A Changing View: Jane Austen's Landscape

PENNY GAY

> Who then shall grace, or who improve the soil? —
> Who plants like Bathurst, or who builds like Boyle.
> 'Tis use alone that sanctifies expense,
> And splendour borrows all her rays from sense.
> His father's acres who enjoys in peace,
> Or makes his neighbours glad, if he increase:
> Whose cheerful tenants bless their yearly toil,
> Yet to their lord owe more than to the soil;
> Whose ample lawns are not ashamed to feed
> The milky heifer and deserving steed;
> Whose rising forests, not for pride or show,
> But future buildings, future navies grow:
> Let his plantations stretch from down to down,
> First shade a country, and then raise a town.[1]

Alexander Pope in 1731 defined an ideal relationship between a gentleman and the land in his possession, a relationship which subordinated the idea of 'improvement' to that of *productivity*. That ideal, in its turn, has a humane basis: the 'use of riches' is not a matter of gain for gain's sake, but rather of care and stewardship, which ensures that all people associated with the land, from the lowliest labourers to pensioned dependents, from tenant farmers to the members of the 'great house', are kept in health and comfort. Jane Austen, writing nearly a century later, does not depart from this ideal, though as an *intelligent* conservative, and a woman (not a landowner), she views its workings in reality with a critical eye.

Austen was writing at a time when England was the focus of conflicting views among the gentry class as to the proper appearance of the landscape. The mid-eighteenth century had seen the rise of 'Capability' Brown, the landscape artist whose sweeping lawns, bridged lakes, and groups of trees had created the simple and elegant landscape park surrounding the great house which we still think of as typically English. Brown's successor, Humphry Repton, Jane Austen's contemporary, was a much more radical 'improver' of the landscape; he would change the orientation of a house, adding flower-covered terraces, shutting out and screening off obtrusive cottages or utilities, relocating roads and rivers. Meanwhile, an alternative aesthetic,

1 Pope, *Fourth Moral Essay* (To Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington), ll. 177-90.

associated with the fashion for the Gothic, had been codified in England in the writings of William Gilpin: this was enthusiasm for the 'picturesque' — a 'natural' landscape to be found in the unimproved countryside; in such a scene ivy-covered cottages and ruined abbeys had an organic place. 'Picturesque beauty', observed Gilpin,

> is a phrase but a little understood. We precisely mean by it that kind of beauty which *would look well in a picture.* Neither grounds laid out by art, nor improved by agriculture, are of this kind.
> . . . The undressed simplicity, and native beauty, of such lanes as these, exceed the walks of the most finished garden.[2]

Repton pointed out, however, that landscapes are not pictures, as the observer's point of view is always changing: there is no constant 'frame' to a landscape.[3] What was in fact happening to the working agricultural landscape of England in the latter half of the eighteenth century was in dramatic opposition to Gilpin's ideal: the agrarian revolution was dividing the land up into fields enclosed by hedgerows, patches of woodland, and tenant farms. Change was unavoidable; what Austen and other conservative thinkers supported was the idea of gradual and careful change only where it was necessary; and clearly the developments in agricultural techniques were an improvement which would lead to greater prosperity for the country as a whole. (The fact that agricultural labourers lost their common grazing rights under the enclosure acts and were consequently impoverished presented a problem which could only be responded to by the sort of paternalism displayed by Mr Knightley, or Emma in her visits to the poor cottagers.)

Edmund Burke, the great conservative politician, in his *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1791), saw England and its constitution as a house or estate endangered by false 'improvements':

> one of the first and most leading principles on which the commonwealth and the laws are consecrated, is lest the temporary possessors and life-renters in it, unmindful of what they have received from their ancestors, or of what is due to their posterity . . . think it amongst their rights to . . . commit waste on the inheritance, by destroying at their pleasure the whole original fabric of their society: hazarding to leave to those who came after them, a ruin instead of a habitation — and teaching these successors as little to respect their contrivances, as they themselves had respected the institutions of their forefathers. By this

2 W. Gilpin, *Observations on Western Parts of England* (1798) and *Observations on the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1786), quoted in Frank W. Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and her Predecessors* (Cambridge, 1966), pp.53, 60.

3 Details of this aesthetic controversy can be found in 'The Repton-Payne Knight Controversy' in Edward Malins, *English Landscaping and Literature* (Oxford, 1966), pp.123-41.

