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# The Space of the Social

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# The Space of the Social

**Description**

This is chapter two of the Jane Austen book-length project, *Social Jane*. Landscape, houses and estates form the backdrop to much of what happens in the Austen novels, and Austen is entirely familiar with the theories of landscape of her time. She sets about debunking Whig improvers, while decimating the pretensions of the Tory do-nothings she saw around her. Benign and cautious progress seems to be her preferred model of land management. The chapter rehearses the social and architectural theories of her time, shows her use of these theories in her characters and in her work, and tries to liberate her from her reputation as a simple lickspittle of the Tory hierarchy.

**Keywords**

Jane Austen, landscape

**Disciplines**

Sociology

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# Chapter Two

## The Space of the Social: *Landscape, Memory and Nature*

### *Introduction*

Elizabeth, as they drove along, watched for the first appearance of Pemberley Woods with some perturbation; and when at length they turned in at the lodge, her spirits were in a high flutter.

The park was very large, and contained great variety of ground. They entered it in one of its lowest points, and drove for some time through a beautiful wood, stretching over a wide extent.

Elizabeth's mind was too full for conversation, but she saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view. They gradually ascended for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road, with some abruptness, wound. It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; - and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. 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. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something! (*P & P*, page 229)

“Will you tell me how long you have loved him?”

“It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley.” (*P & P*, page 347.)

Landscape and property stand as the backdrop to Austen's account of rural life, and they do not do so innocently. On first reading<sup>1</sup>, they have at least four very obvious meanings. They can, in the form of Northanger Abbey, provide the source of mythical terror and fear based on the Gothic horrors of the period. They can merely represent power, power manifested in the ownership of the means of productive resources, a way of making money through the good use of land, technology and people. The land, in particular, is a continual focus of moral judgment, because it can be wisely used, putting people to work, making the local villages productive and successful, or it can be wasted or neglected, causing both its owner and those who depend on it, to suffer in various ways. These things can also be viewed merely as aesthetic forms, ways of exhibiting taste, concrete manifestations of the ways in which nature must be celebrated and altered to fit the needs of its owners. And then these various forms of property and objects can also be used simply to dominate and impress, to flood the visitor with awe and apprehension, to remind the novice of the history, grandeur

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<sup>1</sup> I use a simple dialectical-theoretical approach here. These first ideas about landscape are followed by some short examples of the use of landscape in the Austen novels. Then I canvass formal theories of landscape in Austen's time. The chapter continues with a thorough review of houses and property in the novels, before the conclusion finally reviews these arguments.

and stature of the family in question. In this view, land and property are mostly memory. It is quite clear that landscapes and the properties they enclose are elements that are loaded with social meaning.

The English landscape is one of the locations in which theories of the social and theories of nature engaged in Jane Austen's era, while at the same time it provided the settings for much of what went on in her novels. As will become clear, the landscape offered those with enough income to fashion new forms of nature, and to enact theories of the natural and social worlds. But it also framed what went on in the houses and drawing rooms of Austen's characters, as well as providing the setting for the work and the livelihood of rural dwellers. Malevolent landowners could raze a village in a month, and put paid to centuries of tradition by deciding that they didn't like the view from their study. Enclosure meant the diminution of common land, and the means of subsistence for the poor.<sup>2</sup> And landscape offered the propertied classes a way of expressing their modes of taste and their forms of domination.

As we shall see in the work that follows, the meanings attached to land and to property attracted a great deal of attention in Austen's time. They were at the centre of the debate about what counted as 'Englishness', who had the right to rule, and what was the essential nature of the English landscape. These theories of nature and of land explain much of what was going on in framing the Austen novels.

In this chapter, I start with these preliminary ideas about the power of landscape, then review the occurrence of landscape in the Austen novels briefly. I continue by canvassing some of the formal theories of landscape, memory and nature that writers of Austen's era proposed, and use these ideas more fully to revisit the Austen novels. In the conclusion, I reexamine both general and formal ideas about landscape to offer a broader context on her writing, and the backdrop of the natural environment.

### *The Question of Landscape and Property in the Austen Novels*

Landscape also offered many opportunities for less dramatic stupidity. Early on in *Mansfield Park*, Maria Bertram marries a park in the form of a Mr. Rushworth, a man of little sense, but large landholdings. In contrast to Darcy, who has both sense and property, Rushworth lacks all capacity for logical thought. But this does not prevent him from theorizing over the future of his land:

Mr. Rushworth was from the first struck with the beauty of Miss Bertram, and being inclined to marry, soon fancied himself in love. He was a heavy young man, with not more than common sense: but as there was nothing disagreeable in his figure or address, the young lady was well pleased with her conquest. Being now in her twenty-first year, Maria Bertram was beginning to think matrimony a duty; and a marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of an income larger than her father's, as well as ensure her a house in town, which was now a prime object, it became, by the same rule of moral obligation, her evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could. (*MP*, 38-39)

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<sup>2</sup> For a brilliant account of the process of enclosure, and the several other influences on the enlargement of estates, and the alienation of land, see Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1973), and especially the discussion in Chapter, 10 'Enclosures, Commons and Communities'.

Mr. Rushworth clearly believes he should have a theory of landscape because he is 'by nature' an improver, yet he needs to be told what to believe. For Mr. Rushworth, courtship and landscape are closely interwoven:

... Mr. Rushworth, ... was now making his appearance at Mansfield for the first time ... He had been visiting a friend in a neighbouring county, and that friend having recently had his grounds laid out by an improver, Mr. Rushworth was returned with his head full of the subject, and very eager to be improving his own place in the same way; and though not saying much to the purpose, could talk of nothing else. The subject had been already handled in the drawing-room; it was revived in the dining-parlour. Miss Bertram's attention and opinion was evidently his chief aim; and though her deportment showed rather conscious superiority than any solicitude to oblige him, the mention of Sotherton Court, and the ideas attached to it, gave her a feeling of complacency, which prevented her from being very ungracious.

"I wish you could see Compton," said he; "it is the most complete thing! I never saw a place so altered in my life. I told Smith I did not know where I was. The approach, now, is one of the finest things in the country. You see the house in the most surprising manner. I declare, when I got back to Sotherton yesterday, it looked like a prison - quite a dismal old prison."

"Oh! for shame!" cried Mrs. Norris. "A prison indeed? Sotherton Court is the noblest old place in the world."

"It wants improvement, ma'am, beyond any thing. I never saw a place that wanted so much improvement in my life; and it is so forlorn that I do not know what can be done with it."

"No wonder that Mr. Rushworth should think so at present," said Mrs. Grant to Mrs. Norris, with a smile; "but depend upon it, Sotherton will have *every* improvement in time which his heart can desire."

"I must try to do something with it," said Mr. Rushworth, "but I do not know what. I hope I shall have some good friend to help me." (MP, 52-53)

When Mr. Rushworth is not being cuckolded, he is plotting the reshaping of his land. He *would* be a gentleman if he could, yet he reasons, if reason is possible for him, that the planning of a major landscape, with the implicit need for a theory of nature, and an account of 'man's relation to nature', is probably beyond him. He cannot close the circle. He has the need, but not the capacity to fill the need. He hears Henry Crawford, far too bright, and far too theoretical, waxing on at length about everything, including landscape, but he will not take him seriously, because he loathes his capacity for easy charm, and wishes he would go away.

In contrast, while Henry Crawford owns no land locally, he has all the theory of landscape he needs. Having jumped over the fence with Mr. Rushworth's fiancée in the early part of the novel, thus freeing her literally from Mr. Rushworth's grasp,<sup>3</sup> he has transgressed Mr.

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<sup>3</sup> Remember that, in an early scene, Mr. Rushworth, Mr. Crawford, Fanny Price and Maria Bertram go for a walk at Sotherton (*Mansfield Park*, chapter nine), but come up against a locked gate. Rushworth rushes back to the house for a key. While he is gone, Crawford proposes to Maria that they slide through an opening in the wall together, and make for open country. The symbolism is obvious. She acquiesces, thus escaping both the physical limits of property, and the attentions of her bumbling suitor.

Rushworth's ability to cope. This brief transgression is to be followed by more serious inroads into Mr. Rushworth's sense of property. As Rushworth expresses it to Fanny Price in an exasperated tone:

"Pray, Miss Price, are you such a great admirer of this Mr. Crawford as some people are? For my part, I can see nothing in him."

"I do not think him at all handsome."

"Handsome! Nobody can call such an undersized man handsome. He is not five foot nine. I should not wonder if he was not more than five foot eight. I think he is an ill-looking fellow. In my opinion, these Crawfords are no addition at all. We did very well without them." (MP, 103)

Henry Crawford is too much for Mr. Rushworth. In providing unsought advice to Edward, who is about to assume control of a local parsonage, Crawford lays out his theory of landscape:

"... You talk of giving it (the parsonage) the air of a gentleman's residence. *That* will be done, by the removal of the farm-yard, for independent of that terrible nuisance, I never saw a house of the kind which had in itself so much of the air of a gentleman's residence, so much the look of a something beyond a mere Parsonage House, above the expenditure of a few hundred a year ... it is a solid walled, roomy, mansion-like looking house, such as one might suppose a respectable old country family had lived in from generation to generation, through two centuries at least, and were now spending from two to three thousand a year in ... The air of a gentleman's residence, therefore, you cannot but give it, if you do any thing ... you may raise it into a *place*. From being the mere gentleman's residence, it becomes, by judicious improvement, the residence of a man of education, taste, modern manners, good connections. All this may be stamped on it; and that house receive such an air as to make its owner be set down as the great land-holder of the parish, by every creature travelling the road... (MP, 243-244)

A theory of property and of landscape allow Henry Crawford to see possibilities, and to chart a path in the hierarchy of ownership. While Mr. Rushworth will probably employ Repton<sup>4</sup> to be his theorist and his improver, he will never understand what is at stake. Edward is uninterested in Crawford's tiresome schemes for self-aggrandisement. But Crawford sees the field of property for what it is; a social game of rules, in which land becomes a manifestation of personal virtue and position, and in which houses can be turned into mansions, and mansions into *Places*, to be admired, along with their owners, as touchstones of good taste and privilege.

