heart: just when she thinks that the disgrace brought upon her family by Lydia must sink her power with Darcy for ever, she admits to herself that she loves him. As soon as she realizes this truth, she feels, like the other heroines, that time has run out for her, and she prepares to face the fact that she has lost the man she loves. All the novels, except Northanger Abbey, show that the foundations of true affection are laid by time and moral growth. In Pride and Prejudice we also see an example of a "courtship" and marriage that are based on neither of these requirements: the day after Elizabeth refuses Mr Collins's proposal of marriage Charlotte Lucas determines to have him herself, and on the following day accepts the offer of a man whom she can neither love nor

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<sup>1</sup>Reuben Arthur Brower, "Light and Bright and Sparkling: Irony and Fiction in 'Pride and Prejudice'", in Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Reading (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951; Galaxy Paperback, 1962), p.167.

<sup>2</sup>Tave, Some Words, p.122.

esteem. Where there is no affection between partners, no time is needed to bring them together.

Jane Austen's realistic treatment of time and human relationships led to an innovation in English fiction. It seems that she was the first novelist to make a woman's love for a man and a man's for a woman originate in "nothing better than gratitude". Esteem and gratitude are the foundations of Elizabeth's love for Darcy, and in Northanger Abbey the origin of Henry Tilney's love for Catherine is the "persuasion of her partiality for him" (NA, p.243). Edmund Bertram's first act of kindness towards his homesick little cousin evokes "gratitude and delight" (MP, p.16), and in return for his continuing attentions, Fanny, aged ten, "loved him better than any body in the world except William" (MP, p.22). Although Jane Austen ironically acknowledges in Northanger Abbey that this mode of attachment is "a new circumstance in romance...and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity" (NA, p.243), she is lightheartedly making the serious point that the idea, seldom realized or admitted, was new in fiction. Pamela certainly loves Mr B. before she has anything to be grateful for; Harriet Byron loves Sir Charles Grandison almost as soon as she sees him; while Evelina adores Lord Orville from their first meeting.

The element of time in Mansfield Park is more complex than in Pride and Prejudice. Thematic demands, the disposition of the heroine, the many explicit references to the power of time, and its different uses make the reader conscious of this dimension in a way that is not so much part of the response in the other novels. The calendar that MacKinnon worked out from the one full date given-- that of the ball at Mansfield on Thursday, 22 December--covers only

five months of Fanny Price's critical year, which begins in July of the year Fanny is eighteen. Chapman states that "the earlier chronology [of the action] is clear and consistent, but the nature of the narrative did not require precision" (MP, p.554). The first chapter rapidly covers the eleven years or so that intervene between the marriages of the three Ward sisters and the Bertrams' adoption of the ten-year-old Fanny. The second chapter races through five more years, pausing to give particulars of Edmund's early acts of kindness to the unhappy, timid little girl, of the kind of moral and formal education Maria and Julia Bertram receive, and of Fanny's love for her brother William. The next two chapters complete the exposition: the Grants come to Mansfield Parsonage, Sir Thomas goes to Antigua, and the Crawfords arrive. This wider sweep of time allows Jane Austen to show the environment in which Fanny, Maria and Julia grow up and the sort of education they receive. In unsympathetic surroundings Fanny, physically delicate and dependent, develops a moral strength and freedom which she preserves under increasing pressures of time, place and circumstance.<sup>1</sup> She shows a sensitivity to time and is peculiarly susceptible to the power of habit. (Edmund, not knowing the true reason for many of her actions, over-emphasizes this quality in Fanny.) She firmly believes that true affection between man and woman is a deep, long-growing, long-lasting emotion. Throughout the novel she is, in some respects, timid, naïve and immature, but at the beginning of the crucial year Fanny's understanding, values and principles are sound and practically unassailable; only once does she act against her conscience, and then under considerable constraint.

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<sup>1</sup>See Devlin, Education, p.126.



Her love for Edmund and jealousy of Mary Crawford may at times temporarily cloud her judgement, but this faculty, too, is sound on important moral issues. We see Fanny's sterling qualities of character exhibited in the visit to Sotherton and the episode of the theatricals. Henry Crawford's proposal, the pressure put upon her by people she loves, and the possibility of losing Edmund constitute the ordeal that establishes her as worthy of marriage. It is this period of Fanny's life that Jane Austen examines closely in the almost daily account of her actions, thoughts and feelings. The author's presentation of five months of considerable suffering before her final vindication and happiness clearly shows "the advantages of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure" (MP, p.473).

Edmund Bertram normally possesses active principle and a sense of duty, but his moral judgement is so swayed by his infatuation with Mary Crawford that, as well as acting wrongly himself, he tries to persuade Fanny to do so too. Knowing her strong disapproval of their choice of play and her disinclination to act, he joins in the supplications entreating her to take the part when Mrs Grant cannot rehearse her rôle. Fanny yields unwillingly, but is prevented from keeping her word by Sir Thomas's unexpected homecoming. The revelation of Mary Crawford's real character brings pain and misery to Edmund, and he and Fanny agree that the impression made on his mind by such a disappointment is indelible. The delicate irony directed at both Edmund and Fanny in this passage suggests that inexperienced Edmund and tactful, tender, comforting, loving Fanny are mistaken in thinking that "time would undoubtedly abate somewhat of his sufferings, but still it was a sort of thing which he never could get entirely the better of; and as to his ever meeting with any other woman who could--

it was too impossible to be named but with indignation" (MP, p.460). In the concluding chapter the narrator purposely and rather archly abstains from dates, and time becomes general and once more passes rapidly; some weeks later Edmund becomes "very tolerably cheerful again" (MP, p.462), and "exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier" (MP, p.470), he finds that he wishes to marry Fanny.

There are many such references to time and its power in Mansfield Park. For example, Edmund tells Fanny that her loving Crawford "must be a work of time" (MP, p.347), and tactlessly reveals that Mary Crawford has made a joke about Henry's "having his addresses most kindly received at the end of about ten years' happy marriage" (MP, p.354). Henry Crawford assures Fanny that "absence, distance, time" (MP, p.343) will make her see that his affections are steady. Sir Thomas suffers the guilt and misery caused by his daughter's elopement the longest, but "time will do almost every thing" (MP, p.462) and his sufferings are eventually alleviated. Other uses of time in Mansfield Park are discussed later.<sup>1</sup>

At their final parting Edmund sorrowfully realizes that Mary Crawford does not possess "the most valuable knowledge we could any of us acquire--the knowledge of ourselves and of our duty" (MP, p.459). This acquisition of self-knowledge is the theme of Emma, and in order to show how Emma learns to know herself Jane Austen returns to a simple and straightforward chronology of one year. The opening scene introduces Emma at twenty facing a change in her life. Miss Taylor marries at the end of September or the beginning of October, and

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<sup>1</sup>See pp.130-31, 134-38 below.

thereafter, with clear and frequent references to months, days and passing intervals, the steady progress of Emma's moral education unfolds. The culmination of what time brings about--Emma's realization that she loves Mr Knightley, and his proposal--occurs in July, and the three months before their marriage in October are compressed into the final two chapters. Precise and accurate references to time are necessary in this novel in a way they are not in the others. Dates and the timing of events form part of the trail of clues laid to lead us to the truth about Jane Fairfax's and Frank Churchill's relationship. In December there is a pointed reminder, hidden in Mr Woodhouse's rather absurd talk with his elder daughter, that Frank Churchill wrote to Miss Taylor from Weymouth at the end of September; then he cancels his January visit, but writes that he still anticipates visiting Randalls "at no distant period" (E, p.144); when he eventually comes, although he has never before visited his father in Highbury, he arrives unexpectedly early that he may "gain half a day" (E, p.190); and after Jane Fairfax makes it clear to him that sensible and resolute characters can terminate a hasty and imprudent engagement, and is anxiously waiting to hear from or see him that evening, Miss Bates tells Emma in a torrent of apparent irrelevancies that Jane has surprised her by accepting the situation with Mrs Smallridge; "...and then it came out about the chaise having been sent to Randall's [sic] to take Mr. Frank Churchill to Richmond. That was what happened before tea. It was after tea that Jane spoke to Mrs. Elton" (E, p.383).

Mary Lascelles, in a discussion of chronology and pace in Jane Austen's novels, abstracts the most important point: "The constant characteristic, at all events, of Jane Austen's representation

of time is this: that it is rooted in her (gradually mastered) technique for using the consciousness of her characters as a means of communication with the reader."<sup>1</sup> Emma Woodhouse is adult and intelligent, and the reader is made aware of the passage of time through her mediation. There is no need for the period of action to extend beyond the limits of the critical year--as in the beginning of Mansfield Park--because most of the action is seen from Emma's point of view, and she can reflect on past, present and future. Mary Lascelles thinks that Jane Austen became increasingly aware of the need for variety of pace, both for itself and for emphasis,<sup>2</sup> and certainly Emma exhibits a frequent variation of pace and texture. After a few initial chapters given mostly to narrative and exposition, nearly all the others comprise a combination of dialogue, reflection and narrative. It is often difficult to distinguish the transition to Emma's thoughts from the commentary of the relatively impersonal, omniscient narrator, but the points of observation are also at times clearly separate. The success of presenting "a heroine whom no one... will much like"<sup>3</sup> depends on the merging and diverging viewpoints: we sympathise with Emma because we see much of the story through her eyes, and we also see her faults and follies and the "real evils" of her situation (E, p.5) from the point of view of the narrator. It is this flexible style of narration that allows Jane Austen to control the pace and direct the reader's attention to significant events. In Volume I the steady advance of time is marked by references to months

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Lascelles, Art, p.194.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.192.

<sup>3</sup>Austen-Leigh, Memoir, p.157.

and seasonal weather. The dialogue at Mr Weston's dinner party slows down the pace, and Emma's suspicions of Mr Elton increase the tension, which Mr Woodhouse's consternation and Isabella's alarm at the falling snow sustain. Then, expertly contrived by the fuss over the snow, the crisis of the first volume occurs, and Emma finds herself alone in the carriage listening to the rapid hopings, fearings, adorings of Mr Elton. The crisis that leads to the climax of the whole action is the culmination of suspense which has built up during a slow, intense passage of dialogue in which Emma gradually begins to suspect that it is Mr Knightley for whom Harriet has formed an affection which she thinks he returns. Emma waits in great terror, has to collect herself resolutely, cannot speak, looks at Harriet in consternation as the revelation proceeds. Then comes the sudden realization "that Mr Knightley must marry no one but herself!" (E, p.408), and in the same few moments the terrible understanding of her own self-deceit. From now time cannot move too slowly for Emma-- "the rest of the day, the following night, were hardly enough for her thoughts" (E, p.411), and in some long passages of agonised reflection the pace of the action coincides with Emma's personal time.

The general impression of the tempo of Emma is that it is smooth and steady. This is not so in Mansfield Park because, as Mary Lascelles points out, we need to see Fanny as a child and woman, and there is of necessity a sharp change of pace when the narrative begins the account of the critical year. In Volume I events are marked according to calendar time, the spans of time becoming gradually shorter and the pace slower until the climax at the end of the volume. Two chapters of narrative rapidly cover periods of ten and five years respectively, two more summarize the events of three



years, and then, after the major change in tempo and the beginning of the essential action, we become aware through the consciousness of various characters of the months, weeks, days, hours before the return of Sir Thomas. After the visit to Sotherton, we learn that Sir Thomas will come home in three months; the characters concerned either look forward to or dread this event--"Much might happen in thirteen weeks" (MP, p.107), thinks Maria Bertram. As the theatricals proceed and Fanny's wretchedness becomes more acute, the pace decreases, the texture becomes denser, and we hear that "there will be three acts rehearsed to-morrow evening" (MP, p.167). During the next day Fanny escapes from her Aunt Norris to the east room and manages to have a quarter of an hour's undisturbed but anxious reflection before she has to endure the additional and unexpected pain of seeing Edmund and Mary Crawford rehearse privately together. At last their scene is over. Then "every body [is] in the theatre at an early hour" (MP, p.171), and to her horror Fanny finds herself consenting to read Mrs Grant's part. In this way, by giving us an impression of every move, every detail beforehand, and forcing Fanny to her limit, Jane Austen builds up to the moment of Sir Thomas's unexpected homecoming. In the next two volumes the action settles to a more regular pace, with the necessary variations, both as Fanny anticipates certain events--William's visit to Mansfield, the letter received from Edmund when she is at Portsmouth, her return to Mansfield--and as they occur.