> unprincipled facility of changing the state as often, and as much, and in as many ways as there are floating fancies or fashions, the whole chain and continuity of the commonwealth would be broken.[4]

Jane Austen's novels are apolitical only to naive or wilfully blind readers: it is clear from an examination of her characters' attitudes to their rural environment that she was essentially in agreement with Burke — that the English landscape is inescapably symbolic. Her notorious francophobia — most evident in *Emma* — is the obverse of this, and reflects a Burkean distrust of the disruptive state of revolutionary France.

(i) Picturesque Views

Northanger Abbey 'was finished in the year 1803, and intended for immediate publication', according to the 'Advertisement, by the Authoress':

> The public are entreated to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes.[5]

Readers may safely assume that the novel consciously satirizes eighteenth-century manners and ideas — as indeed it famously does in its burlesque of Gothic fiction. But it also mocks, more subtly, the cult of sensibility: Henry Tilney, as well as being a clergyman and the heroine's destined husband, is a man of fashionable taste. His monologue during the walk around Beechen Cliff is only less vulgar than John Thorpe's boasting about horses and curricles.

Chaper 14 is introduced by a narratorial comment on the scene: 'Beechen Cliff, that noble hill, whose beautiful verdure and hanging coppice render it so striking an object from almost every opening in Bath' (an accent of appreciation which is echoed almost exactly in the comment in *Persuasion* on Lyme): as always in Jane Austen, the town has little to offer against the pleasures of the country. For the

4 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), quoted in Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate* (Baltimore, 1971), pp.45-6. No discussion of 'improvements' in Jane Austen would be complete without due acknowledgement of Duckworth's magisterial study; this essay naturally has a narrower focus, and in particular locates Austen's essential concerns rather earlier than Duckworth does, in *Sense and Sensibility*.

5 All quotations from the works of Jane Austen are taken from *The Novels of Jane Austen*, vols I-IV, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford, 3rd edn. 1932 *et seq*); page references are incorporated into the text.

Tilneys, the walk affords an opportunity to indulge their taste for the picturesque:

> They were viewing the country with the eyes of persons accustomed to drawing, and decided on its capability of being formed into pictures, with all the eagerness of real taste. Here Catherine was quite lost. She knew nothing of drawing — nothing of taste: — and she listened to them with an attention which brought her little profit, for they talked in phrases which conveyed scarcely any idea to her. The little which she could understand however appeared to contradict the very few notions she had entertained on the matter before. It seemed as if a good view were no longer to be taken from the top of an high hill, and that a clear blue sky was no longer a proof of a fine day. She was heartily ashamed of her ignorance. (p.110)

Catherine's ignorance is not, in fact, something to be ashamed of; her honest pragmatism contrasts with the Tilneys' sophistication. They cannot enjoy the simple amenities of a fine day, but must view the country through the spectacles of artifice. Both Gilpin and Brown are evoked in Austen's neat summary: 'its *capability* of being *formed into pictures*.' What the Tilneys are doing is annexing the countryside for self-regarding purposes: those hypothetical pictures would adorn the walls of fasionable houses. The essential egoism of such an attitude is made clear as the narrator's report of the outing continues:

> a lecture on the picturesque immediately followed, in which [Henry's] instructions were so clear that she soon began to see beauty in everything admired by him, and her attention was so earnest, that he became perfectly satisfied of her having a great deal of natural taste. He talked of fore-grounds, distances, and second distances — side-screens and perspectives — lights and shades; — and Catherine was so hopeful a scholar, that when they gained the top of Beechen Cliff, she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath, as unworthy to make part of a landscape. Delighted with her progress, and fearful of wearying her with too much wisdom at once, Henry suffered the subject to decline, and by an easy transition from a piece of rocky fragment and the withered oak which he had placed near its summit, to oaks in general, to forests, the inclosure of them, waste lands, crown lands and government, he shortly found himself arrived at politics; and from politics, it was an easy step to silence. (p.111)

Here Henry is appropriating the dubious 'wisdom' of a particular aesthetic theory in order to bolster up his image of masculine superiority. But Henry is not a good teacher: his monologue leaves his listeners unenlightened and silenced. Henry's failure as a mentor is more seriously demonstrated in the episode of Catherine's Gothic fantasizing at Northanger Abbey (he excites her imagination with a grisly story as they drive there, and then leaves her to herself — and the General). The episode demonstrates the dangers of what is presented in little here: the temptation to make 'sensational', self-indulgent art — or 'romance' — out of the events and places of

'common life' (p.201).