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<sup>4</sup> Humphry Repton was a celebrated landscape designer of Austen's period. He is routinely acknowledged as the primary successor to Capability Brown, the 'father' of English landscape gardening. Brown (1716-1783) designed 170 English gardens, mostly around large country houses. Among them are Blenheim Palace, Warwick Castle and Milton Abbey. His style was 'natural', and it attempted to reflect the best in nature, and to make the best-established structures look as if the hand of intervention was entirely absent. This style replaced the formal gardens of the past. Repton (1752-1818) often worked on gardens that Brown had already designed. He focused on establishing 'vistas' so that local landmarks, such as churches and towers, could be more clearly seen. His purpose was to enhance the prestige of estates by developing long driveways, and by building lodges at the entrance to parks. He designed many more landscapes than he actually created himself, often leaving the transformative work itself to the property owners. His secret was that he often painted water-colours and drew the proposed changes to the property, so that owners could more easily imagine the transformations that were to occur. He also coined the term 'landscape gardener'.

This extended account of property and landscape in *Mansfield Park* is suggestive of the wider role that these elements play throughout Austen's writings, and we will rehearse these themes more fully in the pages to come. But to foreshadow this account, I want to set the scene by noticing the *variety* of uses that Austen makes of land, judgment and hierarchy. In *Northanger Abbey* as we have seen in Chapter One, property plays a powerful psychological role in fashioning understandings of patriarchy, while at the same time offering a vehicle for the satirization of the Gothic novel. In *Pride and Prejudice*, it continually invades our sense of what is right and proper about property, and how it might be used as an instrument of domination. Consider, for example, these delicious comments from Lady Catherine de Berg, as she visits Elizabeth Bennet with the purpose of demolishing her claims to her nephew, the propertied Mr. Darcy:

"You have a very small park here," returned lady Catherine after a short silence."

"It is nothing compared to Rosings, my lady, I dare say ; but I assure you it is much larger than Sir William Lucas's." (*P & P*, 352)

The size of the park is enough to place the Bennets at a disadvantage, and what follows is the intense conversation between Elizabeth and her ladyship about the social disparity between the two families, and therefore the logical impossibility of a marriage between Elizabeth and Darcy.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, the loss of property is associated with loss of status, and the need to recover. The novel opens with the disenfranchisement of the four Dashwood women, and at the heart of this demotion is the loss of property and position :

The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of their property, where, for many generations, they had lived in so respectable a manner, as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance. (*S & S*, 3)

The Dashwood women live in the house of their father, but the father has been married twice, and a son from the first marriage is to inherit. This son already has money, and has married a woman of property. As Austen recounts, the sisters and his step-mother have need of the house, whereas he does not. On the death of the older relatives, John Dashwood promises to help his female relatives. But little comes of it, and the Dashwood women must leave Norland Park. The haste with which Mrs. Dashwood's daughter-in-law takes over the property forms the early shape of the novel.

What is to become of them, of course, is much tied up with where they are to live, and in what fashion. In the end, a relative writes with an offer of a respectable cottage:

He earnestly pressed her, after giving her the particulars of the house and garden, to come with her daughters to Barton Park, the place of his own residence., from whence she might judge, herself, whether Barton Cottage, for the houses were in the same parish, could, by any alteration, be made comfortable to her ... (*S&S*, 23)

As a house, Barton Cottage, though small, was comfortable and compact ; but as a cottage it was defective, for the building was regular, the roof was

tilled, the window shutters were not painted green, nor were the walls covered by honeysuckles ... In comparison to Norland, it was poor and small indeed ! but the tears which recollection called forth as they entered the house were soon dried away ...

The situation of the house was good. High hills rose immediately behind, and at no great distance on each side ; some of which were open downs, the others cultivated and woody ... With the size and furniture of the house Mrs. Dashwood was upon the whole well satisfied... (*Se&S*, 28-29)

Re-established in modest circumstances, and reduced from a large body of servants to three, the Dashwoods nonetheless establish a bridgehead in polite society, and without any self-conscious guile or strategy, start to emerge from their fall, through good connections, and a sense of what is right and proper.

In *Persuasion*, the comparison and analysis of three houses provides much of the background for what happens.. The first, of course, is Kellynche-hall, whose loss is central to the dynamic of the book. As one of many caricatures in the Austen oeuvre, Sir Charles Elliot is clearly incapable of running his estate, and must leave in fear of becoming bankrupt. In the wake of his failure, most of servants will be dismissed, and the village will suffer. His only concern, of course, is with his own loss of status, because without his land, he is hardly worthy of his baronetcy:

Vanity was the beginning and end of Sir Walter's Elliot's character ; vanity of person and of situation. He had been remarkably handsome in his youth ; and at fifty-four, was still a very fine man. Few women could think more of their personal appearance than he did ; nor could the valet of any new made lord be more delighted with the place he held on society. He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy ; and the Sir Walter Elliot, who united these two gifts, was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion. (*P*, 5)

The loss of Kellynche-hall is, in a fundamental sense, the loss of his baronetcy, since his position as a major land-holder makes him responsible for many livelihoods. But faced with the choice between self, and his responsibilities beyond the self, the choice is readily made, and the Baronet and his entourage happily leave for Bath, and the more constant enjoyment of their own company.

Uppercross is where the Musgroves live, and where Anne is to spend much of her time with the loss of the family home:

Uppercross was a moderately-sized village, which a few years back had been completely in the old English style ; containing only two houses superior in appearance to those of the yeoman and the labourers – the mansion of the 'squire, with its high walls, great gates, and old trees, substantial and unmodernized – and the compact, tight parsonage, enclosed in its own neat garden, with a vine and a pear-tree trained round its casements ; but upon the marriage of the young 'squire, it had received the improvement of a farm-house elevated into a cottage for his residence ; and Uppercross Cottage, with its viranda, French windows, and other prettinesses, was quite as likely to catch the traveler's eye as the more consistent and considerable aspect and premises of the Great House, about a quarter of a mile further on. (*P*, 36)



Anne's sister Mary lives in the Uppercross Cottage with the young squire Charles Musgrove, while the older Musgroves remain in the Great House. The comparisons that Mary make between her station in life, and the life they might have in the future in the Great House are routine and inevitable, as common and everyday as discussion of the weather.

Ms. Woodhouse in *Emma* is that rare Austen woman who has her own property, and has no need of matrimony. She and her father own Hartfield, a major property in the area. The life of Highbury focuses on several key locations:

Highbury, the large and populous village almost amounting to a town, to which Hartfield, in spite of its separate lawns and shrubberies and name, did really belong, afforded her no equals. (*Emma*, 7)

Captain Weston, who marries Emma's long-time companion, manages, by hard work and careful planning, to secure a small estate, Randalls, which abuts on Highbury. Donwell Abbey, the only estate that actually seems to work, and to produce food and produce in abundance, is owned by the famous Mr. Knightley, of course. Among these, and a few more besides, was established the 'first circle', in which matters of importance in the village were routinely reviewed. In a discussion about Mr. Elton, newly arrived as the parson, Austen provides more detail on the Hartfield estate:

He (Mr. Elton) must know that the Woodhouses had been settled for several generations at Hartfield, the younger branch of a very ancient family – and that the Eltons were nobody. The landed property of Hartfield certainly was inconsiderable, being but a sort of a notch in the Donwell Abbey estate, to which all the rest of Highbury belonged ; but their fortune, from other sources, was such as to make them scarcely secondary to Donwell Abbey itself in every other kind of consequence ; and the Woodhouses had long held a high place in the consideration of the neighbourhood ... (*Emma*, 136)

Their landed status, and the form of property they own thus sets them apart from the rankings that fall below them, such as working farmers, as Emma outlines clearly to Harriet Smith, who is considering an alliance with Mr. Martin, an exemplary yeoman farmer:

"That may be, and I may have seen him fifty times, but without having any idea of his name. A young farmer, whether on horseback or on foot, is the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity. The yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower, and a creditable appearance might interest me; I might hope to be useful to their families in some way or other. But a farmer can need none of my help, and is therefore in one sense as much above my notice as in every other he is below it." (*Emma*, 29)

Those who have wealth but no land in the country must buy it, or, at a minimum, buy themselves a sufficiently large house and surrounding gardens to allow them to set out their social rank in material form for all to see. It is not difficult to see how property, the design of property and land, its profitability or otherwise, and the medium it affords for the display of wealth and stature, enter into Austen's account at many key points. And the clear territory of moral and social judgement that the ownership of land and estates opens up is

equally unmistakable. The full understanding of this process depends to a large extent on theories of property and landscape that were current at the time. This is the subject to which we now turn.

### *Theories of Land and of Nature.*<sup>5</sup>

In this section, I want to explore theories of nature, landscape and power that were widely discussed in Austen's time, so we can more fully understand the context in which she wrote about these great houses and their land.

#### *The Tory (and the Whig) View of Landscape.*

As Kay Dian Kriz has it, Nigel Everitt's *The Tory View of Landscape*<sup>6</sup> provides a reactionary account of Toryism as 'starkly different from the ideology of free enterprise that underpins the major political parties in Britain today'.<sup>7</sup> Kriz argues that Everitt is at pains to distance the 18<sup>th</sup> century view of Toryism from the emerging bourgeois class of economic self-interest that was coming into full force in Austen's time, and about which we have had much to say in other chapters:

... there was a discourse on landscape – viewed, imaged, and modified by agriculture and gardening – that set itself in opposition to a vision of English society as an assemblage of individuals defined primarily by their economic relationships, and governed by the principles of political economy. Those espousing this “Tory” opposition to commercial ideology held a variety of political allegiances but were generally united by their belief in the values, traditions, practices, and institutions symbolized by the ideal of the benevolent landowner. (Kriz, 487)

To presage a later argument in this chapter, it is clear that Jane Austen's sympathies lay closely with those who took their stewardship of the land seriously. Austen's account, from the housekeeper's tale at Pemberley, to the report we receive in *Emma* of Mr. Knightley's good works, makes it clear that those who own land have a clear moral obligation to protect and secure the interests of those who live and work on that land. Those who cannot are either foolish, as the case of Sir Walter Elliott, or absurd, as with Mr. Rushworth's. Indeed, it is Rushworth who is portrayed as a character worthy of ridicule, as he seeks to 'improve' his property, and make it more useful and interesting to the world of 'commerce' and of taste.