Pride and Prejudice shows this device of anticipation controlling the pace in a simpler way.<sup>1</sup> The reader gains a sense of the passage of time as the narrative moves rapidly towards a significant event--

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Lascelles makes this point in Art, p.189.

Elizabeth's going to Hunsford, or to Derbyshire. In the early part of the novel, however, the almanac which Jane Austen worked on helped her to regulate the pace: she used what Mary Lascelles calls "a Longbourn calendar":

The first six chapters present occasions evidently related in direct succession, but not dated. Then a carefully planned passage in the opening of Chapter VII suggests the pace at which events usually follow one another in the Longbourn world: the Miss Bennets are "usually tempted" to visit Meryton "three or four times a week, to pay their duty to their aunt and to a milliner's shop just over the way". A seemingly casual indication of the time of year follows: "At present, indeed, they were well supplied both with news and happiness by the recent arrival of a militia regiment in the neighbourhood; it was to remain the whole winter...." And to this succeeds an unobtrusive suggestion that the narrative is settling down to a convenient gait: "Every day added something to their knowledge of the officers' names and connections."<sup>1</sup>

In Sense and Sensibility Jane Austen suggests the passage of time by frequent use of phrases such as "the next morning", "within a few days", "about a week after his leaving", and the intervals between events do not greatly vary. Changes from narrative to dialogue, of course, alter the tempo, but generally the pace is extremely regular. The course of Marianne's acquaintance with Willoughby seems to move at the same rate as events before and after it. Mary Lascelles sees a timid attempt "to give some impression of double time by contrasting the beat (as it were) of Elinor's normal with Marianne's feverish pulse, by making us realize the senselessness for Marianne of Elinor's sensible plea: 'Wait only till tomorrow' [(SS, p.177)]".<sup>2</sup> Another instance of Marianne's different sense of time occurs after the Dashwoods have been at Barton Cottage a fortnight, when Marianne comments privately to her mother on the strange-

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.188

ness of Edward's not yet coming into Devonshire and wonders what could occasion the "extraordinary delay" (SS, p.39).

The method of controlling pace in Northanger Abbey is quite different from that in the other novels, and is possible because of the literary burlesque and the rôle of the narrator. Jane Austen cannot use immature Catherine to record the passage of time, and it is in accordance with the burlesque convention to have the narrator's voice intruding with comments like: "The anxiety, which in this stage of their attachment must be the portion of Henry and Catherine, and of all who loved either, as to its final event, can hardly extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity" (NA, p.250). W.A. Craik observes that the intervals between events become longer as the novel proceeds.<sup>1</sup> The six weeks at Bath pass fairly rapidly and regularly with short intervals between events. These increase at Northanger Abbey, and the longer passages of description and Catherine's reactions and thoughts slow down the pace. In this section the narrator does not intrude. After the visions of romance are over, the tempo increases again and there are wider intervals between the visit to Woodston, Catherine's sudden departure, and Henry Tilney's arrival at Fullerton.

In all the novels Jane Austen shows her skill in carrying forward the action and giving the impression of an advance in time. An easy and economical transition links two chapters: "All this [the matter of Fanny's farewells] passed over night, for the journey was to begin very early in the morning; and when the small, diminished

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<sup>1</sup>W.A. Craik, Six Novels, p.25.

party met at breakfast, William and Fanny were talked of as already advanced one stage" (MP, p.374); another chapter begins: "In this state of schemes, and hopes, and connivance, June opened upon Hartfield" (E, p.343). Another skilful but slightly different example is Mrs Elton's impressionistic monologue in the strawberry beds at Donwell Abbey. Phrases and partial sentences strung together with no conjunctions convey in a wonderfully comic passage how Mrs Elton's happiness and enthusiasm evaporate and she becomes bored and fatigued in half an hour (E, pp.358-59).

A character's attitude to time is often indicative of his values and disposition.<sup>1</sup> John Thorpe tries to change time and distances in order to assert his authority over James Morland (NA, pp.45-46). Isabella Thorpe also reveals her foolishness, insincerity and vanity by ignoring clocks and watches (NA, p.39). Another of these manipulators of facts is Mary Crawford; her personal reckoning of time is more than feminine lawlessness: she does not like exactitude and precision--to her, "never" in conversation means "not very often" (MP, p.92)--and she does not live by truths; she will not have watches and furlongs prove her wrong (MP, pp.94-95). Tave writes of her that she tries to "obliterate lines of distinction, or being more deeply corrupt, as we know by the end of the novel, she really doesn't know where they are".<sup>2</sup> Maria Bertram, shutting her eyes while she looks, confounding her understanding while she reasons, hopes weakly and vainly that time will somehow wipe away the return of her father and her marriage with Mr Rushworth. A fuller, more complex use of this

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<sup>1</sup>Tave discusses this topic in Some Words, pp.4-6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.6.

metaphorical significance of time is one means by which Jane Austen delineates Henry Crawford. We are informed early on that "thoughtless and selfish from prosperity and bad example, he would not look beyond the present moment" (MP, p.115). He devours time: he put his estate in order in three months, he has no memory for the past, no thought for the future, and he allows himself two weeks in which to conquer Fanny's heart. When he finds that he is in love with her and that she is not to be easily won, he realizes that "a fortnight [is] not enough" (MP, p.236). While walking in the dockyard with Fanny and Susan, he cannot talk to Fanny as he would in private, but he makes his thoughts and feelings--and his improvement--clear to her by referring to the previous happy summer and autumn at Mansfield, and by saying that he anticipates an even superior one the following year. However, Henry Crawford's love for Fanny comes too late: the power of environment and a faulty moral education, the pleasure of the present moment, and his own cold-blooded vanity are "too strong for a mind unused to make any sacrifice to right" (MP, p.467), and he brings about his own downfall.

In her characters' attitudes to time Jane Austen implies her own view of morality--that it is a process of continuity grounded in religion and tradition. It has already been shown that Donwell Abbey represents values established and proved by time.<sup>1</sup> Pemberley, too, with its good library, which is "the work of many generations" (PP, p.38), and beautiful park unspoilt by "improvements", is redolent of a long tradition of the best in the English character. The owners of these estates exemplify "that upright integrity, that

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<sup>1</sup>See pp.58-59 above.



strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness, which a man should display in every transaction of his life" (E, p.397). The novels clearly show that the moral values that Jane Austen admired are connected with a concept of time. In contrast to Mr Knightley is the parvenu, Mrs Elton, who displays her ill-bred ignorance and vulgarity in every word she utters and every ornamental trimming she wears. Fanny Price's notion of time coincides frequently with her creator's. The narrator gently laughs at Fanny's romantic expectations of Sotherton chapel which has nothing of the awful or melancholy or grand. But more important to our estimation of Fanny than this disappointment, which she herself acknowledges to be foolish, is her disapproval of one "improvement", namely that the custom of family prayers at Sotherton, "a valuable part of former times" (MP, p.86), should be discontinued. Fanny appreciates the growth and beauty wrought by the operations of time in Mrs Grant's shrubbery, and she is dismayed at the thought of a fine avenue's being cut down at Sotherton, and expresses a wish to see the house and park before any changes are made. Her quoting Cowper on the topic shows how close are her and Jane Austen's viewpoints. Fanny expresses her understanding of the value of time in her fine speech, arising from an equal blend of emotion and reason, self-esteem and modesty, on the slow growth of a woman's affection for a man. Even Sir Thomas, who yet does not fully understand Fanny's delicacy of mind and disinterestedness, when he sees her in a new light after Henry Crawford's advantageous proposal of marriage, talks to her of possible misplaced distinctions that she may have encountered at Mansfield, and acknowledges that, when assessing the situation, she "will take in the whole of the past" (MP, p.313) and judge impartially. Most of

the heroines become acutely aware of time when they are unhappy: for Fanny, always sensitive to time and now tortured by Sir Thomas's charge of being selfish and ungrateful, "the past, present, future, every thing was terrible" (MP, p.321); Emma, too, in a moment of anguish and regret reviews her past and contemplates her future; and the wretched present of Catherine Morland's journey back to Fullerton is aggravated by memories evoked by seeing again the road to Woodston.

This ability to recall the past, this human attribute of remembrance, is the faculty, according to Johnson, which "may be said to place us in the class of moral agents": it gives us the power to prefer one thing to another, and it enables us to regulate our conclusions from experience.<sup>1</sup> Jane Austen's views on time and memory are conventionally Augustan, and she frequently links the capacity to remember with virtue, sense and sensitivity. The advantages of memory are most evident in Fanny Price and Anne Elliot, and Jane Austen gives to immature and rather "bookish" Fanny a speech on the mystery and wonders of memory: "If any one faculty of our nature may be called more wonderful than the rest, I do think it is memory. There seems something more speakingly incomprehensible in the powers, the failures, the inequalities of memory, than in any other of our intelligences. The memory is sometimes so retentive, so serviceable, so obedient--at others, so bewildered and so weak--and at others again, so tyrannic, so beyond controul!--We are to be sure a miracle in every way--but our powers of recollecting and of forgetting, do seem peculiarly past finding out" (MP, pp.208-9). This speech,

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<sup>1</sup>Johnson, Rambler No. 41.

studied and sententious though it may be,<sup>1</sup> reveals Fanny's thoughtful turn of mind and perceptive understanding, and points to the difference in quality of mind in herself and Mary Crawford, to whom she addresses the words and who derives no enjoyment from abstract thinking. Fanny owes to her memory her store of knowledge and the many intellectual pleasures with which she sweetens her life. She can memorize words easily--she knows most of the parts in Lovers' Vows by heart--and, on a higher level, her faculty for recollection and her intelligent use of memory are some of the qualities that go to make her moral strength, and keep her firmly anchored to her principles. When Henry Crawford turns his attention and charm to Fanny, she finds that she very soon dislikes him less than formerly, but "she had by no means forgotten the past, and she thought as ill of him as ever" (MP, p.232). Fanny knows that the present is formed by the past. Present experience may cause her to reevaluate the past --as the visit to Portsmouth does--but she does not try to change or obliterate it. She uses memory to support her reason, and reason to control her memory.

Other heroines do this, too. Elizabeth Bennet searches her memory so that she may refute Darcy's charges against Wickham, and her recollections and reason combine to make her realize how "blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (PP, p.208) she has been. Emma, after the revelation of Mr Elton's proposal, "looked back as well as she could; but it was all confusion" (E, p.134). Gradually, however, as

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<sup>1</sup>Moler, in Art of Allusion, pp.123-25, 147-48, finds in Fanny's speeches--on memory, the evergreen, the beauty of an unclouded night--and in her conversation and reading the kind of "thinking" mind that educators like Hannah More and others praised as a sign of a cultivated intellect.

she recalls incidents, her memory brings her to a true understanding of Mr Elton. Memory also recalls poignant moments for Emma when, having realized her vanity and arrogance, she unhappily faces a forlorn future without Mr Knightley, and remembers how he came to cheer her father and herself on the melancholy evening of Miss Taylor's wedding. Such recollections and forebodings serve to make Emma resolve to be a better person, more rational, more acquainted with herself, and in so doing she shows that she is already a better person. Marianne Dashwood, however, who loves "to be reminded of the past...--whether it be melancholy or gay" (SS, p.92), indulges in a sentimental nostalgia which at best makes her appear foolish and at worst brings to mind the "moments of precious, of invaluable misery" (SS, p.303) at Cleveland which precipitate her severe illness.