Sense and Sensibility, as its title implies, sets out to examine the issue of the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility (it is another novel originating in the 1790s, though not published, in a revised form, till 1811). Marianne plays the Radcliffean heroine in a way that naive, tomboyish Catherine could never do. Her apostrophe to 'Dear, dear Norland!' on the family's leaving it (ch.5), is, as Rosemarie Bodenheimer rightly points out, not at all indicative of a sense of unity with nature:

> she is really berating the house and trees for not caring, and asserting the strength of her suffering, and the powers of her vision and appreciation, in a world full of non-suffering, non-appreciative objects. She imagines the trees in the same way that she imagines most of the other people in the world, as unmoved audiences for the performance of her superior powers of feeling.[6]

There is an immediate contrast to Marianne's egoism in the narrator's opening to chapter 6, a strong indication of Austen's commitment to objective 'sense' in viewing the landscape, rather than solipsistic 'sensibility':

> a view of Barton Valley as they entered it gave them cheerfulness. It was a pleasant fertile spot, well wooded, and rich in pasture. After winding along it for more than a mile, they reached their own house. A small green court was the whole of its demesne in front; and a neat wicket gate admitted them into it.
>
> 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 tiled, the window shutters were not painted green, nor were the walls covered with honeysuckles. (p.28)

Austen's suggestion that Barton is something much more spiritually important than 'the picturesque' — that it is a *locus amoenus* — is reinforced in the following paragraph, where the approving phrases accumulate, concluding with a submerged pun on the 'prospect' of a new life for the Dashwood ladies:

> The situation of the house was good. High hills rose immediately behind, and at no real distance on each side; some of which were open downs, the other cultivated and woody. The village of Barton was chiefly on one of these hills, and formed a pleasant view from the cottage windows. The prospect in front was more extensive; it commanded the whole of the valley, and reached into the country beyond. (pp.28-9)

The sisters enjoy walking in the beautiful country around their new home; their characters are nicely distinguished by two encounters:

6 Rosemarie Bodenheimer, 'Looking at Landscape in Jane Austen', *Studies in English Literature,* 21 (1981), pp.605-23; p.609.

Marianne's first meeting with Willoughby, falling as she runs down a hill to avoid rain, and Elinor's gentle but pointed mockery of her sister's 'sensibility' when the two of them meet Edward Ferrars in the lane. Willoughby shares Marianne's enthusiasm; Edward, Elinor's wit and good sense:

> 'And how does dear, dear Norland look?' cried Marianne.
>
> 'Dear, dear Norland,' said Elinor, 'probably looks much as it always does at this time of year. The woods and walks thickly covered with dead leaves.'
>
> 'Oh!' cried Marianne, 'with what transporting sensations have I formerly seen them fall! How have I delighted, as I walked, to see them driven in showers about me by the wind! What feelings have they, the season, the air altogether inspired! Now there is no one to regard them. They are seen only as a nuisance, swept hastily off, and driven as much as possible from the sight.'
>
> 'It is not everyone,' said Elinor, 'who has your passion for dead leaves.'
>
> 'No; my feelings are not often shared, not often understood . . . And there, beneath that farthest hill, which rises with such grandeur, is our cottage.'
>
> 'It is a beautiful country,' he replied; 'but these bottoms must be dirty in winter.'
>
> 'How can you think of dirt, with such objects before you?'
>
> 'Because,' replied he, smiling, 'among the rest of the objects before me, I see a very dirty lane.' (p.87-8)

Edward's placing here as suitable husband for the heroine of sense, Elinor, is confirmed by his reiteration of the narrator's introductory praise of Barton, as reported at the beginning of chapter 18. This offers yet another opportunity for contrasting the dilettantish 'picturesque' view of the country with a conservative ideology of *dulce et utile:*

> 'You must not inquire too far, Marianne — remember I have no knowledge in the picturesque, and I shall offend you by my ignorance and want of taste if we come to particulars. I shall call hills steep, which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth, which ought only to be indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere. You must be satisfied with such admiration as I can honestly give. I call it a very fine country — the hills are steep, the woods seem full of fine timber, and the valley looks comfortable and snug — with rich meadows and several neat farm houses scattered here and there. It exactly answers my idea of a fine country, because it unites beauty with utility — and I dare say it is a picturesque one too, because you admire it; I can easily believe it to be full of rocks and promontories, grey moss and brush wood, but these are all lost on me. I know nothing of the picturesque.' (p.96-7)