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<sup>5</sup> Some of the major writers in this area, as well as Schama, Barrett and Everett are David Solkin (*Richard Wilson: The Landscape of Reaction*, London, Tate Gallery 1982); Ann Bermingham (*Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1760-1860* University of California Press, 1986); Andrew Hemingway (*Romantic Landscape: the Norwich School of Painters*, with Anne Lyles and David Blayney Brown, Tate Gallery Publishing Limited. Michael Rosenthal; *The Art of Thomas Gainsborough*, (Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for the Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1999); Stephen Daniels (*Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993) I follow Kay Dian Kriz in forming this list.

<sup>6</sup> *The Tory View of Landscape*, New Haven, Yale University Press, for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 1994, reviewed by Kay Dian Kriz, in *American Historical Review*, April, 1996, pages 487-488.

<sup>7</sup> Kriz, page 487.

Everett contrasts the emerging market-led landowners with those endowed with long memories of the land. The use of the term ‘Tory’ in this context provides us with another example of the naivety of using contemporary meanings to analyse the past. But from Everett’s catholic use of the term, we are given to understand that in Austen’s time, the phrase referred to a ‘point of view opposed to narrowly commercial conception of life and associated with a romantic sensibility to the ideas of continuity and tradition felt to be embodied in certain kinds of English landscape.’ (Everett, 1) There is a sense in which memory, an understanding of certain things as unchanging and outside of history, is at the centre of this vision. It is a memory of stillness, when men and women behaved better, and established, through their property and their houses, a way of life that ensured those around them were well treated, a sort of eternal paternalism. It is probably a world that never existed in any real sense, but this view had enormous importance, nonetheless. It is a memory of the history of the future. People imagined it to be part of their past, but in fact it was what they aimed for in the years to come.

It was a view that was widely disputed.<sup>8</sup> There were many who poured scorn on the notion that the landscape had ever housed benevolence, and made the claim instead that living in poverty feels much the same in a rural landscape, however picturesque, as it does in urban squalor. From the Tory point of view, however, the emphasis was on values and aesthetics, rather than the rough and tumble of economic life.<sup>9</sup> In this view, if supply and demand rule societies, moral chaos will result. The rich will dominate with ruthlessness, the poor will become bitter and remain uneducated. One might also add that political resentment cannot be far behind.<sup>10</sup> But at the heart of the Tory view was that an abandonment of the old social relations of the countryside meant also the dissolution of a system of beliefs and values that were fundamental to the English way of life. The very notion of Englishness was up for grabs in this struggle. Much more was at stake than money.

Everett’s story then traverses various attempts at improvement in the eighteenth century, in which theories of market economies took over from traditional theories of economic benevolence. The struggle was, in one sense, always an attempt to construct a solid foundation of order on a very fluid economic environment. Order, religion, social hierarchy – these principles were asserted against what was seen as the callousness of economic calculation. If Everett has a sympathy, it is to be more in tune with Toryism than with the new culture of transparent acquisition that was emerging at this time, both in the country and in the city. Everett points out most usefully, however, that no single ideology governed these debates, but rather a series of attitudes and ideological camps existed. Some landowners were indeed benevolent, and others used the market simply to profit at the expense of anything that stood in their way. There was no single, uncomplicated theory of the ruling class. As Everett has it, a code of ‘civil humanism’ was replaced slowly to an ideology of self-interest, and an increasing privatization of public life.<sup>11</sup> ‘Benevolence .. gave way to an unvarnished insistence on market-driven relations.’ (Everett, 8)

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<sup>8</sup> Everett, pages 2-3.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit, page 6.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit, page 7.

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit, page 8. The reference is to the work of John Barrell.

Before we leave this section, we must at least touch on the contrary view of landscape of this era, a set of ideas that Everett calls ‘The Whig Idea of Landscape.’<sup>12</sup> Whig houses exemplified the high forms of development, according to Adam Smith, who argued that the ‘desire to be seen’ constituted the highest level of development.<sup>13</sup> Crucial to the design of the great Whig houses and their landscapes was the strong emphasis on separation – no taint of commerce, production, work or trade should be seen, contra the Tory view. The house is separated from the village on which it depends.<sup>14</sup> Taste, private property and the dominance of the landscape were key themes at work. As the party of ‘Improvers’, the Whigs were routinely satirized in Austen’s novels, though rarely named:

The principal theoreticians ... were quite deliberate ... in equating taste with the heightened display of property and the appropriation of nature to personal use. ... The love of possession is ‘deeply placed in every man’s breast’ noted William Marshall, and ‘places should bow to the gratification of their owners.’ (Everett, 39)

Private property must be distinguished from the rustic and ill-informed public land. Repton himself spoke of the need for ‘marks of grandeur’ spread across the private landscape.<sup>15</sup> The removal of ‘practical buildings, barns, stables and the like were typical of this tendency, and they are exemplified in Austen’s writing by the theories of Henry Crawford and Mr. Rushworth. ‘Fake farms’ could be constructed if this made the landscape look more pleasing, but the fundamental aim was the look.<sup>16</sup> At the heart of this set of improvements was to find the ideal in nature, and to obscure the quotidian life of the country. Rank must win out. The great house must dominate, and it follows logically then that the ‘great people’ in it should equally ‘reign’ as a matter of natural order. Liberals looked to the traditions of paintings, aesthetics and the highest forms of civilization as their justification. ‘Man’ was seeing beyond the ordinary towards the perfect in these works.

Nicholas Dall’s painting of Shugborough  
here. (Everett, p.45)

If such improvements were to occur, then villages might need to be moved.<sup>17</sup> Nature was there to be improved; it would not do as it was. It was not natural enough. Nature was becoming more natural all the time, but at the same time more regulated.<sup>18</sup> Gardens and landscapes had ethics and morality built into them. ‘Striving, industry and application’ might be manifested in them.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Chapter Two, page 38ff. The chapter is *The Whig Idea of Landscape and its Critics*. This section rests heavily on this work. The Whigs formed the constitutional opposition to Toryism. They were for improvement, and while they started as supporters of constitutional monarchy, they became wedded to the new industrial order and social progress. ‘Improvement’ was their motto.

<sup>13</sup> Everett, 38.

<sup>14</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Everett, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Op. cit., 40. William Marshall proposed artificial farms to improve the landscape.

<sup>17</sup> Everett gives examples of such movements on page 41 of this chapter. As an example, he comments: ‘The creation of the gardens at Stowe, began after 1710 ... and dedicated in part to the ‘liberty of Great Britain’, involved the almost complete destruction of three villages.’ (op. cit, page 41)

<sup>18</sup> Everett, 47.

<sup>19</sup> Everett, page 53ff.

But the critics were equally formidable in their views.<sup>20</sup> The removal of towns and villages could not go unnoticed. Local landowners and residents resisted such moves with vehemence, and these ‘social demolitions’ frequently stretched over generations. But the rights of property normally prevailed.<sup>21</sup> Community could be irrevocably damaged by such strategies, a situation Austen would not support. There were those who sought to stop these changes, and these tendencies were supported in times of economic hardship in the country, such as the 1760s. The ancient sense of community was clearly at odds with the new improving spirit. The concentration of wealth in great parks meant the impoverishment of others. Coupled with the developing opposition to the slave trade,<sup>22</sup> these anti-improvements views underscored the role of international trade in the further concentration of wealth. Slavery was a central aspect of the new mercantilism, and was widely abhorred by those who prided themselves on attachment to the highest levels of moral and religious thinking.<sup>23</sup> But:

True ‘English minds and manners’ are associated with the gentle, ancient, long-cultivated landscape ... It is a landscape of cultivated gentry, ancient churches, country houses standing discreetly amid ancient trees, winding lanes, and workmen who seem to be industrious, modest, neat and quiet.  
(Everett, 71)

This is very much a Tory view, of course, and sets itself quite clearly against the improving tendency of the time. Yet it also, clearly enough, also sets itself against the common purpose, by suggesting that hierarchy, social order and inequality have their origins in the mists of time, and are therefore entirely natural and unquestionable. They make up the fabric of ancient English society.

Theories of benevolence and of the free market were therefore engaged in a vigorous dialectical exchange during this period. Whether the two could be brought together in a sort of ‘benevolent improvement’ was the main issue at stake.<sup>24</sup> Improvement could mean the renovation of a village. Local people could be cared for. The estate could become a machine for wealth.<sup>25</sup> Benevolence creates and sustains community, while allowing property to dominate unchallenged, or indeed, because of, the benevolent actions of those with wealth. Against this view, the Whig theory of landscape may be said to be largely concerned with self-interest, and with the dignity and taste of those with the best education, people stuffed with civilization. In an ideal version of how these two interests might merge in benevolent improvement, Everett provides the following example:

When Joseph Hanway described a model process of improvement in the 1770s he chose ... to embody his values in an ideal baronet, one Sir George Friendly ... the general run of improvement is mere fashion, expense, and greed – in large part an insult to the tenants and labourers of an estate, who are its real improvers, but see the wealth they generate

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<sup>20</sup> Everett, page 50

<sup>21</sup> Op.cit., 59.

<sup>22</sup> A theme touched upon in *Mansfield Park*, and more directly confronted in Patricia Rozema’s highly imaginative film of the same name.

<sup>23</sup> Everett, 66.

<sup>24</sup> This is the title of one of Everett’s sections, page 82.