Memory also makes Mary Crawford sentimental: when she goes with Fanny to the east room intending to scold, recollections of the "delightful rehearsal" banish all thoughts of Fanny and Henry, and "her mind was entirely self-engrossed. She was in a reverie of sweet remembrances" (MP, p.358). This "fit" leaves her so softened and affectionate towards Fanny, and momentarily so conscious of other people that she really seems sincerely aware of Fanny's goodness; her words "Good, gentle Fanny!" (MP, p.359) are without affectation. Mr Knightley is a character who makes a profitable use of memory; Tave comments on the combination of memory, observation and imagination that lead him to the truth about Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax.<sup>1</sup> Characters either villainous or stupid abuse or fail to use the power of recollection in various ways: Mr Rushworth

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<sup>1</sup>Tave, Some Words, p.234.

significantly and predictably cannot learn his forty-two speeches in Lovers' Vows; Wickham tries to change the past by, for example, asking for the living in Darcy's gift after previously resigning all claim to assistance in the church; Lucy Steele keeps past pledges in her memory, and remembers, uses, forgets them as it suits her; Frank Churchill's lapse of memory over Mr Perry's carriage causes Jane Fairfax painful confusion and embarrassment.

Jane Austen also uses a character's memory to advance the action and serve the plot. In Pride and Prejudice Mrs Gardiner's recollections of Lambton in Derbyshire and desire to revisit the county are a convincing reason for the contracted tour and consequent visit to Pemberley. Bingley's remembering the exact date of the dance at Netherfield reveals to Elizabeth's satisfaction "a recollection of Jane not untinged by tenderness" (PP, p.262). The same device reminds Harriet Smith--and the reader--of her feelings for Robert Martin. When Emma allows Harriet to pay the Martins a short visit, "the pencilled marks and memorandums on the wainscot" recall for them all, that is, Harriet, Mrs Martin and the two girls, their former friendship: "He had done it. They all seemed to remember the day, the hour, the party, the occasion--to feel the same consciousness, the same regrets--to be ready to return to the same good understanding" (E, p.187). By such means a brief episode contributes to the plot, structure, characterization and formal comedy of the novel.

For the character with a particular awareness time can invest places or possessions with special associations. Anne Elliot is one of these characters, Fanny Price another. As we have seen,<sup>1</sup> part of

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<sup>1</sup>See pp.112-15 above.



the comfort which Fanny enjoys in the east room is derived from possessions which, whether they are mementos of past happiness or sorrow, bring pleasure to the present moment. Fanny's forgiving, unrepining nature finds solace even in former affliction, so harmoniously do time and distance blend the joys and sufferings of the past for her. A similar but humorous instance of possessions used to stir the memories and move the owner to happiness is that of Harriet Smith's "precious treasures". Even as she prepares to burn them, the piece of court plaister and the pencil stub evoke for Harriet all that had happened on the memorable occasions when chance had blessed her with these keepsakes. Time endears places, too: Eleanor Tilney had not liked a damp and gloomy path where she often walked with her mother, but she tells Catherine: "I am particularly fond of this spot....It was my mother's favourite walk" (NA, p.179).

Jane Austen introduces the weather and seasons in her novels only when they affect characters and what happens to them. Many brief references to weather give an impression of verisimilitude--drives in the country take place in mild February weather, the day is very fine for the expedition to Box Hill, a lovely March morning gives Henry Crawford the opportunity for suggesting a walk. But generally weather, as well as lending probability to the action, has an additional significance or function. It can initiate action, contribute to characterization, reflect a character's emotions, or create atmosphere.

The rain and dirty streets help Catherine Morland decide to drive with John Thorpe rather than walk with the Tilneys; fine weather draws everyone out on a Sunday to Kensington Gardens and so Elinor Dashwood meets and talks to Miss Steele; riding in hard rain

gives Jane Bennet a chill which keeps her at Netherfield; a heavy shower forces Fanny to accept Dr Grant's offer of shelter, and as a result a sort of intimacy forms between her and Mary Crawford; and Marianne Dashwood, running home in driving rain, twists her ankle and meets Willoughby. In Emma extremes of weather aggravate a character's ill-humour: snow and severe cold send Mr John Knightley to the Westons' dinner party with very bad grace, and the heat of mid-June gives Frank Churchill a plausible reason for openly expressing his irritability after he has quarrelled with Jane Fairfax. The heat, when Fanny cuts roses and then walks twice to her Aunt Norris's house, gives her a headache, which makes Edmund realize that he has neglected his cousin and consequently insist on her being included in the party to Sotherton.

In addition to these usual and recurrent functions of weather and seasons, there occasionally occurs an almost symbolic use of natural surroundings. In the three later novels Jane Austen sometimes shapes "reality" to make the setting reflect a character's feelings. In doing this in the novels written after 1811 Jane Austen was not turning her back on Augustan influences; although a sympathy between man and nature is more characteristic of Romantic attitudes, it is present in neo-classic writers. Cowper, for example, in "The Shrubbery" (1773) acknowledges the power of nature to soothe the hurt soul, and bitterly grieves that on the occasion contemplated "the season and the scene" exacerbate and nourish his affliction. Jane Austen's use of this device is rare and always on the same small scale as the other features of her settings. There is perhaps a hint of a figurative use of weather in the early Sense and Sensibility--the "animating gales of an high south-westerly wind" which give Marianne

such "delightful sensations" (SS, p.41) correspond to her strong emotions and extreme sensibility, and the January morning on which she rises early to write to the faithless Willoughby is cold and cheerless--but most of the other instances are to be found in the three later novels. In Mansfield Park "the gloom and dirt of a November day" and "dismal rain" reflect Mary Crawford's "very desponding state of mind" (MP, p.205), and later a wet Sunday evening is an appropriately melancholy setting for the sorrowing Edmund's opening of his heart to Fanny. The most notable example occurs in Emma when Emma realizes that she loves Mr Knightley and thinks that she has lost him: "The evening of this day was very long, and melancholy, at Hartfield. The weather added what it could of gloom. A cold stormy rain set in, and nothing of July appeared but in the trees and shrubs, which the wind was despoiling, and the length of the day, which only made such cruel sights the longer visible" (E, p.421). "The weather continued much the same all the following morning; and the same loneliness, and the same melancholy, seemed to reign at Hartfield--but in the afternoon it cleared; the wind changed into a softer quarter; the clouds were carried off; the sun appeared; it was summer again" (E, p.424). Emma goes to walk in the shrubbery where Mr Knightley later joins her, and the change in the weather heralds her happiness.

In Northanger Abbey the device of using the weather to create a suitable background for the mood of an event has a special purpose. The storm which rages on Catherine's first night at the Abbey is not entirely unexpected or improbable. The month is March, a "sudden scud of rain driving full in her face" (NA, p.161) had greeted her arrival, and "the wind had been rising at intervals the whole

afternoon" (NA, p.166). By the time Catherine goes to her bedroom the tempest fills her with sensations of awe, and she hears the characteristic sounds of the dreadful situations and horrid scenes of a Gothic tale. The account of the storm which stimulates her imagination is an excellent parody of Mrs Radcliffe's style:

"The wind roared down the chimney, the rain beat in torrents against the windows, and every thing seemed to speak the awfulness of her situation" (NA, p.168); "Darkness impenetrable and immoveable filled the room. A violent gust of wind, rising with sudden fury, added fresh horror to the moment. Catherine trembled from head to foot" (NA, p.170). It is a more concentrated and only slightly exaggerated version of: "Her melancholy was assisted by the hollow sighings of the wind along the corridor and round the castle. The cheerful blaze of the wood had long been extinguished, and she sat with her eyes fixed on the dying embers, till a loud gust, that swept through the corridor, and shook the doors and casements, alarmed her; for its violence had moved the chair she had placed as a fastening, and the door leading to the private staircase stood half open. Her curiosity and her fears were again awakened."<sup>1</sup>

Generally speaking, the seasons, as opposed to weather, make little contribution to the background of the action. There are references to seasonal changes, as has been noted, to mark the passing of time, and these seasons bring and remove characters: Willoughby is in Devonshire for the hunting months, and the winter season draws all the main characters to London; July takes Tom Bertram away from Mansfield Park for horse-racing. Jane Austen sometimes observes

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<sup>1</sup>Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho, chap. 18.

traditional literary associations with spring and summer: the day after Darcy's premature proposal Elizabeth Bennet notices "the verdure of the early trees" (PP, p.195)--perhaps she is subconsciously in love; Mr Knightley becomes aware of his feelings for Emma in early spring and proposes to her on a "tranquil, warm, and brilliant" summer afternoon (E, p.424); Fanny returns to Mansfield in early summer and the description of the changes which three months have brought to the park possibly contains a symbolic promise of Fanny's love and happiness: "Her eye fell every where on lawns and plantations of the freshest green; and the trees, though not fully clothed, were in that delightful state, when farther beauty is known to be at hand, and when, while much is actually given to the sight, more yet remains for the imagination" (MP, pp.446-47). Although associations of the English countryside in mid-June do not match the mood of all the characters at the Donwell Abbey strawberry-picking party, there is a celebratory note in the description of the house and grounds that accords both with Emma's pleasant feelings and appreciation as she walks about, and with Mr Knightley's character. It is wholly appropriate that the man whose "true gentility" (E, p.358) takes our minds back to Chaucer's Knight should live in surroundings made beautiful by time and tradition, and that they should be described as they are "at almost Midsummer" (E, p.357). Of these five novels Mansfield Park and Emma contain the most interesting and significant uses of the seasons; and it is in her last complete novel, Persuasion, that Jane Austen gives to one of the seasons a thematic importance that was a new development in her work.



## CHAPTER IV

SETTING IN PERSUASION

There is much that is new in Persuasion. Although Jane Austen completed this work only eleven months before she died of a severe illness, her creative powers were undiminished. The weaknesses which critics find in this novel, and which are possibly due to Jane Austen's not having revised it in the way that had been her habit,<sup>1</sup> do not affect the central concerns; the usual qualities are present, as well as some new excellences.

Persuasion exhibits the same delighted interest in the follies and foibles, the virtues and strengths of human nature, the same convincing picture of ordinary domestic life as Jane Austen knew it, and the same elegant and skilful use of language as the other novels. Again we see the central character resolving personal and social problems; but the attention is so steadily concentrated on Anne Elliot's feelings and thoughts that other elements are subordinated to a greater extent than previously to the heroine's experience, and are interesting mainly in so far as they bear a relation to her. Education through love is one of the themes; it is not the heroine, however, but the hero who has to learn to know himself. Jane Austen set herself the extremely difficult task of creating an almost perfect heroine who draws and keeps the reader's interest and sympathy. For the first time the heroine is fully the moral ideal

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<sup>1</sup>See pp. 13, 25 above.

of the novel,<sup>1</sup> and for this reason her point of view coincides most closely with the narrator's. In addition to this innovation a completely new type of person appears in Persuasion: the naval character with strong feelings and sound judgement who, because of his life at sea, owns no Pemberley nor Donwell Abbey, and thus introduces a new conception of the kind of world in which the heroine will live after her marriage. There is humour in Persuasion, and irony, but there is none of the wit and brilliance that characterize Pride and Prejudice, nor the kind of sympathetic laughter provoked by comic characters like Miss Bates and Mr Woodhouse. A.C. Bradley observes that for the first time in Jane Austen's novels the love-story is a romance: whereas Elizabeth Bennet's love for Darcy grows out of esteem and gratitude, Emma Woodhouse's for Mr Knightley is "more or less proprietary", and Fanny Price's is a development of childhood affection, Anne Elliot at nineteen fell "rapidly and deeply in love" and experienced "a short period of exquisite felicity" (P, p.26).<sup>2</sup> Jane Austen treats Anne Elliot with sympathy and tenderness, and moments of poignant sadness are frequent in Persuasion. The pervading mood is a moving melancholy, and even the final joy is tempered, but not lessened, by the pain and sorrow that ~~have~~ <sup>have</sup> gone before. Strong feeling is not separated from reliable judgement; for the first time it is, Howard Babb notes, "the trustworthy agent of moral perception",<sup>3</sup> and such feeling is particularly exemplified in the character of Anne Elliot. Her fine emotional sensibility enables

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<sup>1</sup>Fanny Price is the moral ideal of Mansfield Park to a considerable extent, but less so than Anne Elliot in Persuasion.