In fact, as Bodenheimer points out, 'Edward knows exactly what the picturesque is: a descriptive vocabulary which predetermines what is to be seen and valued.'[7] His own language, of course, is equally determinant; but it is a point of view which the novel endorses. One of the few things in favour of Colonel Brandon is Mrs Jennings'

7 Bodenheimer, p.608.

approval of him (ideology makes strange bedfellows!) as a potential husband for Marianne. These are the terms in which she puts it:

> 'Delaford is a nice place, I can tell you; exactly what I call a nice old fashioned place, full of comforts and conveniences; quite shut in with great garden walls that are covered with the best fruit-trees in the country: and such a mulberry tree in one corner! Lord! how Charlotte and I did stuff the only time we were there! Then, there is a dove-cote, some delightful stewponds, and a very pretty canal; and every thing, in short, that one could wish for!' (pp.196-7)

It is another *locus amoenus,* or rather an earthly paradise — Mrs Jennings' vulgarity is Shakespearean, to be enjoyed, not despised. Importantly, however, Delaford is *not* isolated: it is vitally linked to the rural community, in both its material and its spiritual aspects:

> 'it is close to the church, and only a quarter of a mile from the turnpike-road, so 'tis never dull, for if you only go and sit up in an old yew arbour behind the house, you may see all the carriages that pass along. Oh! 'tis a nice place! A butcher hard by in the village, and the parsonage-house within a stone's throw.' (p.197)

This productive, pleasant home will be Marianne's reward for growing up, for putting behind her a self-indulgent sensibility which can see no good in a landscape unless it serves her town-based aesthetic. If, incidentally, she is obliged also to abjure sexual passion, it is because such passion tends to be equally disregarding of the decorums of sense — the demand that one should at all times act as a member of an organic community, not a romantic individual.

Colonel Brandon's Delaford is contrasted in the novel with another country estate, Cleveland, the home of the fashionable and bored Palmers. We are told in chapter 42, as Marianne and Elinor drive up to Cleveland, that it is 'a spacious, modern-built house, situated on a sloping lawn . . .' (p.302). A careless reader will think that it seems a pleasant place, but the word 'modern' should warn us that all is not well: it is *not* a 'nice old-fashioned place'; indeed, all it has to offer is 'pleasure-grounds' designed in the manner of Repton (though he is not mentioned, his style is recognizable): 'the house itself was under the guardianship of the fir, the mountain-ash, and the acacia, and a thick screen of them altogether, interspersed with tall Lombardy poplars, shut out the offices' (p.302). (These imposing ornamental trees are of course not native to Somerset: Repton was a keen importer of exotic trees into his landscapes.) When we learn that the estate also boasts a 'Grecian temple' to which Marianne immediately repairs in order to gaze longingly in the direction of Combe Magna, our suspicions should be aroused. And when the visitors are taken on a tour of what should be the productive parts of the estate, and see before

them only blight and mismanagement, then there is no question but that Cleveland is an outward and visible sign of the Palmers' dire spiritual state:

> the rest of the morning was easily whiled away, in lounging round the kitchen garden, examining the bloom upon its walls, and listening to the gardener's lamentations upon blights, — in dawdling through the green-house, where the loss of her favourite plants, unwarily exposed, and nipped by the lingering frost, raised the laughter of Charlotte, — and in visiting her poultry-yard, where, in the disappointed hopes of her dairy-maid, by hens forsaking their nests, or being stolen by a fox, or in the rapid decease of a promising young brood, she found fresh sources of merriment. (p.303)

Greenhouses, particularly, are in Austen's view a useless extravagance: one of the few things we hear from John Dashwood in the latter part of the book is the news that he is to pull down all the old walnut-trees at Norland in order to make way for 'Fanny's greenhouse', a typically Reptonian project: 'It will be a very fine object from many parts of the park, and the flower-garden will slope down just before it, and be exceedingly pretty' (p.226). It is Elinor who is regaled with this news,and she is properly concerned ('and thankful that Marianne was not present, to share the provocation'). So the John Dashwoods, damned in the reader's eyes since the dialogue of magnificent meanness in chapter 2, take their proper place in the novel's hierarchy of attitudes to the landscape.