<sup>25</sup> Everett cites Adam Smith’s phrase ‘a machine of happiness’ in describing Sir Charles Grandison’s ‘*Grandison Hall*’, page 83.

spent in ways that tend to alienate them from their familiar landscapes, often by the destruction of cottages. Sir George, however, plants and improves with the 'friendly view' of delighting his neighbours and dependents and securing their comforts. His charity 'has no bounds' as he repairs and beautifies the parish church and builds a village of 'durable and commodious cottages' with gardens 'smiling in verdure'. He seeks always to combine the improvement of the fertility of his farms with his pleasure in 'beautifying the face of the country'. His mansion stands upon an 'eminence' from which he can see the necessities of the poor. He looks down on parade and the 'noise and pride of trade and opulency' which leads men from the country. He regards his tenants and day labourers as his best friends. (James Hanway, *Virtue in Humble Life* (1774) volume 1, pp. xxviii 54-7, 61, cited in Everett, pages 85-86)

Everett seeks to offer complexity in contrast to the somewhat reductionist arguments concerning property and landscape that have been made about the Georgian era, and this is a valuable contribution. There were tensions and ambivalences among landed interests at this time. And it is in this crucible of varying social attitudes about land and property that Jane Austen wrote her books about families who lived in these settings.

### *Sharma on Landscape and Enclosure*

The English historian Simon Schama has written extensively on the importance of landscape in explaining British history.<sup>26</sup> Schama comments:

When Britain was losing an empire it was finding itself. As redcoats were facing angry crowds and hostile militiamen in Massachusetts, Thomas Pennant, a Flintshire gentleman and naturalist, set off on his travels in rough Albion in search of that almost extinct species: the authentic Briton. (Schama, 2002, 10)

Thomas Pennant, he tells us, was one of a group of Englishmen who were out to find the 'real Britain', both 'human and topographical'. All this was occurring in Jane Austen's era, of course. This beginning of the loss of empire, and the exploration towards self-discovery were simultaneous events in the world in which Jane Austen wrote. Just as in our era Rick Steves roams the globe to find the authentic experience we have all missed, thereby 'contaminating', and making less authentic the very places he thinks he has discovered, so too did British internal explorers of the 1700s seek out the real and enduring character of the nation in its landscapes and its people. Pennant published *A Tour of Scotland* in 1772, and it had gone to five editions by 1790. At the same time, Thomas West was '... (steering) tourists to a succession of visual stations, perfect for drinking in the British sublime.'<sup>27</sup>

In order to understand nature, and to transcend the mundane, the British aristocracy of the 1700s traveled overseas, and particularly to Italy, on the familiar Grand Tours, there to

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<sup>26</sup> Simon Schama, *A History of Britain, Volume III. The Fate of Empire, 1776-2000*, Miramax Books, Hyperion, 2002, New York, New York.

<sup>27</sup> This is a quote from Schama, page 12. The Pennant reference is to *A Tour of Scotland, and Voyage to the Hebrides*, B. White, 1772. Thomas West wrote *A Guide to the Lakes, in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire*, Richardson and Urquhart, 1780. It is interesting to note that to find the 'real England', one had to travel to the outer edges of its boundaries, and often into Scotland, where the world remained, in some constructed sense, 'untouched'.

stand in awe in front of depictions of ‘nature’ as a transcendent force, inspiring wonder and grace in those who witnessed it:

The message that both Pennant and West had to deliver was simple, but revolutionary: come home. The British had wandered too much, too promiscuously, too greedily, from Mysore to Naples. In forcing their native scenery to resemble Italy, tricked out with temples and statues and God knows what – or just as bad, engineering it to resemble foreign paintings, so that they could stroll from the picture gallery to the picnic and not notice the difference – they had somehow lost touch with what made Britain Britain: its own unprettified landscape. By some miracle, it had remained unspoiled in the remoter places of the islands, places thought too far, too ugly and too rude for polite excursions. (Schama, 2002, 12-13)

A familiar association of continental ideas with corruption, decay and dissolution now could be discerned. The British had been corrupted by such ideas, but also by their own national preoccupations - too much commerce, too much city fashion, too much ‘progress’.<sup>28</sup> The solution was ‘nature’, in its roughest and most simple guise, free from the pretense of art, culture and artifact. This ‘pure’ nature came in the form of ‘horror’<sup>29</sup>, a ‘spa for the sensations’.<sup>30</sup> Only in these fresh, clean, unspoiled regions of the country could Britons recover themselves, spiritually and morally. And this would mean giving up learning, ‘civilization’ and returning instead to natural wonders:

Of course, the fashionable landscaped park had encouraged the estate-owner and his family to take a stroll along the rambling path, beside a serpentine pond or towards an Italianate pavilion, with the prospect of arriving at a poetic meditation, courtesy of Horace, Ovid or Pope. But the new walking<sup>31</sup> was not just physically strenuous but morally, even politically, self-conscious. Picking up a stick and exiting the park, was a statement. (Schama, 2002, 16)

This new ‘natural’ sensibility that was developing in this time was influenced by the thinking of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>32</sup> Walking for Rousseau had a point. If the progress of society was from nature to culture, then it had been a complete disaster:<sup>33</sup>

Nature decreed equality; culture manufactured inequality. So liberty and happiness consisted not in replacing nature by culture, but in precisely the reverse. Towns, fashion, commerce and wit, were a web of vicious hypocrites and predators. Towns enslaved; the countryside – provided it too had not been infected with urban ills - liberated. Towns contaminated and sickened their inhabitants; the country cleansed and invigorated them. Rather than education assuming its mission to be the taming of children’s natural instincts within the pen of cultivated arts and manners, it ought to do precisely the opposite – preserving, for as long as possible, the

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<sup>28</sup> Schama, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Op. cit. Nature was violent and full of energy, as in the rushing torrent of a stream. Yet this ‘horrid fury’ was also a cleansing force. These experiences of nature provided ‘a spa for the sensations.

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Pennant and West proposed ‘walking tours’ of the nation to discover its beauties and its lessons.

<sup>32</sup> His ‘*Confessions*’ is cited by Schama on page 17, op. cit. (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau; with the reveries of the Solitary Walker*, two volumes, 1782, J. Bews)

<sup>33</sup> Schama, page 18.

innocence, the artlessness, frankness and simplicity of those instincts. No books, then, before 12 at least, instead, romps in the fields, stories beneath trees, and lots of nature walks. (Schama, 2002, 18)

Schama is at pains to remind us that the bucolic paradise of the wealthy man's park bore little relationship to the actual lives of the vast majority of ordinary people who lived in the country. Thomas Bewick<sup>34</sup> was distinctly practical in his outlook. When he went to the country, he saw not only birds, animals and landscapes, as Pennant and West had before him, but also the living humanity all around him. He saw people starving. He saw the mass clearance of crofters.<sup>35</sup> He saw sheep replace people in the landscape because it was more profitable to run sheep than to house people.<sup>36</sup>

Philip Thicknesse wrote of starvation in his *Four Persons Starved to Death, at Datchworth*<sup>37</sup>. He wrote of things that could not happen in an idyllic Eden, and that gave lie to the argument that innocence resided in the countryside. There was another story to tell beyond the bounds of the manorial landscape. If the country was where 'Britishness' and the 'English Sensibility' resided, then it had its complications.

There were also enclosures:

Enclosures – taking the common land, or what was left of the open fields, previously worked cooperatively or in divided strips – were a necessary condition of realizing the full productivity of farmland ... although the process admittedly speeded up in the 1760s, enclosures had been going on for centuries. Moreover, the tool employed to launch the new wave of enclosures, the private act of parliament, required the consent of four-fifths of landowners in any parish.

But not, the critics, pointed out, with the consent of, or even consultation with the hundreds of thousands of smallholders and copyholders who had clung to little lots and patches of land on which they could eke out a living so long as they also had access to common grazing land for their animals. Now they were reduced to wage labourers. (Schama, 35)

As Schama tells us,<sup>38</sup> a process that was termed 'engrossment' was even more important in shaping the wider rural landscape. This was the mechanism by which large numbers of small tenants were replaced by a few in the name of efficiency and higher crop yields. This was a result of new money coming into previously undisturbed rural communities, thus increasing the price of rents, and concentrating land ownership. Justifiers claimed that this was the only way that the teeming populations of the cities could be fed.<sup>39</sup> This may well have been necessary, but it did alter the communal way of life, a way of life that had existed in rural memory for generations, for ever. Schama comments:

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<sup>34</sup> Schama, page 29.

<sup>35</sup> Schama, page 33.

<sup>36</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Cited in Schama, page 33. *Four Persons Starved to Death, at Datchworth*, attributed to Philip Thicknesse, London : Printed (for the benefit of the surviving child) for W. Brown and R. Davis, 1769.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>39</sup> I am paraphrasing Schama, here, especially from page 36.



In one of the great bestsellers of the 1760s (six editions in 10 years), Frances Brookes *The History of Lady Julia Manville*, a 'Lord T' is upbraided for:

pursuing a plan which has drawn him the curse of thousands, and made his estate a scene of desolation: his farms are in the hands of a few men, to whom the sons of the old tenants are either forced to be servants, or to leave the country to get their break elsewhere. The village, large and once populous, is reduced to about eight families; a dreary silence reigns over their deserted fields; the farm houses, once the seat of cheerful smiling industry, now useless, are falling in ruins around him; his tenants are merchants and engrossers, proud, lazy, luxurious, insolent, and spurning the hand which feed them. (Cited in Schama, 36)

This was not simply the reaction of liberal do-gooders. It was, inevitably, the result of new forms of capital entering the rural productive system. As 'New Capitalism' penetrated more deeply into the rural landscape, shifts in the social relations of villages were inevitable. But more was changing than households, landscapes and work habits. The very nature of 'English Sensibility' was placed in question by these shifts. If the search was on for the 'authentic' English and British way of life, a still point in the tumult of history, then these new changes unsettle conservatives and liberals alike. Among the literary figures who lamented these changes were William Goldsmith, who wrote:

... the man of wealth and pride  
Takes up a space that many poor supplied;  
Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,  
Space for his horses, equipage and hounds;  
The robe that wraps his limbs in silken sloth  
Has robbed the neighbouring fields of half their growth.<sup>40</sup>

Such widely-read tracts influenced the socially concerned and Tory moralists alike. What was at stake was a world imagined that had never existed, certainly, but rather a memory, an imagined world that played a significant role in this reshaping of the social consciousness of the time.