<sup>2</sup>A.C. Bradley, "Jane Austen", Essays and Studies 2 (1911):34.

<sup>3</sup>Babb, Dialogue, p.238.

her to respond not only to the people around her but also to her surroundings. Of all the heroines Anne is most aware of and sensitive to her environment, and because of this quality in the heroine, Jane Austen makes greater use of settings in Persuasion than in the earlier novels.

The function of place, spatial detail and time is generally much the same as in the other novels. References to the physical environment, to small objects--both man-made and natural, and to aspects of time define and illuminate character and contribute to the impression of verisimilitude. As before, places reflect characters' disposition, status, feelings and values, but the responses and attitudes which Jane Austen uses to reveal personality are more markedly coloured by characters' emotional experiences in and associations with certain places. The different moral atmospheres are significant, and the heroine's sense of isolation in the contrastive settings is stronger and more important thematically than in the other novels. Because in all the episodes, whether they take place in or out of doors, Jane Austen directs the reader's attention to people and significant spatial detail, her scenes tend to have the same sense of confined space as a stage scene. Within these framed settings she again uses the careful positioning of characters for various narrative purposes. The most striking new features in the treatment of setting in Persuasion are the near-symbolic function of landscape, and the use made of associations with the season of autumn. With regard to the handling of time the most important new aspect is the weight of the past which burdens the present. Of all the heroines Anne Elliot is most acutely aware of the connection between past action and present happiness. The events of the novel

span not much more than half a year, but the reader, like the heroine, is always conscious of what took place eight years previously, and of the long intervening period. This use of the past consequently increases the importance of memory to the action and characterization. The deliberately restricted time scale and settings of Persuasion help shape the structure of the novel, and the sequence of different settings corresponds to the opening-out of Anne's life and the gradual return of her hope and chance of happiness.

Persuasion, like Northanger Abbey, is about half the length of Emma, and the story is organised into two volumes, each with twelve chapters. It is difficult to estimate how much of the novel is devoted to setting--five per cent, perhaps, and this small proportion is sufficient for Jane Austen's purposes. The economical use of setting emphasizes the significance of its nature and function. In Volume I the action takes place at Kellynch Hall, the village of Uppercross and Lyme Regis, and the different moral atmospheres of these places reflect the expansion and change of Anne Elliot's world. After she leaves the confining and loveless atmosphere of Kellynch, each setting that Anne moves into becomes more congenial, and by the time she arrives in Bath the reader has an impression, gained partly from the Crofts' few alterations to Kellynch and from the description of the Harvilles' lodgings at Lyme, of the naval community to which Anne will eventually belong. Captain Wentworth is in the background for much of the novel, but his "frank,...open-hearted,...eager character" (P, p.161) is kept alive by the presence of the Crofts and the Harvilles, and the places with which they are associated. The most significant episodes in Volume I are the walk to Winthrop and the events at Lyme, and Jane Austen's handling of the outdoor

settings and the emotional responses which they evoke constitutes one of the most important developments of her art in Persuasion. Most of the action in Volume II takes place in Bath, and except for Anne Elliot's and Captain Wentworth's walk up Union Street and the gravel path at the end of the novel, the major scenes are set indoors. Jane Austen uses the town setting to reflect Anne's emotions, but not to the same extent as in Volume I. We are reminded of the characters of Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot through their attitude to their house in Bath, but on the whole there is less of a sense of place in the second volume. Corresponding to the general move from country to town, from outdoor to indoor scenes, is the greater prominence of man-made objects in the Bath episodes. The small scale of Jane Austen's coherent and manageable worlds, in which spatial detail is selected carefully and used sparingly, enables her to make apparent trivia extraordinarily suggestive and significant, and in Persuasion such actions and objects convey and evoke feelings of powerful intensity.

There is little description of the Elliot estate, Kellynch Hall. The few references made to the place by the characters suggest that it is extensive, elegant and beautiful, and readers have to imagine for themselves the kind of property it is. These references also serve to place the opening scenes in a solid world of "reality". The way a character refers to Kellynch generally tells one more about the disposition of the speaker than about the house and grounds. Sir Walter Elliot's values are made clear in his rejection of Lady Russell's suggestions for retrenchment: "What! Every comfort of life knocked off! Journeys, London, servants, horses, table.... To live no longer with the decencies even of a private gentleman!" (P, p.13).



In the conversation about the letting of Kellynch, his grand reference to "the pleasure grounds" (P, p.18) and the emphasis that the shrubberies are his and the flower garden Elizabeth's reveal his conceit and his preoccupation with himself and his rank. Sir Walter, Elizabeth and Mrs Clay leave Kellynch "in very good spirits" (P, p.36); the Baronet feels neither shame at his financial mismanagement nor regret at leaving his family seat. His concerns are purely for the outward appearance of social rank, and neither he nor his eldest daughter has any love for Kellynch on account of its natural beauties or associations with the past. In contrast to them Anne walks away from the home, where she has been "nobody" (P, p.5) since her mother's death thirteen years before, "in a sort of desolate tranquillity" (P, p.36). She believes that "one does not love a place the less for having suffered in it, unless it has been all suffering, nothing but suffering" (P, p.184), and her attachment to Kellynch, despite the partialities and injustice which she has had to submit to there, is strong. She dislikes Bath, prefers the country to the town, and enjoys the natural beauties of the countryside and Kellynch. When the Elliots<sup>first</sup> think of moving, Anne hopes that they will take a small house in their own neighbourhood so that they may remain near Lady Russell and Mary and "still have the pleasure of sometimes seeing the lawns and groves of Kellynch" (P, p.14). When it has been settled that Admiral Croft will rent Kellynch, Anne cools her flushed cheeks and soothes her agitated feelings by walking in a favourite grove (possibly made dear to her by its associations with Captain Wentworth many years before), and says "with a gentle sigh, 'a few months more, and he, perhaps, may be walking here'" (P, p.25).

Anne is glad to go to Uppercross; she will avoid "the possible heats of September in all the white glare of Bath", and she will not forgo "the influence so sweet and so sad of the autumnal months in the country" (P, p.33). Past experience has taught her that "a removal from one set of people to another, though at a distance of only three miles, will often include a total change of conversation, opinion, and idea", but she realizes that on this visit she has still to learn another lesson--"the art of knowing our own nothingness beyond our own circle" (P, p.42). Mary and the Musgroves neither feel any curiosity nor show a sympathetic understanding of what Anne feels about the family move. In a sense Anne is just as solitary at Uppercross as she was at Kellynch--perhaps she is more isolated, for at Uppercross she has no friend like Lady Russell, and, when Captain Wentworth arrives, circumstances and her own wishes make her withdraw from company whenever she can. At the same time, however, she is a sympathetic but reluctant listener to the complaints and confidences of both families.

The brief authorial description of the <sup>Musgroves'</sup> houses at Uppercross indicates the character of the owners. "The mansion of the 'squire, with its high walls, great gates, and old trees, substantial and unmodernized" (P, p.36) suggests the superior social standing of the Musgroves in the village, and shows that, like their house, "the father and mother were in the old English style". We learn further that "Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove were a very good sort of people; friendly and hospitable, not much educated, and not at all elegant". As David Cecil notes, Jane Austen's subject is the present-day Musgroves, and she says just so much about the past as is needed to

make us understand the present.<sup>1</sup> She tells us that the Musgroves are in "a state of alteration", and shows the difference between the parents and the "more modern minds and manners" of their children in a description of an interior of the Great House in which she gives more particulars than usual and comments ironically and explicitly on the visible signs of social change. Anne and Mary go to the Great House "to sit the full half hour in the old-fashioned square parlour, with a small carpet and shining floor, to which the present daughters of the house were gradually giving the proper air of confusion by a grand piano forte and a harp, flower-stands and little tables placed in every direction. Oh! could the originals of the portraits against the wainscot, could the gentlemen in brown velvet and the ladies in blue satin have seen what was going on, have been conscious of such an overthrow of all order and neatness! The portraits themselves seemed to be staring in astonishment" (P, p.40). Uppercross Cottage

*had been a farmhouse,*

but upon his marriage Charles Musgrove improved it, and now "with its viranda, French windows, and other prettinesses" (P, p.36) the house displays a modern and eye-catching exterior *well* suited to the rank of his wife. Inside, "the faded sofa", "the pretty little drawing-room", "the once elegant furniture...which had been gradually growing shabby, under the influence of four summers and two children" (P, p.37) suggest the young wife's pride, her conventional taste, the state of her marriage, and her inability to

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<sup>1</sup>David Cecil, "A Note on Jane Austen's Scenery", in The Fine Art of Reading and other Literary Studies (London: Constable & Co., 1957), p.128.

cope with her children. Although the Musgroves' interests and feelings do not extend much beyond their own family concerns, they are warm-hearted, kind people; the atmosphere of the Great House has none of the chill formality and uncomfortable elegance of Kellynch, and Anne's spirits benefit from the change of place. She realizes "that every little social commonwealth should dictate its own matters of discourse", and, understanding what is right, wise and considerate, she determines "to clothe her imagination, her memory, and all her ideas in as much of Uppercross as possible" (P, p.43).

Anne's memory and imagination, however, cannot help directing her heart to Kellynch again when the day comes for the Crofts to take possession. She alone thinks of the "beloved home made over to others; all the precious rooms and furniture, groves, and prospects, beginning to own other eyes and other limbs!" (P, pp.47-48). Mary, when she by chance remembers the date, predictably affects to be depressed by the event, and later, on returning from a visit to the Crofts, is "in a very animated, comfortable state of imaginary agitation" (P, p.48). This contrast between the sisters' attitudes to Kellynch points the difference between Anne's warm and tender heart and Mary's unfeeling, selfish pride, and, more generally, is an instance of Jane Austen's frequent juxtaposition in Persuasion of true and false emotions.

The changes that the Crofts make at Kellynch reveal as much about the Elliots as they do about these kind, straightforward, open-hearted naval people. Admiral Croft's few improvements--moving the place for umbrellas, altering the laundry door--and his comment on the smoking breakfast-room chimney indicate that Sir Walter and Elizabeth set more store by the appearance and grandeur of Kellynch

than by its convenience and comfort, as well as showing the Admiral's sensible, tolerant and practical nature. His removing some of the large mirrors from the dressing-room humorously recalls for us Sir Walter's vanity. It is clear to the reader as well as to Anne that Kellynch has passed into better hands than its owners'. With the Crofts there come into Anne's life, as Mary Lascelles notes,<sup>1</sup> fresher airs that blow from a much wider world than that of the trivial domestic concerns of Uppercross. Mrs Croft has crossed the Atlantic four times and been once to the East Indies, and there seems to be a connection between the spaciousness of her world and her generosity of heart and breadth of mind. No climate disagrees with her, and as long as she is with her husband, she is happy. Her pleasure in her travels and in life derives chiefly from her love for her husband, and the only time that she ever really suffered in body and mind was when she was separated from him. The main function of her talk to Mrs Musgrove about her life is the bearing that it has on Anne's experience. Jane Austen contrives to win the reader's sympathy and admiration for her good and gentle heroine by telling Anne's story and describing her feelings indirectly. When Mrs Croft talks about the "perpetual fright" (P, p.71) that she suffered on the one occasion when the Admiral was at sea and she on shore, our minds turn to Anne's long and unhappy separation from Captain Wentworth. His own partly flippant account of the possibility of his old sloop's being lost at sea has the same function; the narrator, not Anne, calls attention to her unnoticed shudderings. Such naval talk also serves to depict the life of a sailor's wife and present some of the values of the world in which Anne will live.

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Lascelles, Art, p.182.