(ii) Great Estates

At the end of chapter 27 of *Pride and Prejudice,* Elizabeth is invited by her only likable relatives, the Gardiners, to accompany them in 'a tour of pleasure which they proposed taking in the summer' (p.154). Her rapturous acceptance is, as her aunt rightly guesses, an overreaction to her disappointment in Wickham: 'What are men to rocks and mountains? Oh! what hours of transport we shall spend!' — and she goes on to deprecate the vague effusions of 'the generality of travellers'. Elizabeth has at this point an unshakable sense of herself as a rational thinker for whom language is a strong and pliable tool. What she will discover as a result of her first journey, to Kent, is that 'reason' is not infallible (she has misjudged both Darcy and Wickham); and on her second journey, which does not, after all, take her to the picturesque Lakes, but to the estate of the suitor she has misjudged, she finds that both language and reason are inadequate to the demands of a large world and a more complex emotional experience.

Pemberley, where the travellers arrive at the beginning of Volume Three, is the embodiment of the Augustan ideal:

> 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. (p.245)

Mr Darcy is the richest and most aristocratic landowner in Jane Austen's novels, and the character is thus able to resemble most closely Pope' s ideal in the 'Epistle to Lord Burlington' (quoted at the beginning of this article): 'nature' is at its best when subtly ordered by human 'taste'. Elizabeth exercises her own taste in the appreciation of this perfect place: touring the house, she is drawn continually to the windows, which frame beautiful changing prospects:

> The hill, crowned with wood, from which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was good; and she looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks, and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with delight. As they passed into other rooms, these objects were taking different positions; but from every window there were beauties to be seen. (p.246)

As Bodenheimer remarks, 'Pemberley is a "prospect" that looks good in *any* frame. The multiplicity of views, all fine, contributes to the general strategy of piling up positive impressions, and of superseding the earlier rigid and partial assessment of Darcy.'[8]

Elizabeth's meetings with Darcy in this chapter, which all take place out of doors in this extraordinarily beautiful environment, are — as far as the reader is concerned — virtually speechless, a strong contrast to the somewhat frenetically witty indoor exchanges of their earlier meetings in Hertford and Kent. What Pemberley represents is an expansion in the possibililties of life for Elizabeth, something that she has never even suspected she needed; and the master of Pemberley, whose taste and excellent management the place bespeaks, is an integral part of these possibilities. (Even on arriving, 'at that moment she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!' — p.245.) Austen does acknowledge, however, in the novel's concluding chapter, that marriage will restrict, or at best re-channel, some of Elizabeth's vitality: the image of her energetically walking alone across open fields (arriving at Netherfield with 'dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise' — p.32) is replaced with a more sedate and ladylike pony-carriage, doing the rounds of Darcy's great park.

8 Bodenheimer, p.610.

Mansfield Park is less grand, less rich, less beautiful than Pemberley, but the fact that its owner is a baronet and a member of Parliament, and that the novel takes its title from the name of the estate, indicates the author's interest in the symbolic role of such places. The underlying question of the novel is, who is the fit inheritor of Mansfield Park? And the extraordinary and radical answer is: Fanny Price, the poor girl from Portsmouth, and her clergyman husband Edmund, the disregarded second son of the great house's family. Fanny and Edmund of course cannot literally inherit Mansfield, but they are clearly its spiritual guardians throughout, and the end of the novel firmly places them where they may continue to watch over it:

> they removed to Mansfield, and the parsonage there, which under each of its two former owners, Fanny had never been able to approach but with some painful sensation of restraint or alarm, soon grew as dear to her heart, and as thoroughly perfect in her eyes, as every thing else, within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park, had long been. (p.473)

In the course of the novel, Mansfield suffers by the absence of its head, Sir Thomas Bertram, who goes abroad in order to look after his interests in Antigua — the dangerous enterprise of a speculative capitalist (one cannot imagine Mr Darcy or Mr Knightley thus engaged); moreover, it is clear from an early stage in the narrative that he is an unsatisfactory father, who has not seen that his children get a proper moral and spiritual education. Sir Thomas is still the head of Mansfield when the novel closes, but he is a diminished authority and a humbler man, relying on Fanny for affection and comfort — hence the emphasis, in the last paragraph, on *her* view of the 'view' from Mansfield Park: her spiritual authority is acknowledged at last.