### *James Barrell and the Politics of Landscape*

There is a very simple but important argument to be made about the relationship between landscape, property and politics in England's 18<sup>th</sup> century. Only those who owned land could vote. But as Barrell usefully points out, there is a secondary form of analysis that is also at work in this equation, and it is equally as important. He interrogates the thinking of Jane Austen's time to work out 'how a correct taste ... especially for landscape and landscape art, was used as a means of legitimating political authority'.<sup>41</sup> His thesis is that:

If we interrogate writers from the polite culture of this period on the question of what legitimates this claim, one answer we repeatedly discover, though it may take very different forms, is that political authority is rightly exercised by those capable of thinking in general terms; which

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<sup>40</sup> The poem is cited in Schama, page 39.

<sup>41</sup> James Barrell, The public prospect and the private view: the politics of taste in eighteenth century Britain, in *Reading Landscape: Country-City-Capital*, edited by Simon Pugh, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1990, pages 19-40.

usually means those capable of producing abstract ideas – decomplex ideas – out of the raw data of experience. The inability to do this was usually represented as in part the result of a lack of education, a lack which characterized women and the vulgar ... (Barrell, 19)

This ‘authority’ was a complex matter, and required a series of conditions to be met if one were to acquire it. For one thing, mere matters of making a living must be beneath one, because to have an occupation meant inevitably that one’s interests would be tied up with that occupation.<sup>42</sup> A broader understanding of the wide concerns of humanity would therefore be impossible. Then, following a ‘mechanical’ art would create a further narrowing of thought. And, finally, to cap it off, the pursuit of ‘things’, of material objects, would prevent that abstract reasoning that the ‘world beyond things’ required. It is only the ‘man’ of property who can achieve the independence necessary to rise to the necessary level of thinking.<sup>43</sup> Barrell comments:

The man of independent means, on the other hand, who does not labour to increase them, will be released from private interest and from the occlusions of a narrow and partial experience of the world as *material*. He will be able to grasp the public interest, and so will be fit to participate in government. (Barrett, 20, italics in the original)

This ‘wider view’ theory of politics is then easily translated into landscape and landscape painting. Who are those individuals who ‘take the broader view’, and who can put the cares and concerns of everyday life behind them? Of course, the answer is the landed gentry, who have servants to cook, clean and house them, and labourers to turn the soil and a profit on their behalf. In a parallel fashion, landscape paintings can be distinguished into at least two categories, and Barrell claims, these two kinds of paintings were created for the two ‘ways of seeing’, and thus two classes of people.<sup>44</sup> There are realist depictions, which present nature ‘as it actually is’, with all its faults, errors and uncertainties, while the idealist tradition forms a vision of nature which is transcendent, which clears the terrain of awkwardnesses, and presents it instead as a pure and uplifting landscape.

These two visions of nature and of landscape are connected also to matters of perspective. Using an extract from Coleridge’s writing, Barrell comments that viewpoints, in landscape, paintings and in everyday life, may be distinguished into the views ‘from which a vast and panoramic prospect is visible, and low, sunken situations from which only the nearest objects are visible...’<sup>45</sup>. In a similar vein, therefore, we now see the connection between politics, occupation and perspective are close:

... Coleridge compares the low and humble position of his cottage with the view available by climbing from the low dell up the stony mount nearby: ‘the whole World’, he writes, ‘seem’d imag’d’ in the ‘vast circumference’ of the horizon: the images in that extensive prospect seem representative and substantial, so that the prospect becomes a microcosm (Barrell, 23)

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<sup>42</sup> Barrell, 19-20.

<sup>43</sup> Barrell, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Barrell, 20-21.

<sup>45</sup> Barrell, 23.

The vision of a wider society, available to a chosen few, then, is compared again and again with the smaller view, which must be the lot of those who are forced by circumstance and social position, to work in a narrow world to earn a living. Landscapes thus were formed, both in paintings, and in a material sense, to appeal to two 'classes of people'. Barrell takes this fundamental argument further in his discussion of Sir Joshua Reynolds. For Reynolds, some have the capacity to abstract from the particular to the general, to get, as Barrell quotes him '...above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind.'<sup>46</sup> He then connects landscape, abstract thought and taste together:

True taste, for Reynolds, is the ability to form and to recognize general ideas, by referring all the objects of a class to the essential character by which a class is constituted; the lack of true taste is the inability to perform this operation, so that we take pleasure not in the ideal representation of objects in terms of their generic classes, but in the unpurged, accidental forms of objects, minutely delineated. (Barrell, 24)

This situation of perspective, of the capacity to analyse versus the capacity merely to sense and experience from first-hand knowledge, is extremely powerful because it leads to a decidedly political conclusion. There are those who are objects in a landscape, those who are watched, and there are those who do the watching, the observing, and the managing. There are those who command, and those who are born to serve.

Those who can comprehend the order of society and nature are the observers of a prospect, *in which others are merely objects*. Some comprehend, others are comprehended; some are fit to survey the extensive panorama, some are confined within one or other of the micro-prospects which, to the comprehensive observer, are parts of a wider landscape, but which, to those confined within them, are all they see. (Barrell, 27-28, my italics)

The ownership of landed property came to be understood in Austen's time as closely with up with questions of social and moral virtue. It was the 'disinterested landowner', with the broader view who had the responsibility for larger social issues. Land and property were closely tied to the franchise.<sup>47</sup> Only such people had the leisure time to contribute to the running of things. There was also permanence in property. This was no fly-by-night business. Instead, the certainty of land ownership through generations provided a bedrock for democracy and steady government. Taste, government, land and property came together in the landed mind, and thus contrasted with the narrow interests of the trades-people and the mechanics, whose worlds were small, and limited to a vision of the necessities of everyday existence.

Beneath this apparently easy distinction, however, lies a complexity. When we look at depictions of the English landscape of the 1700s, we are also seeing part of an economy that is far from disinterested. The landed world is also far from certain, and property changed hands all the time. Nor was the land 'disinterested', given that its value could be bought and sold on the market.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Barrell, 24, quoting Reynolds from *Discourses on Art*, Robert Wark, editor, second edition, New Haven, Connecticut and London, 1975, p.324.

<sup>47</sup> Barrell, 28.

<sup>48</sup> Barrell, 34

... for James Barry, who described the property market in the late eighteenth-century England as anything but stable, more like a 'game of chance' ... topographical landscape was simply a portrait of our possessions, or of land inviting possession.. (Barrell, 34)<sup>49</sup>

Thus while such equations of permanence, a 'far-sighted view', moral virtue, the 'natural right to rule', and taste could easily be constructed, they rested on a foundation that was no less mercenary than that deriving from other parts of the economy. Landowners were no less self-interested than anyone else in the market to secure their fortune, and maintain their social position, as the Austen novels continually remind us. Indeed, it is the landowning class's obsession with property, profitability and inheritance that drives many of Austen's concerns, and our interest in them.

### *Landscape, Theory and Austen*

In *Northanger Abbey*, are we simply concerned with these matters of commerce, politics and social position? It hardly seems so. Critical Gothicism seems to dominate the story, and property is a long way off. As the novel starts, Catherine is training for her future career:

... from fifteen to seventeen she was in training to be a heroine ; she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives. (*NA*, 15)

The echoes of property and marriage are somewhere in the distance, but only the first hints of this world are early in evidence:

She had reached the age of seventeen, without having seen one amiable youth who could call forth her sensibility ; without having inspired one real passion, and without having excited any admiration but what was very moderate and very transient. This was strange indeed ! But strange things may be generally accounted for if their cause be fairly searched out. There was not one lord in the neighbourhood ; no – not even a baronet. There was not one family among their acquaintance who had reared and supported a boy accidentally found at their door – not one young man whose origin was unknown. Her father had no ward, and the squire of the parish no children.

But when a young lady is to be a heroine, the perverseness of forty surrounding families cannot prevent her. Something must happen to throw a hero in her way.

Mr. Allen, who owned the chief of the property about Fullerton, the village in Wiltshire where the Morlands lived, was ordered to Bath for the benefit of a gouty constitution ; - and his lady, a good-humoured woman, fond of Miss Moreland, and probably aware that if adventures will not befall a young lady in her own village, she must seek them abroad, invited her to go with them. Mr. and Mrs. Moreland were all compliance, and Catherine all happiness. (*NA*, 16-17)

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<sup>49</sup> Barrell is quoting James Barry from *An inquiry into the real and imagined obstructions to the acquisition of the arts in England*, London, 1775, page 207.

As the hour of departure arrives, and Catherine prepares to leave with the Allens for the delights of Bath, Mrs. Morland might be supposed to be ready to impart motherly advice on what is to come in the larger world:

Cautions against the violence of such noblemen and baronets as delight in forcing young ladies away to some remote farmhouse, must, at such a moment, relieve the fulness of her heart. Who would not think so? But Mrs. Morland knew so little of lords and baronets, that she entertained no notion of their general mischievousness, and was wholly unsuspecting of danger to her daughter from their machinations. (*NA*, 18)

Of course, Catherine is already forewarned. With her much-advanced sense of irony, Austen is making it clear that the daughter knows more of this than her mother. She has read all the novels she needs to, the world she inhabits most of the time. Her mind is flooded with images of banditry, debauchery, dark castles, strange highwaymen, and unseen horrors. She is more than prepared, and it is mother who is naïve.