This is the function, too, of the description of the Harvilles' lodgings in Lyme. We see Captain Harville's small house with Anne's eyes, and her emotional response to its ingenious furnishings and homely atmosphere evinces the special significance that the place has for her. Like other houses in the novels, it is an extension of the occupant's personality, and before giving an impression of the interior, Jane Austen describes Captain Harville's genial, hospitable and friendly character. He shows "so much attachment to Captain Wentworth" in his invitation to the whole party, and such "a bewitching charm" in his uncommon degree of hospitality that Anne thinks with deep regret that "these would have been all my friends", and has "to struggle against a great tendency to lowness". The brief description of the house, relatively full, but as usual in this author consisting of generalities rather than particulars, substantiates Anne's impression of the Harvilles' happiness.

On quitting the Cobb, they all went indoors with their new friends, and found rooms so small as none but those who invite from the heart could think capable of accommodating so many. Anne had a moment's astonishment on the subject herself; but it was soon lost in the pleasanter feelings which sprang from the sight of all the ingenious contrivances and nice arrangements of Captain Harville, to turn the actual space to the best possible account, to supply the deficiencies of lodging-house furniture, and defend the windows and doors against the winter storms to be expected. The varieties in the fitting-up of the rooms, where the common necessities provided by the owner, in the common indifferent plight, were contrasted with some few articles of a rare species of wood, excellently worked up, and with something curious and valuable from all the distant countries Captain Harville had visited, were more than amusing to Anne: connected as it all was with his profession, the fruit of its labours, the effect of its influence on his habits, the picture of repose and domestic happiness it presented, made it to her a something more, or less, than gratification.

(P, p.98)

The passage confirms the idea, already shown negatively in "the sameness and the elegance, the prosperity and the nothingness" of

the Elliots' life (P, p.9), that virtue and happiness may flourish in this new rootless naval world of uncertainty, danger and mobility.<sup>1</sup>

Another setting that confirms qualities of character and values is the Elliots' house in Bath. The presence of Mary Musgrove in the Uppercross and Lyme episodes has kept the Elliot pride in our minds, but when Sir Walter and Elizabeth re-enter the novel after nine chapters, the reader needs to be reminded of their vanity and social snobbery, and Jane Austen does this by briefly showing their attitude to their house. "[It] was undoubtedly the best in Camden-place; their drawing-rooms had many decided advantages over all the others which they had either seen or heard of; and the superiority was not less in the style of the fitting-up, or the taste of the furniture" (P, p.137). (Contemporary readers would have known that the terrace houses in Bath were elegant but cramped.<sup>2</sup>) Anne cannot wonder but she does sigh over the knowledge that "her father should feel no degradation in his change; should see nothing to regret in the duties and dignity of the resident land-holder; should find so much to be vain of in the littlenesses of a town; and she must sigh, and smile, and wonder too, as Elizabeth threw open the folding-doors, and walked with exultation from one drawing-room to the other, boasting

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<sup>1</sup>Chapman, in a footnote to page 125 of Facts and Problems, quotes a remark made in a letter by Sir Francis Austen: "I rather think parts of Captain Harville's character were drawn from myself; at least the description of his domestic habits, tastes and occupations have a considerable resemblance to mine." We read of some of these domestic interests in the Letters : in 1796 Frank Austen was delighted to learn how to use a lathe (L, p.8) and "turned a very nice little butter-churn for Fanny" (L, p.10); and eleven years later he was "making very nice fringe for the Drawingroom-Curtains" (L, p.184) of the Southampton house that he and his wife shared with his mother and sisters.

<sup>2</sup>W.A. Craik, Jane Austen in Her Time (London: Nelson, 1969), p.151.

of their space, at the possibility of that woman, who had been mistress of Kellynch Hall, finding extent to be proud of between two walls, perhaps thirty feet asunder" (P, p.138).

Anne's love of Kellynch and preference for the country, especially "her own dear country" (P, p.33), are clear here as she ponders over her sister's and father's satisfaction with their empty life. Like her creator, she prizes the values and virtues established by time and tradition, and associated with the country rather than the town.<sup>1</sup> Anne's dislike of Bath, however, is more than a general distaste for the "littlenesses of a town"; she had been sent to school in Bath after her mother's death and had spent a winter there with Lady Russell after her break with Captain Wentworth, and her memories of the place are painful. As she and Lady Russell enter the city on a wet January afternoon, Anne, catching "the first dim view of the extensive buildings, smoking in rain", looks back "with fond regret, to the bustles of Uppercross and the seclusion of Kellynch". Jane Austen gives no description of Bath--readers can imagine the well-known buildings and streets--but in an unusually sensuously descriptive sentence she gives particulars of the noises and movements that distress Anne. She and Lady Russell drive through "the long course of streets from the Old Bridge to Camden-place, amidst the dash of other carriages, the heavy rumble of carts and drays, the bawling of newsmen, muffin-men and milk-men, and the ceaseless clink of pattens..." (P, p.135). In contrast to Anne Lady Russell likes Bath, and the narrator makes a point of being fair to Lady Russell in her difference of taste. The tone of the passage telling us that, so far from being disturbed by

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<sup>1</sup>See p.7 above.

these noises of the town, Lady Russell regards them as part of the quiet cheerfulness of her winter pleasures is good-humoured and tolerant. Lady Russell is a good woman, of sound ability and strict integrity, and extremely fond of Anne. But she has limitations, and her attitude to Bath to some extent reveals her "prejudices on the side of ancestry", her "value for rank and consequence" (P, p.11), and her emotional insensitivity. She has not Anne's quality of mind or intuitive insight into character, and she shows this lack of understanding in thinking that Anne's dislike of Bath is "a prejudice and a mistake" (P, p.14), and that the enlargement of society will improve her health and spirits. In Volume I, as has been shown, each of Anne's moves takes her into a setting that is more sympathetic than the previous one and reflects the nature of the group of people who live there. In Volume II most of the characters converge on Bath, and this neutral ground, as it were, where all kinds of people may plausibly meet,<sup>1</sup> becomes what each character makes of it. As we have seen, Jane Austen carefully places the characters in appropriate areas of the town,<sup>2</sup> and shows their adaptation to their settings. Sir Walter and Elizabeth, for example, turn their house, in its "lofty, dignified situation" (P, p.137), into another Kellynch. The Crofts continue their habit of making a happy home for themselves quite independent of their surroundings; Admiral Croft tells Anne that Bath suits him and his wife very well:

We are always meeting with some old friend or other; the streets full of them every morning; sure to have plenty of chat; and then we get away from them all, and shut ourselves into our lodgings, and draw in our chairs, and are as snug as

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<sup>1</sup>See p.66 above.

<sup>2</sup>See pp.44-45 above.

if we were at Kellynch, ay, or as we used to be even at North Yarmouth and Deal. We do not like our lodgings here the worse, I can tell you, for putting us in mind of those we first had at North Yarmouth. The wind blows through one of the cupboards just in the same way.

(P, p.170)

And Anne is able to separate herself from her family's social activities and interests; while they assiduously push their good fortune in Laura Place, she calls on a former governess and renews her acquaintance with Mrs Smith.

In telling us that Anne dreads the heat and glare of Bath and grieves at the thought of missing autumn in the country, Jane Austen explicitly contrasts the unpleasantness of a town and the sweetness of the countryside,<sup>1</sup> and Anne's thoughts here remind the reader of Fanny Price's similar reflections and regrets at missing spring at Mansfield.<sup>2</sup> The symbolic suggestion of the trees in new leaf in Mansfield Park, and the sympathy between Emma's melancholy feelings and the cold, stormy July weather have already been discussed.<sup>3</sup> In Persuasion Jane Austen makes a similar but more sustained use of the seasons and landscape to express an emotional state, and she uses this near-metaphor to elucidate one of the central themes of the novel. On several occasions in Persuasion youth and beauty--and, by implication, love--are conventionally linked with spring, and, more particularly, Anne's melancholy and loss of hope with autumn. Anne's pleasure in the sweet sadness of autumn in the country has already been mentioned. On being complimented on her improved

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of Jane Austen's attitude towards town and country see pp.67-69 above.

<sup>2</sup>See pp.70-71 above.

<sup>3</sup>See pp.143, 145 above.



looks when she returns from Uppercross and Lyme, Anne silently hopes that she is "to be blessed with a second spring of youth and beauty" (P, p.124). But the most striking instance of this figurative use of the seasons is the episode of the walk from Uppercross to Winthrop. Though November, it is "glorious weather", but Anne cannot share Captain Wentworth's energetic kind of enjoyment. She is acutely conscious of his walking with Louisa and Henrietta, and tries to keep out of his way and remain with Charles and Mary. The sense of isolation, the resignation and sadness that she feels and does not show or outwardly express, are rendered through the references to the autumnal landscape in free indirect style and authorial comment in such a way that, although the setting highlights Anne's isolation and mood, there is no suggestion of self-pity or excessive sentiment:

"Her pleasure in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn, that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness, that season which has drawn from every poet, worthy of being read, some attempt at description, or some lines of feeling. She occupied her mind as much as possible in such like musings and quotations..." (P, p.84). Anne hears Captain Wentworth enthusiastically commend Louisa for expressing a total and romantic devotion to a hypothetical lover, and understanding the application to herself, she cannot immediately fall into a quotation again. "The sweet scenes of autumn were for a while put by--unless some tender sonnet, fraught with the apt analogy of the declining year, with declining happiness, and the images of youth and hope, and spring, all gone

together, blessed her memory" (P, p.85). As Anne's mind understandably dwells on the sadness rather than on the sweetness of autumn, the irony in the use of "tender", "fraught", "all gone together", gently reproves her self-indulgence, and reminds the reader of Jane Austen's earlier and cruder mockery of heroines who read poetry "to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives" (NA, p.15). The brisk tone of the narrator in the passage describing the "large enclosures, where the ploughs at work, and the fresh-made path spoke the farmer, counteracting the sweets of poetical despondence, and meaning to have spring again" (P, p.85) also mildly criticises Anne, and at the same time there is a hint of her second spring. It is significant that in this passage, when Anne is walking despondently and virtually alone, when her spirits and hopes are at their lowest ebb, and yet, unknown to her, her fortunes have taken a turn for the better with Captain Wentworth's learning of her refusing Charles Musgrove,<sup>1</sup> the phrasing to describe part of the setting--the "gradual ascent"<sup>2</sup>--is the same as in the scene of Anne's reunion with Captain Wentworth, when she walks with him up Union Street, and both are even "more exquisitely happy" (P, p.240) than they had been eight and a half years previously.

Barbara Hardy analyses Jane Austen's treatment of Anne's feelings in these passages to show how, in her opinion, they resemble a romantic ode; how Jane Austen, being a novelist not a poet, places in her rhapsodies "the inner and outer experience typical of the ode

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<sup>1</sup> Moler makes this point in Art of Allusion, p.213.

<sup>2</sup> See Persuasion, pp.85, 241.

in character, marking the confines of personal experience and the larger world that lies outside that experience". Barbara Hardy concludes her discussion: "This nearly lyric episode is important not just as a statement of theme, but as a reflection of feeling and a moral expansion of the emotional state. It places Anne in relation to her as-yet-unanticipated happy ending, but goes beyond this to bring in the world beyond poetry, and beyond passion. It involves the larger world in which we live and feel, not in apartness. It uses Anne's passions, then expands to leave those passions behind. But its enlargement is responsive to the sense of sympathy and community which Anne consistently shows, generous, benevolent, and responsible as she is."<sup>1</sup>

This poetic use of nature to convey mood is an important feature and means of narration in Persuasion. A. Walton Litz suggests that Jane Austen devised this new method of expressing the heroine's consciousness as a solution to the problem that she set herself in isolating Anne.<sup>2</sup> Of its origins he writes:

The sources of this new quality in Jane Austen's fiction must have been complex, but one point seems obvious. More than has been generally realized or acknowledged, she was influenced by the Romantic poetry of the early nineteenth century. Persuasion and Sanditon contain a number of references to contemporary poets, to Byron, Wordsworth, and especially Scott. And although Jane Austen's explicit use of these authors may be for the purposes of satire, her late prose reflects their influence. Nature has ceased to be a mere backdrop; landscape is a structure of feeling which can express, and also modify, the minds of those who view it. In their quiet and restrained fashion, Jane Austen's last works are part of the new movement in English literature.