As a younger woman, Fanny exhibits a tendency to rhapsodize over the beauties of nature which may be viewed from Mansfield Park, but her sensibility has a religious reference which would be quite foreign to Marianne Dashwood:

> Fanny spoke her feelings. 'Here's harmony!' said she, 'here's repose! Here's what may leave all painting and all music behind, and what poetry can only attempt to describe. Here's what may tranquillize every care, and lift the heart to rapture! When I look out on such a night as this, I feel as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world; and there certainly would be less of both if the sublimity of Nature were more attended to, and people were carried more out of themselves by contemplating such a scene.' (p.113)

'Thus', Avrom Fleishman remarks, 'in the language of the eighteenth-century Sublime, is expressed a Romantic view of nature's moral

influence.'[9] But Fanny is not only moved by the sublime aspects of nature, she has a very practical eye for 'the appearance of the country, the bearings of the roads, the difference of the soil, the state of the harvest, the cottages, the cattle, the children' (p.80) — the observations of a potential country clergyman's wife. For her the landscape does not provide pictures, but an environment, a place to live and work (and she undoubtedly does work for her living, as Lady Bertram's handmaid and Mrs Norris's factotum for a good deal of the novel).

For people of fashion, however — and that includes almost all the other characters associated with Mansfield — the country is a place to be 'improved', that is, to be changed according to aesthetic principles rather than agricultural ones. Mr Rushworth, whose name indicates his moral and intellectual fibre, decides that Sotherton Court needs improving; ' "Your best friend upon such an occasion," said Miss Bertram, "would be Mr Repton, I imagine" ' (p.53), and the long speech which follows from Mrs Norris ('if I had more room, I should take a prodigious delight in improving and planting') alerts us that any such project should be regarded with suspicion. Later in the same conversation, Fanny quotes Cowper, 'Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited' (p.56), thereby confirming our suspicions: 'improvement' is usually violent and destructive of an old-established order, and for no good reason. Edmund expresses the idea of gradualist reform that Burkean conservative supported:

> 'had I a place to new fashion, I should not put myself into the hands of an improver. I would rather have an inferior degree of beauty, of my own choice, and acquired progressively. I would rather abide by my own blunders than by his.' (p.56)

'Putting oneself into the hands of an improver' is tantamount to abdicating responsibility for one's estate — and the consequences, Austen suggests, may be disastrous. Indeed they are so for Rushworth, who puts himself into the hands of Henry Crawford and finds his fiancée being stolen from him. When, however, Crawford offers his services to Edmund Bertram, he gets a very different response. The upheaval of the established order he suggests at Thornton Lacey is a parody of the worst excesses of Repton's style:

> 'The farm-yard must be cleared away entirely, and planted up to shut out the blacksmith's shop. The house must be turned to front the east instead of the north — the entrance and principal rooms, I mean, must be on that side, where the view is really very pretty; I am sure it may be done. And *there* must be your approach — through what is at present the garden. You must make you a new garden at what is now the back of the house; which will be giving it the best

9 Avrom Fleishman, *A Reading of 'Mansfield Park'* (Minneapolis, 1967), p.30.

> aspect in the world — sloping to the south-east. The ground seems precisely formed for it. I rode fifty yards up the lane between the church and the house in order to look about me; and saw how it might all be. Nothing can be easier. The meadows beyond what *will be* the garden, as well as what now *is*, sweeping round from the land I stood in to the north-east, that is, to the principal road through the village, must be all laid together of course; very pretty meadows they are, finely sprinkled with timber. They belong to the living, I suppose. If not, you must purchase them. Then the stream — something must be done with the stream; but I could not quite determine what. I had two or three ideas.' (p.242)

Not only is such 'improvement' disruptive, it is also, Austen suggests, frequently hypocritical. What neither of the Crawfords can stomach is the recognition of Edmund's religious vocation: Henry continues his tempting insinuations thus:

> 'From being the mere gentleman's residence, it becomes, by judicious improvement, the residence 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; especially as there is no real squire's house to dispute the point . . .' (p.244)

Edmund's reply quietly but firmly insists that he will remain in the station to which God has called him: 'I must be satisfied with rather less ornament and beauty. I think the house and premises may be made comfortable, and given the air of a gentleman's residence without any very heavy expense, and that must suffice me.'

'A gentleman's residence': this phrase is at the heart of Austen's thinking about landscape: it is seen at its best when inhabited by people who work in harmony with what nature provides: the educated class (the gentry) cultivating but not radically changing the environment. Such people are an influence for good in their society; and though we see almost nothing of the labouring classes in her novels, there is a strong suggestion that the best type of gentleman is the 'pastoral' one — whether spiritually (a clergyman) or literally (a caring and responsible landowner). It is this latter type who is the heroine's destined husband in Jane Austen's second last novel, *Emma;* and it is Mr Knighley's house, Donwell Abbey (note the strong allegorical overtones of both names), which is the epitome of Austen's ideas about the moral significance of landscape.