In the Upper Rooms in Bath, where Isabella and Catherine go to dance, and perhaps to experience something slightly dreadful<sup>50</sup>, they meet the missing Tilneys. Mr. Tilney introduces Catherine to his sister Eleanor, and she is immediately taken with her.<sup>51</sup> However, on the next morning, Catherine is rushed into an ill-judged trip into the country by Mr. Thorpe, who is blunt and to the point in all things. And he very soon comes to the point:

“ Old Allen is as rich as a Jew – is not he ? ” Catherine did not understand him – and he repeated the question, adding in explanation, “ Old Allen, the man you are with.”  
“ Oh Mr. Allen, you mean. Yes, I believe he is very rich.”  
“ And no children at all ? ”  
“ No – not any. ”  
“ A famous thing for his next heirs. He is *your* godfather, is not he ? ”  
“ My godfather ! – no.”  
“ But you are always very much with them.”  
“ Yes, very much.” (*NA*, 63)

Soon after this excursion, Catherine Morland meets property face to face:

Soon after their reaching the bottom of the set, Catherine perceived herself to be earnestly regarded by a gentleman who stood among the lookers-on, immediately behind her partner. He was a very handsome man, of a commanding aspect, past the bloom, but not past the vigour of life ; and with his eye still directed towards her, she saw him address Mr. Tilney in a familiar whisper. Confused by his notice, and blushing from the fear of it being excited by something wrong in her appearance, she turned away her head. But while he did so, the gentleman retreated, and

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<sup>50</sup> In the most recent film version of *Northanger Abbey*, (*Northanger Abbey*, WGBH, ITV and Granada Television, 2008, with Felicity Jones and J.J. Field, written by Andrew Davies, directed by Jon Jones), the two young women discuss the shamefulness of Lord Byron and his family, then hurry to the Upper Rooms to hope to catch a glimpse of him. They scour the book in which visitors' names are recorded, and are dismayed to find him not there. None of this appears in the book.

<sup>51</sup> Again the film diverges from the book at this point. General Tilney is seen plotting with his son to ensnare Catherine Morland in these scenes, but the book merely introduces Catherine to Eleanor Tilney. The General does not make an appearance until later.

her partner coming nearer said, “ I see that you guess what I have just been asked. That gentleman knows your name, and you have a right to know his. It is General Tilney, my father”. (*NA*, 80)

General Tilney is all attention, ensuring that Catherine is invited to dinner, and she is, in all regards, made to be aware that the Tilney clan hold her in high esteem.<sup>52</sup> General Tilney, we soon learn, is all about strategy and property. His sole interest in Catherine is the degree to which her possible marriage to his son can improve the family fortune. To this end, he works with a rare single-mindedness.<sup>53</sup> Little of this is clear to Catherine. The crucial scene comes between Catherine and the General when the decision is made by him to quit Bath:

“ Can you ... be prevailed upon to quit this scene of public triumph and oblige your friend Eleanor with your company in Gloucestershire? ... no endeavors shall be wanting on our side to make Northanger Abbey not wholly disagreeable.”

Northanger Abbey! – These were the thrilling words, and wound up Catherine’s feelings to the highest point of exstasy. (*NA*, 139-140)

In a private reflection, Catherine muses this invitation over. Abbeys and castles are, of course, the sites of all that is evil and exciting. Yet the prospect of yielding to their temptations is very strong:

With all the chances against her of house, hall, place, park, court and cottage, Northanger turned up an abbey, and she was to be its inhabitant. Its long, damp passages, its narrow cells and ruined chapel, were to be within her daily reach, and she could not entirely subdue the hope of some traditional legends, some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun. (*NA*, 141)

She travels with the Tilneys to the abbey, at whose first sighting, Henry asks her:

“ ... are you prepared to encounter all the horrors that a building such as ‘what one reads about’ may produce ?

Henry, playing on the entire assembly of Gothic semiology, reviews all the possible tragedies, confusions and strangeness that such a large building can house. Old chests, isolated wings now desolate, bodies uncovered, skulls to be found, echos, ghosts and spirits. The nights will be filled with dreams and storms; ‘peals of thunder’ and ‘gusts of wind’ will prevail. A secret ‘vaulted room’<sup>54</sup> will be at the end of it. Daggers, drops of blood, hidden compartments – the introduction to the new building covers pages. But the actual sighting of the abbey itself had little to frighten anyone about it:

... her impatience for a sight of the abbey ... returned in full force, and every bend in the road was expected with solemn awe to afford a glimpse of its massy walls of grey stone, rising amidst a grove of ancient oaks, with the last beams of the sun playing in beautiful splendour on its high Gothic windows. But so low did the building stand, that she found herself passing through the great gates of the lodge and into the very grounds of

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<sup>52</sup> *NA*, 103.

<sup>53</sup> *NA*, 129.

<sup>54</sup> *NA*, 158-159.

Northanger without having discerned even an antique chimney. (*NA*, 161)

Her gothic preoccupations carry her through many a scene, as she investigates empty rooms, and seeks to know more of what happened to General Tilney's wife. Austen covers many pages setting out the topography of the house, and the details of the architecture. But in all this no virtual horror will appear, and she is soon confronted, instead, by a more concrete source of tribulation. Soon after she arrives, she is peremptorily evicted from the abbey by its owner for reasons that she cannot understand. The shock is sudden and unexpected. It transgresses every social norm. The imagined power of the landscape and of the abbey itself, which had first overwhelmed her senses, has now gone, but instead she experiences real fear and humiliation:

Turned from the house, in such a way ! – Without any reason that could justify, any apology that could atone for the abruptness, the rudeness, nay, the insolence of it.... And all this by such a man as General Tilney, so polite, so well-bred, and heretofore so particularly fond of her ! It was as incomprehensible as it was mortifying and grievous. ... The manner in which it was done so grossly uncivil ; hurrying her away without any reference to her convenience, or allowing her even the appearance of choice as to the time or mode of her traveling ... What could all this mean but an intentional affront ? (*NA*, 226)

The journey home 'holds no terrors for her'; the source of her terror is now material, not imaginary. But what is the source of this embarrassment? And where is the heroine now? How is a heroine to return from her adventures? In triumph, of course:

A heroine returning, at the close of her career, to her native village, in all the triumph of recovered reputation, and all the dignity of a countess, with a long train of noble relations in their several phaetons, and three waiting-maids in a traveling chaise-and-four, behind her, is an event on which the pen of the contriver may well delight to dwell ... But my affair is widely different : I bring back my heroine to her home in solitude in disgrace ; and no sweet elation of spirits ... A heroine in a hack post-chaise, is such a blow upon sentiment, as no attempt at grandeur or pathos can withstand. (*NA*, 232)

Catherine Morland returns home, to be followed by Henry Tilney two days later, who tells her that her only error was not to be as rich as she should have been. The General had been seeking property and wealth to bring into the family, and having been told of her putative wealthy connections and expectations, had courted her for his daughter-in-law. On finding he was in error, he had turned her out of the house. So Northanger Abbey had at first allowed her to give material substance to the uncertain fantasies which her novel-reading had developed. It provided the Gothic theater she had dreamed of for so many months. But the actual experience of visiting the abbey had given her a rather different sense of horror; the very brutal way in which concerns for land, buildings, wealth and property can drive all other considerations from the world.

Of course, this is not where we leave our heroine. The General may not have killed his wife as Catherine had hoped, but he has shown cruelty enough in other ways.<sup>55</sup> Happily, Henry Tilney has his own money and does not need his father's beneficence. The General's daughter Eleanor marries a 'man of fortune and consequence'<sup>56</sup>, and this softens the General's attitude to his son, whose marriage he believes he can now sanction, in the wake of Eleanor's acquisition of property and position. Eleanor is brought to happiness, in her own house, with a man of her own choice. And Catherine herself brings three thousand pounds to the table, rather less than had first been anticipated, but rather more than the Colonel expected:

Henry and Catherine were married, the bells rang and everybody smiled ; and, as this took place within a twelve-month from the first day of their meeting, it will not appear, after all the dreadful delays occasioned by the General's cruelty, that they were essentially hurt by it. To begin perfect happiness at the respective ages of twenty-six and eighteen, is to do pretty well ; and professing myself moreover convinced, that the General's unjust interference, so far from being really injurious to their felicity, was perhaps rather conducive to it, by improving their knowledge of each other, and adding strength to their attachment, I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial obedience.  
(NA, 252)

In one of the first scenes in the most-loved film version<sup>57</sup> of *Pride and Prejudice*, we see two horsemen galloping with vigour across a field. In a distance is a property. The two men are deciding whether one of them should live there or not. The novel represents the clearest expression of the Tory theory of landscape in Austen's writing. Mr. Bingley is at first an object of interest to Mrs. Bennet, and he becomes, for a period of time, the center of her life's work of marrying her large retinue of daughters, because Bingley brings five thousand pounds a year. But much of the novel has as its background the theme of how land should be owned, and what moral compass should guide its use. While the most famous scene about property refers to Elizabeth's falling in love with Darcy when she sets sight on Pemberley, perhaps an equally compelling moment occurs when the discussion about Darcy's character takes place with his housekeeper. Mr. Gardiner is addressing the housekeeper, and they are discussing the frequency by which Darcy visits his property:

“If your master would marry, you might see more of him.”  
“Yes, Sir ; but I do not know when *that* will be. I do not know who is good enough for him.”  
Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner smiled. Elizabeth could not help saying, “It is very much to his credit, I am sure, that you should think so.”  
“I say no more than the truth, and what everybody will say that knows him . . . . I have never heard a cross word from him in my life, and I have known him since he was four years old . . . .”  
“You are lucky to have such a master.”  
“ Yes, Sir, I know I am. If I was to go through the world, I could not meet a better. But I have always observed, that they who are good-natured when children, are good-natured when they grown up ; and he

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<sup>55</sup> NA, 247.

<sup>56</sup> NA, 250

<sup>57</sup> *Pride and Prejudice*, starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle, BBC and A & E Co-Production, produced by Sue Birtwistle, directed by Simon Langton, dramatized by Andrew Davies, 1995, 300 minutes.



was always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted, boy in the world.”

“ He is the best landlord, and the best master.” (*P & P*, 248-249)

Elizabeth ruminates on this discourse and comments to herself:

The commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds (the housekeeper) was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship! – How much pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow! – How much good or evil must be done by him. (*P & P*, 250-251)

As is familiarly told, Darcy is all arrogance and distance as we start the novel, but all morality and kindness as the novel progresses. His elided securing of Lydia, and the saving of the family honor are clearly ways in which Austen secures for Darcy, and for her heroine Elizabeth, a deep sense of moral authority which is unshakeable. It is his very distance from ordinary affairs that sustains this moral authority, and it is through the management of his land and the people who depend on it that his authority and judgment is valued. He takes Barrell's long view of politics and the world in general. He stands on a high point.