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<sup>1</sup> See Barbara Hardy, A Reading, pp.56-58.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Kroeber makes the same point. See Styles in Fictional Structure : The Art of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.83.

She has learned that the natural setting can convey, more surely than any abstract vocabulary, the movements of an individual imagination.<sup>1</sup>

The well-known paragraph describing Lyme and its environs also illustrates this new attitude towards landscape--and many critics find it an uncharacteristically unsatisfactory piece of writing, an attitude with which I disagree. Yasmine Gooneratne, for example, considers that "the passage resembles nothing more than the descriptive prose of travel-guides to well known beauty spots", and she cannot see "what functional role is played by this particular passage in Persuasion, with its superfluity of irrelevant detail";<sup>2</sup> Mudrick finds the descriptions of Lyme "the more revealing in their awkward and breathless, their almost travel-book style";<sup>3</sup> and, while Mary Lascelles does not find the passage unsatisfactory, she doubts whether Jane Austen intended to show us more of Lyme than the visitors from Uppercross could have seen, or whether she knew she had done this.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly Jane Austen generally presents setting through a character's consciousness. But the authorial account of Lyme and the surrounding country describes the kind of natural beauty and refers to the kind of reflection on such scenery that we have already seen Anne Elliot enjoying, and the reader feels that Anne's views on these scenes would be similar. Because of the closeness of the

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<sup>1</sup>A. Walton Litz, Jane Austen : A Study of her Artistic Development (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), p.153.

<sup>2</sup>Yasmine Gooneratne, Jane Austen (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.188.

<sup>3</sup>Mudrick, Irony, p.224.

<sup>4</sup>Mary Lascelles, Art, p.183, n.2.

narrator's and heroine's viewpoints throughout Persuasion, Jane Austen, while introducing an unusually personal element into the description of Lyme, manages at the same time to suggest through the account the character and state of mind of her heroine. Thus, although Anne does not visit all the places described, the passage is not irrelevant to Jane Austen's concerns.

The first part of the description is what the Uppercross party see as they drive down the long hill and walk to the sea: "...the remarkable situation of the town, the principal street almost hurrying into the water, the walk to the Cobb, skirting round the pleasant little bay, which in the season is animated with bathing machines and company, the Cobb itself, its old wonders and new improvements, with the very beautiful line of cliffs stretching out to the east of the town...." The second part of the passage describes the immediate environs of Lyme:

The scenes in its neighbourhood, Charmouth, with its high grounds and extensive sweeps of country, and still more its sweet retired bay, backed by dark cliffs, where fragments of low rock among the sands make it the happiest spot for watching the flow of the tide, for sitting in unwearied contemplation;--the woody varieties of the cheerful village of Up Lyme, and, above all, Pinny, with its green chasms between romantic rocks; where the scattered forest trees and orchards of luxuriant growth declare that many a generation must have passed away since the first partial falling of the cliff prepared the ground for such a state, where a scene so wonderful and so lovely is exhibited, as may more than equal any of the resembling scenes of the far-famed Isle of Wight: these places must be visited, and visited again, to make the worth of Lyme understood.

(P, pp.95-96)

It was these attractions which Captain Wentworth told his friends of at Uppercross, and which prompted in them an earnest desire to see the place for themselves. This is one minor function of the passage.



Purposeless travelling about in Jane Austen is suspect;<sup>1</sup> it is a symptom of the unsound values of a Mrs Elton: "You would be amazed to hear how my brother, Mr Suckling, sometimes flies about. You will hardly believe me--but twice in one week he and Mr Bragge went to London and back again with four horses" (E, p.306). More important is the special atmosphere that this unusual description by Jane Austen gives to Lyme; its qualities heighten the effect of what happens there. For both Anne and Captain Wentworth Lyme is a place of discovery. There is something about the sea--Henrietta quotes Dr Shirley as saying--that makes one feel young again, and the fine sea breeze restores the bloom and freshness of Anne's youth. She, having thought of herself as faded and altered in looks, becomes conscious of her personal attraction--even for Captain Wentworth. She also discovers that it is to her that he turns for help and advice in the crisis of Louisa's accident. It is here, too, that Captain Wentworth learns several lessons, and begins to understand himself: Mr Elliot's passing admiration for Anne rouses him to notice her looks, and her behaviour after Louisa's fall makes him appreciate the "perfect excellence" of her mind. It was at Lyme, he later explains to Anne, that "he had learnt to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will, between the darings of heedlessness and the resolution of a collected mind. There, he had seen, every thing to exalt in his estimation the woman he had lost, and there begun to deplore the pride, the folly, the madness of resentment, which had kept him from trying to regain her when thrown in his way" (P, p.242). The intensity of the emotions that both characters

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<sup>1</sup>Page makes this general point in respect of characters in Mansfield Park in Jane Austen's Achievement, p.60.

experience in Lyme is increased by the unique treatment of their surroundings. Nowhere else does Jane Austen suggest to this extent her own pleasure and delight in landscape as in this description of the countryside round Lyme: here, words like "sweet",<sup>1</sup> "happiest", "cheerful", "wonderful", "lovely" are reserved for moments of deep feeling and are unusual in her writing; so also is the use of as many adjectives as there are in the paragraph; and so is the use of the word "romantic", to which Jane Austen generally gives the eighteenth-century meaning of "extravagant" or "foolishly unrealistic".<sup>2</sup> Discussing some misconceptions about Jane Austen and about her style --one of which is that she is traditionally regarded as an anti-Romantic, Page cites the description of Lyme as an example of her "sensitive response to the beauty of landscape and [her] skill in conveying such feelings in language", and concludes:

Some of the ideas of this passage are remarkably similar to those of the earlier Romantic poets: the sense of the passing of time, the taste for seclusion and for 'sitting in unwearied contemplation', the stress on first-hand experience and on the value of revisiting a scene, are essentially Wordsworthian. Furthermore, the language is in places close to that of Romantic poetry: not only the phrase 'unwearied contemplation', which might have come straight from the Lyrical Ballads, but the epithets sweet, wonderful, lovely, and the description of 'green chasms between romantic rocks' with its striking echo of Coleridge's Kubla Khan.<sup>3</sup>

The effect of the description of the landscape which excited Jane Austen in this way is that, at the beginning of the episode set in

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<sup>1</sup>Jane Austen also uses "sweet" in this traditional way in Emma, p.360: "It was a sweet view--sweet to the eye and the mind."

<sup>2</sup>Page, Language, p.11.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp.11-12.

Lyme, it suggests that the effect of natural beauty on the spirit is creative and restorative.

The setting of some indoor scenes in Persuasion is not described at all. Any detail, for example, of the room in which Sir Walter and Mr Shepherd discuss the letting of Kellynch, of the drawing-room in which Anne first sees Captain Wentworth again, of the confectioner's shop where they first meet in Bath, would be unnecessary for Jane Austen's purposes. In the first of these episodes the chief function of the dialogue is to launch the plot, a few references to Kellynch confirm characteristics of the speakers, and the interior action which takes place in Anne Elliot's mind has not yet started. When Anne and Captain Wentworth meet again after eight years, we are told that they are in the drawing-room of Uppercross Cottage, but Anne is so overwhelmed by her feelings that she is hardly conscious of what is going on around her and registers only that the room is "full of persons and voices" (P, p.59); all that matters is Anne's awareness of one presence in the room. For the same reason, when she sees Captain Wentworth in Bath, we need to know only that rain has sent her party into Molland's, and that she is sitting by the window, because, again, after she sees him in the street "for a few minutes she saw nothing before her. It was all confusion. She was lost..." (P, p.175). When Captain Wentworth enters the shop, the restricted space places him at close quarters to Elizabeth Elliot, and Anne sees that they recognize each other, that Elizabeth will not acknowledge him, and that he seems to expect her acknowledgement.

An exact explanation of where people are in a room in relation to each other and to furniture is a means of narration that Jane Austen probably learned from her efforts at writing plays and from

other theatrical experiences. She uses this dramatic technique in Persuasion to make action convincing and to build up to climaxes. In the scene when the younger Musgrove boy, "a remarkable stout, forward child, of two years old" (P, p.79), climbs on to Anne's back, Jane Austen carefully places the characters at certain points in the room in order to prepare for the small climax of Captain Wentworth's "kindness in stepping forward to [Anne's] relief" (P, p.80): the little invalid is on the sofa, Charles Hayter is seated near the table, Captain Wentworth is at the window, and Anne is kneeling at the sofa with her back to the two men. Jane Austen makes Captain Wentworth's action natural and convincing by keeping him standing and walking about, and putting Charles Hayter firmly in a chair with a newspaper; in fact, she mentions Captain Wentworth and the window four times. The incident is a "trifle", but it takes Anne "a long application of solitude and reflection" (P, p.81) to recover from her disordered feelings and painful agitation. It is Jane Austen's careful writing to scale that makes such detail so powerfully suggestive. At this early stage in the renewal of Captain Wentworth's love for Anne, when she deduces that "her conversation [is] the last of his wants" (P, p.80), Jane Austen, by emphasizing the characters' positions in the room, contrives to obscure Captain Wentworth's motives from Anne, and therefore from the reader.

The reader, however, has a wider viewpoint than Anne and understands more than she does in the later scene when, sitting near a hedgerow on the hill above Winthrop, she overhears the conversation between Captain Wentworth and Louisa. Anne's isolation, her emotions and experiences--incidents such as when, after she has been playing the piano for dancing at the Musgroves', Captain Wentworth addresses

her with cold formality and restraint--all these limit her field of vision, and less of what Mary Lascelles calls the "subterranean pattern"<sup>1</sup> indicating the gradual change of Captain Wentworth's feelings for her is apparent to Anne than it is to the reader. We also have an advantage over her because, in one of the two short episodes which are exceptions to the consistent point of view in the novel, both the narrator and Captain Wentworth tell us something about his feelings.<sup>2</sup> In the hedgerow scene the setting makes the action probable: the precise placing of Anne on the "nice seat...on a dry sunny bank, under the hedge-row, in which she had no doubt of their still being", and of Captain Wentworth and Louisa "in the hedge-row, behind her, as if making their way back, along the rough, wild sort of channel, down the centre" (P, p.87),<sup>3</sup> makes it natural that Anne should be able to hear them talking and should observe the pause and questions that follow Louisa's information that her brother Charles had wanted to marry Anne, but without the benefit of the reader's greater understanding of Wentworth's state of mind.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Lascelles, Art, p.205.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Lascelles, Art, p.204, believes that these two passages are an oversight on Jane Austen's part. But the reader, who shares Anne's anxiety to know what Frederick Wentworth's feelings are, welcomes the first passage (P, pp.61-62) which ends a chapter and is not a jarring transition. Had she revised Persuasion Jane Austen might have eliminated the second, the fifteen lines of chatter among the ladies in Molland's (P, pp.177-78), which serve only to reinforce Captain Wentworth's false impression of the relationship between Anne and Mr Elliot.

<sup>3</sup> James Edward Austen-Leigh in the Memoir, p.286, gives a description of a Hampshire hedgerow. It is "an irregular border of copse-wood and timber, often wide enough to contain within it a winding footpath, or a rough cart track".