Emma does not visit Donwell Abbey until three-quarters of the way through the narrative, at a point when her unregenerate personality is in need of a severe jolt. Her observation of the place — a working estate, unlike her own pseudo-town house, Hartfield in Highbury — is comparable with Elizabeth's discovery of Pemberley; but whereas

Elizabeth sees Pemberley as literally a revision of Darcy, Emma is the channel for Austen's political views:

> She felt all the honest pride and complacency which her alliance with the present and future proprietor could fairly warrant, as she viewed the respectable size and style of the building, its suitable, becoming, characteristic situation, low and sheltered — its ample gardens stretching down to meadows washed by a stream, of which the Abbey, with all the old neglect of prespect, had scarcely a sight — and its abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up. — The house was larger than Hartfield, and totally unlike it, covering a good deal of ground, rambling and irregular, with many comfortable and one or two handsome rooms. — It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was — and Emma felt an increasing respect for it, as the residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding. (p.358)

Every phrase in this description is loaded with the significances I have been pursuing in this article. The accumulation of adjectives (respectable, suitable, becoming, characteristic, ample) is an unusual stylistic feature in Austen; it suggests an overriding desire to convey the symbolic value of this place. We note also that the Abbey 'neglect[s] . . . prospect': *here* the avenues have not been destroyed in pursuit of a fashionable landscape; rather their 'abundance' contributes to the productivity of Donwell. Moreover the 'true gentility' that it embodies is indicated by an absence of the vain display that Henry Crawford was recommending to Edmund Bertram: here appearance, status, and behaviour all coincide in the figure of the ideal English landholder, one of the old breed, which has not been 'tainted' by modern manners.

It should come as no surprise, then, when a page or so later Austen speaks even more overtly of the significance of Donwell: the landscape has exerted its moral pressure to pacify and refresh the erring members of the community ('It was hot; and after walking some time over the gardens in a scattered, dispersed way, scarcely any three together, they insensibly followed one another to the delicious shade of a broad short avenue of limes . . .'), and the narrator takes a paragraph to herself to summarize the importance of this symbolic landscape:

> It was a sweet view — sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdue, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive. (p.360)

It is worth recalling that this novel was written at the height of the Napoleonic wars, when England was constantly under threat from the French; in this same chapter Frank (cognate with 'French') Churchill arrives hot and bothered at Donwell; on him only the place fails to have a beneficial effect. He declares, 'I am sick of England — and would leave it to-morrow, if I could' (p.365): the fact that he

has just met and quarrelled with Jane Fairfax in the lane offers an explanation for his bad temper in the novel's realistic narrative — but it is not something that the first-time reader is aware of, and a reading arising from the chapter's overt symbolism is much more likely at this point. Frank is described by that true Englishman (or Knight of St *George*) Mr Knightley, as *aimable* rather than 'truly amiable' (p.149); he complains later in the novel that Frank has used 'finesse' and 'espionage' — that his behaviour is definitely un-English. And Frank reveals his full moral turpitude in the episode which immediately follows the Donwell Abbey visit: the picnic at Box Hill.

Box Hill is the opposite of Donwell in many respects: it is 'picturesque' countryside used merely as a pleasure-ground, a place of frivolous and unstructured wanderings. It is defined in the opening paragraph of chapter 43 in a vocabulary of excess and alienation which expands into the action of the chapter:

> Seven miles were travelled in expectation of enjoyment, and every body had a burst of admiration on first arriving; but in the general amount of the day there was deficiency. There was a languor, a want of spirits, a want of union, which could not be got over. They separated too much into parties . . . Mr Weston tried, in vain, to make them harmonize better. It seemed at first an accidental division, but it never materially varied. Mr and Mrs Elton, indeed, showed no unwillingness to mix, and be as agreeable as they could: but during the whole two hours that were spent on the hill, there seemed a principle of separation, between the other parties, too strong for any fine prospects, or any cold collation, or any cheerful Mr. Weston, to remove. (p.367)

The behaviour of Frank Churchill and Emma during this picnic shows that both are 'out of bounds' (Emma has never been to Box Hill, though it is only seven miles from Highbury). This landscape, being neither productive nor in any way related to its visitors, is a no-man's-land, spiritually and literally; and Emma in insulting poor Miss Bates breaks the basic rule of the community which normally constrains her behaviour: as Mr Knightley puts it, to 'laugh at her, humble her . . . before others, many of whom (certainly *some*), would be entirely guided by *your* treatment of her' (p.375).