On contrast, Bingley, the softer and more sympathetic male lead, is thought from the first to have the subtlety of character needed to care for those around him. Indeed, in a scene that comes after Mr. Bingley and Jane Bennet are betrothed, Mr. Bennet comments:

“ You are a good girl ... and I have great pleasure in thinking you will be so happily settled. I have not a doubt of your doing very well together. Your tempers are by no means unlike. You are each of you so complying that nothing will ever be resolved on; so easy, that every servant will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always exceed your income.”

The reader is left in little doubt that the new inhabitants of Netherfield will manage to balance control of the landscape with benevolence, and might even be able to combine some whiggish improvement with benign dictatorship to secure the betterment of the neighbourhood.

If *Pride and Prejudice* embodies the full force of Tory benevolence in the use of landscape and property, *Emma* is benevolence in ironic form. Emma is full of good intentions, but rarely manages to bring these good intentions to fruition. She makes cameo appearances among the poor distributing food and chicken broth to houses in the village, whether they need it or not. But if the village of Highbury were to depend on Emma's benevolence for its survival, it would fare poorly indeed. It is Mr. Knightley, both the major landowner of the area, and the source of widespread practical and moral leadership, who is the benevolent landowner par excellence. As with Darcy, he can be a somewhat distant figure, and offers many a lecture to Emma on the proper code of conduct. But he delivers on the promise of benevolence.

Emma is the trust child of her generation. While she has everything she needs, it has been the spoiling of her. She has gained a superior sense of her qualities, and an indifference to

the deepest concerns of others. She is that rare Austen woman who has her own money and wants for nothing. She is Austen's most deeply ironic heroine:

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence ; and had lived with very little to distress or vex her....

The real evils .. of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think too well of herself ; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyment. (*Emma*, 5)

While Emma Woodhouse spends much of the early part of the novel destroying the sensible alliance that has been developing between Harriet Smith and Mr. Martin, she does find time to do good works. There is an occasional charitable undertaking to keep her busy:

... on the morrow, Emma had a charitable visit to pay to a poor sick family, who lived a little way out of Highbury. (*Emma*, 88)

In the Paltrow film<sup>58</sup>, our heroine and her friend Harriet are depicted briefly visiting a row of impoverished houses to deliver soup to an older woman sick in bed. The scene is one of rural desolation, but the visit is brief. And, as in the novel, it is made clear to us that a secondary purpose for the visit is to skirmish past the house of the vicar, who is the present target of Emma's matrimonial strategy. Indeed the mention of the charitable event is so brief, and the discussion of the vicarage so extensive that it is soon very clear that the main purpose of the walk is to stalk Mr. Elton, and generate an accidental meeting with him if possible.

Emma sums up her experience of poverty and her attitude to the condition in this way:

... it was sickness and poverty she came to visit ; and after remaining there as long as she could give comfort or advice, she quitted the cottage with such an impression of the scene as made her say to Harriet, as they walked away.

“ These are the sights, Harriet, to do one good. How trifling they make every thing else appear ! – I feel now as if I could think of nothing but these poor creatures all the rest of the day ; and yet, who can say how soon it may all vanish from my mind ? ” (*Emma*, 86-87)

In a later episode, Emma and Harriet discuss the 'appalling possibility' of being left alone without marriage as old age looms up. Emma is unconcerned. She sees a life full of work and activities, with the concerns of her nieces and her nephews taking up much of her time, and more than compensating for any anxiety she might have had in not securing her own children. As she lays out her plans, there is no mention of charity, which might well be expected from a young woman of considerable wealth and few duties to perform who wishes to maintain a sound social standing within her community:

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<sup>58</sup> *Emma*, Gwyneth Paltrow, Toni Collette, Alan Cumming, Ewan McGregor, Jeremy Northan, Greta Scacchi, Juliet Stevenson and Polly Walker, Miramax Films, directed by Douglas McGrath, [date missing on box](#), at 30 minutes.

If I know myself, Harriet, mine is an active, busy mind, with a great many independent resources ; and I do not perceive why I should be more in want of employment at forty or fifty than one-and-twenty. (*Emma*, 85)

One is tempted to say in retort that since all her friends will be married by them, or a great majority of them, she will be left with little of substance to do. Later in the book, Austen has Emma Woodhouse proffering a piece of pork to the Bates family, who are always in need. She has taken care of a concern that her father had to secure proper nourishment for those with less resources. But the turning point of her relationship to those with less than herself comes at the Box Hill picnic during a game in which the party are being asked to say one thing very witty, two somewhat witty, or three very dull things. The penurious Miss Bates, fussed by this demand, takes the easy way out:

“ Oh ! very well,” exclaimed Miss Bates, “then I need not be uneasy. ‘Three things very dull indeed.’ That will do for me, you know...”  
Emma could not resist.  
“ Ah ! ma’am, but there may be a difficulty, Pardon me – but you will be limited as to number – only three at once.”

Her sharpness and her dismissal of the vulnerable Miss Bates as an inveterate gabbler who cannot be shut up, immediately throws Emma out beyond the normal realm of moral circuitry, and she receives a strong rebuke from Mr. Knightley, the moral authority in all things, and the true patron of the Bates family. In the coming days, the Bates family gently neglects to receive Emma and her attempts at apology. For a moment, Emma does not count.

But not for long. Before we know it, Emma and George Knightley<sup>59</sup> are to be married, and Emma is to continue her instruction in the ways of managing a large estate, Mr. Knightley’s estate, with many acres of ‘real’ property, and with a central role to play in the economic and social life of the village.

*Mansfield Park* is more complex. Indeed, in contrast to the other Austen novels, much of the economic life of the story lies overseas. Fanny Price goes as a child to Mansfield Park to receive the benevolence of her aunt and uncle, Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram. They own a large estate, to be sure. Or at least the house is large, and there appear to be many servants. Sir Thomas is a baronet and a member of parliament. But his lack of involvement with the surrounding community is striking. Instead, as the novel slowly reveals, the source of wealth for this family lies in a foreign horror, in slavery and plantations. We hear early on of Sir Thomas’s interest in an estate in the West Indies.<sup>60</sup> Patricia Rozema’s film brilliantly depicts the moral bankruptcy of a family who make their living through the violence they impose on others.<sup>61</sup> In an early scene Fanny Price sees a ship anchored in a harbour, and hears the laments of those on board. ‘Who is on board?’ asks Fanny of the coach-driver. ‘Black Cargo’ comes the reply. Later, a sketch book is revealed, in which shocking depictions of rape, lynchings and other forms of brutality are set out. But there is only one mention of the

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<sup>59</sup> The christian name is rarely mentioned.

<sup>60</sup> *MP*, 24.

<sup>61</sup> For two useful commentaries on the film, see David Monaghan’s *In Defense of Patricia Rozema’s Mansfield Park*, pages 59-64, in *Persuasions*, 28, 2006, and Shea, Alison. “‘I am a wild beast’: Patricia Rozema’s *Forward Fanny*.” *Persuasions* 28 (2006): 52-58. While I am a great fan of the Rozema film, and particularly of its extension of the ‘slavery’ argument, I find Shea’s account of silence entirely compelling.

slave-trade in the book<sup>62</sup>, and the word 'slavery' does not appear at all. We soon realize that Sir Thomas is little implicated in the lives of the villagers around him, an obvious necessity if he is going to play the role of a Tory benevolence or a whiggish improver. Instead, he is away in the West Indies securing his overseas properties, and making certain that his flow of income is maintained.

In the meantime, and especially in his absence, there is dissolution aplenty. We have already seen how the novel is a pretty clear attack on the Whig theory of landscape in the character of Thomas Rushworth. Henry Crawford, who Fanny early picks out as a man of irresolution, who cannot be trusted to say what he means, especially in matters of love, is, nonetheless, a man capable of improving a property, though his strategic indifference to those around him who might suffer from his plans is also transparent. In both cases, there is a want of right thinking, in Austen's view. Even more clearly, there is corruption at the heart of the Bertram family itself. Lady Bertram is so dissolute that she can hardly bear to rise from her chaise longue, and seems to be taking some form of laudanum all day.<sup>63</sup> Her pugs are her main concern, along with anyone who might add to her personal happiness, like Fanny. The heir and oldest son Tom is taken up with the familiar troika of women, gambling and alcohol, and wastes the family fortune. Sir Thomas's daughter Maria, who has married the buffoon Rushworth, in order to secure a house in London and the enjoyment of his property, soon starts enjoying Henry Crawford. All this happens as a simple reflection of economic corruption overseas. It is as if the whole enterprise, the global economic and the local domestic, along with the spiritual and moral character of the household, are wrapped up in a single compulsion, to profit, to give into easy pleasure, to avoid any serious concern for the local community at all. Into this confusion Fanny Price is thrown and Edward Bertram, through the agency of Mary Crawford, temporarily succumbs.

Resolution requires the escape from all of this. Sir Thomas must recover his family, which to some extent, occurs. Young Tom Bertram, after a cathartic illness that brings him close to death, comes to his senses. Fanny and Edward escape the clutches of the Crawfords, the twins of corruption who come from the city and return there, and instead of marrying the Crawfords, they marry each other. Susan Price joins her sister and the Bertram family, and escapes poverty in Portsmouth. Maria escapes Rushworth through divorce. All seems well. Yet the large house remains, indifferent to the needs of the community it might serve. And Sir Thomas hardly solves all his problems.<sup>64</sup> The house and the property thus embody for us a center for a small part of the global trading system that Sir Thomas is wrapped up in, taking us away from the village, and into the larger world.

*Mansfield Park* is Whiggery satirized. But it also provides an indication of how a shift to a global involvement in economic life allows a bypassing of the complex set of local commitments that were expected of any large landowner, and on which a great deal of local community wellbeing depended. Not to play a part in what stared the landowner in the face as soon as he set foot beyond his threshold meant to deny the wellbeing of the people around him, whatever the cause might be.

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<sup>62</sup> *Emma*, Chapter 22. [Look up page.](#)

<sup>63</sup> None of this is mentioned in the novel, though Patricia Rozema's film is unambiguous on this point.

<sup>64</sup> In Rozema's film, he moves from Antigua and slavery, to tobacco, but there is no mention of this in the book. We may assume that he remains in the slave trade.