Anne's "interesting, almost too interesting" conversation with Captain Wentworth before the concert is also made possible by the position in which she finds herself in the room. Sir Walter's party arrive early and, waiting for Lady Dalrymple, "they took their station by one of the fires". When Captain Wentworth unexpectedly enters, Anne "was the nearest to him, and making yet a little advance, she instantly spoke", and "her gentle 'How do you do?' brought him out of the straight line to stand near her, and make enquiries in return, in spite of the formidable father and sister in the background" (P, p.181). This placing allows Anne and Captain Wentworth to talk freely and the Elliots coolly to acknowledge his presence. The disturbing background to their conversation--"all the various noises of the room, the almost ceaseless slam of the door, and ceaseless buzz of persons walking through" (P, p.183)--serves by contrast to heighten Anne's inner silence and private joy. When Lady Dalrymple arrives, Anne finds herself necessarily separated from Captain Wentworth. Fully preoccupied with "exquisite, though agitated sensations" (P, p.184) after hearing his opinion of Louisa Musgrove and his feelings as to a first strong attachment, Anne sees nothing of the brilliancy around her in the concert room. Seated on the foremost bench of the two taken by her party, and between Mr Elliot and Colonel Wallis, she now has her attention occupied by the music and her cousin. On hearing Sir Walter and Lady Dalrymple talking about Captain Wentworth, she sees him "standing among a cluster of men at a little distance". When she looks again, he has moved away, but "he could not have come nearer to her if he would; she was so surrounded and shut in" (P, p.188). The unproductive interval over, "benches [are] reclaimed and repossessed", and Anne's anxiety

increases. When her party resettle themselves on the benches, the changes are favourable to her, and scheming a little like "the inimitable Miss Larolles",<sup>1</sup> Anne finds herself "at the very end of the bench before the concert closed" with "a vacant space at hand" (P, p.189). But Mr Elliot is near enough to demand her attention just when Captain Wentworth is about to sit next to her. By this careful arrangement of people Jane Austen shows us where the characters concerned are set by chance or strategy, and this positioning makes Anne realize that Captain Wentworth loves her and is jealous of Mr Elliot.

In the climactic episode at the White Hart Inn a similar emphasis on the positions of the five people in the large room makes probable the two overheard conversations and Captain Wentworth's writing and giving the letter to Anne. When, having been delayed by rain, she arrives at the inn, Anne finds Mrs Croft talking to Mrs Musgrove and Captain Harville to Captain Wentworth. She has to wait the return of Mary and Henrietta, Captain Wentworth writes a letter for Captain Harville, and the two women continue talking. Jane Austen makes it clear that Anne, alone as usual in a group and feeling that she does not belong to their conversation, is seated near enough to Mrs Croft and Mrs Musgrove to hear their opinions on uncertain and long engagements, and that Captain Wentworth, "nearly turning his back

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<sup>1</sup>Miss Larolles, a character in Fanny Burney's *Cecilia*, explains to Cecilia in the interval of a concert how she "sat at the outside on purpose to speak to a person or two...; for if one sits on the inside there's no speaking to a creature..." (Book IV, Chapter 6). Chapman (*Persuasion*, p.295) and Kinsley (*Persuasion*, p.479) erroneously cite Book IV, Chapter 2 for this reference.

on them all" (P, p.230), hears the conversation, too. When Anne, beckoned to by Captain Harville, moves across to a window, she thinks that Captain Wentworth cannot hear her and his friend discussing the comparative constancy of men and women, but that he is able to hear her low-spoken words is made plain by his position in the room and by her being able to hear his pen drop. Such brief explanations as: "the window at which [Captain Harville] stood was at the other end of the room from where the two ladies were sitting, and though nearer to Captain Wentworth's table, not very near" (P, pp.231-32); "it was nothing more than his pen had fallen down" (P, p.233); "she had only time, however, to move closer to the table where he had been writing" (P, p.236); and "Mrs. Musgrove had little arrangements of her own at her own table" (P, p.237) make the incidents of this moving scene completely convincing. Jane Austen was not satisfied with her first attempt at the dramatic and emotional climax which precipitates the resolution of Persuasion--nor, having the second version with which to compare it, are we. There are many weaknesses which show it to be inferior to the final version, described by Southam in his study of the literary manuscripts as "a passage of extraordinary beauty, unequalled in her other works".<sup>1</sup> As regards the different settings Southam comments on the atmosphere of outward calm and spaciousness of the White Hart Inn, which contrasts with the confusion and excitement of events which threw Anne and Captain Wentworth together in the Admiral's house. He then makes a general comment on Jane Austen's technique, which is relevant here:

The cancelled chapters are our only direct evidence for Jane Austen's method of composition in the completed novels.

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<sup>1</sup>Southam, Manuscripts, p.92.

In chapter 10 her structural technique is at an important moment of development as she experiments, at first to fail, with the crucial scene, a climax and resolution, which must raise the dramatic and emotional intensity, and then lead on to the moments of relief and peace. Making her mistakes in the first version Jane Austen went on to recast the chapter, visualizing the scene with great clarity. To place people within the enclosed setting of a room, at rest or in movement, to record their conversation, and to concentrate above all on a delicate sense of relationship, their awareness of one another, spoken and unspoken, these are the feats of her art, here and in the other works.<sup>1</sup>

The world of Persuasion is filled with a number of small objects, some natural, most man-made; they "seem to be present in greater and freer abandon in this novel, lying around, as objects do, in a casual clutter as part of the ordinary scenes and surfaces of life".<sup>2</sup> The general nature and function of such spatial detail is discussed in Chapter III,<sup>3</sup> but, although the principal uses of small objects are the same--to create a realistic fictional world, to animate the action and advance the plot, and to define character, there are some differences and innovations in Jane Austen's treatment of this aspect of setting in Persuasion. For instance, there is no giving and receiving of presents as in Emma--the one reference to a present is Elizabeth Elliot's "happy thought" (P, p.10) of taking nothing to Anne from London as one of her two economies--and there is no emphasis on the association of presents with people as in Mansfield Park. A positive development is the greater use of symbolism, or near-symbolism, that Jane Austen makes, still very delicately and sparingly, of a few objects that are striking and memorable because of their significance in this respect. One reason for this development lies in the nature

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.98.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Hardy, A Reading, p.164.

<sup>3</sup> See pp.97-100 above.

of the hero and heroine; Captain Wentworth's turn of mind and kind of wit find expression in analogy; and Anne Elliot's sensitivity to her surroundings is conveyed through her response to natural scenery.

Most of the miscellaneous domestic objects mentioned in Persuasion reveal or confirm character in some way. The method and effects are never laboured; casually introduced, only named and seldom described, possessions remind us of the qualities of their owners. Sir Walter's favourite volume, his carriage horses, his large looking-glasses suggestively convey that "vanity of person and of situation" (P, p.4) is the beginning and end of his character; that he and Elizabeth have no spiritual or intellectual life and no love for Kellynch is made clear by their leaving Anne to make a duplicate catalogue of Sir Walter's books and pictures and to organise Elizabeth's plants; the mirrors and china that Elizabeth is proud to show Mary and Charles in Camden Place reflect the brittle, fragile glitter of their shallow lives. Like her father and Elizabeth, Mary is also materialistic; things matter to these Elliots for what they indicate about status and rank, and it is for this reason that, when he is in financial difficulties, Sir Walter is unable to retrench and change to a simpler style of living at Kellynch. Mr Elliot is mercenary rather than acquisitive; his unequal marriage brought him a fortune, and, once rich, he schemes for rank and consequence. Anne is not often associated with her possessions, but a single, brief reference to her books and music <sup>(P, p. 38)</sup> contrasts the quality of her mind and taste with her father's and sister's. Anne's having "no knowledge of the harp" (P, p.47) makes the same sort of distinction between her and the Musgroves. The harp, linked as it is with Mary Crawford and Mrs Elton, is certainly, as Tave states, "the instrument of false



elegance"<sup>1</sup> in Mansfield Park and Emma, but whether Jane Austen intends to attribute the values of a Mary Crawford or Mrs Elton to Louisa and Henrietta seems doubtful. In Persuasion the harp, like the grand piano, serves to indicate that the elder Musgroves are "not at all elegant" (P, p.40), and that, while being "very amiable, sweet-tempered [girls]" (P, p.182), Louisa and Henrietta have not Anne's "more elegant and cultivated mind" (P, p.41).<sup>2</sup> The fullest account of a character's possessions is that given of the wooden articles, valuable curios, bookshelves, tops, netting-needles and pins, and fishing-net made by Captain Harville. These items do more than tell us of the Captain's habits of industry and usefulness; they indicate the peace of mind and happiness, the values and the way of life that belong to "that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance" (P, p.252).

Jane Austen does not generally associate her heroines with objects. Fanny Price is exceptional.<sup>3</sup> Like Fanny, Anne Elliot is isolated, lonely, and endowed with a warm heart, keen sensibilities and the powers of memory and imagination, and, as she did with Fanny, Jane Austen uses Anne's sensitive response to her surroundings as a method of characterization and narration. But Anne is not presented through her attitude to her possessions, as Fanny is; in

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<sup>1</sup>Tave, Some Words, p.258.

<sup>2</sup>Page explains that the quality of elegance "entails for Jane Austen far more than smartness, sophistication, and social assurance: if we may come to know the word through the company it keeps, its yoke-fellows suggest that it is to be taken altogether more seriously, as an attribute of deeper value and more difficult attainment". He cites Kettle's definition of elegance of mind as "genuine sensibility to human values as well as the more superficial refinements of polished manner". See Language, p.65.

<sup>3</sup>See p.112 above.

respect of setting, only the beauty and solitude of outdoor scenes evoke an emotional response in Anne, and the difference in sensibility distinguishes Anne's finer mind and greater maturity. Captain Wentworth's values and way of life are partly revealed, as we have seen, through the Crofts and Harvilles and spatial material connected with them, but the most memorable objects in Persuasion are associated with him: the hazel-nut that he selects as a symbol of firmness, and the pen that falls during Anne's conversation with Captain Harville.

The hazel-nut is remarkable for several reasons. It stands out because, although, like the tawny leaves and withered hedges, the hedgerow and the holly bush, it is part of the autumnal scene in which Anne finds solace on the walk to Winthrop, it is one of the few natural and specific objects (distinct from features of landscape) in the novel. We also remember it because we are given a few particulars about it in Captain Wentworth's imaginative analogy, and most importantly because the use that he makes of it is significant with regard to his character and to the theme of persuasion in the novel. The nut is not the only object Captain Wentworth uses as an image to make a point; when talking to the Musgroves about his naval experiences, he compares his ship, a well-used, still-reliable old sloop, to a well-worn pelisse that one might be pleased to borrow and wear on a very wet day. Barbara Hardy observes that his "not too serious manipulations of simile and emblem" are one of the ways in which Jane Austen conveys Captain Wentworth's wit--a quality for which Anne loves him.<sup>1</sup> As, talking to Louisa and commending her

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Hardy, A Reading, p.161.

firmness, but thinking of Anne and her weak-minded deference to Lady Russell, he half-playfully, half-seriously catches down the beautiful glossy nut, Anne, hidden from their sight, understands the significance of the words spoken with such feeling, and can only submit to the pain of knowing how her character is considered by her former lover. The irony of his speech is that, as time is to make clear to him, the qualities that he attributes to Louisa have always been Anne's. That this is so is the lesson he learns in the course of the novel. The events at Lyme teach him to distinguish between Louisa's obstinate self-will and Anne's gentle fortitude, and by the end he has learned to accept that Anne was right in submitting to Lady Russell, that it was her duty to yield to such persuasion, even though, as events decided, it was bad advice. The word "persuasion" in the present-day meaning of the word is used frequently by Jane Austen in connection with many characters in the novel, but it was also employed in a more restricted way in the eighteenth century, and it is this specific sense that lies at the heart of the action of this novel; the title, whether Jane Austen chose it or not,<sup>1</sup> emphasises the significance of the concept. Moler explains the particular meaning: "a parental attempt to influence a child's choice of a matrimonial partner was

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<sup>1</sup>As has been stated on p.23 above, Northanger Abbey and Persuasion were published posthumously in December, 1817. Jane Austen refers to the manuscript previously titled Susan as "Miss Catherine" in a letter written in March 1817, and we must suppose that the title Northanger Abbey was Henry Austen's decision. There seems to be no reference to the title Persuasion in Jane Austen's correspondence; Mary Lascelles (Art, p.38, n.5) conjectures that Henry Austen chose Persuasion, knowing that it would have had his sister's approval as "...that is a title of the kind that Jane Austen evidently liked--she had praised Anna's 'Enthusiasm' (Letters, p.393) ".

frequently described as 'persuasion';<sup>1</sup> and he cites many instances of the use in early nineteenth-century literature. He shows how some of the new philosophical ideas of the period are dramatised in Jane Austen's novels, and finds in her treatment of Captain Wentworth a response to Godwin's ideas on the "energetic" character and the advocacy of "fortitude", the word used in the restricted contemporary sense to refer to a child's challenge of parental authority with regard to choice of a marriage partner.<sup>2</sup> He concludes his discussion: "...I think that Jane Austen sees, and intends her readers to see, a resemblance between Captain Wentworth and the character type of the modern philosopher, and that this resemblance suggests a habit of mind, that, in her opinion, required modification. Jane Austen holds that Wentworth, like the romantic-revolutionary novelists, tends too hastily to assume that an ability to control one's feelings is a sign of shallowness, and that a determination to act without regard to anything but the dictates of one's own will is an indication of strength."<sup>3</sup> This characteristically moderate outlook is to be found in all Jane Austen's novels. Despite the correction to his attitude (which he himself makes) Captain Wentworth's ardent spirit remains undimmed. It is one of Jane Austen's triumphs of characterization that he does not sacrifice individuality while yet improving.