Emma returns to Highbury having learnt a sobering lesson about the dangers of individualism, and she is in due course rewarded with marriage to Mr Knightley and a move to the perfect centre of the community, Donwell Abbey. But despite her commitment to Donwell as an ideal, Jane Austen's ironical sense of reality keeps romance in check here: Emma's first duty is to look after her father until his death, and Mr Knightley nobly joins her in the 'Woodhouse'. This novel's Pemberley is yet to be attained.

(iii) Beyond the Landscape

If *Emma* is the most profoundly committed of Jane Austen's novels to a conservative ideology of which the most attractive image is a fertile, cultivated landscape, her last novel, *Persuasion* (published posthumously in 1817) opens views on a different world. Here the Great House, Kellynch Hall, is a wilderness of mirrors for the vain representative of the worst of the old order, Sir Walter Elliot; and in order to save it financially (so unproductive has it become) it must be let out to representatives of a new order of society — the professions, typified by the Navy.

Anne Elliot, like all Jane Austen's heroines, loves the countryside; she dislikes the city of Bath, scene of Catherine Morland's early adventures; but she begins to bloom again as a woman in love under the influence of a different 'scape' altogether — the sea, and the wildly beautiful cliffs and chasms edging it. The sea is a Romantic image — it is the opposite of the ordered eighteenth-century landscape: it represents flux, the unpredictable and unknowable. And Austen *views* it as a Romantic, her language reflecting the vocabulary of those Romantic poets whose works are so dangerously attractive to people of 'strong feelings' (p.101):

> a very strange stranger it must be, who does not see charms in the immediate environs of Lyme, to make him wish to know it better. The scenes in its neighbourhood, Charmouth, with its high grounds and extensive sweeps of country, and still more its sweet retired bay, backed by dark cliffs, where fragments of low rock among the sands make it the happiest spot for watching the flow of the tide, for sitting in unwearied contemplation; — the woody varieties of the cheerful village of Up Lyme, and, above all, Pinny, with its green chasms between romantic rocks, where the scattered forest trees and orchards of luxuriant growth declare that many a generation must have passed away since the first partial falling of the cliff prepared the ground for such a state, where a scene so wonderful and so lovely is exhibited, as may more than equal any of the resembling scenes of the far-famed Isle of Wight: these places must be visited, and visited again, to make the worth of Lyme understood. (pp.95-6)

Norman Page rightly says of this extraordinary description, 'Jane Austen here displays her mastery of the long sentence structured on a principle quite different from the Johnsonian — on feeling rather than argument, self-expression rather than didacticism . . . some of the phrases here might have come straight from "Tintern Abbey" ("unwearied contemplation") or "Kubla Khan" ("great chasms between romantic rocks").'[10] Under the same, Romantic world-view, Anne

10 Norman Page, 'Jane Austen's Language', *The Jane Austen Handbook*, ed. J. David Grey (London, 1986), p.263. Further discussion of the romanticism of *Persuasion* may be found in my earlier essay on that topic, *Sydney Studies in English*, 5 (1979-80).

becomes the wife of a sailor, of no fixed abode. Structurally, however, he is the equivalent of the earlier novels' Mr Darcy or Mr Knightley, or the clergymen Tilney and Bertram. Captain Wentworth, when in charge of a ship, has a pastoral role, as we see in the case of 'poor Richard' Musgrove; but on land and at leisure, he has no proper employment, and thus makes the mistake of flirting with Louisa Musgrove. When Austen confidently tells us at the novel's end that Anne's husband is a member of 'that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance' (p.252), she is depending on our remembrance of the slightly absurd but attractively vital image of the Crofts, who enjoy their long drives in the country — and the inevitable upsets of their carriage. As Mrs Croft affirms of their life, whether on land or, more comfortably, at sea, 'While we were together, you know, there was nothing to be feared' (p.70). This is a claim which has a much wider emotional ambit than the earlier novels' dependence on a final image of the heroine and her husband happily settled in a productive landscape; and it represents a shaking of the foundations of Austen's conservatism.