In contrast to the globalization of Sir Thomas Bertram, the other Austen baronet, Sir William Elliot, embodies noble duty shirked. He has all the aspirations to be an authentic lord of the manor, but none of the skills. He is widely disliked, and the main source of exchange between himself and the surrounding community is his lack of payment to the local tradespeople. He would like to be a Tory grandee, and lord it over the neighborhood, but his close attention to his personal boudoir and his complexion means he has little time to bully the local community. Instead, he must flee his estate and hide in Bath, while Anne Elliot is left behind to do what she can for the local people:

(Anne to her sister Mary) ... one thing I have had to do, Mary, going to almost every house in the parish as a sort of take-leave. I was told that they wished it. (*P*, 39)

The estate abandoned to the creditors and a rear admiral of the White, the Elliots are free to waste their remaining money in Bath, leaving Anne, Lady Russell and the lawyer to clear up the wreckage. Thus Sir Walter loses his land, but does not lose his position. Instead he fawns and simpers in an urban setting, leaving his obligations behind.

As we have seen above, *Sense and Sensibility* starts with an account of the ancient seat of Norland Park, and the connection of the Dashwood to this antiquity.<sup>65</sup> This is the best form of social capital in relation to land and property. It is that connection with property that goes back before living memory, and is thus 'natural' and beyond history. The memory of the land and of the family is synonymous. If the family has been connected to their property beyond the memory of those still living, this connection seems to be also beyond the actions of individuals, and thereby endowed with a permanence that can be taken for granted. The Dashwoods are therefore defined by their long relationship to land, property and the community. Because their reputation is so strong in the community, we can assume a policy of benevolence reigned in the government of this region.

The loss of this ancient memory and this ancient connection, and the recovery to be formed by the Dashwood women constitutes the main theme of the book. First comes the cottage, though it is a cottage endowed by its connection to minor rank in the shape of Sir John Middleton, a relation of Mrs. Dashwood, who then provides them with a network of relationships with the local gentry, including Colonel Brandon and Mr. Willoughby, among others. Thus while their old seat is lost to commerce and improvement, in the shape of John Dashwood and his acquisitive wife, they can fall back on social connections to keep them afloat. As with all the Austen novels, improvement can only follow, and the marriage of Marianne and Elinor into moderately benign circumstances completes the circle of security. Land and the church become the new basis on which the Dashwood fortunes will now stand. One might be tempted to argue that this movement from ancient security to a new

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<sup>65</sup> *S&S*, 3. Op cit.

social base suggests one that old families can avoid complete collapse in the face of Whig ambition. By falling back on the benevolent Toryism of Sir John Middleton and Colonel Brandon, the old values are reinstated, and the old relationship to the community secured.

### *Conclusions.*

1. My general argument is that Austen's implicit theory of landscape, memory and nature comes closest to the Tory theory of landscape which prevailed in her era among major elements of the landed classes, though the situation is complicated, and it is by no means the only theory at work among this class, or among people in general. But I want to claim that it is absurd to dismiss Austen as simply a spokeswoman for a challenged class about to lose their land to new rising interests, in the shape of Whig improvers, and others using land merely as an element in the surging market economy of the late 1700s. There is much more to be said about Austen's view.

Austen certainly had a well-developed theory of landscape. She believed in benevolent ownership, if the characters of Darcy, Brandon and Knightley are anything to go by. And clearly she made fun of the improvers, those mostly associated with what Everett calls the whig theory of landscape. She relished the chance to make Rushworth a fop and a fool, but his 12,000 pounds a year, more funds than even Darcy controls,<sup>66</sup> also meant he was not lightly dismissed. Her view is quite unequivocal. Life ought not to be reduced to commerce; rather, land and those who own it have wide responsibilities, of which making money may rank lower than other concerns. While she clearly understood the necessity of sound finance and sensible land management, she was more than superficially aware of the broad network of people who depended on benevolent management for their survival. Thus it is in the moral character of those who own the land that she looked to for security. Benevolent landowning, coupled with a clergy who could be depended on to have the best interests of their parish at heart, apparently appeared to Austen to provide the best protection possible for those in the countryside.

I think this is rather more than a simple reactionary view. We must consider what was coming. If Everett and Schama are right, then what was coming was an increasing emphasis on the use of the land simply as a commodity, stripped of its social and historical trappings – a landscape without people – to put it in one way. Austen would never have agreed to that, given her very thoughtful understanding of the complexities of rural life, and the way the social and economic mechanisms depended on large landholders. If whig improvers planned to despoil the land, and merchants planned to buy and sell it at will, then memory and nature would be disrupted, and old patterns of courtesy, responsibility and custom would be thrown out. This is a view that, from all we can read, Austen would have resisted. And we are still some years away from Robert Owen's plans for an alternative rural community in which community members would control much of what went on in his utopian villages.<sup>67</sup> What Austen might have made of these new alternatives, it is hard to decide. But it's clear enough that she resisted the untrammelled markets of the rising classes,

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<sup>66</sup> *Mansfield Park*, page 40. *Pride and Prejudice*, page 10, has Darcy with ten thousand pounds a year.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Owen (14 May 1771–17 November 1858), was one of many theorists during the 19<sup>th</sup>. Century who proposed a 'third way' of developing and sustaining rural communities, apart from the Tory and Whig visions of the rural future.

and the single-minded emphasis on money-making, as her characterization of Mr. John Dashwood and his wife clearly suggests. Given the alternatives available to her, it is not surprising that Austen seems to prefer the thoughtful landowner to the whig improvers.

2. We started this chapter with four simple ideas about how landscape, memory and nature might play out in the Austen era. First, landscape and property can inspire anxiety and excitement, as they do in the consciousness of Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*. Second, land and property can display power quite starkly, and offer a site of economic production and wealth, which they do in Darcy's case in particular. They thus provide locations where the moral conduct of the owner is continually on display in the workings of the community, and the judgements community members of those who own the land. Third, land and property can also be seen abstractly as mediums of displaying taste through landscape gardening and architecture in their highest forms, in which they aspire to the level of art, presenting the civilization of the owner for all to see. In this guise, land and property become a *place*, as Henry Crawford puts it, a venue which people travel to view and admire. Finally, property can inspire awe and dominance, reminding the outsider of the status and the social memory that old ownership of a landscape implies.

3. The Tory theory of landscape and its whig alternative, as set out by Everett, is now seen clearly enough. These two views, and the variations that existed in each camp, point to the complex set of ideas that drove the workings of the countryside in Austen's time. But there's more at work here, as Schama reminds. There is the very nature of 'Englishness' itself, something we might imagine was very dear to Austen's heart. The searching out the authentic nature of England was very much an issue during the Austen period, and much intellectual energy was directed towards what the English might stand for, and where Englishness might be found. Many of these answers lay in nature, and in attempts by landowners to shape their landscapes. Authentic English life might be found in nature, but what kind of nature was the real question. Behind all the improving of nature to make it more natural, was there anything left of the 'real' England. And if nature were not to be touched by civilization, how could the idea of 'England' reside there. And Schama also provides us with a second theme that must have concerned Austen – the enclosure and engrossment of public land, which harmed the local community, and was a primary cause of rural poverty and urban migration. This massive social movement cannot be overlooked in our account of the world in which Austen lived.

To Everett and Schama's views, a third must be added. Barrell's argument about the political nature of landscape, the 'distant perspective' that only the landed interests had, the capacity to see beyond the mundane and take a society-wide perspective, had clearly had currency for some time. In this view, the common folk were merely objects in a landscape to be worked upon. There were others who, with their permanence in the memory of society, and their permanence in the landscape, should be given authority to rule and to judge. This, at least, is James Barrell's view of the thinking of the time. A certain distance from the common weal certainly sums up Darcy's attitude to a tee. He is distant not from coldness, though he admits to no easy sociability. Rather it stems from the need, Austen seems to be saying, to be looking into the distance, beyond the everyday, and to the large issues with which he must deal, like lost sisters, and the long-term matters of property with which he is involved. And while this view might be rigorously challenged as covering a good

deal of self-interest under the cloak of dispassionate benevolence, it is clearly present in Austen's writing.

4. Thus, Jane Austen's theory of landscape is very much a Tory one, a view embodying a nostalgia for the past that never existed, or a present that might exist. But it's much more complicated than that. Austen's view also involves a clear awareness that property speaks to honor, dignity and social standing. It's clear in everything she writes that the moral and social character is of paramount importance in developing her system of social judgement. But I would want to claim that this view has a third part to it as well. Her view of the landscape also encourages good social relations, the conducting of affairs towards a wider benevolence than is usually associated with conservative theory. She clearly valued those who worked the land, as well as those who owned, and she describes in some detail in the tale of Mr. Robert Martin and Mr. Knightley in *Emma*.

5. If landscape and nature are everywhere in Austen and in the theories of the time, it is also important to remind ourselves how memory, both social and individual, also played a part in all this. The memory of land, its use and ownership, has the capacity to establish dominance in a way that any amount of money and rank cannot match. It is the final capital at stake. Long history cannot readily be bought. When Emma seeks to suggest that the Woodhouses are an ancient family, or the Dashwoods suggest that they have owned Norland Hall for many generations, they plan by this device to outrun history and present action, and display their ownership and their status as eternal. It is the classic play of the already-established against the nouveau riche of any generation and any social setting. There is memory in the land and eternity as well. The incumbents seem to be saying "We've been here forever, and you are ephemeral. Thus we are 'natural', and no amount of present action on your part will change things." They have history in the bank. How can antiquity be countered in the struggle for control? Only by history and memory, and that takes time.

6. What I've tried to do in this chapter is to fashion the outlines of the social landscape that Austen creates for her characters to develop in, and to suggest some of the ideas about landscape and property that were current in her world. From these ideas, I believe she developed a very nuanced set of beliefs about how property and landscape might properly be used for the social good. I hope that this argument will free her from the criticism of simple conservatism, while at the same time firmly embedding her in the ideas with which she had to work. Austen saw the new forms of hierarchy emerging around, and had much to say about them. Houses and land were, for her, powerful actors in the theatre of behaving, and they needed their full accounting, which Austen, with her usual insight and wit, provides for us.