Jane Austen manages to write of mundane details in such a way that she gives them an interest that is peculiarly satisfying. The reader is actually pleased to notice, for example, each reference to

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<sup>1</sup> Moler, Art of Allusion, p.193.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp.194-208.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.208.

Sir Walter's carriage horses, and enjoys the cumulative effect and significance of such apparent trifles. Because of the necessary travelling between the different settings, carriages feature prominently in Persuasion. The way that Jane Austen tells us that "the last office of the four carriage-horses was to draw Sir Walter, Miss Elliot, and Mrs. Clay to Bath" (P, p.35) makes us realize that what matters to the Baronet and his daughter is not that the horses are probably going to be sold but that their owners leave Kellynch and arrive in Bath with éclat. Mary Musgrove is disgruntled because Charles keeps no carriage, but she enjoys the consequence that the journey to Bath in her mother-in-law's carriage with four horses gives her. The "very pretty landaulette" (P, p.250) that Anne owns after her marriage, as well as suggesting the style and elegance of her married life, is an object of envy to her younger sister, whose prime concern in life continues to be social position and the things that indicate one's superior or inferior rank. The Crofts' driving out in their new gig is further evidence of their enjoyment of each other's company, and their happy and successful partnership in life is amusingly represented by Mrs Croft's occasional judicious guidance of the reins. Jane Austen frequently uses something as mundane as the fixed number of seats in a vehicle for determining the action. The Crofts' kindness in making room for Anne reminds the reader that there was no room for ~~her~~<sup>her</sup> in Charles's curricle when he drove Mary to Kellynch. And the fact that Lady Dalrymple's barouche holds only four allows Jane Austen to hint at Mrs Clay's designs on Mr Elliot, and also shows how Captain Wentworth comes to think that he has reason to be jealous of Anne's cousin.



Several objects in Persuasion serve the plot in this way. Because the action depends on events of the past, the exposition is relatively complex and long, and the entry in the Baronetage at the opening of the novel is an economical and skilful means of conveying necessary information. The harp is needed to help cheer Mrs Musgrove at Uppercross Cottage and, because of its size, has to be taken in the carriage. This allows the author to have Louisa walk on ahead and tell Mary, Charles and Anne about Mrs Musgrove's sentimental regrets over "poor Richard", and this conversation provides the necessary preface to the narrator's account of the boy's connection with Captain Wentworth, a connection which gives the Musgroves reason for seeking his acquaintance and thus brings him to Uppercross. And the handsome curtains in the window in Pulteney Street give occasion for some gently ironic criticism of Anne for thinking that Lady Russell is fascinated by the sight of Captain Wentworth and his unchanged personal attractions. There are several other such incidents that depend on some seemingly trivial object. A concert programme with the words of a song in Italian serves to separate Anne and Captain Wentworth, and a pair of gloves, a gun and a fine display of greenhouse plants bring them together. The miniature of Captain Benwick, drawn for Fanny Harville by a German artist at the Cape and now to be framed for Louisa, indirectly precipitates the dénouement. One of the most memorable and dramatic events in Persuasion is Captain Wentworth's dropping his pen when he overhears Anne's speech on the constancy of women, a speech in which she unconsciously tells him that she has never stopped loving him. And on the letter which he consequently writes and contrives to give to Anne depends "all which this world could do for her!" (P, p.237). Captain Wentworth's

ardent proposal, given freely in the letter, is appropriate to Jane Austen's most romantic love-story. The letter also enables Jane Austen to switch momentarily to Captain Wentworth's viewpoint, and yet at the same time let the reader experience the scene primarily through Anne's mind.

Anne has waited nearly nine years for this moment of happiness. All the other heroines experience at some point in the crucial year of their story a short time--it is a matter of days, weeks or months--during which they think that they have lost the man they love. The necessity of submitting to this possibility seems to be part of the test that proves the heroine to be worthy of marriage or able to make the right marriage.<sup>1</sup> For Anne this span of time is eight years --"It is a period, indeed! Eight years and a half is a period!" (P, p.225)--and the struggle to achieve a state of equilibrium has been long and hard. The omniscient narrator, assuming a reticence that is appropriate both to Anne's stoical resolve to submit to her loss and to the control exercised by Anne over her strong, retentive feelings, tells us that, when the second part of Anne's love-story begins, "time had softened down much, perhaps nearly all of peculiar attachment to [Captain Wentworth]" (P, p.28). During these eight years Anne has been dependent on time alone to ease her suffering and help her cure, and, when chance brings Captain Wentworth back into her life, she again has to depend on time to make him understand his heart. Without her being aware of it, her "elegance of mind and sweetness of character" (P, p.5) win him back, but consciously she can do nothing except wait.

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<sup>1</sup>See p.117 above.

Captain Wentworth spends about two months in Anne's company before he begins to deplore "the pride, the folly, the madness of resentment, which had kept him from trying to regain her when thrown in his way" (P, p.242), and the action of the novel covers seven months. The emphasis and interest in Persuasion lies not so much in the moral development of the protagonists as in the analysis and communication of moments of intense feeling, and the short time span allows for some lengthy and slow-moving passages of reflection and dialogue which convey such emotional experience. It is the only novel in which the action is dated--it begins in the summer of 1814 (P, p.8) and ends in February 1815 (P, p.162)--but indications of time are less frequent and exact than is usual in Jane Austen, and it seems that she did not use a calendar for the chronology of events.<sup>1</sup> From the few definite dates given--the Crofts take possession of Kellynch on 29 September and Mary writes to Anne in Bath on 1 February--and the allusions to seasons, months and days, it is possible to work out a time scheme for the action, as Chapman has done.<sup>2</sup> Unobtrusive references to "a very fine November day" (P, p.83), the Christmas holidays, "the beginning of February" (P, p.162), and mention of specific periods of time such as "so passed the first three weeks" (P, p.47) and "they had now been acquainted a month" (P, p.160) also suggest the passage of time. The inclusion of past events gives the treatment of time a complexity that is not present in the other novels. The short chapter relating the events of the summer of 1806 fits into the narrative smoothly, told as it is from Anne's point

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapman's comments in Persuasion, pp.302-4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

of view, but one of the weaknesses--a fault which Jane Austen would probably have eliminated if she had revised Persuasion--is that the chapter giving Mrs Smith's revelations of Mr Elliot's real character is not closely knit into the action. The tempo of the narration of events follows a pattern that is the opposite from Jane Austen's practice in the other novels: the narrative of the first three quarters moves forward in periods of weeks or months, but after Captain Wentworth's arrival in Bath five chapters (of the total twenty-four) give an almost day-to-day account of the one and a half weeks before the final reunion, and of the day of the proposal almost every hour is accounted for. Thus the pace of the novel is extremely varied, but the consistent point of view, the similarity of styles used by characters and narrator, and the design of the novel help to blend the parts--with the one exception mentioned--into a unified whole, and to ease transitions of all kinds including that from present to past and back again.

Characters' attitudes to time and the past have a thematic significance in Persuasion, and are indicative of values and moral disposition. Those characters who are selfish and have no true affection for people, who cannot make a right use of reason, imagination and memory are portrayed as having a diminished sense of the past. Sir Walter and Elizabeth have little memory of people or loyalty to places; when Anne arrives in Bath, they make only a few faint enquiries about the people and places that she has recently left: "Uppercross excited no interest, Kellynch very little, it was all Bath" (P, p.137). Mr Elliot avoids the responsibilities and claims laid on him by past actions and friendships, and ignores such memories. Barbara Hardy points out that in all her novels Jane

Austen shows an interest "in the controls which we exercise over our nostalgia and regret".<sup>1</sup> Mrs Musgrove is an example of a person who has not sufficient reason to help her use her memory rightly; her selective and sentimental nostalgia forgets the fact that "poor Richard" "had been very little cared for at any time by his family" (P, p.50). That Lady Russell is fundamentally a woman of integrity, sound reason and true feelings is indicated partly by the emphasis on her loyalty to the memory of Anne's mother. Captain Wentworth's resentment and angry pride at being, as he thought, ill-used by Anne blinded him to the validity of her action and to the strength of his feelings. But, as he is obliged to acknowledge, he had been unconsciously and unintentionally constant, and his reason and memory had never during the eight years allowed him to forget Anne.

That Captain Wentworth remembers the past which he tries to obliterate is clear to Anne on many occasions as she watches him, listens to him talking, or speaks to him herself. At Lyme there is a moment when she feels that his words and manner seem not only to recall the past, but to bring it and his love for her back: "'You will stay, I am sure; you will stay and nurse her;' cried he, turning to her and speaking with a glow, and yet a gentleness, which seemed almost restoring the past.-- She coloured deeply; and he recollected himself, and moved away" (P, p.114). Such moments--moments of either painful or exquisite feeling--make up Anne's experience during the seven months of her story, and, because we see events through her eyes, we share the ebb and flow of her confidence. As she listens to

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Hardy, A Reading, p.98.



Captain Wentworth and compares her feelings now to her feelings then,<sup>1</sup> the pain of the contrast is not made worse by a suffering conscience. Jane Austen seems to have agreed with Johnson that "one of the principal topicks of moral instruction is the art of bearing calamities".<sup>2</sup> Her heroine in Persuasion does not smile at grief, nor has she found patience easy, but because she feels that she was right in submitting to Lady Russell, she has not "the bitterness of remorse to add to the asperity of misfortune".<sup>3</sup> By her right use of memory Anne has liberated herself from the future as well as the past; she has solved the problem of conflicting duties to herself and to her ideals, to her family and society, and she lives a useful, positive life. We see in her that the virtuous spirit is the active spirit. Anne is generous, outgoing and selfless, and in the most moving scene that Jane Austen ever wrote Anne's tenderness and magnanimity win her her reward. The deep compassion for the hardships and dangers of a sailor's life that she expresses in her speeches to Captain Harville rises from her own imaginative participation in Captain Wentworth's life at sea; her words on the enduring power of woman's love--spoken in a scene that without the aid of verse and music achieves a poignancy, beauty and pathos which recall the scene in Twelfth Night when Viola, too, speaks movingly about such love--the force of these words springs from her own "warm and faithful feelings", her own "true attachment and constancy" (P, p.235). In all her novels, but

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<sup>1</sup>Kroeber, in Styles in Fictional Structure, p.83, discusses Jane Austen's "representation of reiterated experience".

<sup>2</sup>Johnson, Rambler, No.32.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

in Persuasion most of all, Jane Austen shows how young women, living "at home, quiet, confined" (P, p.232), can in their narrow and restricted setting avoid becoming a passive prey to their feelings and triumphantly find freedom and happiness.

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